

Apocryphilia

Simon Matthews

Letter of the week!

Watching Newsnight or any of the other flagship current affairs programmes, it is striking how little attention is being paid to the possibility of Scottish independence. Coverage of day-to-day politics remains focussed on speculation about the outcome of the 2015 General Election, with a basic assumption that the UK as we know it will remain intact. This may be an accurate reading of the situation, and it may transpire that Alex Salmond has overplayed his hand. The debate, though, about the referendum and the arguments now being marshalled by the 'No' campaign are fascinating. In February, Sir Nicholas MacPherson, the Permanent Secretary to HM Treasury, gave formal written advice to ministers about whether – in the aftermath of an independence vote – Scotland should be allowed to retain the pound as its currency. He argued against, claiming:

- * Scotland might move to another currency in the longer term (true – presumably the Euro).
- * The banking sector in Scotland is too big in relation to its national income (true – but isn't that the case for the UK generally?).
- * The rest of UK might have to support Scotland if 'things went wrong' (perhaps – shades here of the Irish crisis, where Ireland was underpinned by the EU. But if this happened, and Scotland turned to the EU why would that affect the rest of the UK? And wouldn't we want Scotland to pull through, rather than write them off?)
- * The Scottish government will not follow a rigorous fiscal policy (Ah....!)

His advice, on two sides of A4, avoids wider

considerations and is based on extremely debatable assumptions. It contains nothing about industrial policy, full employment, future investment requirements in the domestic economies of either nation, the current level of the UK national debt compared to other advanced industrial nations and whether government revenue from personal taxation in the UK is now unsustainably low. Presumably he was restricting his reply to a very limited request from Cameron and Osborne for arguments to use against Scotland keeping the pound. None are convincing.

Had the wider questions been put and had MacPherson chosen to address them, he could have started by spending about ten seconds doing some high-powered research on Wikipedia about the impact made by North Sea Oil on the UK (and Scottish) economy in the early 70s. In 1973 the Heath government – rattled by the rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP) even then and casting around for arguments to use against them – commissioned a report from Gavin McCrone on how an independent Scotland might cope in the world economy.¹ McCrone concluded that Scotland – on the basis of access to a reasonable percentage of the revenues from North Sea Oil – would have ‘the strongest national currency in Europe’. His report was promptly classified as Top Secret and was only released, under the 30 year rule, in 2005.

Although HM Treasury and the media have failed to broaden understanding of why people support the SNP and the ‘Yes’ campaign, a number of historians have ventured into the field with some interesting commentaries. In his 2011 book *Vanished Kingdoms* Norman Davies spends pages 679-

¹ The original draft of the McCrone Report is at <<http://www.oilofscotland.org/MccronereportScottishOffice.pdf>>. It was written against a backdrop of SNP electoral success, particularly their gain of Glasgow Govan in a November 1973 by-election. They went on to win seven seats in the February 1974 general election, rising to eleven in October 1974. The MacPherson letter is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279460/Sir_Nicholas_Macpherson_-_Scotland_and_a_currency_union.pdf>. For a more measured, but despairing view, see ‘Salmond has put Britain on the low road to break-up’, *The Financial Times* 11 April 2014, at <www.ft.com/cms/s/0/506cd31e-bf2a-11e3-a4af-00144feabdc0.html#axzz33DTTDA4f>.

685 addressing the possible independence of Scotland. He concludes '...that the United Kingdom will collapse is a foregone conclusion...' and points out that Burgundy, Aragon and Prussia, all seemingly permanent fixtures of the European scene (in some cases for up to a thousand years) are all gone. Nor is complete disappearance the only option. His book contains many examples of shifting borders, dynasties that have vanished, states that have been subsumed, renamed or merged. The collapse of Yugoslavia into six (seven with Kosovo) different countries in recent times is an obvious case in point. The present difficulties in Ukraine are not dissimilar.²

More recently Linda Colley in *Acts of Union and Disunion: What has held the UK together – and what is dividing it?* (2013) points out that the UK is a recent and synthetic entity having only existed for a mere 400 years.³ Echoing McCrone she asks why a dependent Scotland is worse off than Denmark although it has same population and better resources than that country. Colley concludes that a major part of the problem is that the UK is actually a backward country constitutionally. Despite federalism being very common and generally working well everywhere (including the US – usually copied in all other matters) the UK is definitely not a federal nation and nor is there any local equivalent of the well resourced regional government that prevails elsewhere. Instead, the UK is governed directly from London by an unelected civil service and 656 MPs. The only exception ever allowed to this was Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972 – which, co-incidentally, provided a reliable batch of Unionist MP's, faithful

² Davies is an expert on eastern Europe and his book reflects this with lengthy accounts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Galicia, Rusyn (a.k.a. Ruthenia – now in western Ukraine) and the Soviet Union, his account of which is headed 'CCCP: The Ultimate Vanishing Act (1924-1991)'. He includes an interesting chapter on the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (pp. 539-574) pointing out the success of the UK branch of this dynasty in cultivating and managing their image so that a pretence of a UK connection can be kept at all times.

³ For reviews of Colley see *The Guardian* 9 January 2014 at <www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/09/acts-union-disunion-linda-colley-review> and *The Daily Telegraph* 11 January 2014 at <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non_fictionreviews/10563286/Acts-of-Union-and-Disunion-by-Linda-Colley-review.html>.

to the Crown, throughout this period.

Colley duly points out that despite these numerous anomalies the English remain fond of advising others about good governance, particularly in the third world.

In this context the comments of Sir Nicholas MacPherson appear to have more in common with religion and the role of a High Priest: the quiet and firm issuing of a metaphysical pronouncement from which logic, evidence or proof are eradicated, that will banish doubters and rally all to the cause of the Sacred Text. Perhaps this isn't as crazy as it appears. After all, Merrill Lynch ('one of the world's leading financial management and advisory companies, providing financial advice and investment banking services') have a belief in the free market that is so absolute that anything that might seemingly provide an 'edge' over competitors, or an insight into a forthcoming trend is eagerly sought, including the use of astrologers to predict the market.⁴ From here it is only a step to the grim world of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) with its theories about 'Prosperity Theology', and routine defrauding of its adherents via continual cold-calling telesales. (Happily, though, the UCKG is strongly anti-communist.)⁵

It would be interesting (or not) to see written advice about how a heavily deregulated economy, driven by the private sector, can be relied upon to ensure 'a rigorous financial policy'.

Small business goes bust

The comments from McPherson and others about the economic difficulties that might befall the Scots after independence were undermined somewhat in *The Times* on 31 March 2014, where, buried on page 26 (thus ensuring no headline) were the worst

4 For more on stock markets and astrology see *The Sunday Telegraph*, 6 December 2013, 'Financial astrology: can the stars affect stocks?' at <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/10481595/>.

5 See 'Church faces complaints over fundraising', *The Times* 11 January 2014. On UCKG see <www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-04-25/edir-macedo-brazils-billionaire-bishop>, appropriately posted on Bloomberg Businessweek.

ever UK balance of payments figures. These amounted to the equivalent of 4.4% of GDP, giving the UK the worst trade to current account balance in the developed world. Germany – where they make things – has the best. In the olden times, and certainly pre-1979, the monthly trade figures were a piece of ritualised political theatre that required urgent announcements, elaborate explanations, and, sometimes, finished political careers (usually Labour). This is no longer the case. Even *The Times* opined that Britain imports too much and its only hope if it wishes to reverse this is to devalue urgently so that its manufacturing industries can recapture overseas markets. The main stumbling block to this is considered to be the continued maintenance of the pound at too high a level by the Bank of England and the City.

Some months earlier, and again in *The Times*, another article pointed out the low level of investment in the UK as a % of current GDP. The world average for this statistic is 23%. Leaving aside emerging economies (China, India, Brazil etc) the EU average is 18%. The UK registers a mere 14% and compares badly with Spain 19%, Australia 29%, Portugal 16%, Germany 18%, Japan 21% and Russia 22%. A study of major and/or western nations shows that only Montenegro, Pakistan, Eire, Swaziland, Cuba, Turkmenistan, Angola, Malawi, Libya and Iraq invest less in their own economies than the UK. The announcements now being made about a UK economic recovery (the definition of which is rather curious) would not seem to accommodate any evidence of either of these measurements.....which is not surprising as manufacturing exports and investment in the UK itself are not the basis by which the Treasury defines the general performance of the economy. The narrow parameters now followed relate exclusively to inflation, interest rates and – possibly as a sop to those with a conscience – unemployment. The first two are entirely relative concepts (for instance: you can have inflation running at 20% but if the economy is growing at 30% people might still be better off), the last is important but is now calculated purely on counting only those on job seekers allowance.....if a person works 5 hours a week

in a tanning salon or dog grooming parlour then, sorry, they're not unemployed. Ditto if they are self-employed and only getting a handful of pieces of work per year, or if they're on a zero hours contract: officially they are not unemployed, even if they earn nothing.⁶

The carefully constructed artifice overseen by HM Treasury about what constitutes normal economic behaviour, and how an advanced economy ought to be run, looks set to continue even if Scotland quits the UK; and few of the actors on the English political stage seem able to contemplate changes to this.

Certainly the efforts of Labour pre-2010 do not inspire confidence. Great store was set by Gordon Brown in 2009 in the establishment of the International Centre for Financial Regulation was announced. Designed to map out the future of responsible capitalism, it came with a US Chief Executive, Barbara Ridpath, and a UK Chair, Lord Currie, previously an advisor to John Major and currently on the Board of Lord Sainsbury's Institute of Government. Merrill Lynch were a major stakeholder, as were many other US firms. Absent were any representatives from UK industry (although UK banks and the City of London Corporation were members), a telling detail that confirms again how low down the list of priorities secure investment and long term employment for the masses in the are for our political classes. The ICFR was wound up in 2012 after a member of its staff (Charles Taylor) was accused of stealing £600,000 from its accounts.⁷

The lack of any original (and appealing) Labour policies on the economy is seen as a problem for Mr Miliband. In this context the media picking up on the activities of Andrew Balls, brother of Ed, can hardly be helpful. It turns out that the Shadow Chancellor's brother is City bond fund manager at US giant Pimco, formerly the Pacific Investment Management Company. In this position he runs a vast financial operation used by governments around the world as an alternative to

⁶ See 'The world will buy British when the pound is cheaper', *The Times* 31 March 2014.

⁷ See 'Boss "stole £600,000" from City think-tank', *The Times* 11 January 2014.

direct taxation when money is needed for major investment projects. Issuing bonds to raise money, rather than just collecting it from the wealthy by higher domestic taxes, comes at a price – paying arrangement fees and commission to those who arrange the bonds (as well as the interest). Andrew Balls, who like his brother was privately educated before proceeding to Oxford and Harvard, was paid a £4.5m bonus last year and is regarded by his colleagues and contemporaries as brilliant. Will his brother's occupation have any impact on Ed Ball's policy preferences should Labour take office after 2015? Or, in an echo of JM Keynes (who made serious money playing the markets), will the incoming Chancellor – knowing from his family ties how the markets really work – return to the traditional methods of managing the UK economy pre-1979 and still followed in Europe (and Obama's US)?⁸

The Special Relationship in practice: defence procurement

It would be beneficial if the fiscal rectitude that takes centre stage on most UK budgetary matters extended to defence. Which is not to say that defence spending must be cut, but, rather, that decisions are made which appear to fly in the face of common sense.

In their 2010 Defence Review (i.e. cuts programme) the present coalition cancelled the delivery of 21 Nimrod MRA4 reconnaissance aircraft. Descended from the 1949 De Havilland Comet airliner, and rebuilds of existing fuselages that were already 42 years old, the project was 7 years late and heavily over budget. Liam Fox MP took the decision and announced that as a replacement the UK would buy 3 redundant US RC-135 aircraft, at a cost of £634m. These, too, were all 40+ years old, had been stored in the open at a base in the Nevada desert. The RC-135 is based on the 1957 Boeing 707 design. They will remain in service until 2045 by

⁸ On Andrew Balls see *The Times* p. 33 on 22 January 2014, 'Balls brother in the money as Pimco chief executive quits', which goes on to say: 'In 2012 Mr Balls, then aged 38, and six other European directors had a pay pot of £57 million.'

which time they will be over 80 years old.....yes, the RAF will be flying aircraft that are 80 years old: if this were the case today they would be equipped exclusively with pre-WW2 biplanes.⁹

It's all very different from 1965 when the Wilson government ordered 46 Nimrod aircraft so that the Comet production lines could be kept open, UK jobs protected and technological expertise maintained. Such considerations – though obvious elsewhere – are no longer paramount in English political circles.

Another interesting story – barely recorded outside the small number of persons interested in the arcane world of jet fighter procurement – has arisen in the saga of the two new 'super-carriers' under construction for the Royal Navy. It will be remembered that in 2010 there was talk of cancelling one of these, or at any rate completing it and never commissioning it, or even selling it straight away to another country – because the UK, unlike ten other countries, 'can't afford' such a luxury. What will eventually transpire remains unclear.....carrier number one is inching toward completion, but what type of aircraft will it fly?

Both Mr Cameron and Mr Hague have spoken earnestly about improving defence co-operation with France (possibly as a slightly embarrassed retreat from Blair's fanatical pro-US enthusiasm). Given that the UK hasn't designed or built a specifically naval strike aircraft of its own since 1959 and hasn't operated a conventional aircraft carrier since 1978, this was always going to be a difficult decision. Could the French help? Their nuclear powered aircraft carrier 'Charles de Gaulle', in service 2001 after a 15 year building programme, operates the Rafale M. This has a speed of 1156 mph, a range of 2000 miles, weighs 13.8 tons and costs \$102m each.

⁹ See *The Sunday Times* 13 April 2014, 'Keep it quiet: RAF spy planes fail safety rules' at <www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/article1399429.ece>. Ironically one of the reasons given for dumping the Nimrod programme in 2010 was that the aircraft wasn't safe. The Nimrod programme was cut by defence minister Liam Fox after the first aircraft had been delivered to the RAF; at which point it was officially £789m over budget – much less than the amount the UK will spend on buying the US F35b in preference to the French Rafale M.

HMG has resisted the French option and have ordered instead the US F35b which offers a broadly similar speed, but a reduced range of 1200 miles, weighs 22 tons (and therefore requires stronger and more expensive lifts, catapults and decking) and costs \$197m each. The explanation based for going US and not French appears to be that the US manufactured aircraft delivered to the UK will be fitted with Rolls Royce engines, thus keeping UK production lines open, protecting UK jobs and maintaining UK technological expertise: something for which it is deemed worth buying a clearly inferior aircraft at an extra cost of \$95m each. It is odd that this logic, and the related vast subsidy, wasn't extended to the Nimrod programme. The absence of an urgent letter from Sir Nicholas MacPherson advising ministers is also noteworthy.

'Official' conspiracy theory

The death of Major General John Strawson was noted by a couple of broadsheet obituaries recently. Strawson collaborated with Sir John Hackett as the (uncredited) co-author, in 1978, of the popular best seller *The Third World War – 1985*. In this the USSR deliberately starts a massive conventional war by invading western Europe. It meets resistance, so then deliberately resorts to the use of nuclear weapons with a catastrophic attack on Birmingham. NATO then retaliates with a counter strike on Minsk, carefully selected because being in a satellite state (Belarus SSR) its targeting would accelerate the collapse of Soviet control – in the book this duly occurs when an uprising by 'Ukrainian nationalists' leads to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Strawson and Hackett's book may have chimed with the paranoia felt by many in the Cold War then being revived in America, but, speaking as someone who was around then, and politically aware, it never appeared to be the case to me that the Brezhnev era USSR would deliberately start a nuclear war. There was nothing to suggest it at the time, and, post 1990 and the release of much material in the archives, nothing to back up this view has emerged since.

It is interesting to note the calculation made by Strawson, Hackett and others that a ready supply of Ukrainian 'nationalists' would rally to the cause of the free west if a nuclear weapon were dropped on Minsk. (Would they? We bomb your city – you join our side?) Presumably these would have been the exiles and supporters of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (not a few of whom had fought in the SS during WW2) on whose support and nurturing a considerable amount of dollars and pounds were spent after 1945.

Paranoid Harold

The latest volume of Dominic Sandbrook's compendium history of the recent past in Britain has arrived, *Seasons in the Sun*, which covers the period 1974-79. Written in his accessible and entertaining style and culled from a wide range of sources it reinforces the conventional narrative of the period.....severe industrial relations problems + national bankruptcy requiring an IMF loan + Harold Wilson being detached from reality and letting the country drift + the inevitability of Thatcher's win in '79. In many respects it could have been written in the early 80s and makes for an interesting comparison with Andy Beckett's *When the Lights went out*, which strikes a different tone with the same material.

Sandbrook, in particular, struggles with giving his account and retaining his professional credibility. For example, on the issue of massive industrial problems he devotes a great many pages to recounting these (and the episodes, Grunwick etc, are undoubtedly memorable) before finally mentioning, in a couple of sentences, near the end of this section, that the UK lost fewer working days through industrial action in the '70s than either the US or several European nations. Similarly, on the election that never was (September 1978) he concludes that it wasn't such a major event after all. He opines that Callaghan wouldn't have won a majority and that a general election in late '78, therefore, may have led to Thatcher being asked to form a government anyway, as Callaghan would have gone to the country and failed. This

seems plain wrong. If the election had gone ahead in the autumn of 1978, then Callaghan may not have won a large majority, but, as Labour had a consistent 5% lead in the polls throughout this period, the outcome would clearly have been either a small overall majority for Labour or another hung Parliament with Callaghan remaining at Downing Street as the leader of the biggest single party. Thatcher would clearly not have won – and the Conservative Party would then have dumped her, as they planned to do. To imply that this wouldn't have occurred, or simply didn't matter, is to underplay, massively, all the changes wrought in the UK since 1979. In addition, throughout his account of the pros and cons of '78 vs '79 as an election date, Sandbrook fails to mention that even then it was known that governments that go full term (or very nearly full term) have almost always lost – Baldwin (1929) and Macmillan/Douglas-Home (1964) being examples in point.¹⁰ Callaghan duly lost in 1979, as did Major in 1997 and Brown in 2010. The fact that Callaghan ignored this in 1978 only underscores what a decisive moment his pulling back from an election was.

Of particular interest is Sandbrook's account of Wilson's admittedly tired and difficult last couple of years as Prime Minister. We learn that Harold often pointed to mirrors and light bulbs in Downing Street and took baffled colleagues who wanted a private discussion with him about government matters, into the lavatory where he would turn on the taps in the washbasin prior to having the dialogue in whispers. Callaghan jocularly referred to him as 'a bit of a Walter Mitty'. A great many pages are spent sketching the picture of Wilson as deluded, with a highly unusual (almost subservient) relationship with his own PA, Lady Falkender, and erratic judgement in general. However: on pp. 74-75 we learn that, yes, there were hidden microphones in 10 Downing Street. Apparently Harold Macmillan asked MI5 to install them 'during the Profumo scandal'. They remained *in situ* until 1977 when they were quietly removed.

One reading of this would be as follows:

¹⁰ Attlee, too, went full term in 1950, and almost lost.

In 1963 the US (specifically the CIA) lost patience with the British old boy network running MI6, following the imprisonment of John Vassall, Philby's defection and the news that John Profumo MP had, possibly, shared a girl friend with the Soviet naval attaché Yevgeny Ivanov.

The US were also greatly alarmed by the sudden demise of Hugh Gaitskell and the election of Harold Wilson as Leader of the Labour Party. Gaitskell had been very pro-US. Wilson was much less so, and had travelled extensively to and from the Soviet Union, on private business, since 1951. Conspiracy theories abounded on this point – was Wilson a Soviet agent?

Macmillan was simultaneously trying to persuade an irritated, reluctant and puzzled US that the UK should borrow/share the Polaris nuclear missile system (why didn't the British just build their own?).

Wilson and Labour looked absolutely certain to win an election held at any time in 1963-1964.

Advised strongly by elements in the CIA – of whom James Jesus Angleton was prominent and paranoid – and egged on by a significant minority in MI5 and MI6 who were rabidly anti-Labour, and specifically anti-Wilson, the US insisted that MacMillan install recording devices in Downing Street in advance of Wilson becoming Prime Minister.

This was duly done. They remained in place until Wilson retired, after which they were removed.

However.....some elements within either MI5 or MI6 were unhappy with spying on their own government at the request of the US and privately told Wilson – hence his actions and concern at the possibility of the intelligence services machinating to remove him from office.

Basically, Harold was right, and (presumably with Heath) he remains the only UK prime minister spied on by his own security services. Sandbrook, though, can't produce a narrative on these lines. But to ensure he meets professional standards, he has to mention, in passing, the crux of the issue. It strikes me that like many of the English intelligentsia he has difficulty justifying or explaining the miserable state of Britain today and shies away from appropriate criticism of the

recent past.

But: read his book – it is a good, well written narrative with all the required detail in it; but read Beckett, too, to get a better balance of the period.

You're fired

With fixed term Parliaments and the date of the next election set, speculation turns to the next government. On the basis of the opinion polls or the outcome of the recent European elections, few would conclude that purely Conservative or Labour administrations are likely. The Liberal Democrats face a hard time – but will probably just about keep enough seats to remain a factor. UKIP may take enough votes away from Cameron to install Miliband in Downing Street, or vice versa. Who knows? If trying to guess two or three way splits in electoral preferences is hard enough, trying to judge a four way split is impossible. Many people think that a likely outcome would be another coalition, or a minority government.

But could the UK – under the O'Donnell-Sainsbury rules¹¹ agreed in 2009 – possibly default, if agreement between the various parties were too difficult or too protracted, to an interim 'technical' administration of the type seen in Italy or Greece? And, if so, who might it contain? Or, more specifically, who might be invited by the Crown to participate in such a venture?¹²

¹¹ Discussed in *Lobster* 64 at <www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster64/lob64-running-britain.pdf>.

¹² But which version of the Crown? The recent comments of Prince Charles about the actions of Russia in the Ukraine being similar to those of Hitler in the '30s have produced some UK press confirmation (buried in the small print) that the Monarchy is currently in a 'transitional' phase and it is unfortunate that Charles has not, yet, realised this etc. It appears that a decision was made some while ago to ease elderly Queen Elizabeth to one side and replace her with her son for significant constitutional matters and public events. For a non UK view of this see *The New York Daily News* at <www.nydailynews.com/news/world/queen-elizabeth-ii-gradually-hand-royal-duties-prince-charles-report-article-1.1584953>. This process may have started in 2009 with the decision by O'Donnell and Sainsbury to set up the

Continues at the foot of the next page.

Early this year You Gov published a poll identifying the 'most admired' people in the UK. Leaving aside the Queen, the Pope, celebrities, footballers and people on TV generally, the highest regarded Brits were.....Richard Branson, Nigel Farage, Tony Benn (now deceased), Boris Johnson, Alan Sugar and Alex Salmond. An interesting selection. Perhaps, in a time of national crisis with reassuring faces and good communicators at a premium they may be approached. (Assuming Salmond hasn't by then floated away as head of an independent Scotland).

Mandela

The world said goodbye to Nelson Mandela on 5 December. The eulogies were long, the grief genuine and the (largely unspoken) worries for the future of South Africa profound. But is it possible that he was over praised? The hyperbole was considerable with the departed former President of South Africa being compared by many to a saint. Yes – Mandela was a good man, but.....did he really, as some have said, save the world? Has he enacted miracles since his death?¹³

Missing from any of the coverage of his last illness, death and elaborate funeral arrangements was any analysis of the geo-politics at play in the late 80s and early 90s, and the context in which his release and rise to political power should be seen. Quite simply: after the demise of the Soviet Union the need for the US to have a reliable ally in the vicinity of South Africa vanished. At this point – and only at this point – did serious talk about releasing Mandela, and starting a transition to democracy, begin. The need to have an orderly

Note 12 continued:

mechanism by which governments would be formed in the event of a hung Parliament.....thus allowing the Queen (then 83, now 88) to avoid the process. If there is a hung Parliament in 2015 will Prince Charles adjudicate? In an ideal world the UK would have a written constitution where all this would be set out, agreed and voted on.

13 For a view of Mandela that avoids hagiography see Matthew Parris in *The Times* 7 December 2013. Parris lived in South Africa, Rhodesia and Swaziland as a child and teenager. On the South African nuclear deterrent see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa_and_weapons_of_mass_destruction>.

civil government in the Cape, particularly given its mineral resources, remained essential and Mandela in guaranteeing this, unlike many others in post colonial Africa, rose to the challenge of providing the credible leadership needed. In fact, it was Mandela's insistence on plurality, disinterest in self-aggrandizement, upholding of the rule of law and general statesmanship that was being celebrated after his death.....for many this was unusual in Africa, and far exceeded the very low expectations that many in the (white) West had for newly emerging African leaders.

Had the Soviet Union not collapsed, would Mandela have been released and allowed to run for election as President of South Africa?

No mention was made either, of the 1991 decision whereby South Africa voluntarily gave up its nuclear weapons. A variety of motives may have led to this.....at the most lofty, deeply statesman-like behaviour by the apartheid regime (with attending saintly collaboration by Mandela – if he even knew about it) through to a final grim determination by the exiting white politicians to ensure that no succeeding black leader could threaten the West, with normal deal making somewhere in between. It is hard not to conclude that during the Cold War it was considered necessary for South Africa to maintain a small nuclear strike force at the Cape to safeguard the area from aggression by Soviet-backed regimes further north. Because of the attitude toward apartheid by the UN, it couldn't be openly armed by the US, the UK or France, the most likely providers of this hardware. The considered view is that South African acquired its nuclear weapons by collaborating with Israel, culminating in a nuclear test near Prince Edward Island, in the southern Indian Ocean, in September 1979.¹⁴

President Carter noted in his diary in February 1980: 'We

¹⁴ On the Vela Incident (the September 1979 test) see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vela_Incident>. Apparently news articles at the time speculated on the possibility of this being a 'large extraterrestrial object strike, such as an asteroid' rather than a nuclear test. Today much of the information about the event remains classified.

have a growing belief among our scientists that the Israelis did indeed conduct a nuclear test explosion in the ocean near the southern end of Africa' – a fascinating way of putting things. If it were suggested to him that only the Israelis were involved then criticism of them – given the close US-Israeli relationship – would be certain to be private. Surely the US intelligence services (as opposed to 'our scientists') knew about the involvement of South Africa?¹⁵ Is it possible that they didn't tell Carter? Or, given Carter's hostility at that time to the proposed settlement in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, which was quickly jettisoned in favour of his insistence on fresh elections that then allowed Mugabe to take over the country, did they take the view that pragmatic US support for a stable military ally in South Africa was so absolute that the less said the better? Like Callaghan on the bugging of Downing Street (and much else) Carter appeared to believe what he was told in this case.

An impartial account of how apartheid-era South Africa changed, within five years, into Mandela-era South Africa, and the many behind the scenes, negotiations, decisions and deals that enabled this, was absent from the coverage accorded to the death and funeral of Mandela and by its omission made a proper judgement of his role and views difficult.

¹⁵ As Leonard Weiss stated in 2011:

'One of the likely reasons that the U.S. government is withholding the declassification of relevant documents is to assist Israel to maintain its policy of opacity in nuclear affairs, a policy which had its origin during the Johnson presidency and was reinforced in a bargain made with the U.S. during the Nixon presidency. Its abandonment accompanied by the admission that Israel violated the Limited Test Ban Treaty would create some serious political fallout for both countries. But it is hard to argue that helping Israel in this way contributes to U.S. national security at a time when the U.S. demands openness in the nuclear activities of Iran, North Korea, Syria, and all other countries who may be engaged in clandestine weapon related nuclear activities.'

<http://www.npolicy.org/article_file/The_1979_South_Atlantic_Flash__The_Case_for_an_Israeli_Nuclear_Test.pdf>