

Thatcher's Secret War
Subversion, Coercion, Secrecy and Government, 1974-90
Clive Bloom

Stroud: The History Press, 2015, £20 (h/b)

I was seriously interested when I got the publisher's flyer about this book. To my knowledge no-one has tackled this subject in its entirety; and no-one has even re-examined Thatcher's rise to power, the 1974-79 period, since Stephen Dorril and I wrote *Lobster 11* and the expansion of that material in *Smear! Wilson and the Secret State*; and they were published in 1986 and 1991, before the Internet. What could be done these days with Google and Nexis-Lexis?

A little alarm bell rang when I saw the cover. The rear page of the sleeve announces: 'Everything in this book is true; everything is false. It all depends on which side of the looking glass one is standing'. (And this is repeated on the first page of the text.) As an image this is faulty because on one side of a looking glass you get your own reflection, the other side is non-reflective, and on neither side can you see through.¹ As a preface to a purported history book, what does it suggest? Is the author² merely nodding towards bullshit, pop post-modernism? Or is he telling the reader that the book cannot be trusted? In which case, why write it? In keeping with his warning on the cover, the author writes on page 12:

'...what is recorded here is the disparate investigations of different people often working in isolation and never quite sure of what was true or false. In a sense, these pages represent speculation of a rather particular research type, half history and half the innuendo that history is made from.'

I have no idea what that 'half the innuendo that history is made from' means but I doubt that Tony Bunyan, Duncan Campbell, or the State Research collective, for example, felt they were engaged in 'half history and half innuendo'. Coming along in their footsteps, I certainly didn't. None of us are in the author's index, incidentally, though Bunyan and I make it into

1 Anthony Frewin made this point to me.

2 The author has a website <Clivebloom.com>.

the author's 'secondary sources', where he has me as Robin Ramsan. Duncan Campbell is mentioned twice, *en passant*, but is missed by Bloom's indexer.

The book is in two distinct sections: the 1974-1979 period, before Thatcher took office, and her period at No. 10. The 1974-79 period is the most interesting to me and about which I know most, and it is that section on which I will concentrate; and I am afraid this will be almost entirely a catalogue of the author's errors.

On page 15 we have this:

'This was politics by other means, which journalists Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsey named "para-politics" in 1983.'

Well my name is Ramsay, not Ramsey; but OK, this error is often made in England. And we didn't name it 'para-politics' (more usually, parapolitics): the term came from Peter Dale Scott in the 1970s, as we repeatedly acknowledged. A couple of lines later there is the following quotation.

'Brutally summarised.....Mrs Thatcher and Thatcherism grew out of a right-wing network in this country with extensive links to the military-intelligence establishment. Her rise to power was the climax of a long campaign by this network which included a protracted destabilisation campaign against the Labour and Liberal parties – chiefly the Labour Party - during 1974-76.'⁷

I recognised this as a paragraph I wrote in *Lobster* 11. But what has been excised by Bloom after 'summarised'? He's taken out the words 'our thesis is'. Having removed them he can then cite Paul Foot as the source at note 7. (But Foot, doing this honestly, cited *Lobster* 11 when he quoted that paragraph.)

Immediately below this quotation he lists some of the whistle-blowers and investigative journalists of the period (this is where Duncan Campbell gets a name-check) and then adds: 'Amateurs such as Peter Green would not let explanations lie...'. Who is Peter Green? Does he mean Rob Green, Hilda Murrell's nephew?

Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd are discussed.

'Holroyd was apparently confined to a mental hospital after he made public the turf war that raged between MI5 and MI6 over who ran operations in Northern Ireland'. (p. 23)

'Apparently'? Fred was briefly sent to the Army mental hospital at Netley while he was still serving and long before he began whistle-blowing. This stain on his service record has been one of Holroyd's biggest complaints for the last 30 plus years and Bloom would know this had he consulted Holroyd's memoir. A couple of paragraphs later we are told that when Holroyd testified before the Barron Inquiry in the Irish Republic into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings 'Holroyd was considered a Walter Mitty character'. (p. 24) No, he wasn't. You can check for yourself: the Barron hearings and comments are on-line.³

After Holroyd, Bloom turns to Wallace and the errors continue. 'Wallace joined the regular army and quickly rose through the ranks.' (p. 30). It's more complex than that. In his media/psy-ops roles he was a civilian employee of the army. But he was also a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, resigning in 1975 with the rank of Captain. Wallace 'had been dealing with a Protestant murder group and paedophile operation out of the Kincora Boys' Home'. (p. 30). There was no 'murder group' at Kincora I have ever heard of and Bloom offers no source for this claim.

On Wallace, Bloom quotes occasional contributor to these columns, Bernard Porter, thus:

'[Porter] suggests that Wallace was a man with a "grievance" whose "horse's tale" was the result of embitterment and "flakiness". (p. 32).

What Porter actually wrote was this:

'At around the same time [as Peter Wright's allegations] an army "black" propagandist from Northern Ireland, Colin Wallace, appeared with more horse's mouth tales of either the same plot, or a parallel one. He also brought documentary evidence with him: mainly his

³ See <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/dublin/barron03.pdf>>.

notes, made at the time. Both these sources were tainted. Wright had his grievance over his pension, and a general air of "flakiness"; and Wallace had just completed a gaol sentence for a manslaughter charge which he claimed was a put-up job.'⁴

Porter used 'grievance' and 'flakiness' about Peter Wright not Wallace; and it wasn't a 'horse's tale' but 'horse's mouth tales'. Is Bloom's misuse of this paragraph to denigrate Wallace sloppy or malicious?

Still in Ireland, Bloom turns to Maurice Oldfield, and mentions the 1987 story in the *Sunday Times* which said Oldfield had:

'been a security risk when caught "cottaging" in 1980. It was not exactly true, however, but plausible enough to cause damage.'

What does 'not exactly true' mean? Oldfield wasn't exactly caught cottaging? In fact the story was entirely an invention, an MI5 smear run into the *Sunday Times* via James Adams.⁵

Oldfield's death, and some suspicions about its cause, leads Bloom to Gary Murray who mentions this in his 1993 book *Enemies of the State*. This, says Bloom, 'became a bible a both for conspiracy theorists and those whose legitimate investigations suggested an actual series of conspiratorial situations'. (p. 35) It did? News to me. Murray's book was full of fascinating anecdotes and leads, few of which could be followed because of his unwillingness (or inability) to name names.

As we move into the paranoia about the British left in the 1970s we have the 'Trotskyist Workers' Party' (p. 43) which, from the context, should be the Workers' Revolutionary

⁴ Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia* (London 1989, p. 211). This has recently been republished in the 'Routledge Revivals' series.

Said conviction was overturned, something Bloom omits in his account.

⁵ The first thing I did during my brief period at Channel Four News that year was ring up all the people named in that story as sources for it and they all denied saying what was attributed to them.

Party.⁶ We are told that Frank Kitson 'became the first head of military intelligence in Ulster' (p. 44) – he didn't – and on the next page Bloom gives us both Captain Laurence Nairac instead of *Robert* Nairac and John 'Francie' Green instead of John *Francis* Green.

Into the section on the so-called private armies of the mid-1970s and the author's wholly inadequate documentation really begins to irritate. He tells us that David Stirling's GB75 was

'a strike-breaking force that included all sorts of disgruntled intelligence operatives, former soldiers and arms dealers who were preparing for a coup against what they considered a communist government led by a communist agent – the Prime Minister himself.' (p. 47)

But to my knowledge the personnel of GB75 were never revealed and Bloom offers no source on this. And was it intended to break strikes or run a coup?

He tells us that GB75 'maintained contacts with Walter Walker's Unison Committee for Action and an ex-MI6 officer called George Young.' (p. 48) In fact Unison was run by Young and Walker was initially a member of it but quit to start his own group, Civil Assistance when, as he told me in a letter, he could not work out what Young was really up to. Bloom continues:

'Later, in 1975, Young organised Tory action alongside Airey Neave and can be seen in that respect to be one of the secret architects of Thatcher's rise to power.'

It should, of course, be Tory Action; the claim that Neave was involved with Young in this is not sourced by the author;⁷ and what – if anything – Tory Action actually amounted to has never been clear.

⁶ There *was* a Workers' Party at the time, a split from IS, with a membership of about 50. But this isn't the party to which Bloom is referring.

⁷ There is a Wiki entry on Tory Action which says Neave was involved but the source for that claim is given as Paul Larkin's *A Very British Jihad* (Belfast, 2004) and that merely asserts, without any sources, that Neave 'helped' Young found Tory Action.

Back to the subject of Wallace. He tells us that Airey Neave:

'certainly knew a great deal about Operation Clockwork Orange. Here all the threads came together: Irish Catholic gunmen supplied by the Soviet Union and the trade unions....'(p. 53)

Did Neave know about Clockwork Orange? I asked Colin Wallace while writing this review and he said that though it was a long time ago, he was pretty sure he would not have discussed Clockwork Orange with Neave. Taken literally, this statement by the author is nonsense: the Soviets and unions did not supply gunmen. Bloom is clumsily compressing a great deal of disinformation material about Soviet activity in Ireland and the UK: essentially the beliefs that the Soviets were subverting Britain through the CPGB's role in trade unions and were attempting to turn Ireland into another Cuba. If the CPGB's role in trade unions was real, there is no evidence that it was being directed by the Soviets – had there been any we would have heard about it – and Ireland-as-Cuba was simply an invention by those creative amplifiers of the 'red menace' at IRD. (Bloom does not mention IRD.)

Bloom then tells us that Neave met Wallace three times and 'Wallace was dismissed with £70 for his information.' (p. 53) Actually the £70 was the fee from the *Daily Telegraph* for a piece Wallace wrote, anonymously, about the Northern Ireland situation.

Further into the 'Wilson plot' material the author gives us Brian Crozier and gets the Crozier chronology wrong, with Forum World Features in the 1970s and the Institute for the Study of Conflict in the 1960s, instead of the other way round. (On page 73, he calls the Institute for the Study of Conflict 'Crozier's anti-Trotskyist think tank'. Whatever it was, it wasn't that. Crozier never took the Trot groups seriously: his eye was firmly fixed on the Soviet 'threat'.)

The rest of the book is mostly chapters about specific events in the Thatcher period. Some are familiar – the miners' strike; nukes civil and military; the deaths of Hilda Murrell and Willie McRae; arms for Iraq. These later chapters are less

error-strewn (though no better sourced) than his account of the 1974-79 period, perhaps because the material is less complex.

When he strays off familiar territory it goes wrong. He has a short chapter on mind control, for example, which in ten pages, citing only three books, one newspaper article and five websites (none of them serious sites on mind control issues), he skips across the last 35 years from the apparently mysterious death of the Marconi scientists, and part of the late Joe Vialls' story in the 1980s, to John Allman (who wrote in *Lobster* 48). *En route* he conflates gangstalking and Internet trolling (p. 175) while omitting 99.99% of the serious work done in the field. If the book had an editor s/he should have removed this chapter.

The author presents these chapters as illustrative of his thesis:

'that there was an undeclared and internal "cold war" fought throughout the 1980s in which rogue elements in the government, military and secret services seemed to have free rein to distort facts and even kill opposition voices under the camouflage of black propaganda'. (p. 1)

Well, yes, something like that, even if that is oddly expressed. But while the author's thesis is generally correct (we might argue about 'rogue elements') and supported by his account of various incidents during those years, the chapters on the 1975-1979 period are so sloppy and the whole thing is so inadequately sourced as to render it useless.

Robin Ramsay