

*Not the Chilcot Report*

Peter Osborne

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**W**hen I asked for this book in one of London's radical bookshops, I was told they didn't stock the work of a Tory columnist. The kindly assistant didn't know that Peter Osborne had written a fine book on South-African-born cricketer Basil D'Oliveira, confirming with solid evidence the long-held suspicions of anti-apartheid campaigners about the malign roles of business and politicians in Pretoria and London and the conspiracy hatched with the Lord's cricket establishment. When I then mentioned his critical book on New Labour spin doctor and 'dodgy dossier' man Alastair Campbell, his pamphlet and TV documentary on the power of the Israeli lobby, his principled resignation from *The Daily Telegraph* and then his defence of Jeremy Corbyn against New Labour plotters, I was told the book would be ordered *tout de suite*.

It's very good and more likely to be more widely read in full than the Chilcot Report itself, even its executive summary. That's partly because it's less than 200 pages, demonstrates great familiarity with the material provided publicly to Chilcot, is well written and burns with hot logic.

His criticism, from careful examination of the material available to Chilcot, is not only directed at Prime Minister Tony Blair. He concludes:

'I have found no evidence that David Manning, foreign policy adviser inside Downing Street as war loomed, ever tried to correct Tony Blair. Neither have I found protests from Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Nor from Jonathan Powell, Downing Street chief of staff. Nor Alastair Campbell, Director of Communications.

More importantly still, I have not discovered from either the Joint Intelligence Committee or the Secret Intelligence Service that the prime minister was misrepresenting their intelligence. This failure to

challenge Mr Blair means that the Secret Intelligence Service in effect colluded with the prime minister as he led Britain into a calamitous war. (I show that MI5, the domestic intelligence service, emerges much more creditably.)

All this means that we are entitled to assert without contradiction that the Blair government led Britain into war on the back of a series of lies about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.'

Osborne doesn't stop there:

'It has been a chastening experience researching and writing this book. As I studied the events leading up to the war, I felt a growing sense of dismay and ultimately shame and remorse at my own performance as political columnist for *The Spectator*.

This was because I realised it was perfectly possible for an assiduous journalist *at the time* [his italics] to have uncovered many of the lies and falsehoods uttered by politicians and officials.

I failed to do so. It is no excuse that I was part of a wider failure. Though there were shining exceptions, the mainstream media as a whole failed to tell truth to power in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. It should always be taken into account that it was not only politicians and officials who failed in their duty.'

Self-criticism usually gives weight to that made of others. It is not the only reason for reading this fine book, but it's healthy for starters.

*John Booth*