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* New *

**Going round in circles**

In the section below subheaded ‘What goes around’, I referred to David Teacher’s massive study of Le Cercle. Teacher informs me that his fifth, final and slightly revised version is now on-line.¹

Also known as the Pinay Circle or Le Cercle Pinay, it is another of those secretive, international anti-communist groups of spooks and pols formed during the Cold War. There is some interesting material from Le Cercle on the Net.² Somebody has been leaking its internal documents, including the texts of a couple of speeches given at their meetings by the late Brian Crozier.³ In his 1982 speech, in the midst of a gloomy analysis which suggests that the Soviet Union might win the Cold War, he asserted:

‘In the United Kingdom, the counter-subversive arm of the Foreign Office, the Information Research Department (IRD) was destroyed in a complex operation in which the CIA traitor, Philip Agee, played a leading part.’


¹ At <https://isgp-studies.com/david-teacher>. Teacher writes that ‘the most important additions being CIA files declassified in January this year revealing Jean Violet’s true identity, and the 1983 book by Eschel Rhodie of “Muldergate” fame, alleging covert South African funding for both NAFF [National Association for Freedom] and FARI [Foreign Affairs Research Institute]’.

NAFF and FARI were both active in the UK in 1970s.

² See, for example, <https://isgp-studies.com/le-cercle-pinay>.


There is nothing in it about such an operation involving Agee.\(^5\)

What actually happened is more prosaic. By the mid-1970s the foreign policy establishments in the US and UK had accepted that detente with the Soviet bloc was established and the ‘hot’ Cold War of previous decades was over. (Arguably it had been over since the Cuba missile crisis.) In this context IRD was a Cold War anachronism. Crozier and his ilk never believed in detente and thought that, if the Red Menace was less visible, it just meant it was better hidden. (This may just have been old men – and they were all men, I think – unable to change their minds . . . .) History tells us that Crozier and the cold warriors were wrong: since the demise of the Soviet Union no evidence has come to light supporting their view of it.\(^6\)

Detente and its opponents is one of the subjects of the PhD thesis of Tom Griffin. A journalist interested in Irish and intelligence affairs, Griffin has an interesting website\(^7\) and his recent PhD thesis is now on-line.\(^8\) It is titled ‘Offensive Intelligence: An Epistemic Community in the Transition from Cold War Liberalism to Neoconservatism’. This is his introduction:

‘This thesis examines the development of neoconservatism through the lens of the distinctive theory of intelligence associated with the movement. The key primary sources for this theory are the writings of the National Strategy Information Center, and its project, the Consortium for the Study of Intelligence. An analysis of this literature in its historical context shows it to reflect the development of an epistemic community theorising the practice of a cadre of activists experienced in political warfare – the covert intervention by one country in the internal politics of another.

The roots of this tradition are traced to the beginnings of modern mass propaganda in the context of the First World War and the Russian


\(^6\) History also tells us that when the Reagan administration revived the Cold War and began another arms race, the attempt to compete militarily with the US damaged the already inefficient Soviet economy and hastened the demise of that system. A renewed arms race was proposed by a number of strategic analysts, notably Colin S. Gray, who were writing in the late 1970s and early 80s. Gray must have as much right as anyone else to claim he won the Cold War for the US. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_S._Gray>.

These days, Professor Gray teaches part time at the University of Reading. See his biographical page at <https://www.reading.ac.uk/spirs/about/staff/c-s-gray.aspx>“

\(^7\) <http://www.tomgriffin.org>

\(^8\) <http://opus.bath.ac.uk/57359/1/GRIFFIN_Thomas_PhD_Thesis_FINAL.pdf>. Garrick Alder alerted me to this.
Revolution. The Comintern developed as a centre of expertise in the field before fracturing in the 1930s. A group of activists associated with the Lovestoneite group gravitated towards the Western Allies at the outset of World War Two, marking the development of a political warfare coalition, an alliance of state intelligence agencies and sympathetic civil society groups committed to supporting covert political intervention in other societies.

This coalition was institutionalised in the early Cold War, but broke up as it lost state support in the era of detente in the 1970s. In the context of a counter-movement against detente, former intelligence officers and labour activists attempted to develop an epistemic community around a theory of intelligence that would provide a basis for renewed state support for political warfare. This theory informed the actions of neoconservatives in the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.’

I had to google ‘epistemic community’ and found it means ‘a transnational network of knowledge-based experts who help decision-makers to define the problems they face, identify various policy solutions and assess the policy outcomes’. Well, OK: for a PhD some theoretical top-dressing has to take place and Foucault is duly quoted on p. 24. But beneath that – on a quick skim so far on my part – as well as a brisk canter through the American liberal/labour movement/spook anti-communist alliance in the Cold War, there is a useful reminder of what some of the American, Red Menace-proselytising spooks (and their allies in the UK – Crozier again – and Israel) did to oppose detente between the USA and the Soviet bloc; and how that ‘menace’ was exhumed and revived, in part by using the device of claiming that the Soviets sponsored terrorism. The National Strategy Information Centre, on which Griffin focuses, includes some names which might be familiar to Lobster readers, notably Roy Godson.9

Griffin concludes:

‘In prioritising counterintelligence and covert action, neoconservative intelligence theory defended the relationship that had existed between the intelligence community and elements of Cold War liberalism during the early Cold War. In effect that alliance, exemplified most clearly in the relationship between James Angleton and Jay Lovestone, moved out of the Government and into the conservative movement. Questions of intelligence thereafter remained central to the development of neoconservatism at every major turning point from Team B to Iran-Contra

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9 See <https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/National_Strategy_Information_Center>.
That last sentence says in polite academic terms what I would put this way: false intelligence was critical to the recreation of the Soviet ‘threat’. When official (CIA) intelligence estimates supported detente, private sector alternatives were created to attack it.\(^{10}\) We might also add: breathing life into the corpse of the ‘Red Menace’ recreated the conditions in which the careers of the anti-communists could resume and munitions contracts from the government flowed again onto the books of their corporate sponsors.

* New *

**Reviewers needed**

Routledge keeps sending me books I didn’t ask for and it seems churlish not to mention them. I have Richard Griffiths, *What did you do during the war? The last throes of the British pro-Nazi Right, 1940-45*; Philip M Coupland, *Farming, Fascism and Ecology: A life of Jorian Jenks*; Colin Holmes, *Searching for Lord Haw-Haw*; and Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, *Marketing the Third Reich: Persuasion, Packaging and Propaganda*. If you would like to review any of these, please send me an email.

* New *

**Ed Herman RIP**

Edward Herman has died.\(^{11}\) He subscribed to *Lobster*, God bless him. Herman was an academic economist but is probably best known for the books he wrote with Frank Brodhead (*The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*) and Noam Chomsky (most notably *Manufacturing Consent: the political economy of the mass media*). He also produced controversial, revisionist accounts of events in Rwanda and Cambodia which, knowing little about the official versions, I was unable to evaluate. His Wikipedia entry seems reasonably complete.\(^{12}\)

For a recent and typical piece of Herman’s writing, see his long review essay (produced with his last writing partner David Peterson) on Steven

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\(^{11}\) An appreciation is at <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/11/15/thank-you-ed-herman/>.

\(^{12}\) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Herman>

* New *

**The Brexiteer’s gazette**

There’s a smart, political novel by a sometime CIA officer Joseph Finder, *Guilty Minds* (New York: Dutton/Penguin Group, 2016). Watching the progress of a smear story from the Net into the major media, one character asks if it has reached the *Daily Mail* website yet.

‘Does this count as a news site?’

‘Not even close. But it’s on the border between gossip and real news.’

That is spot on, of course: the *Daily Mail* is a dreadful rag etc. etc. and its website is worse. But it does run some good stories. On the 27 November the *Mail* website reported: (a) that while the British-based American financial company for which Prime Minister May’s husband works had paid no corporation tax since 2009, during the same period it had paid its directors £43 million in salaries, pensions and other benefits;14 and (b) ran a long story about the career of Rachael Whetstone, some time chief of PR for Uber in the UK. Whetstone also previously worked for Google, was married to former Tory Party policy chief Steve Hilton and is a personal friend of former PM David Cameron.15 She is currently at Facebook, vice-president of communications for the Facebook ‘platforms’ Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger. The *Mail* scents corruption . . . .

But would the *Mail* have run the stories had May and Cameron been Brexiteers?

* New *

**Russiagate**

‘Deception is getting real. This month, lawyers for Facebook, Twitter, and Google testified before Congress, facing hard questions and ugly truths about Russia’s online operations to inflame American divisions and
undermine American democracy. The story keeps getting worse. Twitter has now found more than 2,700 accounts controlled by Russians and 36,000 suspected Russian “bots”— accounts that automatically generated 1.4 million election-related tweets receiving 288 million impressions during the final 10 weeks of the 2016 presidential election. Google has discovered that suspected Russian agents uploaded more than 1,000 YouTube videos about divisive social issues. And Facebook revealed that Kremlin-instigated content may have reached 126 million Americans.”

So this is real, then, and not some fabrication by anti-Russian or anti-Trump forces in America? I am almost persuaded of this despite the major media’s persistent over-hyping of real stories and not so infrequent promotion of false ones. At any rate, the Russians were doing *something* on social media. The most interesting account of this I have read is by Julia Ioffe. This describes in some detail Putin’s – mostly accurate – view of American operations against Russia. It also includes the claim, from Russian sources, that the Russian internet operations were started in response to the Panama Papers on off-shore banking which exposed the corruption of some people in Putin’s circle. Now that has the resounding ring of real politics about it.

On the other hand . . . 1,000 videos uploaded onto YouTube sounds impressive until you check how much is arriving at Youtube: 300 hours of new material every *minute*; and notice how the article uses the weasel words ‘may’ and ‘suspected’ (used twice) in that quotation above. Perhaps one day there will be some indication of how much effect (if any) this Russian activity had, but at present we don’t know; and it may be impossible to measure. This kind of caveat also applies to the brilliant research by Carole Cadwalladr on Robert Mercer, Cambridge Analytica and the less than transparent funding of

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20 Bill Blum is extremely sceptical about Russiagate in his *Anti-Empire Bulletin* 153. [https://williamblum.org/aer/read/153](https://williamblum.org/aer/read/153) as are many of the writers at [consortiumnews.com](http://consortiumnews.com).
the Brexit campaign at the referendum.\footnote{21}

The sound you can hear accompanying all this is a very large flock of free market chickens coming home to roost. The Net was allowed to grow unregulated in the West; and as long as it was mostly used for porn and shopping, and the propaganda it carried was predominantly pro-American and pro-market, the American corporations benefitting from it were happy. But as the consequences of this vast, dopamine-driven\footnote{22} cacophony of facts, factoids, inventions, opinion, gossip, malice, narcissism, acting-out, propaganda, psy-ops and psy-war become clearer – growing sections of the population move away from professional news gatherers and onto social, editor-free media\footnote{23} – some of our masters are getting nervous. But they’re working on it. The end of Net neutrality and the tweaking of Google’s algorithms to downgrade ‘fake news’ \footnote{24} will just be the first steps.

* New *

**The new MM**

Glancing at the coverage of the Meghan Markle story, I noticed that she was a ‘global ambassador’ for World Vision.\footnote{25} I wonder what Markle knows about World Vision. They’re evangelical Christians and partners with and funded by, *inter alia*, USAID. And USAID has a long documented role as a cover for the CIA. (Never mind the rumours that World Vision itself provides cover for the CIA.)

\footnote{21} Her articles are listed at <http://journalisted.com/carole-cadwalladr?allarticles=yes>. Summary of these issues is at <https://tinyurl.com/yc83bfsq> or <http://truepublica.org.uk/united-kingdom/british-ministers-spies-oligarchs-bankers-russian-diplomats-colluded-brexit/>. Kudos also to <opendemocracy.net> who flagged up some of the issues with the ‘leave’ funding before anyone else. See <https://tinyurl.com/jvywdnx> or <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/peter-geoghegan-adam-ramsay/you-aren-t-allowed-to-know-who-paid-for-key-leave-campaign-adverts>.


\footnote{24} To no-one’s surprise this tweak now classifies as ‘fake news’ a great of left-wing writing. See, for example, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/07/27/goog-j27.html>.\footnote{24}

\footnote{25} Something which World Vision will presumably make such of. See, for example, <http://artistcollective.ca/artists/meghan-markle/>.\footnote{25}
* New *

**The Cambridge phone call redux**

Anthony Frewin reports:

The BBC News website carried a story on 4 December 2017 that the BBC had made a Freedom of Information request to the Cambridge Police asking them to check their files for anything relating to the call apparently predicting the Kennedy assassination in November 1963. The response was

‘Searches were conducted at Cambridgeshire Constabulary for information relating to your request. These searches failed to locate any records or documents relevant to your request.’

Well, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However, it was over fifty years ago and any papers may have been lost, thrown away, or weeded, so this absence doesn’t mean much. I wrote about this in *Lobster* 30, having spoken to a Cambridgeshire Special Branch detective in the mid-1990s who confirmed the call did take place.

My previous article stated how the CIA in London sent a memo to the CIA HQ in Langley. It said:

‘The Cambridge reporter had never received a call of this kind before, and MI5 state that he is known to them as a sound and loyal person with no security record.’

Interesting phraseology, ‘a sound and loyal person’. Could the journalist have been an intelligence agency asset or informant? Being a journalist would be a good cover for keeping an eye on radical students and others.

* New *

**I am paranoid. But am I paranoid enough?**

A character in a recent spy novel says: the basic truth of conspiracy? If it can be imagined, then someone’s already tried it. This may be an exaggeration

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27 In ‘JFK, the FBI and the Cambridge phone call’.

28 There is no mention of the call in Jefferson Morley’s recent biography of James Angleton, *The Ghost: The Secret Life of CIA Spymaster James Jesus Angleton* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2017). And Angleton would have been informed of it.

but perhaps not that much of one, as the recent list of ‘58 admitted false flag 
attacks’ suggests.\(^\text{30}\)

That the rise of conspiracy theories to prominence is at least partly the 
result of the actual behaviour of states, is apparently understood by few of the 
contributors at <conspiracyanddemocracy.org>. This project was set up with 
Leverhulme funding to examine society’s apparent recent propensity to believe 
conspiracy theories. There is little to detain us there. Only John Naughton, of 
the *Observer* and one of the project’s founders, seems to grasp the connection 
between the behaviour of states and conspiracy theories. In a piece on the 
site,\(^\text{31}\) Naughton mentions an article in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* which 
showed that outside intervention in civil wars was more likely if the country 
concerned had oil. Well, there’s a surprise! The article he referenced is ‘Oil 
above water’, and its abstract is this:

> ‘We explore economic incentives for third parties to intervene in ongoing 
internal wars. We develop a three-party model of the decision to intervene 
in conflict that highlights the role of the economic benefits accruing from 
the intervention and the potential costs. We present novel empirical 
results on the role of oil in motivating third party military intervention. We 
find that the likelihood of a third party intervention increases when a) the 
country at war has large reserves of oil, b) the relative competition in the 
sector is limited, and c) the potential intervener has a higher demand for 
oil.’\(^\text{32}\)

* New *

**All the news that fits**

I have commented before in these columns on the lack of quality control at 
the website <globalresearch.ca>: articles are simply reposted or published 
without anyone apparently checking their contents. It’s all the news that fits a 
certain left perspective. One of the articles they carried in late November was 
reprinted from *The Oriental Review*, self-described as ‘an independent Moscow-
based Internet journal focusing on current political issues in Eurasia and 
beyond’. ‘Independent’ and ‘Moscow’ do not sit easily together. Nonetheless 
this is worth looking at. It is a report, based on an Italian TV programme,

\(^{30}\) <https://tinyurl.com/y9jqne48> or <http://educateinspirechange.org/alternative-news/
dont-believe-conspiracies-58-admitted-false-flag-attacks/>. I have doubts about some of the 
examples but there remain enough solid ones to make the point.

\(^{31}\) <http://www.conspiracyanddemocracy.org/blog/crude-conspiracies/>

\(^{32}\) <http://repository.essex.ac.uk/13557/1/BGS.pdf>
which included interviews with three men who claim/confess to have been among the snipers who fired on the demonstrators on Maidan Square in Kiev killing 50? 100? people depending on which source you use. Curious – or perhaps not – that these confessions have not yet been deemed newsworthy by the mainstream media in this country and the USA.

The JFK assassination documents

In the end President Trump caved in to the hated ‘deep state’ and blocked the release of some of the Kennedy assassination documents scheduled to be declassified on 26 October. In six months the whole circus will take place again, though with less media interest.

Processing the 3000 or so documents that were released is going to take the researchers a while and I doubt they are expecting to find much: how carefully have those files been ‘weeded’ in the last half century? Among the initial discoveries was something about the ‘Cambridge phone call’, an apparent advance warning of the assassination. The BBC News website ran this story, which got picked up and circulated among some of the JFK researchers in the US. But there was nothing new there: Anthony Frewin

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern has an essay on this subject titled ‘The Deep State’s JFK Triumph Over Trump’.

How many documents remain depends on who you read. The major media initially told us that a few hundred remained but the Mary Ferrell foundation – the experts – wrote this on the subject:

‘What happened on Thursday, Oct. 26, with the JFK records scheduled for release under the JFK Records Act? A travesty. Most news reports correctly noted the release of about 2800 documents, but added that only a few were held back, in some cases saying “300 documents” remain withheld (see CNN, and Washington Post for example). They are off by a factor of 100. In fact, tens of thousands of documents, possibly as many as 30,000, remain sealed at the National Archives.’

The fact that subsequently, on 9 November, 13,213 new documents were made public, with more to come, settled any debate about whose information was reliable.

Emphasise apparent. The caller said something like ’Ring the American embassy in London for some big news’, not ’JFK’s going to be killed in Dallas.’


33 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-snipers-massacre-on-the-maidan-in-ukraine/5619863>

34 Occasional contributor to these columns, Michael Carlson, has some interesting things to say on this at <http://tinyurl.com/ydxodpuu> or <http://irresistibletargets.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/jfk-assassination-papers-partial-dump.html>.


36 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-41773716>
wrote about this in *Lobster* 30 in 1995. When the story resurfaced, Frewin rang the *Cambridge News* journalist who was taking the media’s calls on this, could not reach him, left a message but did not get a call back. In their coverage of the story to which they are central, the *Cambridge News* seemed keen to deny that there was anything to it. But in his original research Frewin talked to a retired Special Branch officer who was involved and his discomfort when talking about the subject made it pretty obvious the phone call did take place.

The JFK assassination is a unique subject: everybody and their cousin thinks they can comment on it without knowing anything. It’s as if in this one area there are no facts, only opinions. Although journalists are a sceptical – nay cynical – group of people, they endlessly repeat the CIA’s line on the assassination first articulated in a 1968 memorandum, ‘Countering criticism of the Warren Report’. This was sent to ‘chiefs, certain stations and bases’ and stated that those who doubted Warren’s conclusion were ‘conspiracy theorists’. Every account of this files release story in the Anglosphere’s major media (AMM) that I saw used this phrase. That CIA memo must be the most successful media psy-op in post-WW2 history.

Centrally, the AMM behaves as though the Warren Commission was an inquiry into who shot Kennedy. It wasn’t: the conclusion was preordained. The Warren Commission hired some young lawyers to make the case against Oswald. They duly cherry-picked evidence and rewrote eyewitness testimony where it was inconvenient. But they were still left with a ballistics scenario in which the wounds of Kennedy and Governor Connally were caused by a single bullet. As an American gun enthusiasts site recently put it, this ‘magic bullet’ went through ‘15 layers of clothing, a necktie knot, 7 layers of skin, and 15 inches of tissue, shattering 4 inches of rib and a wrist bone’, and emerged unmarked. American society surely has more gun buffs than anywhere else, so it is bizarre that this laughable nonsense is still taken seriously by their major media.

That AMM also behaves as though nothing official has happened since Warren. The House Select Committee on Assassinations is rarely mentioned. This was an investigation, albeit time constrained and underfunded, and it concluded there probably was a conspiracy. The Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) in the 90s is never mentioned. Created to examine which official

37 This was declassified and can be seen at <https://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/cia/russholmes/pdf/104-10406-10110.pdf>.
39 <https://www.gunsamerica.com/blog/lee-harvey-oswalds-carcano-rifle-shooting-it-today/>
documents could be made public, it conducted what amounted to another inquiry in the 1990s.

Buried under the coverage of the declassification story, it was announced in October that 50,000 emails, generated by the ARRB’s activities, were now on a searchable database. On my second search of this I came across a story from 1968 in the Capital Times newspaper of Madison, Wisconsin. In this a doctor, Wayne Owen, reported that four days before Kennedy was killed, he and other trainee doctors heard a patient talk about an assassination plot involving ‘Jack Rubenstein’

‘On Tuesday, Nov. 19, 1963, the 11 interns were making their hospital rounds when they came upon a room into which three men had been brought following an automobile accident. The men had been picked up by Louisiana State Police, were presumed drunk, and transported to the hospital. One of the three also had a bullet wound in his stomach. The man with the bullet wound soon died. But the other two men had only minor injuries. While the interns checked the patients, one of them casually remarked that he knew of “a plot to kill Jack Kennedy”. He went on to tell the 11 startled medical students that one of the men involved in the plot was a man called “Jack Rubenstein”. “We all just laughed It off, thinking the man might be spouting off for some reason”, Owen explained.’

This rang a faint bell for me so I googled ‘Wayne Owen + JFK’, and he crops up in the story of Rose Cheramie, who also predicted JFK’s assassination and mentioned Jack Ruby. This incident with the three men occurred in the same hospital that Cheramie was in and at the same time. That two people, in the same hospital, apparently unconnected, both predicted the assassination of JFK and mentioned Ruby (Rubenstein) is beyond implausible. But neither of the accounts of Cheramie that I looked at mention this other man’s prediction. And Dr Owen is quoted as saying that when they went to look at the hospital files to identify the male patient who had predicted the assassination, the records were missing.

So this is a typical JFK research experience: something looks interesting and instantly turns out to be more complex than it first appeared. If my brief

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41 See, for example, <http://spartacus-educational.com/JFKcheramie.htm> or <https://riversong.wordpress.com/the-strange-and-revelatory-saga-of-rose-cheramie/>

experience searching these ARRB e-mails is anything to go by, they are a treasure trove.

Most significant of all – but also ignored by the AMM – it was reported for the first time at the beginning of October that a young US Navy doctor, James Young, present at the autopsy of JFK, had been sent back to the presidential limousine to look for bone fragments. He found some – but he also found a bullet. Another bullet meant more than one gunman had been firing and his discovery was suppressed to preserve the lone assassin, ‘magic bullet’ thesis. Young’s account – complete with his correspondence about this with Warren Commission member (and former US President) Gerald Ford – was discovered recently in the Navy’s archives. I will be surprised if anything as significant as this turns up in those 3000 pages.43

The money men

Yanis Varoufakis is unique in being the only left-leaning politician to have actually tried to deal with the core EU financial figures – what the subheading of a recent interview with him referred to as ‘the international monetary deep state’. There are lots of interviews around now in which he explains in nice simple terms what he described in great detail in his book.44 Here is his core thesis.

‘What happened was very simple. In 2010, the Greek state went bankrupt, because it was part of a common currency area, a monetary union, that was simply not fit to the purpose of sustaining the great financial collapse of Wall Street, the city of London, the Frankfurt banks, the French banks, etc., and the Greek banks, and so on and so forth. So, there was a cynical transfer of private sector, private bank losses onto the shoulders of the weakest of taxpayers, the Greeks, knowing that those shoulders were weak, so weak that they wouldn’t be able to sustain that burden, and that burden would then be transferred to the shoulders of the German, the Slavic, the French taxpayers. And once they did this, it’s like Shakespeare, it’s like Macbeth: You commit one crime, then you have to commit a second crime to hide the fact that you committed the first one, and then a third one, and then a fourth one. And the second crime, of course, was the second bailout, because once the first bailout makes whole the bankers, then, within a few months, it becomes abundantly

43 <http://tinyurl.com/yccvdjnf> or <whowhatwhy.org/2017/10/06/navy-doctor-bullet-found-jfks-limousine-never-reported/>  
44 Reviewed in this issue of Lobster.
clear that the Greek state cannot sustain that loan. So, a second predatory loan is enforced upon the Greek government in order to pretend that it is making its payments for the first loan, and then a third one, and then a fourth one. And the worst aspect of it is that these loans, which were not loans to Greece, were given, extended, on condition of stringent austerity that shrunk our incomes. So we entered a debt deflationary cycle, a great depression, with no end in sight, and a great depression which sees – has absolutely no chance of a New Deal kind of solution like we had here in the United States in the 1930s, as long as the powers that be in Berlin – we heard the White House spokesman siding himself completely with Berlin – insist that this extending and pretending shall continue.45

The Israeli network

Things might just be changing vis-a-vis the role of Israel in British politics. The BBC News website started the Priti Patel and Israel story, which led to her resignation, running an item which began:

‘The International Development Secretary held undisclosed meetings in Israel without telling the Foreign Office while accompanied by an influential pro-Israeli Conservative lobbyist, the BBC has learned.

Priti Patel met the leader of one of Israel’s main political parties and made visits to several organisations where official departmental business was reportedly discussed.

According to one source, at least one of the meetings was held at the suggestion of the Israeli ambassador to London.’46

Would this have been reported three, four years ago? Would the BBC have run this before the Al Jazeera series on Israeli operations in London?47

Al Jazeera also reported on the British government’s refusal to publish a report on terrorism. The story began thus:

‘The British government has announced that it would not publish in full its report on the sources of “funding of extremism” in Britain, prompting

45 <https://www.democracynow.org/2016/4/28/yanis_varoufakis_bailouts_of_greece_are>
46 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41853561>
47 <http://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/>
opposition charges it was trying to protect its ally Saudi Arabia’. And why are the government so concerned not to annoy the Saudis? Once upon a time it might have been because of oil. But these days oil flows into a world market and Saudi Arabia cannot stop oil getting to an individual country. No, it’s about weapons sales. We don’t make much in this country any more – the really big problem no-one wants to discuss – but we do apparently make some nice weapons. And Saudi Arabia buys them.

Al Jazeera’s reporting on issues such as this one explains why the Saudis and Americans are so hostile to Qatar, which hosts it. The text of the agreement between Qatar and other Middle Eastern states on the non-support of terrorism has been published. The alleged breach of these agreements is the pretext for the anti-Qatar activities. But it is manifestly almost entirely about Al Jazeera.

All our yesterdays

There was an event in Bristol on 3 November, remembering the ABC trial 40 years ago.

ABC were the defendants, Crispin Aubrey, John Berry and Duncan Campbell, charged under the Official Secrets Act, right at the beginning of the slow exposure of the British secret state which has been the background to this journal’s existence. I’m not sure what it says about this country but one of the ABC defendants, Duncan Campbell, was one of the speakers at a 2015 Ditchley Foundation conference on intelligence, secrecy and privacy. Campbell notes on his site:

’I was asked to open the conference discussions, in conjunction with GCHQ’s new Director, Robert Hannigan. . . . No-one argued against calls for greater openness. That’s a first; coming 40 years after a time when it was a crime in Britain even to mention the existence of GCHQ, and

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50 <http://www.crispinaubrey.org/latest-news/the-abc-secrecy-trial-40-year-on> Thanks to Jane Affleck for this link.

51 The wikipedia entry on this looks reasonably accurate: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ABC_trial>
programmes on the subject were banned.”

Broon

And there’s ‘oor Gordon’, with his new memoir, explaining why he supported the US attack on Iraq. We were misled, he claims: we didnae ken. How can he believe that will wash? There was a blizzard of information about Iraq and its putative WMDs and there was no evidence for their existence. Even if the evidence was there it could not justify the invasion, half million deaths and the subsequent lethal pollution by depleted uranium.

The late Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary while Brown was Chancellor, had access to the same information and resigned in opposition to the approaching war. He said in his resignation speech:

‘Why is it now so urgent that we should take military action to disarm a military capacity that has been there for 20 years and which we helped to create? And why is it necessary to resort to war this week while Saddam’s ambition to complete his weapons programme is frustrated by the presence of UN inspectors?

I have heard it said that Iraq has had not months but 12 years in which to disarm, and our patience is exhausted. Yet it is over 30 years since resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

We do not express the same impatience with the persistent refusal of Israel to comply.’

Truth is, since about 1985 there was no American policy that Brown wasn’t willing to swallow in pursuit of his dream of being PM.

Brillo

‘Those who know the history of Soviet Russia will know that there is a strain of antisemitism that has always run through parts of the British intellectual left.’

Thus Andrew Neil, with a classic non-sequitur, during his speech at the annual

52 <http://www.duncancampbell.org/content/talking-gchq-interception-not-required>
53 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41872701>
54 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/18/foreignpolicy.labour1>
Holocaust Educational Trust dinner. I am not aware of this strain of anti-semitism and – unlike him – I’ve been in or around the British intellectual left my whole life. Yes, there is an anti-Israel thread among the British left. Looking at the condition of the Palestinians, it would be pretty strange if there wasn’t.

**Briefly…..**

There is a detailed summary on the True Publica website of the the Iraq-Supergun-Project-Babylon-Nadir embroglio, largely based on the writing of Andrew Rosthorn in *Tribune* with other material from the Jancom site (now apparently defunct).56

Watching the Vietnam War series on BBC4 recently – the Americans doing to Vietnam what they did to Korea – I was reminded of the original genocide of the native peoples living in the US when the Europeans arrived.57 Mass killing was the American way from the get-go. Occasionally an anecdote conveys more than pages of prose. I was reading a biography of the American singer Lena Horne, who was part Native America.58 The author mentions that so shitty was the experience of being ‘an Indian’, one of Horne’s Native America relatives, back at the turn of the century, chose to pass as black.

‘More Than 50% of President Trump’s Nominees Have Ties to the Industries They’re Supposed to Regulate’.59 In other words, yes, Trump was bought and paid for; but not by the Russians.

*Voices for Peace: War, Resistance and America’s Quest for Full-Spectrum Dominance* is a collection of essays and interviews edited by occasional contributor to these columns T. J. Coles. Good titles for books like this are difficult and Coles’ title/subtitle sort of covers the range of contributions. For example, the full-spectrum dominance part of the subtitle is represented by Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, Bruce Gagnon (on US attempts to dominate space) and an essay of mine from *Lobster* 57, ‘Why are we with Uncle Sam?’.


57 Coincidentally, a brief but pointed item on which arrived in my in-box. <https://hubpages.com/education/Never-Forget-The-Native-American-Genocides>


The resistance in the title is represented by essays from Brian Terrell\(^60\) and Kathy Kelly\(^61\); and there are others which do not fit comfortably within it: Ilan Pappé\(^62\) on an Israeli massacre in Gaza and former US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney on the ‘Making sense of tragedies like the Charlie Hebdo incident when the government narrative doesn’t make much sense’, which tip-toes up to the line where conspiracy theorising begins and doesn’t quite cross it.

This is published by clairviewbooks.com at £10.99.

**Bilderberg**

I have already said in this column that I don’t think that Bilderberg matters much any more but, if you are interested, one Robin Upton has done a big job of assembling the extant information on the annual meetings – attenders and subject matter – which can be found at [https://wikispooks.com/wiki/Bilderberg](https://wikispooks.com/wiki/Bilderberg).

**Brexit is dead**

Earlier in this column (see below) and in the previous issue, no. 73, I asserted that the failure of Mrs May to get a resounding affirmation at the last general election meant that Brexit was dead. This judgment still looks correct to me. There was another row over Brexit in the media at the end of September - this time between Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and No. 10.\(^63\) According to Johnson’s allies, prior to his intervention, Prime Minister May was going to opt for the so-called ‘Norwegian option’\(^64\) – i.e. staying in the EU while pretending to leave. Various media stories also reported that the Treasury and the Chancellor wanted a five year transition – i.e. staying in while pretending to be planning to leave.

Elsewhere it has been reported that David Davis, in charge of negotiating

\(^{60}\) See for example [http://vcnv.org/author/briantrell/](http://vcnv.org/author/briantrell/).


\(^{62}\) See [http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iais/staff/pappe/](http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iais/staff/pappe/).


Brexit, has been reading the book by Yanis Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room*, which describes the Greek government’s attempt to negotiate with the EU. Varoufakis found that the EU was simply unwilling to negotiate and went through a series of blocking and delaying manoeuvres. The fact that David Davis has been reading the Varoufakis book may explain why, during the Tory Party conference, he said that the UK might have to prepare for a Brexit without an agreement. But such a policy would be blocked in either or both the House of Commons or Lords, where there there is no majority in favour of such a step.

Cries of ‘betrayal’ and ‘sellout’ (and worse) have been heard for months coming from UKIP and those of similar views on the Conservative right. Occasional contributor to these columns, Robert Henderson, an enthusiastic Brexiteer, put the following at the top of one of his regular e-mail collections of newspaper stories:

> ‘The fact that we have a remainer PM says it all. That she heads a remainer majority Cabinet and a remainer majority party in a remainer majority Commons and remainer majority Lords underlines the massive scope for subverting Brexit which exists.’

With the failure of Boris Johnson to replace May as PM after the party conference, the (closet) Remainers are still in charge of the party. This became open when Mrs May refused to answer the question put to her by Iain Dale: ‘How would you vote now if there was a referendum on leaving the EU?’

Meanwhile, at the Labour Party conference, Jeremy Corbyn announced that Labour’s policy would be to guarantee ‘unimpeded access to the Single Market’ – which will entail membership of the EU in some form. In short, as has been obvious for some while, the solution to this acute problem for the

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65 Reviewed in this issue of *Lobster*.


68 Nigel Farage responded this in the *Telegraph*:

‘Everyone listening to that interview knows that the reality is that May is still a Remainer. I don’t believe it’s possible to carry out this great, historic change against a huge amount of international criticism unless you truly believe in it. Nor, as it happens, does May: in a speech on June 1 she herself said: “To deliver Brexit you have to believe it”. This is the clearest proof yet that the Great Brexit Betrayal is under way.’

<http://tinyurl.com/yc6krhq3> or <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/10/theresa-may-now-eus-stepford-wife-subservient-submissive-every/>
British political system is to stay in the EU while pretending to leave.\textsuperscript{69}

**Labour and the money-movers**

During the Labour Party conference, CNBC had this headline: ‘Socialist firebrands in UK prepared for a "run on the pound" if elected’.\textsuperscript{70} ‘Firebrands’ made me chuckle. What, our Jeremy? But it was John Mcdonnell’s use of the expression ‘run on the pound’ which caught my attention. Oh, dear: Labour’s Shadow Chancellor apparently still hasn’t grasped that while a ‘run on the pound’ meant something back in the day when the pound had a fixed value vis-a-vis the dollar, in the wonderful world of global finance and floating currencies, a ‘run on the pound’ has no meaning. In the event of a left-wing Labour government taking office, the international value of the pound may fall as the money-movers conclude that said government will damage the British economy with reduced inward investment and lower corporate profits etc. But ‘a run’ implies more than that; it implies political intent on the part of those selling sterling. And the global financial markets have no intent other than financial.

The thing to do, if the pound starts falling, is do nothing. (Not that there’s much a relatively small nation-state like the UK could do, any way.) The system is self-correcting. If the money-movers conclude a fall in the pound has gone too far they will start buying pounds again and its value will rise. This is something Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling never grasped. Even though they had given the City more than it could have possibly dreamed of, they spent their years in office anxious that the City was planning something nasty for them.

**Tarzan**

I picked up a copy of Michael Heseltine’s autobiography, *Life in the Jungle*

\textsuperscript{69} Related to this, the Europe minister Sir Alan Duncan – technically Minister of State for Europe and the Americas – was heavily criticised in Brexit circles for apparently saying that Brexit happened because of a ‘tantrum’ by the working class. Curiously, on the same day the results of a survey conducted by people at the University of Warwick of reasons for voting ‘leave’ was published. It showed

‘...The key predictor of someone’s Brexit vote was their deep-down feelings about their own finances – whether they felt they were managing comfortably, doing OK, just about getting by, or having some – or extreme – difficulty.’

<https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/brexit_was_caused/>

(2000 h/b and 2001 p/b), in a charity shop. Heseltine served in the government of Edward Heath, which was partly responsible for the worst inflation this country has every experienced, and in that of Margaret Thatcher, which created the worst recession since the 1930s. I was curious to see how he dealt with these politically uncomfortable facts. Not well, is the answer. Or: predictably and politically, is the answer.

His only comment on the Heath years is that the oil price rise of 1973 ‘put an end to the “dash for growth” policy that Tony Barber at the Treasury had been pursuing’ (2001, p. 155). No acknowledgment that central to the ‘dash for growth’ was deregulating the money-lenders, which created the first big post-WW2 credit boom and stoked inflation. On the Thatcher recession he merely notes ‘Geoffrey Howe’s success in reducing inflation from a rising 10% in 1979 to 3.7% in May and June 1983.’ (2001, p. 203). This is an extremely selective use of inflation stats, as you can see if you consult the data.71

There is one other striking claim. Heseltine was Secretary of State for Defence in the 1980s and was in charge of the policy of countering the growing influence of CND. He describes how the Ministry of Defence set up a unit, DS19, to ‘develop arguments in support of NATO’s plans’. (2001, p. 247) In practise this meant propaganda against CND. He assures us that ‘no information was used that was not in the public domain, The allegations by an ex-MI5 junior officer, Cathy Massiter, that the Security Service collected information for this purpose were untrue.’ (2001, p. 250)

Of course I couldn’t remember precisely what Massiter had said so, for the first time in quite a while, I went into my filing cabinets and dug out the collection of clippings I had on her. In a very long article, ‘The spymasters who broke their own rules’, in the Guardian of 1 March 1985, Massiter explained her objection to MI5 supplying information to DS19:

‘It was was a very important party political issue. Unilateral nuclear disarmament had been adopted as a policy by the Labour Party, a general election was in the offing and it had been clearly stated that the question of nuclear disarmament was going to be an important issue there. It did begin to seem to me that what the Security Service was being asked to do was to provide information on a party political issue.’

She did not say that the MI5 collected information on CND for DS19.72

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71 <http://tinyurl.com/ybwjezsl> or <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KCPTEaGSi9OEaoQVzSyEh8xzPSolWwaXd3iwSjw0sU/edit#gid=0>

Huh?

I noted below (under subhead ‘Two thoughts on the General Election’) that the Daily Mail ran a big smear story about Jeremy Corbyn just before the election. They’re still at it, this time using comments by former MI5 D-G Stella Rimington on the political history of some of the people around Corbyn.73

Guess what? They used to be Trots when they were younger! A revelation! Rimington is now 82 and perhaps not as sharp as she was once, nonetheless she also said this:

‘My first job when I joined the service, I was responsible for the Devon and Cornwall branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

And my job was to know exactly who belonged to it, so should they ever apply for a job that gave them access to classified information, I would pop up and say, “Ah, no.”

That’s why Trotskyists came into that area at the time.’ (emphasis added)

Is she really saying that MI5 believed that the growth of Trotskyist groups was caused by the effectiveness of MI5’s monitoring of the CPGB?

In the air

I am not on Facebook and have never visited it except by accident. (My brother calls me a Facebook refusenik.) But two billion other people are – including most of those reading this column, I expect. Which means that two billion people are providing data about their lives, friends, tastes and opinions to an unaccountable organisation which is doing who-knows-what with it (mostly selling us things, of course, including US presidential candidates).74

Julian Assange said of Facebook:

73 <http://tinyurl.com/y8nx69je> or <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4979404/Communists-spied-MI5-senior-Corbyn-advisors.html>

74 See, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/ydaa2pyz> or <https://www.facebook.com/bbcnewsnight/videos/10154695768566200/>

Nick Must commented: Carole Cadwalladr, the journalist who made this piece, says that military ‘hearts and minds’ operations in countries like Afghanistan are purely psychological operations. She is somewhat mistaken here, as the original hearts and minds process was established by the SAS in conflicts such as those in Oman and Borneo. This included sending medics to treat the local populations with antibiotics, etc, that were not available to the ‘enemy’. So, there was more of a physical-action aspect to a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign than Ms Cadwalladr seems to understand.
'Facebook in particular is the most appalling spying machine that has ever been invented. Here we have the world’s most comprehensive database about people, their relationships, their names, their addresses, their locations and the communications with each other, their relatives, all sitting within the United States, all accessible to U.S. intelligence.' 75

A sense of what Facebook and the other mega-corporations now running the Internet are doing and are capable of is given in a very good essay by John Lanchester, ‘You are the product’, in a recent issue of the *London Review of Books*.76

There is also the prospect of Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg running as a Democratic presidential candidate for 2020.77 With his immense personal wealth and Facebook to promote him, who would bet against him becoming the candidate?

**Grauniadia**

As the *Guardian* slides slowly down the pan there have been odd signs of intelligent life there beyond the economics pages. There was Owen Jones on the prospect that the British (secret) state might not take too kindly to a Corbyn-led Labour government. Invoking Chris Mullins’ *A Very British Coup* and Peter Wright in a jumbled account of anti-Wilson coup talk and planning, which conflated events in the 1960s and 70s, Jones prefaced it all with the obligatory ‘What, me paranoid?’ reference:

‘You are probably imagining me hunched over my computer with a tinfoil hat. So consider this: there is a precedent for conspiracies against an elected British government, it is not so long ago, and it was waged against

75 This quote is originally from an interview he gave to Russia Today in 2011 (see <https://www.rt.com/news/wikileaks-revelations-assange-interview/> but it has been more recently referred to this summer in a profile of him, his activities, Trump and the Russia connections in *The New Yorker* at <http://tinyurl.com/y7pygthg> or <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/21/julian-assange-a-man-without-a-country?mbid=synd_digg>. This *New Yorker* article is very good (but very long – more than 20,000 words) and strikingly sympathetic when compared to other articles on Assange in the major media.


an administration that represented a significantly smaller threat to the existing order than that offered by Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour.’ 78

As usual, Colin Wallace, by far the most significant source on all this, was not mentioned.

In the midst of a long essay on the innocence of middle-class white Americans (like herself), 79 Suzy Hansen noted:

‘The sheer number of international interventions the US launched in those decades is astonishing, especially those during years [post 1945] when American power was considered comparatively innocent. There were the successful assassinations: Patrice Lumumba, prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in 1961; General Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, also in 1961; Ngo Dinh Diem, president of South Vietnam, in 1963. There were the unsuccessful assassinations: Castro, Castro, and Castro. There were the much hoped-for assassinations: Nasser, Nasser, Nasser. And, of course, US-sponsored, -supported or -staged regime changes: Iran, Guatemala, Iraq, Congo, Syria, Dominican Republic, South Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay and Argentina. The Americans trained or supported secret police forces everywhere from Cambodia to Colombia, the Philippines to Peru, Iran to Vietnam. Many Turks believed that the US at least encouraged the 1971 and 1980 military coups in Turkey, though I could find little about these events in any conventional histories anywhere.’

Welcome to the world of Philip Agee, *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, Herman and Chomsky and Bill Blum, circa 1980 – where I came in (but the *Guardian* didn’t).

Bill Blum is still issuing his Anti-Empire Reports. In his most recent, number 150,80 he notes

‘I still get emails criticizing me for the stand I took against Islamic terrorists earlier this year. Almost every one feels obliged to remind me that the terrorists are acting in revenge for decades of US/Western bombing of Muslim populations and assorted other atrocities. And I then have to inform each one of them that they’ve chosen the wrong person for such a lecture. I, it happens, wrote the fucking book on the subject!


80 <https://williamblum.org/aer/read/150>
In the first edition of my book *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*, published in 2001, before September 11, the first chapter was “Why do terrorists keep picking on The United States?” It includes a long list of hostile US military and political actions against the Islamic world during the previous 20 years.’

**Lockerbie: a new thesis?**

Occasional contributor to these columns, Dr. Roger Cottrell, recently sent me the text of his new book on Lockerbie, *Ashes in the Fall: Iran-Contra, the godfather of terror and the bombing of Pan Am 103* (forthcoming from Red Door). The paragraphs below are from the introduction. I have not been following Lockerbie and this was new to me and thus, perhaps, new to some Lobster readers.

**Motive and Target: Chuck McKee and his Team**

In all previous books and documentaries on the Lockerbie bombing, one of two scenarios is pursued. The first, and official, view that Abdelbaset al Megrahi and the Libyan regime bombed the plane is based (as we shall see) on tissue thin and often fabricated evidence and has all but been discredited by everybody who has examined the bombing in a serious way. But there are also problems with the “default position,” particularly identified with Allan Frankovich’s important (but ultimately flawed) documentary, *The Maltese Double Cross*, in 1994. Here, and in subsequent documentaries both for *Al Jazeera* and ZDF TV, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) is assumed to have carried out the bombing as a “contract killing” for the governments in Damascus and Tehran. Specifically, the bombing of Pan Am 103 is seen, in this scenario, as revenge for the shooting down of Iran Airbus 655 by the *USS Vincennes*, in the Gulf of Hormuz on July 3, 1988. Among the 290 passengers and crew killed on the routine commercial flight from Mehrabad Airport in Tehran to Dubai were pilgrims to Mecca, participating in the annual *Haj* and 66 children. The subsequent failure of the US administration even to apologise for this incident led to understandable fury in Iran on the part both of the regime and population but is not, in my view, the reason why Pan Am 103 was bombed.

That there is a *connection*, between the existence of the PFLP-

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81 See [http://www.reddoorvision.co.uk/rogercottrell.htm](http://www.reddoorvision.co.uk/rogercottrell.htm) for a brief biog.
GC cell in Germany, and Sweden, led by Hafez Dalkamini and mostly operating in Dusseldorf, and Neuss, and the bombing of Pan Am 103 is not disputed in this book. In particular, Jordanian double agent Marwan Khreesat is identified as having made a number of barometric Toshiba cassette bombs for the Dusseldorf cell, containing military grade Semtex H, one of which undoubtably destroyed Pan Am 103 (*The Maid of the Seas*) over Lockerbie, Scotland. But as a Jordanian GID agent involved in a sting operation, set up by the recently formed Counter Intelligence Centre of the CIA’s Directorate of Operations, it is doubtful that Khreesat (who was quietly released from police custody and allowed to return to Amman) ever intended his bombs to be used. Rather, it seems that an asset of the CIA, deeply involved in Iran Contra and with consequent connections to the 200 strong force of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon, drew these forces into a bogus plot to bomb several western civilian aircraft in revenge for Iran Airbus 655. With its origins in October Surprise in 1980 (see text) the Revolutionary Guards were pursuing their own clandestine Foreign Policy independent of the Tehran government by this time.

Such was the BKA-CIA sting operation that led to the *Operation Herbstlaub* (Operation Autumn Leaves) bust on October 30, 1988. Thereafter, the PFLP-GC was a spent force in continental Europe. But we believe that this CIA asset, who helped the CIA’s Duane Clarridge (himself an Iran Contra insider and veteran) and Vincent Cannistraro (later notorious in the Lockerbie cover up) to facilitate the sting had his own reasons for wanting Pan Am 103 destroyed. Thanks to the afore mentioned CIA sting and complicity of a CIA asset called Abu Elias, he also had access to the bomb that was later placed on board the plane at Heathrow.

In this book, we set out to prove that the actual target of the bombing was Green Beret Captain Charles “Chuck” McKee (attached to the Pentagon’s Defence Intelligence Agency), Martin Gannon, the Deputy Head of CIA Station in Beirut and a young Lebanese man called Khaled Jaafar, whom they had accompanied from Frankfurt on Pan Am 103A to place into witness protection in the United States. Two Security Officers from the US Embassy in Beirut were also part of the group. Jaafar, aged just 22, was a member of a powerful drug producing clan in the Be’eqa Valley, who wanted to be free to marry his cousin. He could provide supportive testimony to the 200 page dossier that McKee was also taking back to the US to present as testimony to the Kerry Commission. This was why he was killed. The second purpose of the Lockerbie bombing was to destroy or recover McKee’s file.
Brexit is dead

In 'A big business Brexit for a bargain basement Britain’, Nick Dearden complained that:

'An analysis of official statistics on lobby meetings with ministers from the UK’s Department for Exiting the EU (DExEU) and members of the EU’s Brexit Task Force reveals a common willingness to privilege the representatives of corporate interests above all others. The analysis shows:

- Between October 2016 and March 2017, DExEU staff had six meetings with big business representatives for every one meeting with an NGO, a trade union or a think tank. This figure may even just be the tip of the iceberg, as Brexit lobby meetings are also likely to take place with DExEU officials not required to disclose meetings.
- The team of Chief EU Brexit Negotiator Michel Barnier had ten meetings with corporate lobbyists for every one NGO they met between October 2016 and May 2017.\(^{82}\)

This is hardly a surprise and – for those against Brexit, such as Dearden – is good news, surely, because those corporate lobbyists will all be opposed to it.

The Labour Party’s new policy on Brexit, announced on 28 August, shows the way out for the British political system: remaining in the EU while pretending to leave; a.k.a. ‘transition’. The trick is going to be selling this to the Brexit supporters, whose leaders are already crying ‘Sell-out! Betrayal!’.

Bringing it all back home

In May, after briefings from ‘Whitehall sources’, the British media reported:

‘Intelligence officers have identified 23,000 jihadist extremists living in Britain as potential terrorist attackers, it emerged yesterday. The scale of the challenge facing the police and security services was disclosed by Whitehall sources after criticism that multiple opportunities to stop the Manchester bomber had been missed.

About 3,000 people from the total group are judged to pose a threat and are under investigation or active monitoring in 500 operations being run by police and intelligence services. The 20,000 others have featured in previous inquiries and are categorised as posing a “residual risk.”

Fast forward three months and EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove stated that ‘Britain is home to up to 35,000 fanatical Islamists of whom 3,000 are “worrying” for the security service MI5.’ The gross totals differ but the core group remains the same. 500 is a lot of operations to be running.

A measure of how the world has changed is the fact that in the mid 90s MI5 had so little to do, it was scuffling around Whitehall trying to find/generate roles for itself. I wrote this in Lobster 28 (1994).

‘The available fragments of evidence suggest that MI5 will continue on its present course, dealing with a mixed bag of domestic threats and various promising, new subjects. (“Promising” in the budget-sustaining sense.) There are the “foreign terrorists in Britain”, and a variety of new, post Cold War themes emerging out of the general “turbulence” of the New World Disorder. (London’s role as one of the world centres for flight capital is attracting some of the world’s major scumbags.) Some of it even has reassuring Eastern European labels on it. If the former Soviet bloc can no longer be plausibly portrayed as exporting revolution, terrorism, subversion and espionage to Britain, the remnants of the Soviet empire are now (we are told) engaged in money laundering, drug-running, gun-running and – the holy grail – nuclear material smuggling. A “senior police officer” was quoted in the Observer, 6 November 1994: “It’s very easy to present drugs and organised crime as a threat to national security particularly because of Eastern Europe. There the threat of armoured divisions has been replaced by the threat of the Russian mafia.”

Then there is the ever-expanding new European Union super state to be policed. The Independent of 9 November 1994, reported that “MI5. . . and Special Branch are vying to take the lead in representing Britain at Europol’s headquarters in The Hague. MI5 is making an aggressive bid to takeover the European Liaison Unit of the Metropolitan Special Branch. . .”; and the front page of Computer Weekly of 10 November, 1994, reported that “The security service MI5 is to offer advice to

83 <http://tinyurl.com/yarfud2u> or <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/huge-scale-of-terror-threat-revealed-uk-home-to-23-000-jihadists-3zvn58mhq>

84 <www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4840604/Britain-home-35-000-Islamic-fanatics.html>
government IT managers on nearly all computer security issues further
diluting the role of Whitehall’s dedicated computer agency the CCTA.”

This was before the UK joined the Israeli-American plans to smash most of the
states of the Middle East into ethnic and religious fragments. So, since the
current domestic jihadism problem is part of the price of supporting US foreign
policy in the Middle East, is there anyone left in Whitehall who thinks that
policy was a good idea? Apparently so: token British forces are currently
working with the US in at least four wars in the region.85 Or is that taking the
British presence too seriously? In a review of a new account of the war in
Afghanistan, former British ambassador there, Sherard Cowper-Coles, says
that the British Army was there:

‘Mainly, of course, to please the Americans, or, more precisely, the
American military. To show them after Basra what good allies and brave
soldier the Brits really were. But there was another, less honourable,
reason, one that led me to wonder if the British Army had deployed to
Helmand to fight not the Taliban but the Treasury, the Royal Navy and the
Royal Air Force. As one general put it to me: “If I don’t use the battle
groups coming out of Iraq in Afghanistan, Sherard, I will lose them in a
defence review.”’86

**Economic bits and pieces**

There is quite a chorus of voices now warning that we are heading for another
financial crash. One such, and he’s worth taking seriously, is Professor Frank
Portnoy, who wrote in the *Financial Times*, ‘The sequel to the global financial
crisis is here’.87 It’s the same formula as last time: vast personal debt is being
created and bundled up into interest-bearing instruments (derivatives). The
difference this time is that, if things go kablooey again, governments are too
indebted from the last bail-out to rescue the banks a second time.


86 ‘So what the hell were we doing in Afghanistan (and why did we stay?)’, *The Times* (books) 19 August 2017.

87 [https://www.ft.com/content/95808118-662e-11e7-9a66-93fb352ba1fe](https://www.ft.com/content/95808118-662e-11e7-9a66-93fb352ba1fe) Portnoy wrote *Fiasco: blood in the water on Wall Street* (London: Profile, 1997) about the financial
derivatives business and the men (almost entirely men) engaged in it. This anticipated the
financial crash a decade later.
The Guardian’s Larry Elliot had a piece, ‘While Hammond looks for a magic money tree, Labour has found one’, about an idea from Professor Avinash Persaud, which would involve removing some of the exceptions from stamp duty charged on share purchases.\(^88\) This might raise over £4 billion a year, which would just about cover the annual NHS deficit. But the annual UK government deficit for 2016-17 was £52 billion. Labour needs a magic money forest, not a tree, if its economic policies are to be taken seriously without there being talk of raising taxation on the general population.

Meanwhile, down under in New Zealand, Bryan Gould – to my knowledge the last significant British Labour politician who understood macroeconomics – got into an exchange with Don Brash about the creation of money.\(^89\) Brash, who is a sometime leader of the New Zealand equivalent of the Conservative Party and Governor of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, would not accept that banks created money for themselves by lending to other people. Gould’s article includes this:

‘My own efforts to clear up the confusion concluded with the New Zealand Herald’s disappointing decision to decline to publish my rebuttal of Don Brash’s repeated attempts to deny the truth about money creation. . . In his various contributions, Don Brash chose repeatedly, on the central issue as to how money is created, to deny (without any evidence or countervailing argument) what is now almost universally accepted – that an individual bank, in the act of placing a credit entry in a borrower’s account, creates new money.’

What goes around. . .

Tony Gosling, this country’s leading Bilderberg-watcher,\(^90\) drew his subscribers’ attention to an essay, ‘Meet “Le Cercle” – Making Bilderberg Look Like Amateurs’ by Graham Vanbergen.\(^91\) This is a decent introduction to the role of Le Cercle in the past 30 years or so but the best study of Le Cercle remains David Teacher’s massive Rogue Agents: Hapsburg, Pinay and the Private Cold

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\(^88\) \(<http://tinyurl.com/yazl6jmv>\) or \(<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/23/while-hammond-looks-for-a-magic-money-tree-labour-has-found-one>\)


\(^90\) See \(<http://www.bilderberg.org>\).

\(^91\) \(<www.globalresearch.ca/meet-le-cercle-making-bilderberg-look-like-amateurs/5606887>\)
War 1951-1991, which I noted in Lobster 71 when this latest edition appeared. This summary is from Teacher’s introduction.

‘This study is an attempt at a preliminary transnational investigation of the Paneuropean Right and particularly of the covert forum, the Cercle Pinay and its complex of groups. Amongst Cercle intelligence contacts are former operatives from the American CIA, DIA and INR, Britain’s MI5, MI6 and IRD, France’s SDECE, Germany’s BND, BfV and MAD, Holland’s BVD, Belgium’s Sûreté de l’Etat, SDRA and PIO, apartheid South Africa’s BOSS, and the Swiss and Saudi intelligence services.

Politically, the Cercle complex has interlocked with the whole panoply of international right-wing groups: the Paneuropean Union, the European Movement, CEDI, the Bilderberg Group, WACL, Opus Dei, the Moonies, Western Goals and the Heritage Foundation. Amongst the prominent politicians associated with the Cercle Pinay were Antoine Pinay, Konrad Adenauer, Archduke Otto von Habsburg, Franz Josef Strauss, Giulio Andreotti, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Paul Vanden Boeynants, John Vorster, General Antonio de Spínola, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.’

This parapolitical monument began with Teacher’s essay in Lobster 17 on what was then known as the Pinay Circle. The group’s name changed with the death of its founder, Antoine Pinay.

The problem is evaluating such a group. What, if anything, did it achieve?

... comes around

At the beginning of September Spinwatch issued a long document – 35 pages of text and supporting material – by Niall Meehan on the case of Dr Morris Fraser, the child psychiatrist who worked in Northern Ireland in the 1970s despite being convicted of the sexual assault of a 13 year-old boy. Fraser should have been but wasn’t prominent in the recent Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. (At time of writing the document had not been posted on the Spinwatch site.)

Spinwatch last year published Meehan’s ‘Morris Fraser, child abuse, corruption and collusion in Britain and Northern Ireland’ and the Guardian ran

92 <http://www.cryptome.org/2012/01/cercle-pinay-6i.pdf>
93 My critique of a part of which is in Lobster 73 at <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-colin-wallace.pdf>.
a profile of Meehan and the story at the same time.95

**Things Russian**

A little while ago I met a woman who told me her daughter was an investigative journalist for Buzzfeed. To which I said something like this: ‘*Buzzfeed*? Really? I thought that was just click-bait stuff.’ Well, it turns out I was quite wrong about that: Buzzfeed does indeed do investigative journalism and there is some worth your attention. For example there is a four part account of the deaths of fourteen people in the UK, mostly Russian, linked to UK-resident Russian oligarchs and gangsters.96 The authors show that the deaths are all suspicious and suggest that they are the result of either Russian state or Russian mafia activity. But this they can’t *demonstrate*. What they do show is that the British state and the police have apparently little interest in investigating these deaths too closely. This may not be unconnected to the fact that the City of London and all its associated activities – lawyers, accountants, estate agents and insurance companies for example – are currently awash with all that dirty Russian money. One part of the series is the spy-in-the-bag story, the death of the MI6 officer, Gareth Williams, which also suggests but cannot quite demonstrate Russian state involvement.

A theme running through much of the current speculation about Russia is the putative wealth of President Putin. The American businessman William Browder, whose father had been head of the Communist Party in the USA, did a lot of business in Russia in the early years after the Berlin Wall came down and got ripped-off there. Browder offers his opinion of Putin’s personal wealth.

‘Putin is a different type of leader than any other head of state in that Putin has been stealing money hand over fist to the tune of 200 billion dollars for himself in his presidency. Russia is effectively a mafia organization in which he’s the capo and the only difference between this mafia organization and the Colombian mafia or the Italian mafia is that Vladimir Putin controls thousands of nuclear warheads.’ 97

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95 <http://tinyurl.com/hfd4tzj> or <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2016/jun/16/journalism-academic-castigates-media-over-paedophile-doctor>


Others have made similar claims about Putin’s wealth but, like Browder, have no direct evidence. Like so many of the contemporary claims about Russian hacking of US politics, these are plausible but not verifiable.

Back at the did-the-Russians-hack-the-US-presidential-election story, the dividing lines remain as before. On one side:

‘Daniel Coats, the director of national intelligence, said Friday there is no dissent inside U.S. intelligence agencies about the conclusion that Russia used hacking and fake news to interfere in the 2016 presidential election. . . .’

On the other side a group of retired American intelligence personnel put their names to an essay on Consortiumnews which began:

‘Forensic studies of “Russian hacking” into Democratic National Committee computers last year reveal that on July 5, 2016, data was leaked (not hacked) by a person with physical access to DNC computers, and then doctored to incriminate Russia.’ (emphasis in the original)

Former UK ambassador Craig Murray also received a copy of the DNC files and has repeatedly said that he knows the material didn’t come from the Russians.

So what is the basis of the current hostility to Russia? Here’s Trump-supporter Pat Buchanan on that question:

‘ “Is Russia an enemy of the United States?” NBC’s Kasie Hunt demanded of Ted Cruz. Replied the runner-up for the GOP nomination, “Russia is a significant adversary. Putin is a KGB thug.”

To Hillary Clinton running mate Tim Kaine, the revelation that Donald Trump Jr., entertained an offer from the Russians for dirt on Clinton could be considered “treason”.

Treason is giving aid and comfort to an enemy in a time of war.

Are we really at war with Russia? Is Russia really our enemy?

“Why Russia is a Hostile Power” is the title of today’s editorial in The Washington Post that seeks to explain why Middle America should embrace the Russophobia of our capital city:

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“Vladimir Putin adheres to a set of values that are antithetical to bedrock American values. He favors spheres of influence over self-determination; corruption over transparency; and repression over democracy.”

Yet, accommodating a sphere of influence for a great power is exactly what FDR and Churchill did with Stalin, and every president from Truman to George H. W. Bush did with the Soviet Union.

When East Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles rose up against Communist regimes, no U.S. president intervened. For those nations were on the other side of the Yalta line agreed to in 1945.

Bush I and James Baker even accused Ukrainians of “suicidal nationalism” for contemplating independence from Russia.

When did support for spheres of influence become un-American?”

Buchanan has put his finger on it: Trump believes in spheres of influence, as does Putin. Trump has apparently understood (actually, it’s more likely to be those around him who have understood) that the US can no longer be the sole global power; its economy is too weak and too indebted. For obvious reasons of self-interest, despite Trump’s increase in the military budget, the American military-industrial-intelligence complex is unhappy with this and the Democrats are using all available sticks with which to beat Trump, whether true or not. Hence their mutual interest in ‘Russiagate’.

**Brexitteering**

In Lobster 73 after the election in May, I declared that ‘Brexit is dead’. I added that I could not see how this would play out. Peter Kellner has made an attempt at this in his article ‘When Brexit Meets Logic’ for Carnegie Europe, a foreign policy analysis site based in Brussels. The article’s subhead is his conclusion: ‘It is increasingly likely that Britain will either stay in the EU or reach a transitional arrangement very similar to full membership.’ (A.k.a. staying in while pretending to leave.)

Since I wrote that Brexit is dead there has been a steady trickle of stories suggesting that the government’s position is changing as the reality of Brexit impinges on it and Nigel Farage, the perfect bellwether on this issue, has

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103 <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/71558>
begun charging the Conservatives with betraying the Brexit voters. Most interesting to me was the language used by hitherto ardent Brexiteer, Michael Gove:

‘I think that when it comes to an implementation period, it should be driven by a pragmatic judgment, a shared pragmatic judgment, about what we need in the best interests of our economy and guaranteeing a smooth exit from the European Union, in line with the result that the British people voted for just over a year ago,’ he said.

Perhaps I am over-reading this but ‘pragmatic judgment’ and ‘in line with the result’ seems to leave lots of wiggle room, especially for someone who probably still wants to become leader of the Conservative Party.

Sailing . . . .

On 27 June the new British aircraft carrier HM Queen Elizabeth left port for the first time to much celebration. The decision to build two planned carriers was announced in 2008, just before the world banking system went into meltdown. But the planning went much further back: the website of the Aircraft Carrier Alliance tells us ‘The design process began in 1999’. Politicians were barely involved in the decision to spend all those billions; Hansard records little debate on this. In 2010 Gordon Brown, then recently deposed as prime minister, gave the House of Commons the rationale for the carriers commissioned while he was PM and explained why so little parliamentary time was spent on such a large spending project:

‘These are military decisions, made on military advice for military reasons. The reason the decisions have been made is that if we are to retain a global presence as a Navy, as armed forces and as a country, we will need these aircraft carriers in the years to come. We will need them not only because they are important to the defence of the Falklands, but because

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104 ‘The great Brexit betrayal has begun. The Tories have sold out the British people - now even Jeremy Corbyn has a tougher stance’ at <http://tinyurl.com/y7blvlco> or <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/25/great-brexit-betrayal-has-begun-tories-have-sold-british-people/>.

105 <http://tinyurl.com/ya4mf88r> or <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/21/michael-gove-says-cabinet-is-united-on-brexit-transition-period>

106 The second carrier is HM Prince of Wales, due to be launched from Rosyth later this year.

107 <http://www.aircraftcarrieralliance.co.uk> Worth a look at this. The ‘alliance’ is a cosy little cartel whose aim is getting its hands on tax income.
they are important for maintaining the 500-year role of the Royal Navy in
being available to assist in any part of the world.\textsuperscript{108}

There you go: a lifetime in the British labour movement and he offers us
Britain’s world role, about which the military knows best.

However The Times (11 July) – in ‘£3bn warship is vulnerable to low-
cost missiles’ – reported on a sceptical paper from the Royal United Services
Institute pointing out that (expensive) carriers are vulnerable to attack by
(cheap) missiles. (Remember the French Exocet missiles which almost won the
Malvinas war for Argentina?) Others have noted that the ship is run by the
venerable and vulnerable Windows XP\textsuperscript{109} and the construction costs are going
to rise – as they always do, once they’ve got the initial fake price past the
Treasury – probably to double the initial estimate.\textsuperscript{110}

And which planes are going to be using this floating runway? The
American F35, in many reports one of the worst planes ever built: designed to
do everything for everybody and failing to do almost all of it. In other words,
it’s business as usual: to continue Britain’s role as the cheer-leader for
American military power, a British aircraft carrier is going to be parked
somewhere – probably in the Middle East – flying expensive but dodgy\textsuperscript{111}
American planes on operations approved by America.

With rather less media attention, a campaign was launched a couple of
months before this to provide free tampons to schoolgirls who receive free
school meals because poor parents can’t afford to buy them and girls are
skipping school every month. Welcome to Blighty 2017!

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**Illumination**

Will Banyan, who wrote ‘The “Rothschild connection”: the House of Rothschild
and the invasion of Iraq’ in Lobster 63,\textsuperscript{112} has written a very interesting

\textsuperscript{108} [http://tinyurl.com/ycqe6m3c](http://tinyurl.com/ycqe6m3c) or [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2010-11-01/debates/1011025000002/AircraftCarriers](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2010-11-01/debates/1011025000002/AircraftCarriers).

\textsuperscript{109} See, for example, [https://www.theregister.co.uk/2017/06/27/hms_queen_elizabeth_running_windows_xp/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2017/06/27/hms_queen_elizabeth_running_windows_xp/).

\textsuperscript{110} [http://tinyurl.com/64y8e27](http://tinyurl.com/64y8e27) or [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/robertpeston/2011/04/aircraft_carrier_costs_to_rise.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/robertpeston/2011/04/aircraft_carrier_costs_to_rise.html).


\textsuperscript{112} [http://tinyurl.com/ydba39hw](http://tinyurl.com/ydba39hw) or [https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster63/lob63-rothschild.pdf](https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster63/lob63-rothschild.pdf).
account of the relationship between the media and the Bilderberg group, ‘Bilderberg Myths: “Fake News” from Infowars and Friends’, 113

Arguing against some of those on the American paranoid fringe who still cling to the idea that Bilderberg is a big secret (and secret society), Banyan shows in great detail that the group has been reported on or written about quite a lot in the last 40 years. This is the best article I have seen on Bilderberg since the late Mike Peters’ seminal piece in Lobster 32.

Spooky

On Jefferson Morley’s site about the Kennedy assassination, jfkfacts.org, Morley writes: ‘One of the stories I will tell in The Ghost: The Secret Life of CIA Spymaster James Jesus Angleton is how the British secret intelligence services pressured Harold Wilson, the leftist Labour leader, into retiring early.’ In support of this he offers an article by Alexander Cockburn. 114 Cockburn quotes fragments from David Leigh’s The Wilson Plot and asserts: ‘...unending smears about his personal life, certainly contributed to his sudden resignation as prime minister in the spring of 1976. There had indeed been a “very British coup”.

Well, no, actually, there hadn’t been (not that some people hadn’t tried).

Angleton got the fantasy about Wilson-as-Soviet stooge from the KGB defector Golitsyn. Golitsyn was either simply playing defector games – singing for his supper and telling Angleton the things he thought Angleton wanted to hear – or was part of a KGB operation to mess with Angleton’s head. While a section of MI5, fronted by Peter Wright, believed this nonsense from Angleton, most of the British intelligence-security establishment didn’t.

Wilson had told his confidants within the Labour Party that he would retire at 60. During his final period in office 1974–76 he was visibly tiring, his alcohol consumption was increasing and his once formidable memory was declining. His father had suffered from Alzheimers and Wilson was afraid it would afflict him, too. Which it did.115

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114 ‘Ashes and Diamonds’ from In These Times, 1 February 1, 1989, p. 17.

115 Wilson’s speech patterns in his later years have been analysed and appear to show signs of Alzheimers. See <http://tinyurl.com/ycykjg2p> or <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1084534/Former-British-Prime-Minister-Wilson-suffering-Alzheimers-resigned.html>
Trump, Russia, hacking and all that

Things we definitely know: Trump wanted to lift the sanctions on Russia which had been imposed by the Obama government in 2014. His Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was CEO of an American oil company which did a deal with the Russian state allowing it to drill there. Tillerson also opposed the sanctions. Trump has had relationships with Russian banks. In short, some of the Trump regime’s leading figures did not share the belief in the new ‘Russian threat’ which was generated during the Obama years; and it is not surprising that some of them had meetings with Russian officials.

After which it starts to get fuzzy. We have had a series of reports suggesting that Russians – hackers? spooks? military? – intervened during the recent presidential election and have been hacking American databases.

There are three drivers of this. Electoral politics: the Democrats are using it to attack Trump. Internal Democratic Party politics: explaining why Hillary Clinton lost will influence the direction of the Democratic Party. The neo-conservative, corporate-oriented wing of that party wants to establish that Clinton’s loss was the result of external factors, not a bad candidate with policies the electorate don’t want. Russian hacking is a scapegoat for the Democrats’ defeat. If they fail to make that stick, the more radical wing of the Democrats may triumph. (There is an obvious comparison with New Labour and the Labour Party led by Corbyn.) The third factor is what we might as well call the military-industrial-intelligence complex, which wants the new cold war to continue (good for careers and profits).

The Russia-gate thesis wasn’t helped by the publication in January of an official account of allegations about Russian actions (and a great deal about the TV station Russia Today) which was received with widespread derision. People on the left (who hope for an end to the new cold war or want to change the orientation of the Democratic Party), and the right (supporters of Trump) are resisting the Russia-gate narrative. There’s Pat Buchanan, for example, still

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117 Tillerson has been awarded the Russian Order of Friendship by President Putin for his contribution to developing cooperation in the energy sector.

118 See, for example, <https://350.org/oil-russia-and-trump/>.


120 See, for example, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/h4amzgg> or <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-01-06/here-us-intelligence-report-accusing-putin-ordering-campaign-influence-us-election>. 

www.lobster-magazine.co.uk

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best remembered as a Nixon speech-writer, who recently wrote this:

`We are approaching something of a civil war where the capital city seeks the overthrow of the sovereign and its own restoration . . . . That the objective of this city is to bring Trump down via a deep state-media coup is no secret. Few deny it.`

This is the view of some on the American left, for example those writing at the Consortiumnews website, where Mark Ames upbraided another left-leaning magazine, *Mother Jones*, for its reporting on so-called Russia-gate:

`What passes for “Russia reporting” at *Mother Jones* is mostly just glorified InfoWars paranoia for progressive marks — a cataract of xenophobic conspiracy theories about inscrutable Russian barbarians hellbent on subverting our way of life, spreading chaos, destroying freedom & democracy & tolerance wherever they once flourished . . . because they hate us, because we’re free.`

Larry Hancock, one of the best of the Kennedy assassination researchers, recently recommended that anyone who doubted Russia-gate should read four stories. I did; and while it is true, as Hancock writes, that there are ‘clues’, there is no evidence. A number of these hacker stories claim highly-placed but unnamed sources; but until recently there was no (public) evidence showing Russian, let alone Russian *state* involvement. The closest we have got to evidence is a piece at The Intercept, ‘Top-secret NSA report details Russian hacking effort days before 2016 election’ and a report in the *Washington Post* recounting the Obama administration’s response to receiving a CIA report on Russian hacking in late 2016. To my untrained eye these look like the real deal; but as McGovern and Binney have reported recently, the CIA has the technology to ‘break into computers and servers and make it look

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123 The stories are listed at <https://larryhancock.wordpress.com/2017/06/05/patriotic-russian-hackers/>


125 If you’re not as picky about evidence as I am, Russia-gate looks impressive. See, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/y9dfg5jz> or <http://www.theweeklings.com/golear/2017/04/05/how-deep-is-your-treason-the-three-tiers-of-trumprussia/>.

like others did it’. Which makes things difficult. At the very least it provides a get-out clause for those who don’t want to believe that Russia has been hacking. On the other hand, the Ukraine has experienced years of hacking of the computers running its infrastructure, and who can be responsible for that if not the Russian state? Or would McGovern and Binney want to claim that it’s the CIA pretending to be the Russians?

The new anti-semitism

Or, more accurately, the new definition of anti-semitism. The definition has been changed: if you criticise Israel, says the Israeli state and its supporters, it is now true by definition that you are anti-semitic. Hence all the charges of anti-semitism in the Labour Party in the last couple of years. How this has been done, in a long march through international institutions, is discussed in a very interesting article by Alison Weir (who is, by this definition, an anti-semite). To this issue these columns will return.

Following the money

What does this recent headline say about current American diplomacy? ‘Qatar signs a $12 billion arms deal with Defense Department after being labeled a state sponsor of terror by Donald Trump’.  

Two thoughts on the General Election

In the week preceding the election I was wondering what the big, last minute bombshell about Corbyn would be and who would run it. In the event we had the now notorious 13 pages in the Mail denigrating him but the new claim was in the Daily Telegraph:

Jeremy Corbyn was monitored by undercover officers for two decades

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127  See below, under subhead ‘Trump’.

128  <https://www.wired.com/story/russian-hackers-attack-ukraine/?mbid=synd_digg>

129  <http://ifamericaknew.org/history/antisemitism.html>

amid fears that he was attempting to undermine democracy, the *Telegraph* can disclose.

A former Special Branch officer, who does not wish to be named, said that the Labour leader was monitored because he was "deemed to be a subversive." 131

In a follow-up the *Daily Mail* reported

‘Corbyn’s file was kept open by six commanders of the branch over the course of 20 years amid fears he was attempting to undermine democracy.’

Normally this would be a big story/scandal but in the present climate it may simply be ignored.

My second thought is about Brexit. In this column in the previous issue of *Lobster*, no. 73, I commented:

‘Most of the groups in this society which have power, the EU itself, of course, and the Euro-establishment here, are opposed to Brexit. Consequently I do not believe it will happen. As the “negotiations” proceed, a negative feedback loop will be created: as more details emerge, criticism will increase; as the negative consequences of Brexit become clearer, public support for it will decline; as support declines, MPs who are fearful of opposing their constituents’ wishes will grow emboldened and political opposition to Brexit will grow; as the political tide begins to turn, opposition from within the British economy will become more vocal. And so on.’

The loss of Conservative Party seats in the House of Commons is the beginning of that negative feedback loop. There is now a substantial majority in the House of Commons opposed to Brexit (as there is in the Lords) and Mrs May failed in her attempt to get a resounding public vote in support of her Brexit plans. I don’t see how this will unfold but I think Brexit is dead.

**All the president’s sex slaves**

In the piece in the previous issue of *Lobster* headed ‘Fake news? Fake something…’ I noted that the site globalresearch.ca had run a piece about the so-called Pizzagate story in the US. This is a fantasy about the upper echelons of US politics and pedophilia which is circulating on the Net. The origins of this can be traced back to an earlier fantasy about the CIA and mind-controlled sex

slaves which goes under the name of Project Monarch. All one can say about Project Monarch is that apart from the testimony of putative victims of said program – basically Cathy O’Brien – there is no evidence that Monarch existed at all. And O’Brien’s claims are laughable, as even the most cursory look at them shows.

Manchester

To my knowledge it was voltairenet.org which first suggested that the bombing of the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester was blowback from MI6 operations in Libya. When I checked I discovered that the Daily Telegraph had run essentially the same story – bar the reference to MI6, of course – the day before. A couple of days later Peter Oborne in the Mail and Max Blumenthal in Salon.com, placed the Manchester-Libya events in the wider picture of American (and British) intervention in the Middle East and North Africa.

Blumenthal referred to the MI5 officer David Shayler, who had been on that agency’s Libya desk, and who spoke of the use by MI6 of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) in an assassination attempt on Libya’s Prime Minister Muammar Gaddafi. The father of the Manchester bomber was a

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133 As a CIA mind-controlled sex slave O’Brien claims to have had sex with, inter alia: Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Ford; CIA Director Bill Casey; Madeleine Albright and Dick Cheney; Senators Byrd and Spector, Congressmen Trafficant and VanderJagt, and Governors Thornburgh, Blanchard, and Alexander; Prime Minister of Canada Mulroney, President of Mexico de la Madrid, and Saudi Arabian King Fahd; and Bill and Hillary Clinton. See <http://tinyurl.com/y974cmds>.

134 <http://www.voltairenet.org/article196455.htm>


136 ‘Why MI6 must share the blame for the jihadis in our midst’ at <http://tinyurl.com/yctehkpa> or <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4546934/PETER-OBORNE-MI6-share-blame-jihadis.html>

137 ‘The Manchester bombing is blowback from the West’s disastrous interventions and covert proxy wars’ at <http://tinyurl.com/ybd5s6fh> or <http://www.salon.com/2017/05/27/the-曼城-bombing-is-blowback-from-the-wests-disastrous-interventions-and-covert-proxy-wars_partner/>
member of LIFG. So, yes, the Manchester bombing is almost literal blowback from the British state (and secret state’s) dickering with Libya in the 1990-2005 period. Shayler’s knowledge of MI6’s funding of LIFG may explain why the British state pursued him so hard.

The presence of a reported 10,000 Libyans in Manchester, an unknown number of whom are sympathetic to radical Islam, is a consequence of the pretensions of empire among our leaders, both elected and unelected.

**9/11 and the left**

There is an interesting essay, ‘Beyond their wildest dreams: 9/11 and the American Left’, by Dr Graeme MacQueen, former co-editor of the *Journal of 9/11 Studies*. MacQueen lists all the American left websites which have declined to take the 9/11 researchers seriously and tells us that this allergy to what we might call deep political research goes back to the Kennedy assassination. He notes that some prominent American leftists – he cites Noam Chomsky and Alexander Cockburn – dismissed JFK’s assassination. I think that some of the reluctance shown by Chomsky, Cockburn and others is a fear of being tarred with the conspiracy theory brush. This fear of guilt by association with certain sections of the extreme right-wing has been discussed in *Lobster* before. Some of the reluctance also comes from a sense that we shouldn’t be distracted from the more important areas of history – imperialism, capitalism, and now the environmental crisis – by individual incidents such as assassinations that are of little consequence by comparison.

MacQueen’s essay appeared on a site I had not come across before, Truth and Shadows, devoted to 9/11. I glanced at the other essays listed on the site’s home page. One caught my eye: ‘How we KNOW an airliner did NOT hit the Pentagon’. This is one of the most striking of the ‘truther’ claims. If true it means that the eye-witnesses who say they saw an airliner flying into the

What’s the likelihood that Ramadan Abedi (the Manchester bomber’s father) was one of the dozen LIFG members resident in the UK that were affected by this: ‘Libyan dissidents put under house arrest following Tony Blair’s “deal in the desert”’? *(Daily Mail* 11 September 2011). See [http://tinyurl.com/646bl8j](http://tinyurl.com/646bl8j) or [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2036049/Libyan-dissidents-house-arrest-following-Tony-Blairs-deal-desert.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2036049/Libyan-dissidents-house-arrest-following-Tony-Blairs-deal-desert.html)


[https://truthandshadows.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/911-and-american-left/](https://truthandshadows.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/911-and-american-left/)

He tells us that Cockburn endorsed the Warren Commission verdict.
Pentagon are lying.\textsuperscript{142} Were they part of the plot? Or were they warned off immediately after the event? Both propositions seem vanishingly implausible to me. The essay contained this assertion:

‘There is NOT ONE piece of wreckage that has been positively tied to Flight 77. The engines, virtually indestructible, were not recovered, although it is claimed that an engine “core” was from one of the 757 engines. There were no bodies, no seats, no pieces of luggage. There were a couple of pieces of fuselage but they were big enough that one person could pick them up. There’s no proof it came from that plane.’

It’s been a while since I looked at 9/11 but I thought I remembered quite a lot of photographs of debris inside and outside the Pentagon. So I went to Google Images and asked for ‘9/11, Pentagon, debris’ and yes, there are now hundreds if not thousands of such images.

As for the claim that ‘There is NOT ONE piece of wreckage that has been positively tied to Flight 77’ – why would anyone seek to do that? It’s only some of the 9/11 ‘truthers’ who ask for that level of proof (knowing they won’t get it). Everyone else takes it for granted that the debris – yes, including engine and fuselage parts – in and around the Pentagon is from the missing Flight 77.

In the comments below this essay ‘Tamera’ writes:

‘I was on the phone with my hubby when I heard a whirring noise. I thought the web server I was working on was acting up. After that I woke up on my back on the 1st floor. I didn’t know it was the 1st floor yet, that realization would come later when we were trying to get out of the pitch black office with wires hanging down and zapping everything they touched. Once we were able to crawl from floor 1 up to floor 2 using fallen computer equipment, the first thing we smelled was fuel. One of our group, a hobby pilot, new [sic] it was jet fuel. As we got out onto the corridor we weren’t able to see through the black wall of smoke leading to the E ring. Bloody bodies full of glass from the windows were making their way out, soldiers trying to go back in to help others but couldn’t see. Long story short... saw the bits of plane parts all over the parking lot when we got out. Those who were there... know... those who talk nonsense like this blogger know nothing of what they speak. Many years later... I can still remember the smell, see the bodies and hear the cries of my dead comrades.’

After which the ‘truthers’ try to explain away ‘Tamera’s’ comments, concluding that she’s a troll (and, by inference, that they are being monitored by the

American state).

Dr MacQueen wonders why the America Left doesn’t take the 9/11 ‘truthers’ seriously. This essay, and the comments below it, it suggest why.  

**Trump**

Hillary Clinton is still thinking about how she lost the election. She claims there was a big Russian-directed social media conspiracy to defeat her, using the data-mining of Cambridge Analytica and the money of American billionaire ‘hedgy’ Robert Mercer which paid for it. The Atlantic, which published Clinton’s comments, sources this Russian conspiracy claim to two members of the Senate Intelligence Committee who referred to ‘some reports.... that there were upwards of a thousand internet trolls working out of a facility in Russia, in effect taking over a series of computers which are then called botnets, that can then generate news down to specific areas.’ (emphasis added) The reality is more complex. As yet there is no evidence that all this social media wizardry had any effect. There are lots of other possible explanations of why Clinton lost the election: a poor campaign on behalf of a poor candidate, offering the same old pro-corporate, neo-con lines as her husband; voter suppression techniques and gerrymandering by the Republicans; and disenchanted supporters of Bernie Sanders not voting for her.

Without suggesting that I have any idea what is going on, let me draw your attention to three striking essays. The first, by the excellent Russ Baker and two others, is a long analysis of Trump and his links to the Russian Mob. It

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143 A recent more detailed account of the evidence showing that it was a plane which struck the Pentagon is at <http://tinyurl.com/yb7p9dcz> or <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/10/07/bringing-closure-to-the-911-pentagon-debate/>.


seems to explain why the FBI appears to be foot-dragging in its inquiries: they’re trying to protect an older operation of theirs which penetrated the Russian Mob in the USA.\textsuperscript{147}

The second, ‘Tainted Leaks: Disinformation and Phishing With a Russian Nexus’, shows how complex the analysis of data disinformation campaigns is becoming. It’s summary is this:

‘This report describes an extensive Russia-linked phishing and disinformation campaign. It provides evidence of how documents stolen from a prominent journalist and critic of Russia was tampered with and then ”leaked” to achieve specific propaganda aims. We name this technique “tainted leaks.” The report illustrates how the twin strategies of phishing and tainted leaks are sometimes used in combination to infiltrate civil society targets, and to seed mistrust and disinformation. It also illustrates how domestic considerations, specifically concerns about regime security, can motivate espionage operations, particularly those targeting civil society.’ \textsuperscript{148}

The third, by Ray McGovern (ex-CIA) and William Binney (ex-NSA), suggests that we are well and truly through the looking-glass. They tell us:

‘On March 31, 2017, WikiLeaks released original CIA documents — almost completely ignored by the mainstream media — showing that the agency had created a program allowing it to break into computers and servers and make it look like others did it by leaving telltale signs (like Cyrillic markings, for example). The capabilities shown in what WikiLeaks calls the “Vault 7” trove of CIA documents required the creation of hundreds of millions of lines of source code. At $25 per line of code, that amounts to about $2.5 billion for each 100 million code lines. But the Deep State has that kind of money and would probably consider the expenditure a good return on investment for ”proving” the Russians hacked into Democratic Party emails.

In other words, it is altogether possible that the hacking attributed to Russia was actually one of several “active measures” undertaken by a cabal consisting of the CIA, FBI, NSA and Clapper — the same agencies responsible for the lame, evidence-free report of Jan. 6.’ \textsuperscript{149} (emphasis

\textsuperscript{147} <https://whowhatwhy.org/2017/05/17/fbi-cant-tell-trump-russia-2/>

\textsuperscript{148} <https://citizenlab.org/2017/05/tainted-leaks-disinformation-phish/>

\textsuperscript{149} <https://consortiumnews.com/2017/05/20/the-gaping-holes-of-russia-gate/>
True or what?

The first three of what will be many books about the ‘post truth’ era we are now apparently living in were reviewed in the Guardian on 23 May. I am uncertain about how seriously we should take all this. This is not an entirely new phenomenon. There was a 2001 anthology, for example, YOU ARE BEING LIED TO: the Disinformation Guide to Media Distortion, Historical Whitewashes and Cultural Myths (New York: the Disinformation Company). The authors who contributed to this covered the spectrum from the sober and academic like Howard Zinn to the conspiratorially-minded Alex Constantine. What is new is that it used to be only the left which complained about the lies of the mainstream media (MSM) and used MSM as a term of abuse. Now it’s the left and the right. All my life the British Left has assumed that the MSM would tell lies, to conceal the embarrassing truth, to denigrate the left, support the Conservative Party and to express the opinions of the owners of the media. Rupert Murdoch’s set of newspapers and the Rothermere family’s Daily Mail have been around a long time; and their predecessors were not markedly different.

The origin of this ‘post truth’ world in politics lies in changes to broadcasting regulations made in 1987 by the Federal Communications Commission. American broadcasters were then freed from the so-called Fairness Doctrine – the legal requirement to present multiple viewpoints on political issues. This opened the door to ‘shock jocks’ and political attack radio – Rush Limbaugh etc. – lying, in short. A decade later the Internet developed, without state regulation, and with it the growth of the conspiracy theory culture we now live in and the rise to prominence of shysters like Alex Jones.

Marshall

Jonathan Marshall, who has two excellent essays in the previous edition of

150 For an explanation of how Google is gamed to spread fake news, see <http://tinyurl.com/ycmahxd> or <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2017/06/how-the-trump-russia-data-machine-games-google-to.html>.


152 It included a version of my writing on New Labour as the American tendency.

153 See <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1880786,00.html>
Lobster, has three more important pieces of work on the Consortiumnews website about political lobbies in the US political system: the China lobby of the 1950s and today’s Saudi and Israeli lobbies.\textsuperscript{154} Marshall is about as good as it gets these days.

London calling

And then there was the story claiming that ‘London economy subsidises rest of UK region bar London, the south-east and the east of England in 2015/16’.\textsuperscript{155}

This is a classic case of blaming the victims. The economic policies of the Thatcher governments were designed to benefit the City of London, which largely funds the travel-to-London work region. The victims of those policies were British manufacturing which contracted under the pressure of the highly-valued pound and the abolition of exchange controls. The City of London (and thus the wider greater London area) boomed but much of the rest of the UK was depressed. Since when little has been done to rebuild those depressed areas except pour public spending (dole money) into them.

I am suspicious of the Conservative Party’s recent enthusiasm for regional autonomy – city mayors, for example. I suspect the long-range plan is to create fiscally autonomous regions in England which would have to raise their own taxes. This would free London from the ‘burden’ of the rest of the UK and effectively create the city-state which some in the City of London have been dreaming of since the expansion of the City in the late 1980s after ‘big bang’.

\textsuperscript{154} See <https://consortiumnews.com/tag/jonathan-marshall/> where you will find a list of the essays by Marshall on the Consortiumnews site.

\textsuperscript{155} <http://tinyurl.com/lud7vh8> or <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/may/23/uk-budget-deficit-grows-to-more-than-10bn-as-people-spend-less>
A bullet to the head for the James Files JFK ‘confession’

Garrick Alder

In a cell in an Illinois prison sits a 75-year-old ex-Mafia man who says he was the real assassin of US President John F Kennedy. James Files, who claims he was the legendary ‘grassy knoll gunman’ of 22 November 1963, is due for parole soon. The precise date of his release is not clear, having previously been given as January 2016 and Spring 2016, both of which are now well behind us. Illinois Department of Corrections gives the parole date of 5 June 2016 and a discharge date in 2019. No doubt, once he regains his liberty, Files (now ostensibly a devout Christian) will have a lucrative old age in the limelight. Mainstream journalists have lavished attention upon Files’ tales in a way that they have have not done with other assassination ‘confessions’, of which there has been no shortage. It’s easy to see why. Files is a genuine gangster and a would-be killer (his 30-year sentence was for an attempted murder committed in 1991), and he presents a simple story that circumvents the bewildering forest of forensic, ballistic and eyewitness evidence relating to the case.

An entirely representative example of such coverage can be taken from The Daily Mail, which has published at least four stories about Files in the last three years. In a 2015 story, Files is quoted as telling his interviewer:

‘I was aiming at Kennedy’s right eye. When I pulled the trigger it was almost like looking from six feet away through the scope. As I squeezed his head moved forward. I missed and got it right along the temple, right behind the eye. I squeezed off my round. I hit him and blew his head backward. I fired one shot and one shot only.’

It’s punchy, pithy, stuff and it transports the reader back in time to stand in the shoes (and look through the sniperscope) of the mystery grassy knoll gunman, then just 21 years old.

Stephen Fagin is curator of the Sixth Floor Museum, which is housed in the former book depository building on the outskirts of Dallas, Texas. From there the ‘official’ assassin – Lee Harvey Oswald – is said to have fired on

1 See <http://tinyurl.com/ycbfmfjy> or <http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/search/inms_print.asp?idoc=N14006>

Kennedy. Refreshingly, the museum does not take a partisan line on assassination research and holds a wealth of evidence concerning all theories. Mr Fagin says:

‘It is possible that those who continue to believe in Files do so because he offers a neat, clean answer with all the gaps filled in. There is also the tantalizing promise of hard evidence emerging once he is released from prison. That alone might be enough to sustain some interest, at least in the short term.’

Files has an interesting history and there can be no doubt that he had significant Mafia connections. But his confession that he shot JFK is a lie, a fabrication invented more or less from the whole cloth. This article shows how the hoax took shape, and illuminates the overlooked proof that the story is a lie.

**Enter West and Vernon**

In 1978, Chicago FBI Agent Zach Shelton was put to work investigating an inter-state hijacking gang, of which Files was the ringleader. The hijackers were unsophisticated, simply overpowering lorry drivers at rest points along their routes and making off with their vehicle and its cargo. Special Agent Shelton, sure that Files must be operating with the blessing of the local Mob, got an informant to penetrate the gang to see what he could learn. Among the information that Shelton received was the informant’s account of accompanying Files on a trip to Dallas, during which they drove through downtown Dealey Plaza, the scene of Kennedy’s assassination. The informant told Shelton that Files had begun acting strangely and had said: ‘If the American people really knew what happened there, they wouldn’t know how to handle it.’

Not the most penetrating insight ever offered concerning the assassination, and not evidence of anything at all, but it stuck in Agent Shelton’s memory. Files wound up in an Illinois prison in 1991, convicted of the attempted murder mentioned above. In 1992, Agent Shelton – now transferred to the Bureau’s office in Beaumont, Texas – came across a newspaper story about a preacher-turned-private-investigator called Joe West. The article said that Mr West had a source who could place mobsters Charles Nicoletti and Johnny Roselli in Dallas on the day of Kennedy’s murder. Still interested in the ‘Mob did JFK’ theory, Agent Shelton got in touch. It transpired that West’s source was (like Files) a jailed criminal and, also, unreliable. In spite of this, Agent Shelton passed on Files’ name, suggesting that Mr West might want to contact Files to see what he might know. Mr West then contacted Files

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3 Email to author 21 March 2017.
repeatedly at his Illinois address, via phone calls, personal visits and letters. Files consistently rebuffed West's attentions. An example of one of Files’ letters to Mr West, disavowing knowledge of the assassination, is reproduced on Dave Perry’s website.4

In 1993, Joe West died of complications after heart surgery, and this is where Files’ story really begins. Predictably, Files has claimed that Joe West was bumped off by shadowy conspirators, who interfered with his medication. Why they didn’t simply dispose of Files himself and save themselves a lot of effort is unclear. What passed between Files and West in their unrecorded one-to-one conversations is not known. After West’s death, his documents pertaining to his JFK investigation ended up in the hands of his friend Bob Vernon, a Dallas TV producer, and this paperwork led Vernon straight to Files.5 And it appears that once he realised that West’s mouth had been shut for good, Files’ mouth suddenly sprang open, pouring out detail after detail to Mr Vernon about how the assassination was pulled off by the Mafia in general and James Files in particular. The fact that a television producer might be willing to pay a goodly sum for a taped confession may have played a part in it, because that was exactly what happened next.

Like any experienced criminal, used to improvising elaborate lies on a regular basis, Files had been presented with a golden opportunity and he seized it with both hands. DVDs and TV documentaries have resulted from the Files-Vernon collaboration; and no doubt Files – whose ostentatious conversion to Christianity and renunciation of sin (such as bearing false witness) is almost too ‘pat’ – will derive a regular income from the media upon his release.

To take a snapshot of how his tales are being received, one can look to reader reviews submitted to Amazon.com. Stephen Fagin of the Sixth Floor Museum is cautious, saying: ‘I would not consider online book or DVD reviews to be a reliable indicator of support for James Files, as those can easily be rigged by posting under different user names.’6 It’s a fair point. However, Amazon customers can select to read only the reviews submitted by verified purchasers of individual books. There are about half a dozen publications touting the James Files story. Let’s take just one of them: Wim Dankbaar’s Files on JFK: Interviews with Confessed Assassin James E. Files, and More New Evidence of the Conspiracy that Killed JFK (published in 2008). From this,

4 <http://dperry1943.com/files.html>


6 See note 3.
anyone can verify for themselves that 72 per cent of readers have given him five stars out of five. This isn’t for its literary merit – several readers have commented on the numerous typos and basic English usage errors in Dankbaar’s work.

The effusive opinions of verified purchaser ‘Roy the Media Boy’ are entirely representative:

‘For years now, the debunkers have attempted to punch a hole in the incredible story detailed by Files. To date, they continue tilting at a windmill. The detailed story that Files tells, is supported by numerous individuals in this book, and continues to stand the test of time. We can ponder whether Files actually fired the fatal head shot, (as he claims), but there is NO doubt that he was at Dealey Plaza, knows who else was there, and all the other skeletons surrounding this murder of the ages. I have an extensive library regarding the JFK assassination, and this book would be in my Top 5.’

Into the firearms thicket

The key issue in the supposed ‘controversy’ surrounding James Files’ story of shooting JFK concerns firearms and ballistics, as one might expect if familiar with JFK research generally, and it is argued with ferocious pedantry from all sides. Files claims to have used an XP-100 pistol to fire at Kennedy from the grassy knoll. The supposedly corroborative evidence for this is a couple of .222 shell casings found on the grassy knoll in October 1987 by assassination researcher John Rademacher. And this is where the nitty gets gritty, but not so gritty as to be incomprehensible to the layman.

Manufactured between 1963 and 1998, the distinctive-looking Remington XP-100 (from ‘Experimental Pistol’) is normally a .221 with a lengthy barrel. But the shells that supposedly corroborate the Files ‘confession’ are .222 calibre. Much effort has been expended on arguing the toss on the .221/.222 calibre difference. For example, Files-sceptic JFK researcher Dave Perry states: ‘[...] Remington Arms’ staff expert on the XP-100, when contacted on April 1, 1998, flatly denied the pistol was ever chambered for the .222.’ But a devout firearms enthusiast states: ‘Initial plans to chamber the XP-100 in the .222 [size] changed because that case had too much capacity to be efficient in the pistol’s short barrel.’ So it appears that Remington’s staff were correct in that the pistol on sale to the public was never .222-compatible, but that statement

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7 <http://dperry1943.com/final.html>

8 <https://www.americanhunter.org/articles/2014/6/4/the-singles-scene/>
doesn’t address the fact that prototypes were indeed .222–compatible. And in any event it would not be difficult to replace the barrel on a .221 with a barrel to fit .222 ammunition.⁹ Given the possibility of a customised weapon, the debate doesn’t settle much either way.¹⁰

If the firearms debate is a stark reminder of why the mainstream news media tend to shy away from JFK research, with all its bewildering sub-debates and apocrypha, the ammunition itself seems far more promising. As already stated, the two spent shells were found by John Rademacher in 1987. Since then they have been extensively analysed in great detail by a researcher called Allan Eaglesham, who hunted down every scrap of relevant information that he could identify. This produced a convincing argument that the shells’ design proves they were not manufactured until the early 1970s. If Mr Eaglesham is right – and no counter-argument has appeared – then Files’ tale is dramatically weakened.¹¹

However (and of course there is a significant ‘however’ to all this), Mr Eaglesham’s ‘Exhibit A’ has a conspicuously less than impeccable pedigree. It consists of a scan of a document that was supposedly rescued several decades ago from company trash by a Remington employee. He then gave it to an anonymous correspondent on an Internet discussion forum, who kindly sent it to Mr Eaglesham. (How fortunate that Mr Eaglesham happened to join the one discussion group frequented by the person who held this crucial document, which no-one else has ever seen.) This chain of evidence makes ‘hearsay’ seem like a signed confession by comparison and simply cannot be relied upon.

But even if the firearms and ballistics evidence are frustratingly inconclusive, they do point us directly to the question that turns out to reveal the solution to the whole James Files enigma: how did the XP-100 ever appear in the debate to begin with?

Assassination eyewitness Malcolm Summers was standing in Dealey Plaza, very near the presidential limousine when the shooting took place. He can be seen ‘hitting the dirt’ in the background of the famous Zapruder film of the killing. He witnessed crowds rushing to the ‘grassy knoll’ and followed them, thinking that they had a gunman cornered there. According to statements made by Mr Summers in his later years, he encountered a shady-

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⁹ A gun enthusiast’s minutely-detailed account of precisely this customising endeavour can be read at <http://www.bergerbullets.com/articles/norman-johnson-remington-xp.pdf>.

¹⁰ Along the way, Files has said he re-bored the XP-100 from .221 to .222, which is a whole new debate in itself.

¹¹ <http://www.manuscriptservice.com/Headstamp/>
looking character carrying a strange-looking weapon, who warned him off the scene with ominous remarks.\textsuperscript{12}

John Rademacher found his way to Malcolm Summers and put to him a series of photographs of firearms which used \textit{.222} calibre ammunition, (including the XP-100, even though only the early prototypes fired \textit{.222}) asking him to pick out the one he thought he saw brandished on the knoll. Mr Summers eventually chose the XP-100. We don’t know which other weapons Summers was shown but the XP-100 (shown below) was then and still is a very unusual looking pistol and it is hardly a surprise that, in a nice demonstration of confirmation bias, Summers picked it out.\textsuperscript{13}

![XP-100 Image]

But armed with his new ‘information’, Mr Rademacher approached investigator Joe West – whom we met at the start of this story – and told him what he had found. Since Mr West communicated extensively with Files in unrecorded conversations, the simplest explanation has to be that Mr West amateurishly revealed this evidence to Files. Once Mr West was dead, Files had information he could use to his own advantage and began talking of using the XP-100.

\textbf{Game over}

The proof that Files has been lying through his teeth all along is pathetically simple and obvious.

In his notarised statement to the Dallas Sheriff’s Office, dated 23 November 1963, Malcolm Summers gave no indication whatsoever that he saw any suspicious character on the knoll when he witnessed the assassination the

\textsuperscript{12} A brief summary of his story, given in person and evidently recorded at some point in the 1980s, can be seen on YouTube at \textit{<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVi1qBl8dR8>}. A detailed version of Mr Summers’ eyewitness account was recorded in 2002, and can be heard in this oral history, after the ten-minute mark at \textit{<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrkGCDQubhQ>}. \textsuperscript{13} Malcolm Summers also stated in his 2002 testimony (as seen in the second YouTube clip from footnote 12) that he encountered a man on the grassy knoll who had a jacket draped over his arm. Summers said that the barrel of a gun – just the barrel, note – could be seen poking out from under the jacket. How good an identification from a full picture of a gun Summers could give, having only seen the barrel, is highly debatable.
preceding day (and of course, no other knoll witness saw one either). Mr Summers’ original statement focused instead on a vehicle seen speeding through Dealey Plaza some 20 minutes after the assassination, the relevance of which is hard to fathom. And on 30 October 1978 Mr Summers signed a statement for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which was reinvestigating the JFK murder. On that date, Mr Summers put his signature to a document verifying that his 1963 statements were ‘accurate and complete’. This is definitive. Mr Summers did not see the mystery gunman he later claimed to have seen.14

Eyewitness testimony is notoriously prone to fading and embellishment over the course of years, but why Mr Summers’ story underwent such a drastic metamorphosis is a question that can never be answered properly, since he died on 8 October 2004, aged 80. With Mr Summers’ fantasy of a knoll gunman dispelled, the identification of the Remington XP-100 goes with it, and the whole James Files hoax dissolves like a wisp of, well, gunsmoke.

The British state’s failed attempt to kill off the Freedom of Information Act

Garrick Alder

‘Freedom of Information. Three harmless words. I look at those words as I write them, and feel like shaking my head till it drops off my shoulders. You idiot. You naïve, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it.’

It appears that Freedom of Information (hereinafter FOI) laws have never been loved by their parents. When US President Lyndon Johnson signed the world’s first FOI Act into law in 1966, he was so keen not to be associated with it that – uniquely among modern Presidential enactions – there was no photographer present to capture the historic moment. It is fitting that Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair, who gave the UK its own FOI Act, has since attempted to disassociate himself from the law he presented to the Queen for Royal Assent in 2000.

The UK’s FOI Act has been threatened with curbs, cuts, and cancellations almost since its inception. In 2015 an Independent Commission on the Freedom of Information Act was established. This was led by Lord Burns and will hereinafter be referred to as the Burns Commission. Coming at a time of much political opposition to FOI, the Burns Commission seemed to promise, if not outright doom for the Act, then certainly a significant setback or two. But the trap that had been lovingly prepared for the Act, which included (as we shall see) stacking the Commission with the state’s henchmen, did not snap shut. The Act has survived untouched and will irritate, annoy, and alarm state bureaucrats for at least the foreseeable future. With the previously mentioned history of governmental pressure upon FOI, its fans and foes alike are now in somewhat uncharted waters. However, we can perhaps draw some provisional observations by comparing the UK FOI Act to its US predecessor, which similarly encountered a potentially-devastating clampdown barely a decade after enactment.

Tony Blair had consistently championed the FOI cause throughout his time as leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition, and, when he became Prime Minister in 1997, the enactment of UK FOI legislation was taken for granted. Delays set in almost immediately. The tentative consultation signalled by the White Paper Your Right to Know didn’t begin until December 1997, some seven months after Labour had formed its first government since 1979.\(^2\) Three years later, the Lord Chancellor’s department proposed that the new legislation should be phased in with delays between the Act taking effect in various categories of ‘holding authority’. The idea was to start the process with central Government to provide ‘models of best practice’ that would naturally cascade down into lower tiers of governance. Instead, Mr Blair set a uniform commencement of 1 January 2005, which, it was believed, would allow for public sector bodies to consult, confer, and prepare for the new openness. As Conservative Party researchers demonstrated, the five-year lead-in also coincided with a notable uptick in file destruction by Whitehall departments, with some civil service branches essentially doubling their shredding efforts.\(^3\)

Even with such a significant lead-in time before FOI came into effect, Mr Blair was slow to notice the ‘dangers’ he was creating for himself. When realisation hit, the Government responded with surprising speed. Just 18 months after FOI was implemented, Mr Blair’s Attorney-General Lord Falconer was directed to re-examine the new law and see if it should be curtailed. The envisioned method of curtailment was financial, in the form of fees for requests (where there were none before) and increases in such fees as already existed. Even before Lord Falconer had finished his re-assessment, Mr Blair had resigned and the role of Prime Minister had been transferred to Gordon Brown. Given the historical rivalry between those successive PMs, there was surely a personal dimension to the remarks made by Gordon Brown during his speech ‘On Liberty’, delivered at the University of Westminster barely four months after Mr Blair’s resignation.

‘The Freedom of Information Act has been a landmark piece of legislation, enshrining for the first time in our laws the public’s right to access information. Freedom of Information can be inconvenient, at times frustrating and indeed embarrassing for governments. But


Freedom of Information is the right course because government belongs to the people, not the politicians.’

Brown then went on to identify the people he felt would be best-positioned to protect the public's right to know, by referring to his desire to 'make sure that legitimate investigative journalism is not impeded' and his belief that 'our rights and freedoms are protected by the daylight of public scrutiny as much as by the decisions of Parliament or independent judges.' If there was any lingering doubt about Mr Brown’s views on journalistic freedom, it was decisively dispelled when he went on to name Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre as an appointee to an ad hoc panel to examine the question of how some material still held by the National Archives should be declassified with the FOI Act in mind.

Mr Brown had put his finger deftly on the point that had alarmed Mr Blair in 2005, and to which Mr Blair only confessed in his autobiography published three years after Mr Brown’s remarks.

‘The truth is that the FOI Act isn’t used, for the most part, by “the people”. It’s used by journalists. For political leaders it’s like saying to someone who is hitting you over the head with a stick, “Here, try this instead,” and handing them a mallet. The information is neither sought because the journalist is curious to know, nor given to bestow knowledge on “the people”. It’s used as a weapon.’

Mr Blair’s language here is revealing. It is the vocabulary of conflict, of instability, of incipient revolution. It betrays a siege mentality. Why does he perceive FOI as a weapon with which to assail public servants?

The apparent answer is that Mr Blair had an uncharacteristically troubled conscience. No sooner had the FOI Act come into force than Mr Blair’s own Labour Party used it to go on muck-raking expeditions. Labour Party activists up and down the country were enrolled into a pseudo 'crowd-sourcing' exercise, in which the Home Office was barraged with requests for information. The requests all had one thing in common: they related to Mr Blair’s opposite number on the Parliamentary benches, Conservative Party leader Michael Howard. Mr Howard (now Baron Howard of Lympne) was the distinctly authoritarian Home Secretary from May 1993 to the last day of John Major’s fractious 1990-97 administration. The Labour Party clearly felt reviving the


atmosphere of the Major years would be a significant advantage in 2005.6

Mr Blair draws a distinction between ‘journalists’ and ‘the people’ as though the two categories were somehow mutually exclusive. This curious and artificial dichotomy has a suitably paradoxical corollary: that Mr Blair believes it would be safe (under FOI) to release information to members of the public, who do not have the means to publish it, but unsafe to release such information to the press who would publish it for everyone else to see. Mr Blair – who famously admitted that he could not operate a home computer – was clearly thinking in Gutenbergian terms, since even during the first decade of the 21st Century the Internet had put a form of publication within reach of just about everyone in Britain who was minded to try it.

It would be entirely natural to infer that Mr Blair’s fear of FOI-equipped journalism was at least partly fed by his close advisor and confidante Alastair Campbell, a veteran of the print-era Fleet Street before becoming Mr Blair’s press secretary. There is no index entry for ‘Freedom of Information’ in Mr Campbell’s diaries. And if there was any doubt about the extent to which Mr Blair’s and Mr Campbell’s views could be treated interchangeably, in 2004 Mr Campbell explicitly said: ‘I’m just an extension of Tony [Blair]. That’s what I am. And I did a job for him and I think while I was there I did a good job.’ 7

There is an absolutely crucial socio-political context here. Britain’s traditional press is famously dominated by right-wing proprietors and viewpoints. A certain distrust of ‘Tory rags’ is in the figurative lifeblood of members of the Labour Party, which by and large maintained an uneasy truce with the press for most of the decade after Mr Blair’s 1997 election.

However, even once admitted, this context does not alter the fact that Mr Blair’s perception of FOI as a tool wielded by a hostile press is at odds with reality. A survey conducted in 2010 indicated that non-journalists accounted for the majority of all requests submitted to government at both local and national level.8 Journalists account for 33 per cent of FOI requests submitted to councils, which could indicate that local journalism is as robust as ever. However, journalistic activity accounts for a mere 8 per cent of FOI requests to central government as opposed to the 39 per cent submitted by ‘the public’.


This is worth restating in stronger terms. Mr Blair’s time in office appears to have led him to become detached from reality and adopt a ‘siege mentality’ about journalists on national publications, who were in fact failing to make significant use of their legislated access to some of Whitehall’s filing cabinets.

We may never get the chance to learn what Mr Blair might offer by way of explanation for his remarkable beliefs, because he refused to appear before the Justice Select Committee of the House of Commons in 2012 when the Committee was re-examining the FOI Act. Chairman Sir Alan Beith MP was sufficiently annoyed to set down the following decidedly undiplomatic statement:

‘Former Prime Minister Tony Blair described himself as a “nincompoop” for his role in [creating] the legislation, saying that it was “antithetical to sensible government”. Yet when we sought to question Mr Blair on his change of opinion he refused to defend his views before us and submitted answers to our written questions only after our Report was agreed, and after a press report had appeared, suggesting we might criticise his failure to give evidence. We deplore Mr Blair’s failure to co-operate with a Committee of the House, despite being given every opportunity to attend at a time convenient to him.’  

Mr Blair’s Home Secretary at the time the FOI Act was passed was Jack Straw, and – rather like his patron – the Right Honourable Mr Straw underwent something of a ‘reverse Damascus’ conversion in his subsequent views on the matter. He stated several times that the FOI Act was being ‘misused’ and proposed the introduction of a fees regime to curb the amount of FOI requests. When Mr Straw and Lord Howard were both appointed to the Burns Commission, the omens seemed clear.

Maurice Frankel is chairman of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, which championed the cause of open access legislation for years prior to the 2000 Act and since then has acted as an unofficial ‘watchdog’. He found Mr Straw’s appointment to the Burns Commission ‘unsurprising’.

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'It was clear how the Commission was being set up. We all thought “Here it comes...” My belief is that Jack Straw was the cornerstone and everyone else was an afterthought. I certainly don’t believe that Michael Howard was the first name on anyone’s mind when the Commission was being created. But once they had dragged in a former Home Secretary from the Labour Party they tried to provide balance, or what looked like it, by getting Michael Howard on board too. But of course both men were known for their hostility to FOI.‘

The mystery, then, is why a ‘hanging jury’ delivered an acquittal. A straightforward reading would be that the pair of Home Office heavyweights simply failed to swing the opinions of other commissioners, and ultimately the opinion of the chairman himself. Mr Straw did not respond to inquiries undertaken during the present research and Lord Howard did reply but declined to say anything.

Lord Bridges of Headley, who drew up the Commission, also declined to comment. It has therefore not been possible to question him about the extent to which his position at the time might have influenced his appointments. This is particularly regrettable since one of the circumstances that appears to have renewed Government efforts to rein in the FOI Act was the release in May 2015 of letters sent by the Prince of Wales to Government departments. Fought tooth and nail by the Government at every inch of the way, the Supreme Court eventually decided in favour of requesters, The Guardian.

When he appointed the Burns commissioners, Lord Bridges was Parliamentary Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a governmental post which is in the direct gift of the Duke of Lancaster, better known as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The Burns Commission’s historical analogue appears to be the efforts to rein in the then eight year-old US FOI Act by the Gerald Ford administration in 1974. President Ford, somewhat in keeping with his bungling image, proposed to restrict the US FOI Act as part of an attempt to restore faith in the workings of the federal government. This motivation is essentially the same concern that drove Tony Blair to disavow his own FOI Act some 35 years later. Ford did

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12 Lord Howard demonstrated his commitment to transparency by stating: ‘I do not think it would be appropriate for me to share with you the internal deliberations of the Commission.’ Letter to author, 27 April 2017.

not appear to notice the towering irony of setting out to restrict the public’s ‘right to know’ in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal that had propelled him into the Oval Office in the first place (another instance of a government trying to defend itself against a supposedly ‘hostile press’). It is worth noting that the Washington Post’s investigation of the Watergate scandal, culminating in the downfall of President Nixon, did not involve any use of the US FOI Act anyway.

Ford’s attempt to use Watergate as an excuse to ‘smother’ FOI managed to achieve the opposite, with Congress passing a series of enhancements strengthening the FOI Act rather than weakening it. Nate Jones is director of the FOI project run by George Washington University’s National Security Archive (ironically abbreviated to NSA), a cross-disciplinary effort between academics and journalists which (to cite the project’s own raison d’etre) ‘....combines a unique range of functions: investigative journalism center, research institute on international affairs, library and archive of declassified U.S. documents (“the world’s largest nongovernmental collection” according to the Los Angeles Times), leading non-profit user of the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, public interest law firm defending and expanding public access to government information, global advocate of open government, and indexer and publisher of former secrets.’ (National Security Archive, 2017)

Mr Jones identifies the Ford administration’s misjudged attempt to weaken the US FOI Act as the point at which the fight for access really took off.

‘Most commentators agree that the biggest step forward for FOIA was the 1974 Amendments, [passed] in the wake of Watergate. The 1974 Amendments enacted provisions so that public interest requesters paid fewer fees, established [the principle of] segregability review so that agencies now have to go line by line of each document and must release all information that is not specifically exempt, [and] gave more teeth to requesters suing in court, and other improvements.

The bottom line is that the US law has generally grown stronger over time – though with steps backwards as well. The 2016 FOIA Improvement Act, for example further strengthened the law by weakening the B5 exemption, eliminating most FOIA fees if an agency misses its statutory deadline, strengthening the Ombudsman’s Office, and other improvements.’

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14 Nate Jones, FOI project director at the National Security Archive, email discussion 22-24 April 2017.
The ‘B5’ exemption referred to by Mr Jones (sometimes given as ‘B(5)’) is the bit of the US FOI Act that is hated and derided by himself and his fellow FOI aficionados as the ‘Withhold It Because I Feel Like It’ clause. This is because the clause is so loosely-worded that it can be used to justify the withholding of just about any document that might conceivably prejudice a future legal action against the body holding the information. Some measure of exactly how subjectively B(5) can be interpreted can be gained by simply observing the fact that the Department of Justice has found it necessary to publish an 8,590 word explanation (not including footnotes) setting out how and why the 25-word exemption is applied.\(^\text{15}\)

The UK’s FOI Act does not contain such a catch-all exemption.

Nor is exemption B(5) the only obstacle raised in dealing with officialdom via the US FOI Act. The legislation contains just nine specific exemptions, but as Mr Jones is keen to observe:

‘Exemption three allows Congress to pass a new exemption at any time -- this is how the CIA Operational Files exemption was created. To date there are over 300 of these on the books... including information about watermelon growing techniques! That these statutory exemptions are snuck in so easily is another problem with US FOIA.’ \(^\text{16}\)

The CIA Operational Files exemption to which Mr Jones is referring was created in 1984 (appropriately, some might think) and allows the Central Intelligence Agency to withhold anything it claims is ‘operational’ without even requiring the material in question to be reviewed.

‘[Since passage of the exemption] the CIA has stretched the definition of “operational” to include all manners of files, including histories [which are] by definition not operational! Essentially the CIA can now deny many requests without even reviewing the documents to see if their withholding is truly justified. Other agencies are jealous of the CIA’s ability to deny documents without reviewing them and have strived to get their own statutory non-review denial authority, but largely have not been as successful.’ \(^\text{17}\)

Perhaps, then, the UK has learned a lesson from the US Act by not allowing a hydra-headed proliferation of arbitrary FOI exemptions. But there is a sting in


\(^{16}\) See note 13.

\(^{17}\) See note 13.
this hydra’s tail. Unlike the CIA, the security and intelligence agencies of the UK (better known as MI5 and MI6 respectively) are protected by Britain’s FOI Act with an all-encompassing clause 23(1) concerning ‘Information supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters’, which is an absolute exemption and therefore not amenable to public interest considerations (emphasis added).¹⁸ The words ‘relating to’ are interpreted so broadly by the Information Commissioner’s Office that it has led to their rejection of an attempt by this author to learn even the total number of documents held in a certain MI6-related category by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Here, the US FOI has an interesting kink. It is known as the Motion for Vaughn Index, and appears to have no parallel in its British counterpart – or outside it. The Vaughn Index is named after an FOI applicant who in 1973 sued the US federal government, which put the court in the position of having to decide whether the government had applied its own exemptions properly. To this end, the court required a sort of pre-digital set of metadata, just enough to reach a conclusion without actually disclosing the contested information itself.¹⁹

Consequently, the Vaughn precedent has been used to pry from withholding agencies a detailed summary of the requested material, including the number of pages, who created the record, when they created it, a synopsis of what the record is, and so on. This is a glaring example of how the UK’s FOI Act might be augmented, and it could considerably ease the burden on the FOI tribunal system (a process outside the scope of this essay). The National Security Archive’s Nate Jones calls the Vaughn Index ‘an important tool, but [one that] came about because court precedent mandated it […] Alas far fewer than one per cent of FOI requests go to court, and thus have Vaughn indexes [created].’²⁰ Perhaps the concomitant lack of public awareness is the sole reason that there has been no impetus for a British ‘Vaughn’.

All this, however, is for the future. In its 2016 report, the Burns Commission concluded:

‘…the Act is generally working well, and that it has been one of a number of measures that have helped to change the culture of the public sector.

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¹⁸ Frequently misunderstood, and sometimes deliberately misrepresented, the term ‘public interest’ relates to whether or not the public’s best interests would be served by releasing material responsive to an FOI request. It has no bearing on the question of whether or not the general public would find the material interesting.


²⁰ See note 14.
It has enhanced openness and transparency. The Commission considers that there is no evidence that the Act needs to be radically altered, or that the right of access to information needs to be restricted. In some areas, the Commission is persuaded that the right of access should be increased.’  

The Commission might have been persuaded that access should be enhanced, but it did not actually recommend doing so. However the ‘Straw objection’ was explicitly addressed, in terms that made it clear that a decision was anticipated in Whitehall.

‘We have not been persuaded that there are any convincing arguments in favour of charging fees for requests and therefore we make no proposals for change.’

There is a distinct sense of entrenchment and stalemate here. The state’s ‘big guns’, in the form of two formidable Home Secretaries, were wheeled out and deployed against FOI in its current form, and their ammunition proved to be dud. But on the other hand, the ‘front line’ of FOI reform has not advanced one figurative inch. The end result is a typically British compromise that satisfies everyone precisely because it satisfies no-one. Maurice Frankel calls this outcome ‘benign neglect’.

‘There is a sense in which the failure to enhance the Act is benign neglect, a common tactic with Governments throughout history. The press was full of anxiety about the Act being curtailed and tightened and I think that in their relief they were willing to overlook the fact that things hadn’t improved either. The press are fond of sticking up for the freedom of the press, but when it comes to actually advancing and widening freedoms they are very conservative.’

As for Tony Blair’s shuddering confession of the ‘stupidity’ of introducing FOI in the first place, one can look back at the shadow cast by the USA’s 1966 FOI Act. Despite solid progress on domestic issues, President Lyndon Johnson is now remembered chiefly for his effective resignation in 1968 due to the disaster unfolding in Vietnam. Mr Frankel’s succinct observation is apt:

‘I’m sure most people can think of at least one decision that Tony Blair made while he was Prime Minister that was a far bigger mistake than the


22 See note 18.

23 See note 11.
Freedom of Information Act.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} See note 11.
Using the UK FOIA

Nick Must

Garrick Alder has a piece in this issue detailing some of the history and foibles of the respective American and British Freedom of Information Acts. I found this a particularly interesting read because I am currently embroiled in a lengthy appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in the UK. As a part of the research for my own previous Lobster article 'The Western Union Clandestine Committee: Britain and the “Gladio” networks', I had succeeded in obtaining some documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Upon receipt of these papers, the first thing I noticed was that some of the information (a number of names) had been 'redacted’ – blacked out, in other words. The covering letter that came with the released documents was vague, in that it merely stated that ‘some’ information was being withheld. This left me unsure as to exactly how much information was being denied to me. Was it solely the names on the documents I had received, or were there other papers?

Following procedure, I asked the FCO to review its own release; as expected, this was to no avail. The next step has been to further appeal to the ICO. I am part way through that process and nowhere near hitting a complete dead end. One minor victory from the process thus far, is that it has been clarified to me that it is only the names on the documents that are being withheld (i.e. there are no further papers). However, what has really struck me, after reading Garrick’s article, is how the continuing denial I am experiencing is based on the FCO using not Provision 23 of the FOIA (which covers ‘Information supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters’) but, instead, Provision 27 (which covers ‘International Relations’). The argument from the FCO – and, by direct association, from MI6 – is that the release of the additional names would harm current or future relations with other nations and that:

'The FCO has argued that the fact that the requested information dates from 1949 is irrelevant. This is because disclosure of the withheld information would breach the principle that the UK government does not release the names of officials from its own external intelligence agency, and by extension, those of allied intelligence services. Consequently, the

1 <http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster72/lob72-western-union.pdf>
FCO has argued that it would seriously compromise such cooperation and thus prejudice the UK’s interests in, and relations with, the countries concerned.’

This argument is patently ridiculous. As I detailed in my Gladio article, one of the names of the participants in the meeting was not redacted. This was Major General John Sinclair, who at the time of the meetings was the Deputy Chief of MI6 and would later be Chief himself. My continuing appeal to the ICO will detail as many other examples as I can possibly gather where the names of MI6 officers have been deliberately released into the public domain by the UK government itself, including the four examples available from the ‘Our history’ page on the MI6 website!

More anon.

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2 Email from casework office at ICO, June 12, 2017.

3 See <https://www.sis.gov.uk/our-history.html>.
To the halls of Montezuma, from the shores of Tripoli: Donald Trump as ‘anti-Wilson’

Dr. T. P. Wilkinson

A century ago, a Southern academic and racist emerged in Europe and the United States as a crusader to ‘make the world safe for democracy’. Woodrow Wilson had been elected president in 1913, a year before Europe’s imperialists plunged the world into four years of mass murder. That war alone caused some four million direct battle casualties and untold millions of non-combatant deaths in the aftermath. Despite the actual policies he pursued, Wilson would be be turned into an icon of the 20th century’s most enduring myth: the benevolence and humanitarian virtue of the great slaveholder republic founded in 1776. Wilson could arguably be called the nation’s first celebrity politician and international celebrity export. This remarkable marketing accomplishment predated television.

The successful promotion of Wilson on both sides of the Atlantic as the archangel of peace and the United States as virtual heaven on Earth was certainly made easier by the cinema (especially the newsreel) and mass literacy (although an overwhelming number of the soldiers slaughtered in the European theatre were illiterate). It was the organisational and manipulative skills honed during the campaign to bring the US into this initially European war that would empower the men who came to dominate the mass media; and whose descendants dominate it today.

In 2017, a real estate mogul from New York City, the original headquarters of the propaganda machine that created Woodrow Wilson, became the 45th president of the United States. The country has been waging war almost continuously since 1945, most recently its proclaimed ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT). From all indications the US war efforts have not been all that successful, at least by any literal interpretation of the war’s stated objectives. The ‘terror’ that is the ‘enemy’ does not appear anywhere near defeated. Despite the efforts of US Forces (both overt and covert), the new president arrived in the White House with what might best be called a stalemate in the GWOT: no victory in sight, just attrition.

So 2017 begins not unlike 1917. There has been no progress in the war – just a continuous flow of corpses and body parts, albeit mainly those of civilians in the alleged combat zones.

1 Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born in Virginia and educated in Georgia and South Carolina before taking degrees at Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore) and ultimately becoming president of Princeton University before launching his political career. Among his contributions upon becoming US President was to introduce the post-slavery Jim Crow regime into the federal civil service.
In 1917 Wilson’s handlers needed to create the conditions by which the US population could be persuaded to surrender its men and boys as cannon fodder in Flanders and at the same time convince the belligerents in Europe that the US was not shipping soldiers and materiel to Europe to expand its own empire. These were no mean tasks. Aside from a significant faction among the ruling elite that was unwilling to spend money defending Britain (a competitor), there was the generally held attitude of a largely immigrant population that Europe was the place they had gladly left behind. Either they wanted nothing to do with Europe or they were sufficiently connected by family ties that they saw no reason to return to shoot relatives who happened to remain there. As for the Black population of the US, they had nothing to say in the matter. The number of Blacks allowed to vote for Wilson was insignificant. Furthermore they did not need to go to Europe to be killed. It was dangerous enough being Black in the US. The US regime had neutralised the indigenous population and its ex-slaves were largely under control. Hence one could say that domestic peace (for whites at least) prevailed.

However in 1913 Wilson had signed the Federal Reserve Act. Explained as a law to establish economic and monetary stability after what had been one of the longest depressions in history, it actually transferred the nation’s finances to a para-statal corporation dominated by the country’s most powerful banks. Those banks had also become the principal creditors of Britain and France in their war against Germany. In other words, the US regime had created a structure by which its fiscal and monetary policy would be made not by the legislature (as foreseen in the Constitution) but by committees of men for whom the outcome in Europe was far from a matter of indifference.

Until late 1915 the Allies seemed a sure bet. Their creditors were convinced the war would be won quickly. By 1916 faith in a quick end to the slaughter had disappeared. Much worse were the serious fears of an adverse decision, either a victory for Germany or an end to hostilities with conditions disadvantageous to Britain and France (and hence their US bankers). Anything short of an Allied victory heightened the risk that the Allies would default on their debts. Hence pressure mounted for Wilson to mobilise on the side of Morgan’s debtors. (The DuPont family was thrilled to increase its supply of explosives and munitions to the War Department.)

A new narrative was needed

Provocations had been fabricated in the past to justify US military intervention against weak or defenceless countries like Spain, Mexico and the much hated Black republic of Haiti, whose inhabitants also were considered racially inferior.

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2 The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 is often included in the catalogue of Wilson’s ‘progressive’ legislation. The circumstances of its adoption and its drafting at Jekyll Island, Georgia are another story.

3 The surplus profit DuPont generated during WWI was enormous. For details see Gerard Colby Zieg, Beyond the Nylon Curtain, re-issued in 2014 in the Forbidden Bookshelf series.
But a war in Europe would be a war against white people with comparable or even superior weaponry and military aptitude. The last war the US had fought against whites was half a century before. The Civil War had traumatised the country for decades thereafter. Hence Wilson’s government was faced with a huge challenge: to create an image of the war in Europe which could be sold to the white citizenry. Moreover it had to create the illusion of a threat to the country which could make the US intervention appear as self-defence. To do this it was necessary to create a new image of the USA. To accomplish this complex task, the Committee on Public Information was established.

Since the British Empire had been the traditional enemy of the US since 1776, a story had to be concocted in which the US and the UK were now friends bound – as opposed to enemies separated – by history. Then a story had to be invented as to why the German Empire, only constituted in 1881, was an enemy of the US although there had never been a war between the two countries. A story also had to be told that there was something common between Britain and France (historical enemies and constant competitors) and the US, which made them the natural allies of the United States.

There were some tricky details. A lot of immigrants actually came from Germany and or had family ties to different parts of the German Empire. Until recently there had been no reason to give this much attention. Now it was entirely possible that such German immigrants would be asked to fight against Germany. Could they be trusted? What about the Irish who had no reason to love Britain as the colonial master of their ancestral homeland? Complicating this was the known activism of Germans in the emerging labour movement.

Then there was the large number of rural and semi-rural inhabitants far from the centres of power. Leaving aside the notorious ignorance of world geography and affairs, those farm boys and ranch hands could be recruited to take land from Indians and Mexicans. But would they volunteer to get their guns and sail far away to Europe, where there was no land to grab?

Thus the Committee on Public Information had to rewrite US history, almost from the beginning. This was the origin of the US mission in World War I to ‘make the world safe for democracy’. The polemics of the British settler elite – e.g. Thomas Jefferson – notwithstanding, the foundation of the United States was a unilateral declaration of independence from an imperial regime in London that threatened to extinguish the sources of oligarchical wealth in thirteen of its North America colonies in favour of industrialisation and power-sharing with creole elites emerging in the Caribbean; in short an end to chattel

\[4\] Any doubt about the British attitude toward Irish independence was removed when Roger Casement, who had played a leading role in exposing the slavery and mass murder in the Congo Free State under its owner, Belgium’s Leopold II, was hanged by the British for treason because he took his Irish nationality seriously and was convicted of accepting German promises of aid to the Irish nationalist struggle. It has been suggested that the British were killing two birds with one stone since Casement had earned the enmity of the Belgian empire
slavery and the expense of suppressing slave rebellions.  

A system of government whose spurious origins are attributed to the slave-holding society of ancient Greece, democracy was redesigned as the perennial flower of a state whose landowners and financiers had consistently resisted every attempt to deliver it to the vast majority of the country’s population. At the same time the ‘melting pot’ fantasy was invented to explain why previously separate immigrant communities, successively imported to exploit whatever group had landed in the previous generation, were now mysteriously all Americans. These ethnic and language groups were endowed with the holy spirit of Manifest Destiny, the political equivalent of the ‘gift of tongues’ – in reality the sediment of America’s acidic political system.

Demonizing Germany

Germany was then reduced to a mere rapine horde of cannibals, ruled by a fanatical dictator (an image to return throughout the 20th century in the depiction of the regime’s enemies). The German emperor, a cousin of the then-reigning British king-emperor, was turned into the enemy of Democracy and humanity. In essence, the Hohenzollern king-emperor was simply turned into the logical opposite of the emerging fiction. The diplomatic manoeuvres by which France had assured that Germany went to war remained concealed so that even today charitable historians insist that Germany was the sole cause of the war. The vicious image of Germany then had to be turned into a real threat to the innocence of Europe.

The sinking of the Lusitania (the Latin name for Portugal), a British merchantman plying the Atlantic with munitions, but also carrying American passengers, became the Maine or the World Trade Centre for US propagandists. The German imperial government had published ample warning in the United States that the ship was transporting munitions to Britain and as such could not enjoy the benefits of neutral shipping. Despite public knowledge that the British ship was deemed a legitimate target for German submarines, the ostensibly neutral US government did nothing to discourage its citizens from taking passage. When it was duly sunk, outrage followed. The incident

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6 Wilhelm II was a welcome guest in the United States before the war. This author’s grandfather was a witness to one of the yachting enthusiast’s visits to Newport, RI on the occasion of regattas in Narragansett Bay.

7 In 2014 an Australian historian ‘sympathetic’ to Germany omits entirely Britain’s interest in provoking war in 1914. See *Sleepwalkers* by the current Regis Professor of History at Cambridge University, Christopher Clark, reviewed by this author at <http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster68/lob68-sleepwalkers.pdf>. In contrast Carroll Quigley provides a more circumspect analysis in *The Anglo-American Establishment* (on-line at <http://www.carrollquigley.net/pdf/the_anglo-american_establishment.pdf>), a book largely disregarded although Quigley was a Georgetown professor and a mentor of Bill Clinton.
was converted into a *casus belli* for the United States regime to abandon its previously declared neutrality and to openly side with the British and French in the European imperialists’ war. The bankers’ president reacted according to a script that is followed to this day.

Then the war atrocities propaganda, which the British had used so successfully to incite their own subjects, was reworked for domestic consumption in North America. Meanwhile an entire industry had been created to fabricate the American Dream (still a central element in school curriculum in the subordinated Federal Republic of Germany). Needless to say the treatment of non-whites in the US could not be and was not heralded as a virtue. Yet since white supremacy was a major part of all European imperial ideology, this omission went unnoticed. British and US propagandists were eventually to elaborate the myth of American independence into the absurd – because truncated – fable of national self-determination as an excuse for fragmenting the Austro-Hungarian and German empires after the war.

The history of how these central myths were propagated in the US is too extensive to treat here but Creel, who was the leading light of the Committee on Public Information, gave a detailed account in his book about the Committee. It is crucial to understand that the ‘Dream’ is a 20th century fabrication, designed to sell the war at home and persuade European allies that the US was not entering a war of conquest in Europe. In 1917, the empire that still cannot say its name was shaping the consciousness of subsequent generations for whom the US is merely the purveyor of ‘freedom’, Coca Cola and Levis jeans (later the Internet, a computer system designed for surviving its own plans for global atomic war against the Soviet Union). This is the non-empire with over 800 military bases world-wide and whose ambassadors have

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8 English books in German schools still teach the long-discredited ‘Thanksgiving feast’ story although it is a matter of historical record that Thanksgiving in the US was celebrated as a military victory – like Blood River in Afrikaner history’s Day of the Covenant – until Abraham Lincoln turned it into a national holiday of reconciliation between the North and South in the US Civil War. The American Dream is composed of little lies, exaggerations and outright falsehoods written into textbooks, film scripts and consumer-based celebrations exported wherever a buck is to be made.

9 This became part of the Wilsonian ‘14 Points’. See <www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/fourteen_points.shtml>.

10 George Creel, *How we advertised America* (1920). Creel was a Madison Avenue advertising executive given the brief.

11 Fittingly the dean of armed propaganda (counter-terrorism) in the US, Edward Lansdale, began his career as the advertising executive who made Levi’s jeans into the famous clothing brand it is today. For some odd reason the worshippers of the Internet forget to mention that it is the successor to the ARPANET, invented by the US military to assure that its computer systems would survive the expected retaliatory strike following the first atomic strike against the Soviet Union – the core of US strategic planning until the end of the so-called Cold War, as can be seen in the official history film produced by the Sandia National Laboratories, the R&D department of the US atomic war establishment. See <https://archive.org/details/U.s.StrategicNuclearPolicy>.

*Continues at the foot of the next page*
the power of pro-consuls in most of the world’s 187 United Nations member-states.\textsuperscript{12}

**Propaganda reborn as PR**

It is necessary to understand the public relations (as Edward Bernays felt compelled to rename ‘propaganda’) and corporate advertising machine created to foster the strange belief that the United States of America is truly exceptional not only for its citizens, but for the rest of world (at least the white part). It is this carefully crafted and maintained image of the US that is found in every cinema, on almost all televisions, and in the music and consumer goods proliferated even more virally than the weapons supposedly limited by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is the base for the consciousness of millions who have been taught to abhor every particular quality of their own cultures and countries not consonant with the taste promulgated by the boards of US corporations, especially among those who think of themselves as ‘white’.

Only then is it possible to grasp the peculiar reaction to Donald Trump’s election in 2016 to the highest elected office of that invisible empire, with its ubiquitous invisible army. George W. Bush was mocked. Barack Obama was canonised. But Trump – who is in every way as much a creature of the real US as his predecessors and competitors – is reviled and treated as a threat to world peace. Ronald Reagan – who actually joked on camera about nuking the Soviet Union – has been forgotten (like the Alzheimer’s he no doubt brought into office).

Mr Donald Trump of Trump Towers is the 45th person authorised by the US Constitution to occupy the slave-built mansion at 1600 Pennsylvania most appropriately named the White House. With the notable exception of one Kenyan-American and his family, this has been occupied solely by men who consider themselves to be ‘white’ and their domestic servants often enough of the ‘coloured persuasion’. Yet the Washington correspondent of the liberal Lisbon daily *Publico* reported that the world economic system is threatened with destruction by one of the most notorious (though certainly not the richest) New York real estate magnates.\textsuperscript{13} No irony was intended.

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\textit{Footnote 11 continued}

The fact that almost all crucial servers for the Internet are located in the US – such that the EU felt compelled to adopt consent rules for the storage of data from European users on US servers – is never seen as a risk to ‘Internet freedom’. Never mind that virtually all Internet software, and much of the hardware, originates from US corporations.

\textsuperscript{12} There is an old joke on the Left about the US regime: ‘Why has there never been a coup in Washington D.C.?’ The answer: ‘Because there is no U.S. Embassy in Washington D.C.’ In a conversation the son of a Honduran tobacco plantation owner told this author that in the nation’s capital, Tegucigalpa, the three most important buildings in the country were the Catholic Cathedral, the headquarters of the Honduran armed forces and the US embassy, the last being paramount.

Portugal, a country whose cultural significance, were it not for Brazil, would probably compete with that of Belgium or Finland, is about as far as one can get from the centres of power in what North Americans call 'Old Europe'. Its last great moment was 1755 when the destruction of Lisbon by an earthquake precipitated a European financial panic. Since then, as the 2008 collapse of the casino economy amply showed, it has been sufficiently far from power to have become a very realistic place – a showcase for the fraud that drives that world economic system and for how a people accustomed to poverty and neglect by their rulers still manages to maintain a kind of quiet dignity and decency noticeably lacking in the Western hemisphere. The absurdity of that Publico report from Washington ought to be apparent in a country whose 11 million inhabitants – making it slightly larger than Mr Trump’s home town – have been reduced from imperial citizens to inhabitants and customer service employees in a relatively cheap theme park for the rest of Europe’s still employed tourists. They could be forgiven for asking what the new US President could possibly do to more seriously diminish their standard of living than has already been done by the previous 44.

However, Portugal’s political class continues to pursue the ideals enshrined in the Treaty of Methuen, probably the first subprime mortgage of an entire country to be consummated in modern European history. This reader had to ask what world economic system was threatened with demise by the new tenant in Washington’s most exclusive rental property? By what logic or stretch of the imagination is one to believe that a man made wealthy by real estate speculation in one of the most manipulated property markets in the world could even conceive anything that would destroy the basis of his family’s wealth? Did we all miss something?

Another bizarre headline heralded the ‘end of political correctness’. For those who follow this line of thought it may be helpful to remind them that ‘political correctness’ originally meant the hypocritical and deliberately divisive appropriation of the language of political liberation to undermine the very liberating goals of ending various forms of exploitation and oppression based on race, class, or gender. It is a testimony to the effectiveness of reactionary propaganda that the language of liberation has been converted into an instrument for defending its opposite. It is also proof that language does not directly mirror the real world – an insight only appreciated when the managers of language, the mass media in all its permutations, attack those who hold

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14 This event also played a central role in Voltaire’s satirical novella Candide, a work later adapted by Lillian Hellman and Leonard Bernstein to dramatize the United States during the post-WWII purges.

15 Named after the British diplomat who negotiated it, this treaty guaranteed Portugal’s sovereignty (against any challenges by Spain) in return for what would now be called ‘most favoured nation status’. In the course of Anglo-Portuguese relations, Portugal would sacrifice its textile industry to Manchester in return for privileged access of its wine (e.g. Port and Madeira) to British markets and open its Brazilian ports to British merchants.

views with which they cannot agree. Nazis and the now largely defunct communist parties of what was once called the Soviet bloc are the only ones whose use of language was supposedly deceptive or simply dishonest. In what was once called ‘the West’ or the ‘free world’, the unrestricted expression of ideas was claimed as an exclusive property. Everything said or written in the West was *per se* free (and putatively true) whereas everything said in the ‘East’ was putatively false and composed of lies. No matter how many lies were exposed in the West, the West was still ‘free’ and ‘true’, while no matter how accurate or intelligible the communication in the ‘East’ was, it was composed *prima facie* of lies.

One of the most astounding examples of this hypocrisy was the claim that official economic reporting in the ‘East’ was always doctored, if not outright false. When the GDR collapsed, this claim was reasserted as the basis for deliberate undervaluing of state-owned assets awarded for next to nothing to Western bidders (to the extent competitive bidding even applied). Yet it was not only the standard practice of Western governments to falsify cost of living figures by changing the composition of the basket of goods used to measure it, or to fake unemployment figures by changing the definition of unemployed, whole batteries of accounting firms specialised in producing deceptive balance sheets to undervalue companies for tax purposes. This practice was especially common for US corporations operating in Latin America, e.g. Cuba and Guatemala. The fraud was only exposed when nationalist governments in those countries tried to enforce compensation for eminent domain actions based on tax returns that had been filed under previous regimes. John Blair, in two studies produced while he was an economist for the defunct US Congressional Committee on Transnational Corporations, wrote quite clearly that the US Government has no reliable economic statistics because it is almost impossible to get accurate disclosure from the principal economic actors – business corporations. In other words, the world economic system that Mr Trump supposedly endangers is so opaque that not even those employed by the government to routinely record and analyse its activity are able to attest to the reliability, let alone veracity of the data disclosed. How this condition can be reconciled with the dogma of free information in the West defies comprehension.

So let us leave aside the ‘nuclear threat’ Mr Trump supposedly poses to the world economy as we know it. The fact is we know very little about it by those criteria we have been told we are to trust, e.g. the media owned by those very corporations whose secrecy is all but inviolate. We have no reliable or honest information about the status of the world economy from anyone

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17 This was the real source of conflict between United Fruit and the Arbenz government that led the CIA to overthrow the Guatemalan president in 1954. It was also the reason why Fidel Castro nationalised assets of major US corporations: they had refused compensation based on their fraudulent tax returns filed under the defunct Batista regime.

claiming the right to tell us its condition. In political terms we are not even entitled to this information since it is *per se* private property, free only for those who own it. Ultimately this means the only claims sane people can make on their governments is that they do or do not do certain things, which have a real economic impact: e.g. secure incomes or the basic needs for everyday life. For real human beings. Of course that is where the central conflict begins. The ‘world economic system’ to which not only the Portuguese journalist refers is not designed to satisfy real economic (basic needs of everyday life) problems. It is designed to satisfy the needs of legal entities called corporations and other subordinate fictions for those people who ‘own’ them.

So to return to plain language, the author for *Publico* is saying that Mr Trump poses a threat to the system by which existing corporations and their owners satisfy *their* needs. But these needs must not be too clearly specified since the more specifically they are described the more obvious it must become that they have nothing to do with what most of the world’s population expects from an economic system. The jargon of the world economic system is so pervasive that few people even realise that their own descriptions of the economy make it impossible to draw a direct connection between what corporations and their owners do and what effects those actions or omissions have on the struggle to satisfy the basic needs of everyday life.

Here it is important to mention the ideological function of the so-called ‘priority of needs’ pyramid which everyone taught economics and business administration in school or university learns. This pyramid claims that humans prioritise their needs beginning with food and shelter and in the last stage – when everything else is done – consider the acquisition of knowledge or wisdom or human rights. This ‘priority of needs’ is really an argument for depriving humans of their humanity, which for better or worse means the necessity of determining themselves what best satisfies their basic needs. Like B.F. Skinner’s primitive behaviourism theories, the hierarchy of needs is really a trick to justify slavery, both physical and intellectual. The language is deceptively simple. The illusion of simplicity is intended to mirror a supposedly simple reality.

But reality for humans has never been simple. Ungoverned by ‘instinct’ and wholly at the mercy of language, it is impossible for humans to satisfy their own basic needs without cognition – essentially overt and covert verbal behaviour. Of course without cognition they can satisfy the needs of *others* – and that is why the ‘priority of needs’, merely a clever metaphor, is a standard ‘social science’ explanation in a discipline that prides itself on pretensions to numerical-mathematical objectivity.

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19 Skinner’s research coincided with a whole range of programs funded by the CIA to investigate manipulation of human behaviour. It is entirely possible that his work was wittingly or unwittingly promoted by those sources of academic largesse. For a stark contrast to Skinner’s ‘biological determinism’ see Morse Peckham, *Explanation and Power: The Control of Human Behavior* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
The exaggerated fear of Donald Trump can only be understood in terms of what the image of Donald Trump means to those fed on the American Dream, the neurosis cultivated in the advertising laboratories of Woodrow Wilson’s Creel Committee. This is not to say that people have no reason to fear the future exercise of US imperial and corporate power. Rather it means that Donald Trump – properly speaking the spectacle of Donald Trump, President of the United States – has infected the educated white population with a massive dose of cognitive dissonance. They find themselves struggling to reconcile their childish beliefs in the coherence between the stated policies of their regime and its actual practices. Most of what passes for enlightened – I dare not say Left – journalism and debate always exhibits considerable embarrassment when a POTUS publicly displays the incoherence of the American Dream with its reality. They find themselves forced to make the ‘bad US policy’ a product of ‘bad presidents’ when it is in fact the product of a bad system – a bad regime which their national loyalty compels them to support. After the phenomenal ‘blackwash’ of the US ‘Global War on Terror’ purged popular memory of the embarrassing George W Bush era, a garden variety white billionaire threatens to undermine a century of brainwashing.

This raises an even more important strategic question. Do the invisible people who rule the US not recognise the risk that Donald Trump poses for the carefully nurtured infatuation of Europeans and the white middle classes everywhere with the American Dream? Or do they feel this is an endgame? Are they convinced that they have sufficiently isolated Putin’s Russia and the Chinese tiger so that no matter what the US does it will retain the support Wilson’s Committee on Public Information so carefully engineered – if only because the US remains the lesser of all evils, makes the more popular films and controls the Internet?

We cannot forget that the machinery, which maintains consent, ignorance and ideological conformity with the business ideology of the United States, is still in place. It is entirely possible that Donald Trump is an accident or evidence of dissent in the US ruling elite – which is still overwhelmingly ‘white’. Given what we know – or could know – about this machine, the hysteria about Donald Trump may also be a crafted fabrication. Despite all the formal outrage over President Trump’s policies, not a single European government has threatened retaliatory measures against the US. Although Mr Trump declared NATO obsolete, neither Greece – which cannot even afford to be in NATO – nor any other member has announced its withdrawal. Nor have there been any calls for such action in the mainstream or compatible media. So is this a lot of ‘wolf-crying’?

What about the so-called real economy? Donald Trump has trumpeted that his administration will bring Chinese jobs back to the US. One might conclude that he is promising US corporations to reduce workers to the status

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of ‘coolies’. No government in Europe – and certainly not the European Commission – has any plans for restoring full-wage employment to its own citizens. Angela Merkel has successfully suppressed any debate about German military deployment in the US combat theatres where refugees are the second major crop, after opium. The past half year, the Portuguese government, led nominally by a Socialist, spent most of its time concocting a budget to please Germany’s George Wallace, the finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble – with little mention of the Portuguese themselves, whose wage and consumption taxes have increased every year while salaries have been frozen at 2006 levels. The crypto-socialist Hollande decided not to seek re-election, possibly because he had done his real job – dividing the French Socialist Party (PSF) beyond the capacity to govern. A minister under the last French president declared in an interview that the Americans had bought the French Socialist Party years ago – only confirming what Philip Agee wrote in his *CIA Diary*.\(^{21}\)

One hundred years after the myth of the Good America, the nightmare of the ‘American Dream’ seems about to end. The comedian George Carlin once said they call it the ‘American Dream’ because you have to be asleep to believe it. Maybe it would be a good thing if Donald Trump’s election made people wake up.

Dr T P Wilkinson blogs at

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\(^{21}\) The *Guardian*, part of the compatible Press in the UK, published an article by a ‘colour revolutionary’ from the Gene Sharp cottage industry that brought us the spectacle of Yugoslavia’s explosion and the fascist coup in the Ukraine. (See <http://tinyurl.com/zovy68v> or <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/01/worried-american-democracy-study-activist-techniques>.) The author asserts that no more than 3.5% of the population is needed to bring down a tyrannical regime. Apparently there was never 3.5% capable of forcing the release of thousands of Black Americans rotting in US prisons, including such political prisoners as Mumia Jamal or Leonard Peltier – even though their 'trials' have long been proven to have been rigged by the State. The sincerity of the 3.5% is apparently as selective as the interest of the infamous 1%.

Gene Sharp (b. 1928) is a retired political science professor from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and researcher at Harvard’s Center for International Affairs, who founded the Albert Einstein Institution in 1983. The institution’s funding has come from the entire host of US political warfare foundations – NED, IRI, Rand, Ford. His cottage think tank (amusingly also located in Cottage Street, East Boston, Massachusetts) and its role in the manufacture of synthetic ‘revolutionary’ movements is the subject of a documentary *The Revolution Business* (<https://www.journeyman.tv/film/5171>). The Sharp-inspired OTPOR (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otpor!>) – meanwhile renamed – played a central role in orchestrating the media campaigns that made Milosovic’s Serbia the tyrannical cause of the war which with the power of the US – exercised, *inter alia*, by counter-terror expert Richard Holbrooke – forced the destruction of the Yugoslav Federation in the early 1990s. The process was described in detail in the documentary *The Weight of Chains* (2010) (at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waEYQ46gH08>).
Deception and distraction strategies relating to the John F Kennedy Assassination

Garrick Alder

Introductory note

This essay involves one of the most outrageous and intellectually toxic propositions of all time: the claim that intelligent extraterrestrials have not only visited Earth in modern history, but are continuing to do so, and that various governments – principally that of the USA – are concealing this knowledge from the general public.

For the record, I do not believe any such thing. It has been amply demonstrated that stories about UFOs and extraterrestrials serve various intelligence bodies as a useful way of discrediting people or other organisations. It is this discrediting tactic that is the focus of the present work.

1: Flights from reason

In 1999, private detective Milo Speriglio published a document purporting to indicate that Marilyn Monroe had been murdered because she knew too much about the cover-up of human contact with extraterrestrials. Mr Speriglio said that this document had been passed to him by UFOlogist Timothy Cooper, who in turn claims to have received it from a retired CIA counterintelligence officer. Mr Speriglio’s document is supposedly a CIA eavesdropper’s summary of a telephone call between popular columnist Dorothy Kilgallen and her friend Howard Rothberg, a Hollywood producer.


2 A transcription of the anonymous letter that Mr Cooper claimed was sent with the ‘Marilyn memo’ can be read in SS Brotherhood of the Bell: The Nazis’ Incredible Secret Technology. The first page of the letter can be read via the Google Books preview at <http://tinyurl.com/y9bpz2ux>. ‘The Bell’ is supposedly a secret weapon created by Germany during the Second World War, the near-magical properties of which are unbelievable in the extreme. This elusive secret weapon has been invoked as the explanation for a bell-shaped UFO that is said to have crashed in Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, in 1965. What is of interest here is that the researcher who ‘discovered’ the existence of The Bell claims to have learned of it via a contact in Polish intelligence. The author’s evidence? Documents that he was shown, and allowed to copy, but not allowed to keep. In other words, the usual procedure for disseminating disinformation via credulous intermediaries. This will be a recurrent motif in the present work.

According to the memo:

‘Rothberg told Kilgallen that she [Monroe] was attending Hollywood parties hosted by the “inner circle” among Hollywood’s elite and was becoming the talk of the town again. Rothberg indicated in so many words that she had secrets to tell, no doubt arising from her trysts [sic] with the President and the Attorney General. One such “secret” mentions the visit by the President at a secret air base for the purpose of inspecting things from outer space.’

The date on the memo is 3 August 1962, and Marilyn Monroe died two days later in circumstances that are still disputed. Mr Speriglio was just one of the many investigators who were convinced that Monroe was murdered. In her column of 5 August 1962, Dorothy Kilgallen went over the odd circumstances of Monroe’s death, but didn’t suggest anything in particular, only that ‘The real story hasn’t been told, not by a long shot.’

Ms Kilgallen herself also later died in circumstances that are still the subject of debate and reinvestigation. The usual theory is that she was murdered to prevent her from exposing a conspiracy behind the JFK assassination. With two mystery deaths on its roll-call, the ominous nature of the ‘Marilyn memo’ seems unavoidably obvious. The memo also mentions that Kilgallen:

‘. . . replied that she knew what might be the source of visit. In the mid-fifties Kilgallen learned of secret effort [sic] by US and UK governments to identify the origins of crashed spacecraft and dead bodies, from a British government official.’

This tallies well with a story about ‘flying saucers’ that Ms Kilgallen filed from London on 23 May 1955, and which was published in several US newspapers. In this story, Ms Kilgallen stated:

‘British scientists and airmen, after examining the wreckage of one mysterious flying ship, are convinced these strange aerial objects are not optical illusions or Soviet inventions, but are flying saucers which originate

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4 You can read the whole memo at <http://www.blackmesapress.com/page4.htm>. The accompanying commentary stakes a claim to the memo’s authenticity. This is based on the fact that it was submitted as part of an ‘appeal of the CIA’s refusal to release transcripts of government wiretaps on Marilyn Monroe’s telephones’ and that the appeal was subsequently approved. The logic of this argument seems to be that the CIA would not place any value on a fake document. This might very well indicate that the ‘Marilyn memo’ is indeed a document created by the CIA, but it is far from being evidence that the ‘Marilyn memo’ is a genuine record.

5 <http://thedorothykilgallenstory.org/dorothy-kilgallen-in-words.html>

on another planet. The source of my information is a British official of Cabinet rank who prefers to remain unidentified [who said] “We believe, on the basis of our inquiry thus far, that the saucers were staffed by small men – probably under four feet tall. It’s frightening, but there is no denying the flying saucers come from another planet.”

Did Ms Kilgallen simply invent this entire yarn, or were important figures from the British Government really putting out such information? It appears that the latter is the case.

In his autobiography, Sounds from Another Room, former Air Marshal Sir Peter Horsley recounted a distinctly odd experience from 1954. Sir Peter tells how he made the acquaintance of a military man (to whom he refers only as ‘General Martin’) and as a result was introduced to a conspicuously talkative extraterrestrial in an anonymous flat in Chelsea, London.

This supposed alien, who was called ‘Janus’ (perhaps related to the fact that the mythological Janus was a god with two faces) sat and chatted with Sir Peter at great length about affairs earthly and otherwise. For example, as well as delivering an anti-nuclear weapons message, ‘Janus’ expressed a desire to meet Prince Philip, declaring the Duke to be a wise man who could solve many of the world’s problems. (Sir Peter told him that, unfortunately, this would be difficult to arrange). What did Sir Peter’s alien interlocutor look like? Alas, his chattiness was the only conspicuous thing about this self-declared visitor from another world. Sir Peter recalled: ‘It was difficult to describe him with any accuracy; the room was poorly lit by two standard lamps and for most of the time he sat in a deep chair by the side of a not very generous fire.’

This ridiculous encounter strongly suggests that a UFO-themed disinformation operation was taking place in Britain during the period 1954-55, and that Ms Kilgallen and Sir Peter Horsley were two of its unwitting pawns. It’s unclear whether this operation related to anything else happening at the time, or if it was part of a general project to get false information into circulation in case it could be useful later on. In any event, something was going on in London in the 1950s that required these respectably-sourced tales to be circulated.

I believe, but cannot prove, that there were actually two disinformation operations taking place in these incidents, as indicated by the discrepancy between the ‘small men under four feet tall’ in Kilgallen’s story and the distinctly human-sized Janus met by Sir Peter. The operation that ensnared Dorothy Kilgallen was related to the USA’s U-2 spy plane project, which started in 1954, and the UFO legend was therefore ‘surfaced’ in the US via Ms Kilgallen in 1955. The CIA’s internal history of the U-2 project claims that the high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft accounted for more than half of UFO sightings in the 1950s and 60s. The US Air Force’s investigation of UFOs – the famous Project Blue Book – got under way in 1952, and checked regularly with the Agency in order to eliminate U-2 flights from their catalogue of sightings. See <http://tinyurl.com/yqzjb5> or <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/the-cia-and-the-u-2-program-1954-1974/u2.pdf> (page 39 onward).
Returning to the ‘Marilyn memo’, we can infer that the purpose was to link the deaths of Monroe and Kilgallen to ‘UFO cover-up’ stories. The purpose of doing so becomes a little clearer when the reader observes that there is a third mysterious death that is being linked to secrecy about flying saucers – that of President Kennedy, who supposedly visited a ‘secret underground base’ to witness these alien exhibits with his own eyes. With just one piece of paper, these three deaths are contaminated by their proximity to the idea that there is a huge and all-encompassing conspiracy to conceal the existence of aliens from the easily alarmed public.

Does this contamination extend into the Oval Office and touch President Kennedy himself? Yes, it does. In 2011, a memo surfaced in which JFK demanded that CIA Director John McConne provide him with a report on what was and was not known about the UFO phenomenon. That memo is dated 12 November 1963, and JFK was murdered 10 days later. This document was released to author William Lester by the CIA as the result of a Freedom of Information Act request. Whether it is genuine or not – and there’s no way of knowing, since the space that should contain the signature of the memo’s author has been totally redacted – it has produced much excitement among extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI) conspiracists. But it is worth looking at it with a slightly more analytical eye. The author – supposedly Kennedy – states his justification for the order as being his concern that the Soviet Union might think that US interest in extraterrestrials was a cover for intelligence operations aimed at probing Soviet defences. This sounds altogether more plausible, and even suggests that Kennedy was already aware of such subterfuge; but again we are unable to assess the memo on that basis alone.

The 12 November 1963 memo was seized upon by triumphant ETI conspiracists chiefly because it seemed to fit perfectly with a separate memo that had surfaced three years earlier, in 2008. This document was supposedly a CIA memo dating from some time during the JFK administration, and refers to the UFO phenomenon in familiar terms before stating melodramatically: ‘As you must know LANCER has made some inquiries regarding our activities

Footnote 8 continued
The operation that reeled in Sir Peter Horsley was related to Britain’s 1952 entry into the nuclear arms race, hence the interest shown by ‘Janus’ in world peace and avoiding nuclear conflict. The aim of this would be to discredit anti-nuclear campaigners by association with far-out tales of interplanetary peaceiks. This was a regular theme among the ‘UFO contactees’ of that period, who described meeting distinctly human-looking extraterrestrials who delivered anti-nuclear messages about Earth becoming a member of ‘Galactic Federations of Harmony’ and the like.

9 You can examine it at <http://tinyurl.com/ya3o87oj> or <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/74/Letter_written_by_John_F_Kennedy_to_the_head_of_the_CIA.jpg>.

10 At a meeting between Soviet and US meteorologists in May 1975, a Soviet delegate said that he and his colleagues were not receiving reports of UFO sightings any more and that the cessation must have been due to someone making ‘a political decision’. Those familiar with the sardonic nature of Russian humour will recognise that this was a rather pointed remark. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000028609.pdf>.
which we cannot allow.’ Edge of the seat stuff, to be sure.

This memo was supposedly rescued from its intended destruction in a CIA ‘burn bin’ following the 1987 death of CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton and sent to the aforementioned Timothy Cooper in July 1999. For that reason, it is referred to as ‘the burned memo’, a title that is ironic considering that it has shed more heat than light upon the debates of the ETI conspiracists.11

LANCER (mentioned in the ‘burned memo’) was the Secret Service codename for President Kennedy, and the ‘we’ refers to members of the elusive Majestic 12 committee, which has been discussed by ETI conspiracists ever since papers supposedly identifying the group came to light in the 1980s. The documents that started the entire rigmarole are supposed to be the minutes and memos of a high-ranking cabal within the American Deep State, which oversees and coordinates all manner of covert chicanery related to the grand UFO cover-up. The documents have been debunked over and over again, but phantom things die phantom deaths and so they still keep coming up decades later.

In 1988 the FBI investigated the alleged leak of the documents and concluded that they were bogus. However, as a 2017 FOIA request revealed, the FBI conducted its investigation in an uncharacteristic way.

‘Despite the FBI saying they looked into this case because of “a potential violation of federal law under our jurisdiction that we did investigate”, the Bureau neither investigated the espionage angle they opened the file for, nor any of the potential violations of federal law involved in forging government documents.’12

This is self-evidently significant. A major hoax involving phoney government records was being carried out on an international scale. Yet the FBI’s investigation consisted of writing a letter to the US Air Force’s Office of Special Intelligence (OSI), to which the OSI eventually replied, telling the Bureau that the documents were fake. At that point, the FBI shut the book on the entire affair. It seems obvious that this was one of those inter-agency games of Blind Man’s Bluff that bedevil the US Deep State. The FBI realised it had simply blundered across an officially-sanctioned disinformation project and that it was in the interests of national security to keep it under wraps.

The long and the short of which is that the ‘burned memo’ cites documents that have been comprehensively debunked by everyone who has ever investigated them properly. However, the ‘burned memo’ does seem to relate to an apparently genuine memo from President Kennedy – the aforementioned memo of 12 November 1963, released to William Lester in


2011 – the meaning of which was apparently moderated by the pre-emptive ‘leak’ of the ‘burned memo’. So again we run into an instance in which JFK assassination research has been contaminated by association with forged documents relating to a huge cover-up of extraterrestrials and ‘flying saucers’.

All this indicates some kind of distraction and deception project related to the Kennedy assassination. But all of the so-called leaks discussed in the above took place after the assassination. This probably means that the assassination was simply being thrown into the mix to bamboozle and mislead researchers and readers looking into either the assassination or the supposed ‘UFO mystery’. But when we look at some apparent connections between the ETI hypothesis and the JFK assassination that existed at the time of the murder itself, things take on an altogether darker appearance.

2: Flight from justice

In June 1947, a month before the supposed ‘Roswell incident’, a man called Fred Crisman was involved in an allegation of a UFO sighting at Maury Island, in Washington State, during which a strange craft did various inexplicable things (there are conflicting eye-witness accounts, not relevant here). Crisman claimed to have visited the scene of the sighting and picked up some mysterious metal that was supposedly emitted by the flying object. He later started telling people that he had been harassed by ‘Men In Black’, who wished him to keep his mouth shut (although they obviously didn’t have much success). This marked one of the first appearances of the sinister dark-suited agents, who would go on to make frequent visits to alarm and dismay supposed UFO witnesses throughout subsequent decades.

According to the FBI file on the Maury Island case, on 25 July 1947 (so a fortnight after the supposed ‘Roswell Incident’ which unfolded on 7-8 July 1947), an unidentified third party (n.b.) was responsible for Crisman being contacted by another UFO witness. This other ‘UFO witness’ was Kenneth Arnold, whose sighting of nine unidentified flying objects over Mount Rainier, Washington State, gave the world the term ‘flying saucers’. (It should be noted that Mr Arnold’s sighting had taken place on 24 July 1947 - i.e. on the previous day to the introduction). Mr Arnold and Mr Crisman met in a hotel room in Tacoma, Washington State, on 30 July, where they discussed the possible implications of what they had seen. While they were talking, no fewer than five separate anonymous phone calls were made to local newspapers, pinpointing the room in which the meeting was taking place and detailing the nature of

13 I suspect, but have not been able to establish, that William Lester’s FOIA request was submitted before the ‘burned memo’ surfaced in 2008, and that the latter was created to establish its apparent relationship to the former.

14 The full FBI file on the Maury Island incident was obtained by the excellent FOIA activists at Muckrock.com and, if you have the patience, can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/glj6goy> or <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2016/dec/05/fbis-real-x-files-documents-strange-connection-bet/>.
their discussions. (The FBI later determined that those calls were not made from the hotel room, but believed Crisman was behind them anyway).

At some point, Crisman handed his box containing the metal samples to two Air Force Intelligence Officers, who also spoke to Mr Arnold and (according to Mr Arnold) told him that they had already obtained fantastic-sounding evidence of flying saucer activity, including clear photographs of one of the disc-like craft.

If this sounds recognisably like a disinformation project, what happened next seems a little more serious. The day after meeting Messrs Crisman and Arnold, the two airforce intelligence officers departed in a B-25 aeroplane and were killed when the aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff. Soon after that, mysteriously-sourced stories started appearing in regional newspapers stating that the dead men had been carrying proof that flying saucers had visited Earth – this evidently being Crisman’s metal samples.

Interviewed by the FBI about the metal samples, Crisman stated that if he were obliged to be identified in relation to this, he would tell people that the entire story about the metal had been a hoax, justifying this to the FBI by saying that the affair had caused him too much trouble already. Evidently Crisman had some concerns about being prosecuted and appearing in court – although it’s not clear what crime the FBI believed they were investigating.

All of which seems a long way indeed from the JFK assassination. However, the FBI’s file on the entire Crisman-Maury Island affair contains a detailed report dated 24 August 1947 by Guy Banister, the Bureau’s SAC (Special Agent in Charge) in Butte, Montana. This is the same Guy Banister who would later turn up in close proximity to Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans. It’s not clear why Banister was investigating an incident that took place at Maury Island since he was based in Montana and the Maury Island affair took place in Washington State.

In 1968 Fred Crisman was subpoenaed as part of the freewheeling JFK investigation conducted by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, who believed Crisman to be a CIA officer or agent. Crisman appeared before a Grand Jury to determine whether he should appear as a witness in the Clay Shaw trial. During his Grand Jury appearance Crisman equivocated on the question of whether he had ever met Jack Martin, the unpleasant drunk who was pistol-whipped by Guy Banister shortly after the assassination and who, essentially, set Garrison’s entire investigation in motion. (Banister himself was dead before Garrison’s calamitous probe got under way).

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15 He did not tell the FBI that he had committed a hoax, as has been erroneously claimed by some researchers.

16 See Banister’s 1964 obituary at <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/75138205/>.

17 It may be relevant that during this period, Butte, Montana was J Edgar Hoover’s equivalent of Siberia, and the place of exile for FBI agents who were in Hoover’s bad books or had somehow disgraced themselves. See <http://tinyurl.com/y9yk2duk> or <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-04-14/news/9604140299_1_ron-kessler-butte-montana>.
Crisman also hemmed and hawed over his relationship with a Tom Beckham. In his testimony Crisman recalled that Beckham possessed phoney FBI credentials and claimed to have been handling the bank accounts of anti-Castro mercenaries. Crisman further indicated that he probably heard Beckham mention the name ‘Sergio Arcacha-Smith’ – an anti-Castro would-be revolutionary associated with Garrison suspect David Ferrie. Arcacha-Smith had non-connecting offices with Guy Banister in the Newman Building at the junction of 531 Lafayette Street/544 Camp Street, New Orleans. Of course Lee Oswald was ostentatiously and inexplicably drawing attention to this address by handing out his pro-Castro leaflets with ‘544 Camp Street’ as his contact address.

The knot of connections here is extraordinarily tight. Any serious post-assassination investigation of Oswald could soon lead to Banister, Arcacha-Smith, and Beckham – and from there would run straight into the welcoming arms of Fred Crisman, a teller of tall tales who was connected to two famous UFO incidents: Maury Island and Kenneth Arnold’s sighting. This is precisely the fate that nearly befell Jim Garrison in 1968, from which he was only rescued by the Grand Jury’s decision to reject his attempt to subpoena Fred Crisman.

What was Crisman up to, exactly? As mentioned, Garrison believed Crisman to be a CIA officer, or perhaps agent. An internal CIA memorandum – dated 4 March 1970 and sent to the deputy director of the Agency’s Domestic Contact Service division (DCS) – discusses some ‘poison pen’ letters about Crisman that were apparently doing the rounds in Tacoma, Washington State. The scurrilous letters – facsimiles of which accompanied the memo – contain a large amount of information of dubious reliability. It is the memo itself, composed by Wayne Richardson, chief of the CIA’s Seattle office, which is interesting. In discussing the anonymous letter-writer’s assertion that Fred Crisman was a CIA ‘disruption agent’ Mr Richardson states:

‘Mrs Virginia Thorne advises that Crisman is not now an employee of the Agency and never has been. There is apparently some record in the Agency of Mr Crisman in relation to the Garrison Case. She added that

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18 Beckham is one of those intriguing but ropey bit-part players who briefly wandered through Garrison’s investigation. Garrison devotee Joan Mellen thinks him significant but hasn’t found out much about him. See <http://tinyurl.com/y8a49uoa> or <http://joanmellen.com/wordpress/2015/10/20/my-investigation-of-the-garrison-investigation-new-orleans-louisiana-october-17-2015/>.


The strange thing here is that Virginia Thorne worked in the Agency’s Domestic Contact Service division (DCS). So Mr Richardson, for some reason, had contacted Mrs Thorne in order to write a memo to Mrs Thorne’s own superior, the deputy director of the Domestic Contact Service. A ‘contact’, in this context, is an unpaid and voluntary informant (Clay Shaw himself was one of hundreds of businessmen who voluntarily gave information to the CIA via DCS). DCS also ‘rendered support’ for employees of other US intelligence bodies. So Mrs Thorne’s apparent non-sequitur about Crisman not being an Agency employee looks like it is an indirect way of confirming that Crisman was indeed an unpaid domestic contact for the Agency – or something more substantial for another body.

Mr Richardson’s memo to the deputy director of DCS concluded: ‘[I] do not anticipate doing anything further unless advised by you to do so.’ This gives the game away nicely. Why would the deputy director of DCS even consider lifting a finger to issue advice relating to Fred Crisman, unless Crisman was already a CIA informant, at the very least?

All this intrigue, however, is as nothing compared to the episode discussed in the next and final section of this essay.

3: Flight From Dallas

Published in 2006, *Flight From Dallas* (by lawyer James P Johnston and journalist John Roe) is an investigation into the account of the experiences of US Air Force Sergeant Robert G Vinson. Sergeant Vinson went public because he felt that the establishment of the Assassination Records Review Board in 1993 had freed him from his obligation to keep silent.

The core of the story is that Sergeant Vinson was at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, on 22 November 1963, waiting to fly back to his home base at Colorado Springs. He was unexpectedly told to board a small unmarked aircraft, and, during the flight, learned that President Kennedy had been assassinated. The aircraft (says Sergeant Vinson) briefly touched down on what appeared to be a long stretch of land near an urban area. A pair of men – one Caucasian and one Latino – quickly embarked and the aircraft took off again. The plane then landed at a strange location, which Sergeant Vinson discovered was Roswell Air Force Base in New Mexico. To cap the entire thing, when Sergeant Vinson later saw television news coverage of the assassination,

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21 At some stage, someone who read the memo drew a ring around the name Dr Jon Gold and wrote a large but seemingly redundant ‘AKA’ in the margin. See <http://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=103837#relPageId=3&tab=page>.


23 Trafford Publishing (publishing on demand) 2006.
he recognised that the Caucasian who had hurriedly joined his flight was Lee Harvey Oswald.

The first thing to say about this story is that it is, on the face of it, ludicrous. The second thing to say about it is that Sergeant Vinson is a very credible witness. He had high-level security clearance at the time of his experiences and continued in the Air Force until his retirement three years later. The basics of the Sergeant’s tale, as documented by the authors of *Flight from Dallas*, have only been set out as far as Sergeant Vinson understood it – which is not very far at all. However, Sergeant Vinson’s refusal to attempt to make sense of what he witnessed is wholly respectable, so we are left with the facts, to make of them what we will. And viewed through the prism of a possible UFO-related deception strategy, Sergeant Vinson’s account suddenly starts to make a lot of sense.

His boarding of the flight that morning was clearly pre-arranged. He was told that no other aircraft were available, and specifically directed to the unmarked aircraft. When he boarded, no-one asked who he was, demanded ID, or even looked at him. This simply does not happen in commercial aviation, let alone in military flights. At the termination of his journey, the rest of the passengers and crew disembarked without a word or a backward glance, leaving him all alone on a grounded aeroplane at a military base. No ground crew appeared to carry out the usual post-landing procedures. After a little while, Sergeant Vinson disembarked and looked around to discern where he was. Not another person could be seen anywhere.

At this point, with the night drawing in, he spotted a single lit window across the deserted runway. The window was a security checkpoint, manned by a single Air Policeman, who had apparently not been at all fazed by the sight of a lone stranger wandering around but had sat and waited for Sergeant Vinson to make a beeline toward the lighted window. This officer didn’t demand ID and casually informed Sergeant Vinson that he was at Roswell Air Force Base. Not only that but the officer told him that the base was ‘under high alert’ and nobody could leave or enter. Understandably, Sergeant Vinson found this hard to reconcile with the circumstances surrounding his unexpected arrival. When the alert was lifted some considerable time later, Sergeant Vinson had to make his way home to Colorado by public transport, which took the best part of 12 hours.

There’s a lot more to Sergeant Vinson’s career history that could be relevant here, but the upshot of it all is clear: Sergeant Vinson – precisely because of his immediate respectability and credibility – was selected to witness the post-assassination appearance of someone who looked very like Lee Harvey Oswald. This could later be demonstrated to be ‘impossible’ because Oswald was in custody at the time. And for good measure, Sergeant Vinson would be honour-bound to relate how the Oswald lookalike disembarked and disappeared into an Air Force base that had been publicly

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linked to rumoured UFO cover-ups since 1947. In all, Sergeant Vinson’s experience looks, walks, and quacks like a classic but customised episode of flying saucer-related deception and distraction.\textsuperscript{25}

In this light – a self-discrediting encounter with a ‘Second Oswald’ – another incident bears re-appraisal. This is the ordeal of Ralph Yates, a Dallas resident who maintained, in the teeth of ferocious hostility during repeated FBI interviews, that he had given a car ride to a young man hitching a lift from Oak Cliff, south-west Dallas, the suburb where Lee Harvey Oswald was living at the time. During their journey toward the heart of the city, the young man (who was carrying a long slim package wrapped in brown paper, which he said contained ‘curtain rods’), chatted excitedly about President Kennedy’s impending trip to Dallas and tried to engage a reluctant Yates in conversation about the feasibility of assassinating Kennedy during his visit. The hitch-hiker said his farewells on Elm Street and disappeared in the general direction of the nearby Texas School Book Depository.

As soon as Lee Oswald was identified on TV as the suspected assassin, Yates understood the importance of his encounter and went straight to the FBI. But there was a big problem. Yates’s encounter took place two days before the assassination, and Oswald’s ‘curtain rods’ line was also told to his colleague Wesley Frazier on their way to work on 22 November.\textsuperscript{26}

James Douglass, author of \textit{JFK And the Unspeakable}, provides the awful conclusion to Yates’s repeated attempts to get his story believed by the FBI:

‘During his final, January 4 trip to the FBI office, Ralph Yates was accompanied by his wife, Dorothy. He had asked her to come with him. In an interview forty-two years later, she told me what happened next to her husband. After he completed his (inconclusive) lie-detector test, she said, the FBI told him he needed to go immediately to Woodlawn Hospital, the Dallas hospital for the mentally ill. He drove there with Dorothy. He was admitted that evening as a psychiatric patient. From that point on, he spent the remaining eleven years of his life as a patient in and out of mental health hospitals.’ \textsuperscript{27}

Here, again, we meet a witness to the comings and goings of an Oswald lookalike, whose experiences of that lookalike seem explicitly designed to discredit the witness. If Ralph Yates was delusional, then it was a \textit{folie à deux} worthy of its own medical paper – because Yates’ colleague Dempsey Jones told the FBI that he had discussed the ominous hitch-hiker with an understandably anxious Yates the day after it happened, and so 24 hours


\textsuperscript{26} Whatever was in the long, slim, package Oswald took to work on the morning of the assassination, it wasn’t curtain rods as he claimed. No such curtain rods were found when the School Book Depository was searched by police after the murder.

\textsuperscript{27} James W. Douglass, \textit{JFK And the Unspeakable} (Orbis, New York, 2008) p. 350 et seq.
before the assassination took place.

This tips the balance decisively in favour of Yates’ lucidity and the corollary is that an Oswald ‘ringer’ was being sent out to attract attention to himself in advance of the assassination in order to muddy the waters for later investigators. In other words, it was a deception and distraction operation. And if it had become public, it would have eventually led investigators to Sergeant Vinson and his encounter with an Oswald lookalike fleeing by plane.

Some years after his encounter with the Oswald ‘ringer’, Sergeant Vinson identified the impromptu landing strip where the lookalike boarded the flight to Roswell. It was a 4,463-metre stretch of the Trinity River flood plain, just to the east of Oak Cliff, the Dallas suburb where the genuine Lee Oswald lived.
A British connection to the death of Otto Warmbier

Nick Must

This article concerns events from the last two years that took place in North Korea (NK). Bearing in mind the secrecy that surrounds not only that country itself but also the overt (and covert) efforts of Western nations to destabilise it, some of what follows involves a modicum of informed speculation. My intention, as you read, is that you might bear in mind how the events herein retold might appear to the isolated and beleaguered government of North Korea.

If you are a follower of international news, you will be aware of the recently deceased Otto Warmbier. He was the young American who was detained by the NK state on 2 January 2016. It was alleged that, in the early hours of New Years Day, the then 21 year old Otto Warmbier had stolen a state propaganda poster from a ‘staff only’ area of the hotel (the Yanggakdo Hotel, the primary hotel for international tourists) where his tour group was staying.

As the New York Times Choe Sang-Hun reported in his piece ‘U.S. Student Runs Afoul of North Korea’s Devotion to Slogans’:

‘... in North Korea ... political slogans are sacrosanct ... And the most important among them ... are those that bear the names of the North Korean leader ...’

The slogan on the poster Warmbier was supposed to have stolen? ‘Let’s arm ourselves strongly with Kim Jong-il’s patriotism!’ The arrest was not made public, however, for almost three weeks with the first news reports on 22 January giving the basic facts as released to the media by NK. The expected process followed, with a ‘stage-managed confession’ to the world’s media a month later; then, in mid-March 2016, the guilty verdict and sentence to 15 years imprisonment and hard labour. The Atlantic gives a decent summary of

1 New slogans are issued by the NK government each year and the literal translations into English make them sound kooky, of course. For example, ‘Let the wives of officers become dependable assistants to their husbands!’ might be better represented as: ‘Army wives: support your husbands!’

One of the slogans for 2015 also hints at the NK ‘dictatorship’ caring more for its people than many Western governments by calling for ‘organic farming on an extensive scale’. See the Reuters report on the 2015 batch of slogans at <http://tinyurl.com/ybawlnbj> or <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-propaganda-slogans-idUSKBN0LG0SY20150212>.

the background and timeline of events including the fact that, as part of his ‘confession’, Warmbier allegedly claimed his motivation was that:

‘... he would receive a used car worth $10,000. His actions, he said, were also on behalf of the Z Society, a college group at the University of Virginia that Pyongyang alleges is a front for the CIA.’

There appear to be at least sixteen fraternities/sororities at the University of Virginia, and some of them do have odd histories. It should be noted that the allegation against the Z Society and the University has been denied; those NK nuts are simply being unjustifiably paranoid about Western spying, you’d suppose?

Firstly, though, I should bring the story of Otto Warmbier up to date. On 13 June this year – less than 18 months into that long sentence – Warmbier was repatriated to the United States in a coma. He had apparently been in that state since not long after the trial. The NK government claimed it was a result of botulism, the U.S. government said it was because he had been tortured. Either way the unfortunate young man died on 19 June, less than a week after arriving on home soil. It’s a very sad tale indeed.

Following his sudden demise, there has been some coverage of the other people who were on the group tour with Mr Warmbier. It turns out that the only other single male on the trip – and thus the person who was allocated to share a room with (the similarly solo male traveller) Warmbier – was a British man, one Danny Gratton.

Gratton was the only Westerner to witness the arrest but, bizarrely, ‘He was never contacted by the U.S. government or the tour company that arranged the visit.’ He had not been interviewed by the media at all before the death was announced and subsequent media coverage of Mr Gratton’s part of the story has included surprisingly little background information on him.

What happened on the night of the poster theft? The tour party arrived in country just before New Year’s Eve and the organisers – who had a reputation for being party animals – made sure the NYE festivities locally were

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4 <http://uvamagazine.org/articles/wrapped_in_mystery>


6 Typical of this limited coverage is the one minute BBC interview with him which can be seen at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40371575>.

not missed by their travellers. The group were celebrating in Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang when it has been stated (and this has not denied by Mr Gratton) that he deliberately got himself separated from the rest of the group.\(^8\)

The CCTV footage from the hotel which is supposed to show Otto Warmbier stealing the poster\(^9\) is (predictably) not that good and could well be of any male... perhaps even Mr Gratton. The tour organisers encouraged excessive alcoholic consumption and, according to the statements of other members of the tour party, Warmbier had been ‘drinking vodka to 5am’. The *Independent* reports that the CCTV footage timestamp shows 1:57 a.m.\(^10\) So it would seem that Otto Warmbier saw in the New Year at Kim Il Sung Square, returned to the hotel and became the second person in the group who managed to evade the constant watch of the NK chaperones that night. He then found his way to an off-limits floor of the building from where he stole the poster, returned to be with the rest of the group – none of whom seemed to have noticed his absence – and proceeded to imbibe until close to sunrise.

So, Gratton and Warmbier both managed to escape the attentions of their state guides on the same night. This was highly unusual. The travel writer Becki Enright has written of her own trip to NK in 2012:

> ‘You can’t travel in North Korea unless you are in a guided tour group. It’s very restricted and you almost feel as though you live on the tour bus as you can’t wander around freely – you have two guides who *chaperone you every step of the way.*’\(^{11}\) (Emphasis added)

Mr Gratton’s disappearance from the public square prompted a mighty panic on the part of the NK chaperones but he eventually made it back to the hotel, having used more than one taxi. I expect that the North Koreans train their own spies in the use of multiple modes of public transport as an established tactic in mobile counter-surveillance trade-craft. What conclusion might they have come to on learning that it seems like Mr Gratton had used this exact same tactic?

Mr Gratton is a taller than average male with an athletic and strong physique. In December of 2011 he undertook a sponsored trek to base camp

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\(^9\) The CBS news ‘Inside Edition’ video on YouTube shows the CCTV at the very start of the report, plus there is another opportunity to see Mr Gratton interviewed. See [http://tinyurl.com/yd2krofa](http://tinyurl.com/yd2krofa) or [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w0gCyqkQ4U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w0gCyqkQ4U).


at Mount Everest. I wonder if the North Koreans learned about the Everest trip as I did? All it took was a little bit of Googling. (Presumably while the population of NK are denied access to the Western Net the security services are not.) If they do know this extra information, I wonder what conclusions they might have drawn?

There can be few better times for a covert meeting than New Year’s Eve. I don’t think it would be surprising if the NK government had a suspicion that Danny Gratton was working for MI6, perhaps as a member of ‘the increment’ (as it has been called in the past). But although quite a plausible initial case can be made that Mr Gratton is a good candidate for a man on a spooky mission to North Korea, unless we are looking at an incredibly elaborate cover story, he has been working in the greetings card business for over a decade.

His Just Giving fundraising page is at <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/danny-gratton>.

For special operations MI6 usually looks to ex-special forces soldiers some of whom, following their regular service, can be found in the small permanent staff of the Territorial Army special forces regiments.

The ‘rogue spy’ Richard Tomlinson passed selection for 21 SAS before he was recruited to MI6 (his account of this process forms a large chunk of Chapter 2 of The Big Breach (London: Cutting Edge Press, 2001). Tomlinson’s book also gives details regarding ‘the increment’, how it is drawn from the most experienced Special Forces personnel and how a specific week of MI6’s Intelligence Officer’s New Entry Course ‘is dedicated to familiarisation with the increment’.

Among the most recently declassified CIA documents about the Kennedy assassination are some in which CIA officers wondered if Oswald hadn’t done the deed for Castro, or out of sympathy for Castro’s Cuba. In a piece for Politico.com journalist Philip Shenon and historian Larry Sabato discussed both the documents and how such speculation was suppressed in favour of the Warren Commission’s ‘lone nutter’ verdict. WhoWhatWhy.com responded to Shenon/Sabato on 8 August pointing out:

‘The authors are careful to preclude the possibility that anyone other than Oswald could have shot the president, while leaving the door open to the possibility that the Russians and/or Cubans were involved.’

The authors of the piece – anonymously credited as being ‘WhoWhatWhy staff’ – declare that the Politico story is disinformation. In doing this they quote the Webster’s dictionary definition of ‘disinformation’: ‘false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth’.

This characterisation is rejected by Jefferson Morley on his site JFKfacts.org where he writes:

‘The word “disinformation” suggests that the authors, former New York Times reporter Phil Shenon and Virginia professor Larry Sabato, are deliberately making assertions they know to be false. I know Shenon and Sabato. Both are very knowledgable about the JFK story.....I have no reason to believe they are making assertions they know to be false.’

In a way there is no dispute here. Shenon and Sabato discussed the newly available CIA documents. No false assertions were made or necessary; no false information was presented. It’s what they omitted from the story which is significant. To discuss Oswald-Cuba-CIA without referring to all the information we now have showing that Oswald was working for US intelligence agencies looks like deception by omission – disinformation by omission.

But the omission is only deliberate if Shenon and Sabato know the

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3 John Newman’s very dry, analytical work on CIA documents, for example, in his Oswald and the CIA. At another level Chauncey Holt’s account of Oswald at <http://www.assassinationresearch.com/v3n2/v3n2holt.pdf>.
material linking Oswald to US intelligence agencies; and it is possible that they
dismiss all that kind of information as ‘conspiracy theories’ not worth their
attention and are simply unaware of it. Even if they are familiar with it, Shenon
is a former New York Times journalist and knows there is no point in trying to
include this ‘other’ Oswald material: the major media – and Politico.com is part
of that these days – simply won’t publish it; and Sabato is a history professor
whose career and professional standing would be damaged by deviating from
the received version. Both have written books about the assassination (which I
haven’t read) endorsing the Warren Commission verdict.  

How powerful is the taboo around the Kennedy assassination? Here are a
history professor and a senior journalist who have endorsed a 54 year-old,
official political report, done in a hurry to get it out before the 1964
presidential election, which some of the Warren Commission’s own members
didn’t believe, and whose key claims an undergraduate could falsify, from
scratch, with a few hours work on the Internet.

Many JFK researchers are waiting for the disclosure of all the remaining
CIA documents, apparently hoping they will show something significant. They
won’t: no collection of official papers will have been more carefully ‘weeded’.
We are probably stuck with what we have. There may be some further
revelations in memoirs and confessions, but on past performance JFK
researchers will ignore or trash them as they did the accounts of Chauncey
Holt and E. Howard Hunt.

It was in the early 90s that Holt first publicly claimed that he was one of
the three ‘tramps’ photographed while under police escort on Dealey Plaza
after the assassination. His testimony is almost universally ignored these days,
however, having apparently been discredited. But as I have shown, Holt’s
critics got that wrong. The trashing of the confession of Hunt has been no
more rational. I find this strange. You might think that the researchers would
welcome such insider memoirs/confessions, especially when both accounts
refer to the CIA, the solution to the assassination favoured by most of them;
and Holt’s posthumous memoir confirms the picture of the Agency which had
been pieced together over the last half century by the researchers: it was

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4 Shenon’s, A Cruel and Shocking Act, was shredded by Anthony Frewin in Lobster 68 at

5 See, for example,
<http://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=fac_pm>.

6 See <http://tinyurl.com/j6zolb4> or <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-
last-confession-of-e-howard-hunt-20070405>.

Those who dismissed the story said that Hunt was old, ill and under pressure from his
son, St. John Hunt, and said something to please him, inventing a story about the single most
controversial topic in American history. Really?

In one of the odder connections, St John Hunt has teamed up with Republican pol Roger
working with the Mob and illegally operating within the USA.

Chauncey Holt reported that he was sent to Dallas by his CIA contact to take part in an anti-Castro event being run by the then head of the CIA's Cuba desk, Desmond Fitzgerald; and while he was there saw other CIA contract agents like himself.

‘The area of Dealey Plaza was swarming with contract agents of the CIA, dissident Latins and terrorists, right-wingers and many organised crime figures.’

Holt implied, rather than stated, that the Agency was behind the assassination but believed that the real authors of the conspiracy – which he thought was a brilliant operation – would never be identified.

E. Howard Hunt was the first CIA officer to say that the CIA was responsible for the assassination and identify those involved – some of the usual suspects, with the addition of one new name, Cord Meyer. And Meyer is significant, for at that point he was a senior figure in the Directorate of Plans, the covert action branch of the Agency. If anyone had the authority and the bureaucratic reach to organise an event as complex as a public presidential assassination, he did.

Cord Meyer was also named by Holt as being part of the senior group, with Fitzgerald, which was organising the anti-Castro event.

‘So, late in 1963 we, in California, were among a group that, without the consent of the higher-ups in the agency, including the director of the president of the United States, were working with the Cubans to “remove” Castro by any means possible, including assassination.

Our responsibility was limited to furnishing the weaponry needed, the recruiting of personnel and providing necessary documents, some of which were in the name of Lee Harvey Oswald.’

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8 Chauncey Holt, *Self-portrait of a Scoundrel* (Walterville (OR): Trine Day, 2013) p. 182. I discussed this book briefly at the end of ‘JFK, Chauncey Holt and the three “tramps” redux’ in *Lobster* 71 at <www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster71/lob71-jfk-three-tramps.pdf>. Suffice to say here that Holt was ill-served by Wim Dankbaar who assembled the book, and Trine Day, who published it. Neither seem to have thought that editing and proof-reading was necessary.

9 He suspected that he and the two other ‘tramps’ – Harrelson and the other man he knew as Montoya – were in position to act as back-up fall-guys in the event that the framing of Oswald went wrong.

10 See note 7. Hunt named LBJ, David Morales, Frank Sturgis, David Attlee Phillips, William Harvey and Antonio Veciana, all of whom have cropped up in the research. The new name was Cord Meyer who had never, to my knowledge, been linked to the assassination before.

11 Though precisely how senior isn’t quite clear. Accounts vary and there is nothing official to check them against. He was maybe no. 2 in the Directorate of Plans. Holt described him as Chief of Foreign Operations.

12 Holt (see note 8), p. 156
But E. Howard Hunt also named Lyndon Johnson as part of the plot and that put Hunt beyond the pale for most of the research community, for whom the LBJ-dunnit thesis *a priori* is ridiculous.

These stories of CIA involvement are a problem for those of us who think the LBJ thesis the most plausible theory so far. None of the extant sources of the LBJ theory mention the CIA and they all present the assassination as a local-grown, Texas conspiracy. Is there a way of reconciling the two accounts? There might be; but at this point we are way off into speculation.

One of the central questions in this is why they – whoever they were – decided to build the entire scheme on a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, a cheap, unreliable weapon. The answer must be that it happened this way because Oswald owned a Mannlicher-Carcano; and as recent analysis seems to have confirmed, the photographs of him posing with the rifle and American left newspapers, both Trotskyist and Communist, were authentic (despite his claim that they had been faked).  

In his memoir Chauncey Holt tells us that, in the months before the assassination, the weapons workshop he ran for the CIA was investigating the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. It was also experimenting with re-firing a bullet, previously fired by a Mannlicher-Carcano but unmarked, through another, better rifle, a Weatherby .263, which had been rebored to remove its lands and grooves. Thus the bullet fired from the Weatherby would appear to have been fired from a Mannlicher-Carcano. The absence of lands and grooves, however, reduces the round’s velocity and accuracy considerably. Holt thinks that it was one such round which made the shallow wound on JFK’s back and then fell out (no bullet was found in the wound by the Parkland Hospital doctors). Holt’s suggestion is that this was the famous ‘magic bullet’, CE399, found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, whose presence and virtually pristine condition forced the Warren Commission lawyers trying to establish the ‘lone gunman’ scenario to argue – with straight faces – that an unmarked bullet.

‘... has gone through 15 layers of clothing, a necktie knot, 7 layers of skin, and 15 inches of tissue, shattering 4 inches of rib and a wrist bone.’

In the scenario based on Holt’s surmise, a bullet fired through a modified Weatherby .263, but apparently from a Mannlicher-Carcano, whose ownership could be traced to Oswald, hit JFK in the back. This wound was non-fatal and

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14 ‘The master reloader, working for us, theorised the these bullets had been fired in what is called “a cold shot”; that is fired using only a very strong primer, without power.’ Holt (see note 8) p. 160

part of a fake assassination attempt set-up by the CIA. This would be attributed to Oswald, the defector, socialist and member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee; and thus indirectly to Castro himself. Holt says he had been told that the ‘anti-Castro event’ being planned for Dallas by the CIA aimed to end the threatened rapprochement between Castro and Kennedy.

But if Holt’s speculation about the Weatherby-fired round and CE399 is correct – and chances are we will never know – why a low velocity round amidst a volley of high velocity rifle fire? Assuming the low velocity round and the others came from the same people, then presumably it was used because the CIA wanted a round which would survive intact enough to be identifiable as having been fired from Oswald’s gun. That plus the photographs of him posing in his backyard with gun and lefty newspapers, plus the various reports of ‘Oswald’ talking of killing Kennedy in the months before the event – the perfect frame (so long as Oswald was dead and couldn’t talk about his intelligence links). In this scenario people like Holt were duped – the word he uses – into taking part in an assassination proper.

On the other hand, if we do not assume that the fake assassination attempt and the real thing were the same people, the phoney attempt provided the context for, and concealment of, a real assassination. A patsy was in place; the CIA’s role in the fake attempt meant no serious investigation would take place: concealing the CIA’s bogus attempt meant concealing the real thing. Did the assassination conspirators piggy-back on the phoney attempt? Here the presence of Cord Meyer in Holt’s memoir as part of the anti-Castro event and in E. Howard Hunt’s account as a member of the CIA assassination plot he was invited to join is suggestive.

On the other hand, perhaps we can merge the two theories, LBJ and the CIA. Having created the perfect context for an assassination attempt, did the CIA conspirators – perhaps the crew named by E. Howard Hunt – give the nod to Vice President Johnson and his gang in Dallas and thus got Kennedy killed without having to risk doing the dirty deed themselves?

Most of the researchers assume the bullet was planted – presumably at the hospital – to provide the link to Oswald’s rifle. But would you plant a pristine round?

One such is discussed by Garrick Alder in his ‘Deception and distraction strategies relating to the John F Kennedy Assassination’ in this issue. Another is the famous ‘Odio incident’. On which see <http://www.jfk-online.com/odiohsca.html>.

Presumably he was meant to be killed ‘while resisting arrest’. No fool, our Lee was shouting ‘I am not resisting arrest’ when the Dallas Police confronted him in the cinema.
Labour, Corbyn and anti-semitism

John Booth

Anyone reading and hearing about Labour’s annual conference in Brighton might have thought it riven by yet more acrimonious controversy over anti-semitism. From The Guardian to the Daily Express and the broadcast journalists in between that was the big story for those critical of the party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.¹

But for those who were there or learned of it through the burgeoning alternative media, there were other impressions to be gained. The Jewish former party leader Ed Miliband appeared in relaxed mode at fringe events.² The keynote conference speaker was Naomi Klein, the Canadian author of Jewish descent who has done much to challenge the orthodoxies of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism.³ On the conference floor Jewish party activist Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi wowed delegates by her denunciation of Israeli policy on settlements and Gaza. She concluded: ‘This party does not have a problem with Jews.’⁴

Away from the formal party conference fringe, the events of the Momentum-led festival The World Transformed were routinely oversubscribed. Momentum is chaired by Jon Lansman, a former kibbutznik brought up in an Orthodox Jewish family.

Later that day Wimbourne-Idrissi helped launch Jewish Voice for Labour

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b098jfrq>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj1nuw38DqY>
⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4zpURgqhJw>
(JVL) alongside international jurist Sir Stephen Sedley, Oxford emeritus professor Avi Shlaim (a member of the Israel Defence Forces in 1967) and David Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialists’ Group.

A clue as to why the Corbyn-led Labour party has been dogged by antisemitism allegations can be found in comparing the words with which Rosenberg concluded his 2017 JVL address to a packed audience and one from a fundraiser for New Labour 15 years earlier. Here’s Rosenberg on Marek Edelman, the longest surviving member of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, who died in 2009:

‘This hero was persona non grata in Israel for remaining an anti-Zionist, and for saying about that incredible Uprising: “We fought for dignity and freedom. Not for a territory, nor for a national identity”. But the very most important thing he said was: “To be a Jew means always being with the oppressed, never with the oppressors.”’

In contrast, this is Jon (now Lord) Mendelsohn speaking to Jewsweek.com on 8 September 2002:

‘[Tony] Blair has attacked the anti-Israelism that had existed in the Labour Party . . .Labour was cowboys-and-Indians politics, picking underdogs. The milieu has changed. Zionism is pervasive in New Labour. It is automatic that Blair will come to Friends of Israel meetings.’

Mendelsohn was speaking during the build-up to the Iraq war. At the time Corbyn was indulging in what the New Labour fundraiser would probably style ‘cowboy-and Indian politics’ by helping create the Stop the War Coalition. Mendelsohn was a close associate of Michael (now Lord) Levy in drawing down funds from Israel supporters, a programme also well described in Robert Peston’s *Who Runs Britain?*. The ITN political editor in his informative chapter ‘Democracy for Sale’ makes clear that a good deal of that funding was not from Labour supporters, but from those, including previous Conservative backers, who identified with Blair and his support for Israel and the Iraq war.

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5  <http://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/>

6  <http://tinyurl.com/y9dhkx5f> or <http://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/jvl/jew-means-always-oppressed-never-oppressors/>

7  On the identification of New Labour with the interests of Israel see, for example, ‘Blair and Israel’. Originally in *Lobster* 43, this was reproduced in *Lobster* 73 at <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/blair-israel.pdf>.

Mendelsohn is a former chairman of Labour Friends of Israel (LFI), membership of which, as he says, attracted many of the New Labour intake in 1997 and which resembled a passport to promotion for many of them. Not all have stayed in party politics since Labour’s 2010 defeat. Former Cabinet minister and chairman of LFI James Purnell is now a senior BBC executive and is talked of as a possible future director-general. LFI supporter Lorna Fitzsimons, formerly Parliamentary Private Secretary to Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, became chief executive of the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM) after losing her parliamentary seat in 2005. Most of the LFI supporters still in Parliament or subsequently elected to it were opposed to Corbyn’s 2015 election as leader and tried to unseat him the following year. From their ranks – some of them here supporting LFI chair Joan Ryan – have come many of the well-publicised claims of anti-semitic abuse that has attended Corbyn’s rise.

As the Al Jazeera documentary series, The Lobby, exposed earlier this year, there is a very close working relationship between the Israel embassy in London and the Friends of Israel groups in Parliament, including the one chaired by Enfield North MP Ryan.

There is also a strong link between the embassy and the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) that has led criticism of Corbyn and was very active on the ‘anti-semitism’ issue at the Brighton conference. Two JLM officials, Jeremy Newmark and Mike Katz, were backed by Yvette Cooper, a Corbyn rival for the leadership in 2015, when they unsuccessfully stood as Labour candidates in the general election.

But it would be wrong to assume that the issue of Palestine – a career-long campaigning issue for Corbyn – is the only reason why the LFI members and their media supporters have so fiercely opposed the Labour leader and

9 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37517074>
11 <http://www.lfi.org.uk/in-parliament/>
12 <http://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/>
13 <http://tinyurl.com/yb2v3fd4> or <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/top-labour-mps-to-address-inaugural-jlm-one-day-conference/>
why ‘anti-semitism’ has been used against him. The LFI as described by Mendelsohn in 2002 was one that enjoyed not only the active support and promotion possibilities of Blair’s No 10, but one whose supporters received the largely uncritical support of the mainstream media. (Cooper, The Guardian’s preferred Labour leader in 2015, had a regular column in the supportive The Daily Mirror during the 2017 general election.)

For those MPs and peers in the Blair-led New Labour initiative backed by Rupert Murdoch and many of the political reporters and columnists on The Daily Mirror, The Independent, The Observer and The Guardian, the arrival of Corbyn as a leadership contender was distinctively uncomfortable – a forced ejection from what had become quite a cozy comfort zone. Not only was Corbyn challenging their New Labour assumptions about neoliberalism, neo-conservatism, the ‘war on terror’, triangulation, the Third Way of Anthony Giddens and the communitarianism of Amitai Etzioni, he was developing a grass-roots movement that potentially threatened their parliamentary careers. (There are some parallels here with the formation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981.15)

In addition, the energy and fund-raising capacity of the 600,000-plus members meant Labour was no longer dependent on the deep pockets of the friends and associates of Lords Levy and Mendelsohn. And just as the trade unions with their resources warmed to the new direction of the party, so the clever and relatively inexpensive use of social media by younger Corbyn-supporting activists largely obviated the need for Labour to curry favour with mainstream newspaper owners Rupert Murdoch, Viscount Rothermere, Richard Desmond and the Barclay Brothers – all supporters of the policies and priorities Labour was now clearly rejecting.

Coinciding with the progress of Corbyn was the public’s opportunity to challenge membership of the European Union offered by the Conservative Party at the 2015 election. The referendum the following year – Labour in 2015 had ruled out an EU referendum – offered electors in many of the safe seats into which the New Labour machine had parachuted its favoured neophytes the chance to express their views. In many parts of these so-called Labour heartlands, they voted to quit the EU.

While a few Labour critics of Corbyn using the anti-semitism meme agreed with his Brexit-voting constituents – John Mann was one16 – most were committed Remainers.17 And while some mainstream media outlets

15 See Tom Easton, ‘Who were they travelling with?’ In Lobster 31.
16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRUTpypkV0I>
17 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36496203>
wanted out of the EU, the ones that didn’t – The Daily Mirror, The Independent and The Guardian – then publicised the Labour Remainers’ claim that Corbyn failed to campaign effectively for a Yes vote.

That charge and the anti-semitism allegations formed the core of the effort to unseat him in 2016. These continued after Theresa May’s decision to call the 2017 general election though many of them, including LFI chair Ryan, subsequently increased their majorities on the back of Corbyn’s popularity.  

Israel and the EU

David Cronin details how support for Israel and EU membership often coincide: Israel is so closely linked to the Brussels institution on trade and other matters it is virtually a member. He shows how Israel organises support across the countries of the EU with the help of its powerful US backer, AIPAC, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee.

A personification of this Israel/EU link is Chuka Umunna whose 2015 resignation from the Shadow Cabinet team over the EU was followed by his fierce denunciation of Corbyn for allegedly failing to act over the rise of anti-semitism in the Labour party. A pattern of similar front-bench resignations dogged Corbyn’s leadership as did critical Labour MPs such as Tristram Hunt quitting Parliament and causing difficult by-elections.

Another thread linking Corbyn’s critics inside Labour and their supportive media arises from his criticism of US foreign policy. That is personal as well as political: his second wife and the mother of his children was a Chilean refugee from the 1973 Pinochet coup. Corbyn’s campaigning against the Iraq war, the infringement on personal liberties that followed 9/11, the demonization of Muslims and support for the Palestinians is all of a piece. This places him poles apart from the position of many in the Parliamentary Labour Party who identified with New Labour and its role in Iraq, extraordinary rendition, detention without trial and much else in pursuit

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22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgnANRWjhx4>

of the US-led and Israel-supporting ‘war on terror’.

Corbyn’s 2017 conference speech challenging much of the basis of New Labour’s economic, political and international strategy,\(^24\) while popular with most of the party’s expanding membership, was less well received by those in Parliament, the studios and the newspaper columns still wedded to the priorities and party practices of Blair and Gordon Brown. While it’s true that Corbyn’s position was not strengthened on the anti-semitism issue by some of his supporters, including Ken Livingstone, it’s also important to see this attack on him in a wider context.

He is the first Labour leader to challenge Labour Party orthodoxies for several decades. He is doing so when the neoliberal belief in markets and light-touch regulation and the neoconservative drive to a 21st century marked by ‘wars on terror’ are both running out of steam. The 2007/8 crash has exacted a heavy price on the lives of the majority not only in this country but many others, including the US. The apparently permanent state of conflict at home and abroad is costly in other ways.

From the viewpoint of Israel, reliant as it is on assured Western financial, economic, trade, political and strategic support, the election of Corbyn to party leadership is one more piece of bad news. Surveys in Europe and the US have shown the growing opposition to the policies of Israel. One expression of this is the mounting influence of the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.\(^25\)

**Redefining anti-semitism**

The response by Israel’s supporters around the world has been to seek to define anti-semitism – for which there is almost universal abhorrence – to include criticism of Israel. This worldwide effort to conflate criticism of Israel with anti-semitism is well described by writer Alison Weir.\(^26\) She shows that the originator was Israel’s former Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky. (Older readers or students of Russian history may remember Sharansky and his wife as important figures in the Cold War Russian Jewry movement.\(^27\) Weir quotes Sharansky as saying in 2002: ‘The State of Israel has decided to take the gloves off and implement a


\(^{25}\) <https://bdsmovement.net/>

\(^{26}\) <http://ifamericaknew.org/history/antisemitism.html>

\(^{27}\) <http://tinyurl.com/yd2d73lk> or <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1978/07/20/avital-scharansky-and-the-politics-of-sorrow/24c7541f-60c2-42ef-bc0c-00c6078358ef/?utm_term=.10d77be93a07>
coordinated counter-offensive against anti-semitism.’

Sir Stephen Sedley, the jurist who spoke in Brighton, wrote in May 2017:

‘Endeavours to conflate the two by characterising everything other than anodyne criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic are not new. What is new is the adoption by the UK government (and the Labour Party) of a definition of anti-semitism which endorses the conflation.’

After reviewing the implications of such action, he concluded:

‘In recent times a number of institutions, academic, religious and social, have stood up to pressure to abandon events critical of Israel. What are less easy to track are events which failed to take place because of such pressure, or for fear of it; but the IHRA [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] definition offers encouragement to pro-Israel militants whose targets for abuse and disruption in London have recently included the leading American scholar and critic of Israel Richard Falk, and discouragement to university authorities which do not want to act as censors but worry that the IHRA definition requires them to do so.

‘When a replica of Israel’s separation wall was erected in the churchyard of St James, Piccadilly in 2013, the Spectator denounced it as an “anti-Israeli hate-festival” – a description now capable of coming within the IHRA’s “working definition” of anti-semitism. In such ways the official adoption of the definition, while not a source of law, gives respectability and encouragement to forms of intolerance which are themselves contrary to law, and higher education institutions in particular need to be aware of this.’

In the fevered atmosphere that followed the candidature and election of Corbyn as Labour leader, Sedley’s careful dissection and evaluation counted for little: perceived slights and remarks shorn of context became the basis for the media assault, including demands for the suspension and expulsion of party members.

Significantly for active Labour supporters, The Observer and its sister paper, The Guardian, was home to many of these attacks. The former had supported the 2003 Iraq invasion and offered a platform to the

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28 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n09/stephen-sedley/defining-anti-semitism>

neoconservatives who promoted it. So continuing with the ‘anti-semitism’ theme was no surprise, though a disappointment to those who had applauded The Observer’s principled opposition to the Suez invasion in 1956.

The Guardian, while maintaining its support for Blair and Brown, was more critical over Iraq. But it came out strongly against Corbyn when he was nominated for the party leadership and during the 2016 attempt to unseat him. Often its reporters and columnists used ‘anti-semitism’ as the basis of its criticism of the Corbyn-led Labour party.

Quite why two publications long favoured by Labour activists should have taken this line is not clear. It would appear commercially unsound for these papers whose combined paid-for circulation totals little more than half that of Labour’s membership to risk alienating a hitherto loyal readership. If the view of Labour under Corbyn and ‘anti-semitism’ taken by their respective managements is not led by financial considerations, what is driving them along this road?

In the two years since Corbyn was elected leader, Labour’s support has grown in terms of members, supporters and voters. The claims of party anti-semitism in that time have been strident, but often serving as little more than proxy attacks upon Corbyn and the direction of Labour under his leadership. Corbyn can be criticised for many things but this is best done directly and with precision. In these brittle political times to employ the devious and crude instrument of ‘anti-semitism’ is a dishonest and dangerous strategy.

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30 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/11/terrorism.afghanistan>
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/21/foreignpolicy.iraq1>

31 <http://theguardian.fivefilters.org/?v1>

32 <http://tinyurl.com/y8nv95nc> or <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/abc-national-press-circulation-figures-mirror-titles-were-the-biggest-fallers-in-august/>
Have you heard the one about the Conservative Prime Minister who is disowned by the right-wing of the Tory Party for not seeing through a bombastic and nationalist policy, and disowned by its left-wing for duplicity and generally ridiculed by the wider public?

Forget 2017. Instead, proceed to 1956 for the full story . . . and a very different world where the UK standard rate of income tax was 42.5% (8s 6d in the pound), unemployment was non-existent (the lowest ever level of 185,000 was recorded in mid-1955) and UK was building five or six times the amount of public housing that it does now, all fully funded by central government. The time, in fact, of Sir Anthony Eden: a Prime Minister who never lost a bye-election and who remained astonishingly popular despite and because of the aberration – if it was that – which brought about his downfall. For decades now, in football parlance, Eden has been struggling to avoid relegation. Not quite bottom of the League (Bonar-Law, aka ‘the unknown PM’) and maybe not yet a bookies’ favourite for the drop (like Chamberlain or, more recently, Cameron) but clearly in trouble.

There have been efforts to mend his reputation, most recently by D. R. Thorpe, an academic who specialises in salvaging the careers of ‘underrated’ politicians. His Eden job followed similar efforts on Selwyn Lloyd (1989) and Douglas-Home (1996). Writing in 2002, with access to just about everything then in the public domain, Thorpe draws to our attention many now forgotten details about Eden’s background and career, particularly in the post-1945 period when the UK still thought itself a major international player and had not yet been publicly disabused of this by the US.

For most of his political life Eden was revered as the finest Foreign Secretary the UK had produced in modern times. He graced an endless schedule of summits, conferences, negotiations, diplomatic visits and crises with his erudition, multilingual skills and matinee idol profile. Latterly he developed some original ideas about how to go about solving some of the thorny problems of the post 1945 era; and, importantly, was unafraid of attempting to implement them.

At the Berlin gathering of ‘the Big Four’ in January-February 1954 he floated the idea of a settlement for Germany, that would have ended the
occupation of the country and brought about unification, in exchange for Germany becoming a neutral non-aligned state in central Europe. Now forgotten, this was taken seriously at the time and a very similar version of it was agreed for Austria a year later. It failed to transpire because, although attractive to the Soviet Union, the French were not sufficiently in favour of Germany being non-aligned (preferring, instead, a pro-France Germany) and the US hostile, wanting a pro-west, pro-NATO Germany.

**Geneva**

Eden’s reputation peaked at the Geneva Conference, which was held a few months later and was the last time the UK convened and enacted a major international diplomatic event in its own right. The Conference was designed to produce a lasting settlement to the instability in Indo-China – following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu – and Eden wanted a solution that would allow France to relinquish direct colonial rule without losing face, while still retaining a role in the area. The conference agreed the *de facto* temporary separation of Vietnam into northern and southern territories, followed by elections in both and negotiations between whoever won these and the Emperor Bao Dai on the formation of a national government. Simultaneously Cambodia and Laos would gain independence. The intention with all three new countries appears to have been that, albeit self-governing, they would have remained part of a Francophone domain rather like what later did happen with the French territories in Africa after 1960.

In July 1954 Eden’s proposals were ratified by the UK, France, China and the Soviet Union. The electoral arrangements were to be overseen by India (‘non-aligned’), Canada (pro-west) and Poland (pro-east). The US did not participate, did not agree with the recommendations and made it clear it reserved the right to act independently. Traditionally regarding anything ‘China’ as their preserve, they considered Eden naïve (at best), the Emperor Bao a clear Communist stooge and Ho Chi Minh a ruthless conspirator controlled by Moscow. Within a few years, with the US actively promoting dissent and opposing anything less than a clear Communist defeat, it was game over and the descent had begun into the final phase of the long and miserable Vietnam War and the loss of 3.3 million lives. Eden’s alternative was surely better than this.

A shoo-in as Prime Minister after Churchill quit in April 1955, Eden, having tried novel diplomatic approaches in Europe and the Far East, made a speech on 9 November saying that Israel should give up some of the territory it had occupied since 1949. Without listing here all the tit-for-tat operations on either side, since its creation Israel had frequently intruded into its neighbours. The most notable of these being at Qibya in 1953 when 69 Jordanians (mostly women and children) were massacred. The UK had a treaty with Jordan which obligated the UK to come to that country’s assistance if requested. Fear of this being triggered was the starting point of Eden’s difficulties and the root of his wish to bring about a re-ordering in the Middle East, as he had tried a year
earlier in Indo-China. Under his instructions the UK prepared Operation Cordage (January 1956). This would enforce the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1948 by destroying the Israeli Air Force in a surprise attack, after which Israel would accede to reasonable Arab demands in a process refereed by the UK. It seems likely, given the personnel within the UK defence hierarchy, that the US and Israel would have learnt of this proposal.

The UK’s tribulations with Egypt’s President Nasser, far from being the be all and end all of Eden’s worries, thus ran parallel with this. Installed in power after a CIA-sanctioned coup that saw off Egypt’s dissolute King Faroukh (shades here of Emperor Bao Dai), Nasser quickly turned out not to be pro-west but agnostic in that regard. Nasser was happy to deal with the Soviet bloc and initially reliant on various German (some ex-Nazi) advisors as Egypt became a leading player in the non-aligned group of nations. When the US tired of Nasser’s manoeuvres (July 1956), they withdrew funding for the Aswan Dam project. Nasser retaliated by nationalising the Suez Canal a week later. With the UK having only three days reserves of oil, Eden worried a great deal from this moment onwards about Nasser being able to affect the performance of the UK economy. The perceived risk was that Nasser would impose tolls, taxes, levies and encourage a general slowness in dealing with shipping passing through the canal, while extracting concessions that would benefit Egypt. But how, and against whom, would the UK act?

**Suez**

At this point Israel undertook further incursions into Jordan (13 September and 10 October 1956) that left 109 Jordanian military and police dead. Eden now feared that Jordan would activate the 1948 treaty and require the UK to attack Israel. Four days later the French helpfully suggested that Israel be invited to join UK and France in an attack on Egypt: it was judged that Nasser would be overthrown and replaced with a ‘moderate’ pro-west regime and Israel placed in a position, as a junior partner, where an ascendant UK and France would dictate terms to the participants in the Middle East at another grand international conference. But as with Eden’s other projects, the US were having none of it. Nor did the Commonwealth back the UK: India and Pakistan were in the non-aligned group of nations, South Africa took no view, Canada wanted a UN solution, Australia backed the UK publicly but did nothing, New Zealand committed some forces but withdrew them once a shooting war began.

But fear of a request from Jordan and/or of Nasser blackmailing the UK drove Eden on. Having reached a secret agreement with France and the UK (24

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2 Codenamed Operation Fat Fucker by the CIA. After his abrupt departure, King Faroukh’s private and extensive collection of pornography was the subject of some attention.
October 1956), Israel attacked Egypt on 28 October. Two days later the UK and France began five days of air attacks on selected Egyptian military targets. Halfway through the attacks Lord Mountbatten, the First Sea Lord, advised Eden that the operation should be called off as it would be ‘too costly politically’. It is not clear on whose behalf Mountbatten was speaking; but notwithstanding this intervention, UK and French troops invaded Egypt (5 November) only for Eden to order a halt within 24 hours. In the US voting was taking place in the presidential elections at precisely that moment and, although the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket breezed home with 57% of the popular vote, the US had insisted on an immediate ceasefire.

It’s never been really clear why the UK and France didn’t invade at the same time that their air bombardment started. Had they done so Eden and Guy Mollet, the French PM, might have prevailed. Instead, because Nasser had closed and blocked the canal at the start of hostilities, the UK and France sought IMF loans. These were refused (via a phone call from Secretary of State Dulles to Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold MacMillan) on 6 November. It was made clear that nothing would be forthcoming unless they withdrew and let the UN tidy up the area, with Egypt remaining in control of the canal. The US also indicated that it would refuse to export oil to either country unless they complied. It is accepted that MacMillan conveyed this to the cabinet in ways that exaggerated the impact non-compliance might have on the UK economy, and a ceasefire was then decided upon.

But the UK and France could clearly have completed occupation of the canal zone before any US fiscal action kicked in. The UK commander reckoned it would take ‘up to’ 11 November to secure all the objectives. The difference, then, was about carrying on for a further 2-3 days; in any event, even if the US started an oil embargo against its main allies, the UK had de facto access to oil supplies from Kuwait and Qatar – and France had direct access to those from Algeria. It is also striking that the point wasn’t made publicly in 1956 as loudly as it might have been that given the US would not have allowed Panama control over the Panama Canal, they had little moral right to prevent the UK and France having control over the Suez Canal. Equally, Eden had the option of suspending Sterling convertibility, and closing the Sterling area to the Dollar for a couple of weeks until matters died down. Why didn’t he at least indicate that he might do so?

Eden and Mollet demanded a summit with Eisenhower but this was refused. The UK public were not much bothered by this. Suez was popular and Eden stratospherically so. His position in Parliament also appeared secure. It was hardly a scenario, then, for urgent change. But enter at this point Alan Lennox-Boyd MP (Colonial Secretary) who asked the novelist Ian Fleming to

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3 The existence of the secret agreement – The Protocol of Sevres – was denied at the time and for many years subsequently. Knowledge that such a document existed, though, was fairly widespread. Eden’s denial of it, in the House of Commons, led to the accusations that he was not conducting government business in a sufficiently moral fashion.
make his holiday home in Jamaica available to Eden so that the Prime Minister could ‘recuperate’. Eden agreed to go abroad. Why did he do so? The history books, diaries and official records are all silent on this. Was it made clear to him that his denials of collusion with Israel were known to be lies? Many people suspected as much but few had actual proof. Did the US make it clear they would put proof of this, provided by friendly elements in France, the UK and Israel, into the public domain unless he went? During his absence (22 November – 14 December 1956) the business of re-structuring the UK government, to make it more amenable to the US, got under way. This took the form of Harold MacMillan having a series of private meetings at the US embassy and Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, publicly promoting the need to address the ‘moral crisis’ facing the nation.

Throughout this Eden’s ill-health, with a long-standing liver and gall bladder problem, was played up. And he was indeed ill. Suffering from severe fevers that were not life-threatening, and he had been prescribed the accepted medicine at that time for those symptoms: amphetamines and purple hearts (which had the side effect of causing mood swings, impaired judgement and paranoia). However, was he so ill that he couldn’t have carried on as PM? This seems unlikely. On the other hand, though, the five days gap between the aerial bombardment and the land invasion at Suez suggests he wasn’t thinking clearly. Carrying it out during the US Presidential election was also asking for trouble, whatever the intentions. (Though Eden was never fully in control of the timetable. Nasser’s actions and delaying tactics adroitly ensured the UK would have difficulties ‘going it alone’, and took into account the date of the US Presidential elections.) And, apart from that, was it even necessary? Even in 1956 oil could have been diverted via the Cape of Good Hope (as it was 1939-1945) and the Suez Canal was later closed between 1967 and 1975 without the UK economy being stricken.

Eden returned – intending to stay on as PM – but found things too far developed and quit on 9 January 1957. Eden had lost support across the Conservative Party in Parliament, with the left-wing because of his collusion with France and Israel (‘moral grounds’) and with the right-wing because he hadn’t seen the operation through. To continue footballing comparisons: he was a manager – popular with the supporters – who was sacked by the board after an embarrassing home defeat by non-league opposition.

After Eden’s departure MacMillan ‘emerged’ as the new PM, to markedly less public support (the Conservatives lost 3 by-elections in February and

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4 Fleming’s wife, Ann, was a personal friend of Eden’s wife. Eden’s wife was also Churchill’s niece and Churchill considered Eden’s failure to see Suez through to its conclusion – once it had been started – as a major mistake. Lennox-Boyd, in turn, was a close political ally of Churchill. In another twist Ann Fleming was also having an affair with Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell (whom Eden personally disliked). Fleming’s property in Jamaica was not particularly well appointed and was somewhat isolated. During Eden’s stay at the address local police turned away visitors. It would not be fanciful to conclude that Eden was being sent somewhere isolated and deliberately taken ‘out of the loop’. 
March of 1958). Early on in his tenure MacMillan effectively traded away the UK’s independent nuclear deterrent via the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA). Had MacMillan discussed the prospect of this during his previous meetings at the US Embassy? UK governments had originally taken the view that the UK should develop, manufacture and own a deterrent that was entirely funded and controlled by the UK. A policy started by Attlee after Ernest Bevin had memorably proclaimed ‘we must have one with a Union Jack on it’, this had been brought to fruition by Churchill and Eden in 1952. Under the terms of the MDA, post 1958, the UK and US ‘co-operated’ – which meant that the UK got some things (a bit) cheaper, but became gradually more reliant on the US.5

In retirement Eden became President of the Royal Shakespeare Company where he preferred the modern productions directed by Peter Brook. He was still in charge when Brook did his anti-Vietnam war piece ‘US’ (1966) and was interviewed on TV in 1966 suggesting the US should cease bombing North Vietnam and make peace overtures to Hanoi.

Thorpe is at great pains throughout his book to insist that Eden was not pro-European integration then, and wouldn’t have been now, were he still alive. This clearly reflects the readers Thorpe is writing for, but it ignores the fact that the EU didn’t exist in 1956. When one learns that Eden suggested that Oscar Kokoschka should do his portrait (Kokoschka did one of Konrad Adenauer) and was also fluent in French and German, the idea that he was anti-Europe seems implausible. In fact the case can be made that, were he around today, Eden might well have been very pro-EU. Edward Heath – the most pro-European PM the UK has yet produced – was appointed Government Chief Whip by Eden in late 1955, thus owing much of his advance in politics to Eden’s patronage. Later, John Major – another PM with (reasonably) pro-EU views – was entirely typical of those who joined the party and rose within it during the Heath period. The Conservative Party represented by Eden, Heath and Major really does seem a long way away now.

Another Suez?

In the last 12 months Suez has been revisited with some commentators saying that Brexit will be ‘another Suez’, implying that it will be a type of national humiliation with Brexit being either diluted or reversed on the ‘instructions’ of Washington, or at any rate powerful external forces. This ignores the fact that the reasons Eden didn’t survive in 1956 were:

(1) he was repeatedly taking a line in world affairs which advocated very different views to the US, and was prepared to act accordingly;

(2) the US then was run by people who regarded the UK as an essential ally in the nuclear stand-off with the Soviet Union.

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5 Blair scrapped the UK’s remaining stockpile of freefall nuclear bombs in 1998 as they had been built 20+ years earlier and, by the ’90s, aircraft delivered bombs were considered ineffective anyway. The UK nuclear deterrent thus became completely dependent on US launch systems, and clearly no longer ‘independent’. Part of the day-to-day theatre of UK politics demands that (most) politicians keep up a pretence that it is.
Neither of these factors apply in 2017. Teresa May and the UK have no significant world role and the current US leadership is not overly bothered if the UK is its ally or not in its various tribulations with North Korea, Iran and Russia. Instead, we are left with the thought that the couple of weeks of intrigue that ‘did’ for Eden were essentially a coup carried out within UK politics by an establishment that regards cleaving to the US as an essential ritual.

Was this the first overt change carried out within the UK at the behest of the US and their local supporters? Have there been others? The general election of 1970 that resulted in a surprise Wilson defeat inevitably comes to mind. The US – and many within the UK’s intelligence and military – wanted Wilson out in 1970. The election that year was characterised by an extensive campaign targeting marginal seats, run by Ronan O’Rahilly, from an offshore radio station owned by a Swiss-based electronics company later shown to have had a connection to the Lockerbie bombing.6

Following the Suez parallel, if Clinton had won the US Presidency in November 2016, is it possible the UK might have dumped Brexit by now? The ‘centre’ emboldened by numerous US telephone calls and briefings and, rallying behind whoever is flavour of the month in respectable politics, would have found a way to drop the matter. But Trump is President, not Clinton. This hasn’t and won’t happen and – carrying on the football terminology – we are now resigning (or being expelled) from the league after failing to fulfil our fixtures.

So, does the election of Trump mean, ironically for keen Brexiteers and hopefully for hard-line Corbyn fans, the end of US interference in UK matters? Or are we merely living in a country where it’s all just legerdemain and stage management by an increasingly deluded people?

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A director of Mebo Electronics, the Swiss electronics company, was questioned at the Lockerbie inquest and stated that he would call George Bush Snr. as a character witness if he were ever charged with an offence.
Anti-Semitism in the Labour Party

Colin Challen

I feel compelled to respond to John Booth’s excellent article on ‘anti-Semitism’ in the Labour Party. I write as one who has 35 years membership of the party, most of which years were spent as a Labour Councillor, an employed organiser of the party and latterly an MP. In all of this time I encountered not a single instance of anti-Semitism; and given my experience perhaps I should have.

As the Labour Party organiser in Leeds in the 1990s, and the full time agent for the Jewish Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) for Leeds North East, Fabian Hamilton, I might reasonably have expected to hear something unpleasant. Following the Blairite ascendency, the selection contest for the parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East in the 1997 general election was bitterly fought. Liz Davies was originally chosen when an all-women shortlist had been used, but this news was greeted with utter dismay by the new elite running the party – an elite from that part of Islington which didn’t correspond to Jeremy Corbyn’s. (I surmise at this point that Jeremy and Liz at that time were at least fellow travellers if not friends – I’m willing to be corrected on that point.)

After her selection, I got the message that it had to be undone. My job was to undo the selection. (Coincidentally, at this time a court case established that all women shortlists were illegal.) Fabian Hamilton, who had been the candidate in 1992, was back in the frame and was for various reasons the favoured party candidate to win the new selection process. Liz Davies was ruled out of standing again because she failed to declare at her original selection meeting that she had appeared in court on the grounds of non-payment of the poll tax. As the presiding party officer at the selection meeting this was ironic: I’d been in court for the same reason.

So, on a flimsy pretext Liz Davies was defenestrated and in the subsequent period the constituency, one of the most ethnically diverse in the UK and a key seat for Labour’s success, struggled in deep factionalism to select a new PPC. With the benefit of 2017 hindsight this would have been a perfect time for proto-Corbynistas to spread some anti-semitic muck about. This was when there was little media attention given to the oddball backbencher from Islington or his acolytes. If his camp was motivated by such instincts it could have passed under the radar. But nothing emerged, despite the anger that the deselection of Davies aroused, and the bitter conflict that followed.

If anti-semitism is not found in tests of this sort – tests of utter bitterness – then where is it to be found?
Labour Friends of Israel

I turn to the issue of the influence of the Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) in the Labour Party. I went as an MP on an LFI-funded, week-long trip to Israel in 2009. If the ambition of LFI was to turn me into a craven fan of the Israeli state, it failed, but not miserably. What I found was the rapidly receding liberalism of what might be described as a democratic dream, foundering on fundamentalist values – values which are justified in their keepers’ eyes on the grounds of self-defence and history.

Israel, I believe, likes to think of itself as an outpost of western democracy – no, civilisation – in an as yet untamed tribal, primitive world. (The sort of world which the historian David Starkey is apt to describe as being stuck in the middle ages.) But ever since 2009 the Israeli coalition government has relied on religious fundamentalists to stay in power. Zealots have, I suppose, been a part of the street scene in Jerusalem since biblical times, but to see them strutting around in the 21st century was certainly an eye-opener for me. And they hold a privileged position in Israeli society. Thanks to LFI, I also witnessed (from a distance) the imprisonment of the Gaza people, the ‘apartheid wall’ and the illegal settlements. We were there when an election campaign was going on. It was surprising to see how many campaigns were being fought in Russian rather than Hebrew, a point I’m sure that was not lost on the remaining Arabs in Israel, who could with justification see the influx of Russians (the main source of recent Jewish immigration) as a particular form of Jewish colonialism.

And then there is the issue of Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial and museum outside Jerusalem. I found this a very moving place. It seemed a shrine. Inside, a circular hall of filing cabinets two or three stories high, containing the names of all the known victims of the holocaust bore testament to the suffering of a people, arranged almost as a mirror image of the efficiency of the Nazi extermination system. That’s surely what LFI would want me to see, to understand that the Jewish state could not tolerate the oppression of the Jews and that it alone, at all costs, would be there to defend them, nuclear weapons, wall, illegal settlements, diplomatic belligerence and all.

I had time to pause and reflect on what surrounds Israel. Our friends the Wahhabi? Or perhaps that old friend of the west, Egypt, with its lately installed dictator? Or the crumbling waywardness of countries previously treated as vassal oil reservoirs with little or no legitimate government – and, more importantly, with no evident desire to progress? Compared to them, where stands Israel?

So, I hope for any thinking Labour MP, an LFI trip could be a rare opportunity to question where Israel stands, what threats it faces and what threats it poses. I have to say that on the basis of my visit, Israel did itself no favours. That’s probably not the result LFI’s financial backers would have desired. But I have no regrets seeing things with my own eyes that many only see through the eyes of others.

It should be clear that I have sought to understand what’s going on in Israel. I have taken an interest and formed the view that Israel fails to live up to its ideal of a
western-style democracy (putting it mildly) and to criticise that country is justifiable. Sadly that can no longer be discussed without the inevitable and specious accusations of anti-semitism, not least from those in Parliamentary Labour Party whose cloth ears shroud debate but still have a nose for a good old fashioned lunge at their hated new leader.

*Colin Challen was MP for Morley and Rothwell from 2001-2010.*
It’s rare for a serious, seasoned reporter and respected journalist to take on the case of the murdered president John F. Kennedy. So when former *New York Times* reporter Philip Shenon writes a book on the subject, you take notice and hope he tries to get the story straight.

Shenon says that his interest in the subject was sparked by an anonymous former Warren Commission attorney who complained that they were not given the full facts, especially about the CIA-Mafia plots to kill Cuban premier Fidel Castro. Although a great deal was kept from the Warren Commission, Shenon believes they got it right: the president was killed by one man alone, Lee Harvey Oswald. Shenon told Dave Davies on National Public Radio (NPR):

‘We’ll never be able, totally, to rule out the idea that there was a second gunman because this scientific analysis is really much more art than science. But all of the most credible, technical, scientific research suggest that Oswald was the gunman in Dealey Plaza.’

Oswald, in turn, was killed in police custody by Jack Ruby, a ‘very troubled misfit, loser’, and not part of any grand conspiracy.

But Shenon has a conspiracy theory of his own, one floated immediately after the assassination and discounted. In this Oswald, the lone wolf assassin, was encouraged and possibly supported by Cuban communists while he was in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination. Logically, this then makes them confederates and accomplices in a conspiracy of sorts. As Shenon said in his NPR interview:

‘...it’s remarkable to discover that the CIA itself describes what

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1 The few that have: Seth Kantor, Earl Golz, Gaeton Fonzi, Dick Russell, Anthony Summers and Russ Baker.


3 While some have speculated this was the late Arlen Specter, I believe it is Sam Stern, who complained to the House Select Committee on Assassinations about the same thing. See Samuel Stern, House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) Interview, 22 August 1978, <http://tinyurl.com/yb4azr9w>.

happened after the Kennedy assassination as being a cover-up, that lots of clues in Mexico City especially, were never pursued. And if they had been pursued, it might have pointed to other people who at least know what Oswald was going to do. And one thing I’ve always tried to make clear is that you cannot shorthand this as, Castro did it. I don’t think there’s any credible evidence that Fidel Castro, personally, was involved in ordering Kennedy’s assassination. But people around Mexico City who Oswald was dealing with may have felt very differently about, you know – at the height of the Cold War, some of those people may have wanted to see John Kennedy dead . . . . And isn’t it possible that some of those people encouraged Oswald to do what he was going to do? Isn’t it possible that some of those people offered help for him to escape afterwards?’

Central to Shenon’s thesis are two key elements: a 7 September 1963 Castro speech and interview with the Associated Press; and Oswald’s visit a few weeks later to Mexico City, where he reportedly attended a ‘Twist party’ at which he was encouraged to kill Kennedy. Neither are honestly dealt with by Shenon and the full facts refute his conspiracy theory.

**Official documents released**

There has been a flurry of news stories on this subject because of the release of previously sealed records on the assassination under the JFK Act of 1992. Shenon promoted his thesis in an article (co-authored with Larry Sabato) in Politico magazine, ‘How the CIA Came to Doubt the Official Story’, that presents a few documents from among those recently released.⁵ Among these are a letter from J. Edgar Hoover, not seen by the Warren Commission, that refers to an Associated Press (AP) news report on the interview Fidel Castro gave to the AP reporter Daniel Harker at the Brazilian Embassy in Havana on 7 September 1963. Picking up on the AP wire feed, the New Orleans newspaper *The Times-Picayune* ran a page 7 story, ‘Castro Blasts Raids on Cuba – Says U.S. Leaders Imperilled by Aid to Rebels’.⁶

Shenon also promotes a CIA report to the Rockefeller Commission on possible Cuban connections to the assassination that leaves out significant details you will read here.⁷

Shenon on NPR:

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'But in fact, these CIA documents from a couple weeks ago show that there was a real theory offered within the CIA that Oswald . . . . would have seen a remarkable interview that Fidel Castro had given to the Associated Press in early September 1963, a story republished in The Times-Picayune newspaper in New Orleans, that – in which Castro made clear that he thought he was under threat of assassination by the Kennedy administration and that the Kennedy administration might face reprisals as a result of this assassination threat – the theory being that Oswald would have read that article, would have become enraged on Castro’s behalf and then set out to get vengeance for Castro – to kill Kennedy before Kennedy could kill Castro. That is not to be shorthanded as Castro ordered Kennedy’s assassination – no, not at all. It’s just that Oswald felt he was acting in Castro’s behalf by setting out to kill Kennedy.’

Following Hoover, Shenon suggests that Oswald was ‘enraged on Castro’s behalf’ by the news report. But there’s no evidence Oswald even read it, let alone that he was ‘enraged’ by it.

The AP interview indicates that Castro knew about the CIA plans to kill him; but Shannon fails to mention the headline and key element of the story, ‘Castro blasts Raiders’, in which Castro specifically mentions the CIA-backed JMwave maritime raiders. These anti-Castro Cuban commandos were infiltrated into Cuba with high powered rifles that, as JMwave boat captain and later Watergate burglar Eugenio Martinez said, ‘were not to be used for hunting rabbits’. (Some of the JMwave commandos were captured and paraded on Cuban TV with their weapons, and reportedly confessed to their CIA backing.)

While the AP article that Shenon speculates so enraged Oswald was published in the New Orleans newspaper on Monday 9 September, Castro’s speech and interview were given two days earlier, on Saturday 7 September, at the Brazilian embassy, a key fact that Shenon also neglects to mention. This is especially significant because on that day two other significant meetings took place, one in Dallas and the other in Brazil.

On that day in Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald was meeting with CIA case officer David Atlee Phillips and anti-Castro Cuban commando leader Antonio Veciana, founder of the militant Alpha 66 group that was attacking Soviet ships in Havana harbor. At the same time, Rolando Cubela (AMLASH) was meeting his CIA case officer in Brazil to discuss the assassination of Castro.

As some CIA officers suspected, Cubela was a double-agent, informing Castro of his CIA contacts. This may explain why Castro chose the Brazilian embassy to deliver his message to Kennedy, a double entendre that was only understood by those knowledgeable about the CIA’s meeting with Cubela, a key fact the CIA did not share with anyone, including the Warren Commission.

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9 [http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/havana/Cubela.htm](http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/havana/Cubela.htm)
Oswald in Mexico City

A few weeks later Oswald went to Mexico City to try to get a visa to Cuba, and visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies. There he was said to have been encouraged by the Cubans to kill Kennedy and is said to have bragged that was what he intended to do.

At the Soviet embassy he is said to have met with Valeriy Kostikov, known to the CIA as an assassination expert, while at the Cuban embassy he dealt with Sylvia Duran, a Mexican national who assisted Oswald in filing his visa application. While Duran claims she only met with Oswald at the Cuban embassy, and indeed told Shenon so, others have made the claim she invited Oswald to a ‘Twist party’ she hosted.

For those who missed the 1960s, that turbulent decade was ushered in by the Twist, a song written by Hank Ballard and a dance popularised by Chubby Checker – the first world-wide dance sensation. Sylvia Duran hosted a number of such ‘Twist parties’, including one that was said to have included Lee Harvey Oswald. It was at this party that it is alleged Oswald met the Cuban embassy personnel who encouraged him kill Kennedy.

Following the Kennedy assassination, and even before the end of 1963, the party Oswald ostensibly attended had come to the attention of the FBI agent in Mexico City who had interviewed the participants and discounted the affair. Sylvia Duran’s cousin was the Mexican poet and writer Elena Garro de Paz. In 1964 one June Cobb moved in with de Paz and says that she learned how de Paz, along with her daughter Elenita, had previously attended one of Duran’s ‘Twist parties’ – the very one, in fact, that had also been attended by Oswald. Cobb took this information to a State Department officer, Charles W. Thomas, stationed at the US embassy in Mexico City and he sparked another investigation in 1965. Shenon devotes much of his book to this second ‘Twist party’ investigation.

Not mentioned by Shenon is the fact that June Cobb was a CIA asset (LICOOKY-1), who had served as Castro’s secretary when he first took over power and had made the Havana Hilton his headquarters.  

Shenon on NPR:

‘Well, there is this amazing story about what is described as the twist party, you know, Chubby Checker’s “Twist” was very popular in Mexico City, too. And there were witnesses after the assassination who come forward to say that they remembered seeing Oswald at a party – a twist party, that he had been invited there by this vivacious, young Mexican woman who worked in the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City, a woman named Sylvia Duran, who had apparently given Oswald his help in preparing the visa application for Cuba and that people at this party had in the past talked openly about wanting to see President Kennedy dead.’

Others at the party included the communist writer Emilio Carballido, General

<http://aarclibrary.org/a-cruel-and-shocking-misinterpretation/>
Jose de Jesus Clark Flores, who appears elsewhere in the story allegedly giving Oswald money at the Cuban embassy, and ‘two American Gringo beatniks’.

The CIA’s 24 page report to the Rockefeller Commission, requested by former Warren Commission attorney David Belin, and which Shenon takes seriously, claims that Elena Garro de Paz said:

‘At the party she saw three Gringos, not drinking, not mixing and more or less just standing around together like bumps on a log. They were so obviously out of place that she asked someone in the Cuban Embassy about them and was told that “they were just passing through”.’

At the party Carballido and Cuban embassy officials were allegedly overheard talking to Oswald about killing Kennedy, and, so, the plan to kill the President was possibly ‘hatched or encouraged’ by the communists there.

On the day of the assassination, Elena Garro de Paz, the primary source of the story, was whisked away to the Hotel Vermont by a Mexican security officer Manuel Calvillo, who kept her incommunicado for a week ‘for her own protection’. In contrast, Sylvia Duran was twice arrested and violently interrogated by Mexican security officers until she confessed to having a sexual affair with Oswald.

In subsequent interviews with Anthony Summers, Gus Russo and now Shenon, Sylvia Duran adamantly denied ever meeting Oswald outside of the Cuban embassy.

In his book Shenon says that the two Gringos who were with Oswald at the Twist Party were seen with him on the street the next day, and adds that one of them was an American film actor.

Although not mentioned in the CIA report to the Rockefeller Commission, nor by Shenon, among the recently released records is a CIA report that identifies the American film actor in Mexico City as Richard Beymer, of West Side Story and the Longest Day fame. He had twice called the Cuban embassy and asked for Sylvia Duran, calls picked up by the CIA’s phone tap (LIENVOY).

The two gringos

A few Google clicks away I found Beymer in a small Midwest town, his phone number in a public directory, and he answered the phone when I called. Yes, he was in Mexico to attend an Acapulco film festival, and was with a traveling
companion, New York City bar owner Bradley Pierce, who is now a Catholic priest. And yes, they did go to Mexico City and did try to get a visa to Cuba. While Beymer was surprised he is mentioned in CIA reports, he does not remember Sylvia Duran specifically, but does ‘vaguely recall being invited to a party’, and attending a Twist party is something they would have done, being two footloose Gringos below the border. But no, he did not meet Lee Harvey Oswald, someone he thinks he would remember.

Bradley Pierce recalls more. Now Father Bradley, and patron of a Connecticut seminary, he recalls the trip to Mexico he took with Richard Beymer, but doesn’t recall meeting Oswald or the Twist party, though he does remember the assassination. They had just gotten off the elevator of their hotel in Mexico City when they heard of Kennedy’s killing in Dallas.

So they were in Mexico City at the time of the assassination, and since they were only in Mexico for two weeks, they weren’t in Mexico when Oswald was there. Oswald’s visit to Mexico city commenced on 27 September - i.e. two months before the later visit (at the time of the assassination) by Beymer and Pierce.15 (The dates on the CIA wiretap show Beymer called Duran at the embassy in late November and again in early December.)

The House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) investigated the ‘Twist party’ story. They reviewed the documentation of previous investigations by FBI and CIA personnel and interviewed many people who were said to have been at the party – but not Garro de Paz herself, who declined to cooperate with the Committee. They were unable to stand it up: the HSCA account of that investigation shows that Elena Garro de Paz had been extensively interviewed by US personnel, most of whom did not take her seriously.16 One of the CIA’s accounts notes: ‘GARRO’S chronology of the events she described as having occurred in the Mexican capital in September 1963 never coincided with the confirmed data of OSWALD’S presence there.’17

SHENON: You know, I desperately don’t want to fall down the rabbit hole of the Kennedy assassination. You know, people do become obsessed with this. It is fascinating. I think it’s – you know, it is the event in my lifetime that changed the way Americans think about their government and about truth.

And it’s really made so much of our – you know, I think you can look

15 There are many sources that the visit was in September and they include: <http://aarclibrary.org/a-cruel-and-shocking-misinterpretation/> and <http://tinyurl.com/y7ezdjsc> or <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/10/21/will-trump-release-the-final-jfk-assassination-documents-a-deadline-looms-pressure-grows/>.

16 See <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=799#relPageId=249&tab=page>.

17 In a 157-page file called ‘Helms Hearing Duplicate’, a collection of papers gathered by former CIA director Richard Helms as he prepared to testify to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978. See <http://tinyurl.com/ycadjhog> or <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=147162&search=Oswald#relPageId=90&tab=page> at p. 89.
back to the Kennedy assassination as the event that turned so much of our public conversation toxic and full of conspiracy theories and full of the assumption that we’re not being told the truth by our government. And trying to bring as much truth as possible to what can be determined about this, I think there’s real value to that today.’

For those of us who have gone ‘down the rabbit hole of the Kennedy assassination’, trying to determine ‘as much truth as possible’, it isn’t just the Castro Cuban commies who must be scrutinised, but everyone who associated with the alleged assassin, including the anti-Castro Cubans, intelligence officers and others who became entwined in the assassination story.

It is pure speculation on Shenon’s part that Oswald even read the news reports of Castro’s interview; and that he attended the ‘Twist party’ in Mexico and was enticed to kill the president by Cubans had been discredited. But Oswald most certainly did attend a party in Dallas where he was encouraged to commit a political assassination – that of General Edwin Walker, a crime he is also accused of committing.18

But will that party get the attention, a book and the publicity that Shenon has given the ‘Twist party’?

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William Kelly is a New Jersey based freelance journalist and historian. He is the author of two books – 300 Years at the Point and Birth of the Birdie, and is working on The Divine Skein at Dealey Plaza - How JFK Was Killed and How They Got Away With It. He was the recipient of the 2013 Mary Ferrell Award for his work on the 11/22/63 Air Force One Radio transmissions and is the co-chairman of the Research Committee of Citizens Against Political Assassinations (CAPA-US.org). His articles on the assassination of President Kennedy are posted at JFKCountercoup.blogspot.com.

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With the start date for fracking near the North Yorkshire village of Kirby Misperton almost upon us, there has been a marked increase in police activity in the area, with convoys of police vans driving around the narrow lanes surrounding the site. A nearby protest camp receives regular visits. CCTV cameras have been erected in several locations. This is all part of ‘Operation Kingfisher’, which North Yorkshire police (NYP) launched in 2016. A Freedom of Information request in 2016 sought to unearth some of the thinking behind Operation Kingfisher. NYP posted their response online on 27 January 2017.¹

The request asked:

1. Please can you confirm what the aims and objectives are for NYP’s Operation Kingfisher.
2. Please can you provide a copy of any presentation information issued by NYP to local councils, schools and NYP officers related to fracking.

NYP refused to provide the information, mainly on the grounds that:

'Section 22 – Information Intended for Future Publication

Information is exempt pursuant to Section 22 if, at the time when the public authority receives a request for it: the public authority holds the requested information; the public authority intends the information to be published at some future date, whether that date is determined or not; and in all the circumstances it is reasonable to withhold the information until its planned publication.

Unfortunately, in this instance I am unable to provide you with a determined publication date at this time.

Section 22 is a qualified class based exemption, which means that consideration must be given to the public interest in disclosure or non-disclosure of the information, but there is no requirement to demonstrate any harm that may occur in the event of the information being disclosed. It is recognised that it must be reasonable in all the circumstances to withhold the information until the date of publication.’

and:

'Balancing Test

A decision has already been taken to publish this information prior to the

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/y7zx3tf7> or <https://northyorkshire.police.uk/access-to-information/foi-disclosure-log/operation-kingfisher-925-2016-17/>
request being received. This process is in accordance with a planned publication strategy. Requesting earlier disclosure of the already accessible information would duplicate workload, and there is public interest in the information being disclosed in its entirety. Therefore it is my decision to withhold the information at this time.’

This convoluted attempt at accountability is summed up by NYP’s statement that ‘The date for publication is in the distant future’. It would appear that having a ‘planned publication intention’ is sufficient reason to withhold information. This point is clarified on the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) website:

‘The intention to publish must pre-date the request. This means that a public authority cannot, when it receives a request, attempt to give itself more time to provide the information by deciding to publish it in the future rather than provide it within the statutory time limit for answering a request.’ ²

This loophole is big enough to sink practically any request for what official bodies wish to keep secret. Given that there is no need to provide any date for future publication, but only that there is ‘an intention’ to publish which predates any request, the author of any document merely has to say as much when the information is created. It would appear this option may be the choice in many cases where FoI requests are turned down, more often than not incorrectly. The website FOIwiki.com lists more Section 22 refusal appeals being upheld by the ICO than not, in a ratio of 14 to three ³ How many more refusals simply go by the board?

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² <http://tinyurl.com/y8m6c6g9> or <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1172/information-intended-for-future-publication-and-research-information-sections-22-and-22a-foi.pdf>

³ <https://foiwiki.com/foiwiki/index.php/FOIA_Section_22_Exemption>
Scott Newton

The UK government’s approach to Brexit has floundered along ever since Theresa May’s infamous ‘Brexit is Brexit’ comment in July 2016, which sought to foreclose Britain’s negotiating options even before the talks had started. It excluded the possibility of a Norway-style relationship between the European Union (EU) and the UK, under which the latter would continue to participate fully in the single market. This would have minimised the disruption to both British industry and finance consequent on leaving the EU and would have left the legal status and rights enjoyed by migrants (both EU migrants in the UK and UK migrants in the EU) unaltered. The downsides, of course, would have been: first, that Britain would no longer have any say in decisions by EU members about the future internal and external relations of the organisation; and second, that a contribution to the EU budget would still be required from the UK government. It is hard to believe that a Brexit of this kind would have been very difficult to arrange. It was, however, ruled out from the start by the May administration, largely because two of the most baleful consequences of EU membership for the Brexiteers would be unaffected. They were (1): freedom of movement (and therefore unrestricted immigration) from EU states into the UK, and (2): subjection to the rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The May government therefore sought a new relationship with the EU. This has never been set out with clarity but appears to involve ‘access to the single market’ without any obligations. The government appears to believe that the size of the British market, and the embedded positions within that market of many EU firms, would ensure that economic rationality would prevail in the EU and lead to a bespoke deal for the UK.

It seems very clear that this approach has always been a non-starter. Time and again the European Commission in Brussels and politicians from leading EU members – Germany, France and the Netherlands in particular – have made it clear that no trade talks can start until the UK agrees to a divorce settlement with the EU large enough to compensate for the end of its annual budgetary contribution. They have also stated explicitly and repeatedly that there can be no ‘bespoke deal’ and that the best UK negotiators can hope for, now that they have ruled out the single market, is an arrangement similar to the recent Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada. This does cut tariffs dramatically but leaves trade in food subject to

quotas and controls relating to plant health. There is no access to the single market for financial services. It took seven years to negotiate CETA, notwithstanding that Canada’s GDP is not much more than half that of the UK (1.53 trillion US dollars in 2016, compared with the UK’s 2.62 trillion US dollars in the same year). This all led May herself to state that CETA ‘would . . . represent such a restriction on our mutual market access that it would benefit neither of our economies’. 

Britain’s efforts to establish a post-Brexit relationship with the EU better than the one embodied in CETA have generally led to a dialogue of the deaf. Signs of real progress have only become apparent after London recently indicated that it might be prepared to consider a financial settlement in the region of £50 billion, far more generous than the £20 billion (equivalent to two years’ budgetary contributions, in other words the payments expected in 2019 and 2010) envisaged in September 2017. Yet moves of this kind, in the direction of compromise with Brussels, have been consistently attacked by those wanting a ‘hard Brexit’. Influential backbench MPs such as John Redwood and Jacob Rees-Mogg have been vociferous, as have Cabinet Ministers like Liam Fox, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove (the last two quite shamelessly placing their own ambitions ahead of the national welfare). Pressure groups such as Economists for Free Trade (EFT: basically the liberal economic ideologue Patrick Minford), encouraged by unjustifiably generous media treatment given the outfit’s actual size and weight in the field of applied economics, have not helped. The combination of their lobbying activities with evident disagreements concerning the EU question in the Tory Party has prevented the government from coming up with an approach to the Brexit bill, the position of EU migrants in the UK and the Irish border question, designed to neutralise these issues and open up the next stage of the talks, dealing with trade. The upshot is that no agreement is in prospect, with (at the time of writing) just 16 months left before the UK is due to leave the EU.

Why has the May administration embarked on this course? The answer lies in the internal dynamics of the Conservative Party. Ever since the eclipse of the Liberal Party by Labour in the 1920s, it became the political home of British capital. Entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) became an objective of large-scale business and finance in the UK during the late 1950s and early 1960s, as profits to be made from trade with the fast-growing European market overtook those being derived from commerce with Britain’s Commonwealth and what was left of the Empire. ‘Going into Europe’, and therefore ensuring that UK firms had tariff-free access to the EEC customs union, became a central feature of Ted Heath’s attempt to modernise the
British economy after 1970, and was backed by all the country’s main business organisations.

Yet the Tories have never been comfortable with membership either of the old ‘Common Market’ or of its later metamorphoses, the European Community (EC) and the EU. Back in the 1960s there were many who opposed ‘going into Europe’ because they saw the move as a desertion of Britain’s closest allies in the Commonwealth, countries which had stood by the UK in two world wars and then became its most important trading and financial partners. These sentiments were frequently expressed by firms with interests in the Commonwealth, and backed by concerns in the City which viewed the EEC as protectionist and likely to restrict the traditionally global reach of British banking capital. But they were outweighed by the power and wealth of domestic corporate capital and unable to divert Heath from his mission. From the 1980s onwards, however, opinions changed under the impact of the neo-liberal revolution driven through by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. There was what was euphemistically called a ‘shake-out’ of the economy as many firms either closed or rationalised. The power of organised industrial capital, strong in the 1960s and 1970s, started to wane in the face of a challenge from small business, the self-employed, the service sector and City banks less interested in Europe than the Far East. Here there were abundant opportunities likely to arise from the opening up of China and from cultivation of both the entrepôt position and the development potential of former colonies such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya.

During the 1980s there was increasing evidence of a reorientation of capital, much of it commercial and financial, away from Europe. By 1993, 80 per cent of Britain’s £1.3 trillion portfolio of overseas assets was held outside the EU, a point made by Margaret Thatcher. She was no longer Prime Minister when she made the comment, having resigned in November 1990, but Thatcher’s prestige in the Tory Party – especially among the grass roots – was immense. Here there was an enthusiastic response to her frequently expressed suspicions of what were seen as the federalist ambitions of the EC and the EU, along with its apparent liking for regulation and intervention. Belonging to Europe implied (so it was argued) not just an end to the free market capitalism espoused by Thatcherism, increasingly connected to a liberal global market, but also to the British nation-state. The health of capitalism in the UK and the future independence of the country itself required a new start, a Brexit. These views were also articulated by the growing number of Conservative MPs with professional backgrounds in finance and services during the post-1979 era, who outnumbered those from corporate industry.

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The Tories were, however, unable to transform this fusion of ideology, nationalism and economics into a winning political formula. Although the forces driving a European strategy for British capital grew steadily weaker after 1979, they remained potent enough within the Conservative Party establishment to hold back the rising tide of Euroscepticism without being able to reverse it. The resulting stand-off led to tensions within the Party which undermined John Major’s premiership, left his two immediate successors unelectable and triggered a right-wing breakaway party established to promote the cause of national departure from the EU. This was UKIP (the UK Independence Party), which, after 2005, began to attract growing popular support, taking more votes from the Conservatives than from Labour. UKIP’s rise had a serious impact on the Tory performance at the polls after 2005, especially in local and European elections. By 2015, however, its strength was also growing at the national level. In that year’s General Election it secured 3.8 million votes (12.6 per cent of the vote) and replaced the Liberal Democrats as Britain’s third party.

Despite the UKIP success, the Tories did win a majority in 2015. The 2017 General Election result, however, suggested that the circumstances which had permitted the 2015 majority – namely the collapse of the Liberal Democrats and the rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP), replacing Labour as the main political party in Scotland – were not necessarily going to last. In 2017 the Conservatives were once again reduced to the status of a minority administration, clinging to power in the face of an unexpected Labour challenge, sustained by the disintegration of UKIP as a political force. That its supporters flooded back to the Tories was largely due to May’s determination to promote the idea that she and her colleagues were prepared to back a ‘hard Brexit’ and departure from the EU at any price.

The lesson is obvious: given the underlying weakness of the Conservative Party, a product of its weak demographic profile and a long-term decline in membership, the Tories can only guarantee themselves a competitive position in British politics for the foreseeable future if they seal off the Eurosceptic Right of the party to prevent any recrudescence of the UKIP insurgency. This explains the otherwise incomprehensible decision to rule out membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) after Brexit. The advantage of having that

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9 The EEA includes Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and Switzerland. These nations are not part of the EU but, with the addition of Switzerland, do comprise the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), whose members gained access to the single market when the EEA, covering the EU and EFTA, was formed in 1994.
membership would be retaining access to the single market for both goods and financial services, lower payments to Brussels, the right to impose an ‘emergency brake’ on inward migration, and national control over policy relating to agriculture and fisheries.

The other side of the table

However, all that said, there is another side to the Brexit talks. Take the comments of Manfred Weber MEP, chair of the Centre-Right European People’s Party and a key ally of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Weber explained that May needed to ‘offer more clarity’ on the divorce bill (basically name a figure large enough to satisfy Brussels without any bargaining process) and agree to the status quo concerning the legal position and rights of EU citizens in the UK. Without this there was no chance of starting talks either about a post-Brexit EU-UK trade relationship or about the transition period to the new era after March 2019. This sounds reasonable enough until it is realised that the EU has still not specified a figure of any kind, though there are reports that it is considering something in the region of £60 billion. The resulting uncertainty has left British negotiators in the position of trying to come up with a figure large enough to satisfy Brussels without knowing how much this is likely to be. The implication of Weber’s comments seems to be that there are very influential political figures in the EU who do not really want the talks to succeed. Weber’s message supported (unwittingly, I am sure) the comments of Yanis Varoufakis in September to the effect that, whatever business organisations in the EU want, the political leadership there, in Berlin, Paris and Brussels in particular, does not want the negotiations with the UK to result in a mutually beneficial agreement. They want them to fail, unless London makes a U-turn and puts membership of the single market back on the table and finally manages to come upon a winning formula concerning the divorce bill.

Failure of the talks will leave the British government facing a choice: go through with a hard Brexit, abandoning the whole enterprise; or make a U-turn on the single market. Taking the first of these two options would be highly disruptive and likely to generate severe economic pressures. It would have very serious results for industries which not only export to other EU members but import many components from suppliers and manufacturers there. Firms

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based here, especially large corporations and multinational banks, may well relocate their factories and offices to other EU members. Businesses continuing to operate in the UK would lose access to the single market and at the same time face higher import costs thanks to a low sterling rate against the euro. (There would be an upside for domestic interests since producers across the EU would face a British market surrounded by tariffs and hardened further by the adverse price effect resulting from the shift in the terms of trade.)

Even these small glimmers of light would be absent outside the field of commerce. There would be an increased prospect of Scottish secession from the UK and therefore of the break-up of the country, a process likely to result in the loss of our seat on the UN Security Council. The UK would be left facing profound economic and diplomatic isolation, depriving it of influence over a whole range of pressing international questions including the environment, climate change, migration, trade, development, global security and co-operation against Islamic fundamentalism. A central pillar of British foreign policy since 1945, namely to seek increasingly close relations with the countries of Western Europe in the quest for international stability and national prosperity, would be destroyed. No replacement would be available bar refuge in the ‘special relationship’, namely subservience to the economic and strategic interests of Washington. This would leave the UK with not even the pretence of an independent foreign policy; its public services up for sale to US-based multinational firms specialising in the provision of health, insurance and social care; and under pressure to adapt to US norms regarding trading and environmental standards (an obvious example here is the practice of washing chickens in chlorine).

These consequences are serious enough to cause heavy turbulence within the Conservative Party. In any Parliamentary vote, encouraged by large scale capital as represented by the big banks such as HSBC, as well as the CBI and multinational firms such as Honda, Nissan and Ford, the Party’s pro-EU fraction would either abstain or support the Opposition. (This prospect has been raised by Lord Heseltine, placing his enthusiasm for British membership of the EU ahead of his dislike for ‘socialism’).

Taking the second option – i.e. abandoning the attempt to leave the EU – would sustain the UK-EU relationship but involve a national diplomatic humiliation unparalleled since the Suez fiasco of 1956. Its impact on the Tory Party would be devastating, likely provoking a UKIP revival and a highly unpleasant turn to xenophobia in our popular politics. Opting to remain in the single market after all is not likely to be so explosive but, given the expectations raised by May’s government when they ruled this out last year, it...

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still involves a very significant U-turn. It would mean accepting a ‘soft Brexit’ including a large financial settlement and a Norway-style relationship with the EU, with its apparent implications regarding free movement and a continuing role for the European Court of Justice in British life. This is likely to provoke a Tory revolt and the new lease of life for UKIP which cannot under any circumstances be permitted. Party interest is therefore driving the Tories unerringly towards hard Brexit, its huge risks notwithstanding, since it will guarantee the long-term survival of the Conservative Party. This, in turn, will ensure that British capital, in its post-Thatcherite, neo-liberal form, will continue to have a congenial home and a political organisation designed to promote its national and global interests.

If the May Government favours a hard Brexit (albeit, perhaps, reluctantly) why would the EU want an outcome like this? According to the French philosopher Voltaire (in his 1759 novel Candide) the British executed their own Admiral Byng after he lost the battle of Minorca in 1756 ‘pour encourager les autres’. So it would be necessary for the EU to make an example of the UK to warn other members considering departure from the organisation of the likely consequences. Imagine that the British succeeded in negotiating a good free trade arrangement with the EU – one that included access to the single market and the benefits enjoyed today by their citizens in the EU. Why would other nations, impoverished by austerity policies designed to keep German and French bankers happy and prop up the single currency, not wish to follow? What all this means is that the Brexit talks are seen in the EU and above all in Berlin, Paris and Brussels – the three centres which matter in this affair – as an existential issue for the EU. The product of an evolutionary process going back to the late 1940s, the EU is seen as a guarantee against any repeat of the European conflicts which led to the carnage and suffering of 1914-18 and (even more devastating) 1939-45. Its progress from the European Economic Community, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, to the European Union, underpinned by the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, is an ongoing journey. It is intended to lead to the establishment of a federal or confederate state (this has yet to be determined) in which the national rivalries and economic conflicts of the past are buried. Given that the tensions between France and Germany were at the core of these, it is logical that the two nations should have been at the heart of the European project from the start and that they should be determined to make it succeed now. All this means that the outcome of the Brexit talks must ensure the EU’s survival and long-term protection against any other leavers, even if that involves some loss of income and employment in the immediate future at least. The only terms for a Brexit acceptable to the EU must be Brussels’ terms: Britain faces a diklat on the leaving bill and conditions of access to the single market, or nothing.

This is why the Brexit talks are going nowhere fast. There can be no good outcome for the May Government. May and her Ministers have certainly contributed to what now looks like a slow motion train wreck, thanks to the ‘Brexit means Brexit’ straitjacket they decided to put on at the start of the
process. But given the attitudes taken by key figures in the EU, they are not the only ones responsible for the ongoing crisis. Hapless, incompetent and self-obsessed as key figures like May, Johnson, Gove and Davies undoubtedly are, even they must understand this. Indeed, David Davis’s comments in his Berlin speech on 16 November that the EU was placing ‘politics above prosperity’ indicates that they do.\(^{16}\) It seems, then, that barring unexpected climb-downs on both sides, there is only one sure escape from the current \textit{impasse}: this is to abandon any hope of agreement with the EU and walk out of the talks now, accepting that there will be a hard Brexit and that it is time to start preparing for it before the deadline in March 2019. MPs such as Jacob Rees Mogg and John Redwood, along with Tory peers such as Lord Lawson, back this course of action.\(^{17}\) They favour negotiating a series of free trade agreements between Britain and its leading commercial partners, including the EU, in which goods, services and capital could flow freely between them and the UK. This would involve a gigantic leap into the dark for the UK since there would be a transition period of indeterminate length while these agreements are made, during which time Britain would trade by World Trade Organisation rules. All the same, it seems clear that there is a majority within the Conservative Party for taking that leap into the dark.

However, the hard Brexiteers face a problem. Whatever the strength of their numbers in the Tory Party, they do not comprise a majority in the House of Commons, thanks largely to the unexpected outcome of the June 2017 General Election. Their chances of steering a hard Brexit through Parliament are therefore restricted. This has not been lost on EU members, who are aware that they are negotiating with a weak government constantly under pressure from its own MPs as well as from opposition parties. For this reason many in Berlin, Paris and Brussels regard the hard Brexit option as a bluff. They expect either a total climb-down and no Brexit at all or a very soft one – even if this amounts to accepting a \textit{diktat}. And they may be right. It is always very dangerous for historians to predict the future but there is, in the present configuration of political forces, the embryo of a resolution to the Brexit issue which suits most – but not all – of the players. This is for the May government to be defeated in Parliament on the question of a hard Brexit. It would then either have to backtrack on its hostility to membership of the single market or resign, leaving the Brexit process to be concluded by Labour or some coalition formed for that purpose. The result would be either a Norway-style agreement or (just possibly) the scrapping of the entire project. The Tories (or most of them) would be left shouting from the opposition benches; but this outcome would leave the Party less divided and vulnerable to splitting than it would be after a U-turn. Hard Brexiteers would no doubt cry betrayal, but they would


\(^{17}\) A Tory radical from the free market right of the Party, Lawson was Margaret Thatcher’s Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1983-89.
not need to seek refuge in or establish a political party like UKIP. The
Conservative Party would survive to fight and, presumably, win another day
and retain its appeal to the new forces in British capital without having plunged
the country into a chaotic episode with incalculable consequences. This may
not be Mrs May’s game plan: but it would not be an improbable dénouement of
the Brexit drama.

Scott Newton’s *The Reinvention of Britain 1960-2016: A Political and
Economic History*
has just been published by Routledge.
Hoodwinked by the Department of Health?
Frank Dobson and the 1997 Jimmy Savile report

Garrick Alder

This is a continuation of ‘A Jimmy Savile sex scandal concealed during the 1997 General Election’ in Lobster 73.¹

What happened to the external management review of Broadmoor high-security hospital that Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell had commissioned, once the Conservative Party had left office? The report was sent to his office in April 1997, shortly before the Conservatives lost power at that year’s General Election. The report, including the reference to the 1995 police investigation of Savile’s sex offence, then landed on the figurative desk of the Rt Hon Frank Dobson, MP for the London constituency of Holborn and St Pancras South. Mr Dobson was Tony Blair’s first Secretary of State for Health from May 1997 to October 1999.

Since his retirement at the General Election of 2015, Mr Dobson, now 77, has lost a significant amount of weight. This, he cheerfully volunteers, is the result of re-adjusting to regular mealtimes rather than having to grab quick snacks during a long working day. But he retains his signature ‘Father Christmas’ appearance. Old habits die hard, however: he takes his cappuccino with a chocolate dusting: ‘It's not a real cappuccino without chocolate.’ ²

He is blunt about his time in Cabinet, referring to the Civil Service as ‘the machine’. He found it obstructive, laborious, and occasionally malicious. On one occasion Department of Health staff presented him with a blank ‘With Sympathy’ card tucked inside the usual sheaf of official letters awaiting his signature. When he asked who the card was for, he was hesitantly told it was for ‘someone big in the private healthcare sector.’ He didn’t sign it. ‘It was a trick of course,’ he recalls, ‘a dirty trick – and if I had signed it then it would have come back to damage me somewhere along the line.’ Mr Dobson was very careful about his dealings with ‘the machine’.

¹ <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-jimmy-savile.pdf>

He famously wrote a memo about the NHS to Tony Blair in 1998, telling the Prime Minister: ‘If you want a first-class service, you have to pay a first-class fare – and we’re not doing it.’ What previous accounts have overlooked is that Mr Dobson had this memo typed up in his House of Commons office, away from the prying eyes of ‘the machine’.

‘If the Civil Service don’t like what you are up to, then they will go to their colleagues in Downing Street and scupper you before you have got there. Generally speaking, if I did this then I got in first and got my own way. Because if you already have the Prime Minister’s backing then it’s easier to say “Such-and-such has to be done”.’

Did ‘the machine’ ever hide anything from him? ‘Not that I know of, but then of course I wouldn’t know about it, would I?’

Asked about the handover from Mr Dorrell’s tenure, Mr Dobson recalled that soon after taking office his predecessor paid him a visit: ‘Stephen Dorrell asked could he come and see me. I always got on with Stephen Dorrell and I got him to go through who in the Department of Health were good people to get on with and who weren’t.’

Shown the 1997 Broadmoor report commissioned by Mr Dorrell, which mentioned the presence of a sex offender among Broadmoor’s staff, Mr Dobson said: ‘I don’t remember this and think I would have done, if it had come up.’

Which is odd because in 1999 a report was put to Parliament under Mr Dobson’s name concerning conditions at Ashworth High Security Hospital. It cited the 1997 Broadmoor report at some length – but it didn’t mention the fact that in 1995 Thames Valley Police had investigated a child sex abuse incident on Broadmoor hospital property. Shown the relevant portions of the 1999 Ashworth Report, Mr Dobson’s perplexity increased:

‘I do not recall anything to do with Broadmoor. I have no recall of this incident from 1995. I would have seen this report on Ashworth before it was put to Parliament in 1999. But it’s an independent report and you don’t start interfering with independent experts when they are writing reports.’

The paradox, then, is that a review of Broadmoor, commissioned in February 1997 and subsequently delivered to the Conservative Secretary of State for Health in April 1997, was cited in a second 1999 report to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Health – who today states that he has no recollection of the affair. What happened to the review during the two years between its delivery and its quotation in another document is unknown.

The Savile incident occurred in April 1995. The Health Secretary at that
time was Virginia Bottomley, who was succeeded by Mr Dorrell in July that year. This indicates that two separate Health Secretaries under Prime Minister John Major could have been aware of the scandal. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that the Prime Minister himself would have learned of it. Both Sir John and Baroness Bottomley were contacted in relation to this matter, but no reply was received from either.

Directed to the specifics about Broadmoor in the 1999 Ashworth Report, Mr Dobson said: ‘The only bell this rings is that there were things wrong at Ashworth and we needed someone good.’ The Broadmoor incident ‘doesn't ring a bell. If something was reported to the police then it was reported to the police.’

Asked whether he had discussed the 1997 Broadmoor report with Mr Dorrell during their meetings in 1997, Mr Dobson suggested: ‘Stephen Dorrell might not even have seen it.’ Could such a report really be ignored by the man who commissioned it and then overlooked by the man in whose name it was quoted two years later? Or did ‘the machine’ simply not bring it to their attention?

What is clear, however, is that Savile’s gradual easing out from Broadmoor began after Labour took office in May 1997. By July that year, Savile’s friend and colleague Alan Franey had been nudged into taking early retirement from his post as General Manager. By 1998, the new chief executive, Dr Julie Hollyman, had concluded that Savile’s involvement wasn’t benefiting Broadmoor. 3 She believed that ‘the hospital was doing something for him and that that wasn’t right’ and she drastically restricted Savile’s access to accommodation. After 1998 Savile ‘would have needed to obtain a non-dedicated set of keys by presenting his identity card to reception staff, or else entered the hospital as a visitor without access to security keys.’ 4 By 2003 the Kirkup review established, Savile had stopped visiting Broadmoor altogether, although it wasn’t until 2009 that he was de-registered as a keyholder.

Nor was Savile’s criminality the only Broadmoor dirt swept under the rug at the Department of Health. The 1999 report (on conditions at Ashworth) 5 refers to the 1997 review commissioned by Mr Dorrell as follows:

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3 <https://tinyurl.com/y88hmjvu> or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jimmy-savile-investigation-broadmoor-hospital> (see s.7.53)

4 <https://tinyurl.com/y88hmjvu> or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jimmy-savile-investigation-broadmoor-hospital> (see s.6.17)

5 <https://tinyurl.com/y7p6lse2> or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ashworth-special-hospital-report-of-the-committee-of-inquiry> (s.1.20.0 et seq)
‘There were allegations [in the media] of drugs finds and a possible child pornography ring [at Broadmoor]. Mr Dorrell ordered an External Management Review of the Hospital to investigate the truth or otherwise of the allegations [. . . ] The Review team demonstrated that most of the allegations made so vociferously in the media were unfounded.’ (emphasis added)

The allegations of a possible child pornography ring are intriguing in view of the recollections of former Broadmoor nurse Bob Allen. As reported in Lobster 73, in 1995 Mr Allen alerted management to the incident where Savile brought a child onto hospital premises overnight. Mr Allen has not seen the 1997 review commissioned by Mr Dorrell, so was not aware that the review team was tasked to look into claims of child pornography.

What Mr Allen recalls is that there was indeed someone at Broadmoor who was producing child pornography, although Mr Allen did not know whether that person was doing it for his own private use or for circulation among other paedophiles. According to Mr Allen, the child abuser was a member of staff who acted as a babysitter for the children of colleagues but secretly took indecent photographs of his charges. All this occurred on hospital premises, since the person in question had staff accommodation even though the staff bungalows were outside Broadmoor’s perimeter fence. (The child abuser’s name is withheld here for legal reasons.) Mr Allen recalled: ‘I can’t remember how it came to light, but it turned out that this guy had a box full of obscene photographs of his colleagues’ children. It was in his attic.’

Mr Allen is quite definite that the staff member was arrested, charged and convicted: ‘He served time for it.’ This is a second serious matter involving child abuse at Broadmoor secure hospital that has not been reported or brought to light during reviews since Savile’s death. It is precisely the sort of issue that should have been covered by the external review team in 1997, then scrutinised afresh by the Kirkup review that took place after Savile’s death. The apparent explanation is that the child pornography scandal was concealed from the management review team in 1997 and so the Kirkup review was unaware of it in 2014.

One incident relating to awareness of paedophile activity at Broadmoor is particularly interesting. Bob Allen recalled a visit to the hospital made by the late Diana, Princess of Wales. Mr Allen said that the Princess was introduced to one Broadmoor patient who asked for her autograph. Diana told the patient that she didn’t normally give autographs during such visits but would make an

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6 <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-jimmy-savile.pdf>

7 Telephone interview with the author.
exception in his case. The patient got her autograph, and shortly afterwards Diana turned to Mr Allen and said: ‘That guy is a paedophile, isn’t he?’ Mr Allen told her that, indeed, the patient had a horrendous history of abusing children for sexual purposes.8

The patient – whose identity Mr Allen naturally would not divulge – later stuck in Mr Allen’s memory for a second reason. On his release from Broadmoor, he emigrated to the USA and according to Mr Allen ‘is still there today, I believe.’ Mr Allen finds it suspicious that a former high-security psychiatric patient – with a string of convictions for child sex abuse – managed to gain permission to reside in the States, whose immigration processes are famously draconian.

All of this was unknown to Frank Dobson during his time as Secretary of State for Health, and it must be stressed that there is no suggestion Mr Dobson participated in a cover up of any child sex abuse scandal.

As for Savile himself, Mr Dobson recalled: ‘I have to say he always made my flesh creep. But I never met him. I don’t think he was still at Broadmoor when I was Health Secretary, was he?’ Informed that, yes, Savile was still part of the management team at Broadmoor during the first Blair government, Mr Dobson said: ‘You have heard what I have to say, and that’s that.’

8 Was Diana primed by Savile to sign an autograph for this patient? If so, had she correctly divined the reason for Savile’s interest in him? Savile had been a factor in her life for many years. He is referred to by name as a sort of ‘marriage counsellor’ in Diana’s illicitly-recorded ‘Squidgygate’ conversation of 1989 – so before the Royal divorce – and remained on the periphery of affairs thereafter. Diana’s long-term aide Commander Patrick Jephson recorded in his memoirs that Savile was among independent observers whose advice the Princess sought out and that such observers did ‘nothing but good as far as I could see’. (Shadows of a Princess [HarperCollins, 2000] p. 422)

Commander Jephson’s memoir also records (p. 510) a visit to Broadmoor in December 1993, during which the Princess met with patients and sat in on a private meeting of the Patients’ Council, which received her warmly. Indeed, the 2014 Kirkup review stated:

‘HRH (sic) Diana, Princess of Wales visited the hospital on several occasions. Although some staff believed that Savile was in some way behind these visits, there is little evidence to suggest this, though it would be typical of Savile to claim a link. Two were official visits, and several were less-formal visits, arranged at shorter notice, when the Princess would spend time talking to patients, sometimes in private conversations, but always with appropriate security in place.’ (sec 8.17)

Why would Diana would have maintained an acquaintance with someone she apparently believed to have been a paedophile? The answer may be that Savile remained on good terms with the Prince of Wales and therefore served as a conduit along which useful information might arrive. A strategic relationship, in other words, of the kind the Princess is known to have cultivated frequently during her manoeuvres against the Royal Family.
Trustworthy, loyal, obedient, clean and reverent...

*The Hotel Tacloban* by Douglas Valentine

Dr T. P. Wilkinson

'I'll never forget that day—it was the day of his mother’s funeral. I'd heard the news of Kennedy’s death on the TV and I’d gone into the living room, where the adults were consoling one another, to let everyone know. I was fourteen at the time and the first person I told was my grandfather, who didn’t hear a word I said, and who, when I repeated myself, pulled away from me and said, "I don’t care." Next I told my father the awful news, “Dad” I said excitedly, “The President’s been shot and they got the guy who did it.” More kindly than bitterly, he replied, “The guy they got didn’t do it, Doug. You can count on that.”'

Unlike others of that generation, Douglas Valentine did not become obsessed with the question ‘Who shot Kennedy?’ At the age of 14, he could not imagine why his father had reacted in that way to news of the Dallas assassination. Yet he went on to publish his first book 24 years later in which he discovered the roots of his father’s reaction that day.

*The Hotel Tacloban* recounts the story of a 16 year-old high school dropout who, like many of his generation, lied about his age to get into the Army and go fight the ‘Good War’, for flag and country, as an Eagle Scout should. In the event, he spent about one month in combat and the following three years in a Japanese POW camp.

Joining the Army was not only patriotic, it was an escape from home. He was shipped to the Pacific, where his unit was assigned, and to a campaign with Australians that officially never took place. Generalissimo and Viceroy of the Philippines Douglas MacArthur had agreed to deploy secretly to New Guinea a contingent of US Forces to assist the Australians in obstructing the Empire of Japan from staging an invasion of Australia from New Guinea’s

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southern coast. There the unit to which Douglas Valentine Sr. was assigned was sent and there MacArthur forgot about them.

Douglas Valentine became a writer by first recovering everything his father had been officially commanded to forget some 40 years previously. The literary transcription covers events that ‘did not happen’. The mission on which his father was sent ended in a patrol during which everyone in his squad but him was killed. As officially there were no American troops in New Guinea at the time, there could also be no US POWs. He was the only US soldier in a camp otherwise holding only Australian and British prisoners – and at age 16 he was more than somewhat out of place.

As an Eagle Scout, Douglas Sr. had reached the pinnacle of the paramilitary organisation Baden-Powell launched in support of British imperialism during the Boer War. He lied about his age to do his patriotic duty. Does the lie or the duty or the patriotism come first in the Boy Scout law?\(^3\)

After three years of imprisonment, this Eagle Scout came back to the US physically broken and denied every recognition, benefits or assistance due to veterans of US wars. What is worse he had to give his consent to this denial, obstructing later recourse. Naturally the actions of MacArthur, Patton and Eisenhower toward the WWI veterans of the ‘Bonus Army’ could have shown what the ordinary private soldier has to expect when in need after having served his country. However, the machine for selling the military and war has always been rather successful at masking the real divisions between those who command and those who die. Even today it is the supposed military virtue attributed to these generals, their supposed loyalty and concern for their troops, their supposed (imagined) bravery at the head of enormous bureaucratic organisations, which is allowed to overshadow their actual conduct as officers in the military class and caste system.

The history of the prisoner-of-war camp known as Hotel Tacloban, because of its proximity to the eponymous provincial capital of the Philippine island of Leyte, might never have been told. Douglas Jr. and Douglas Sr. were not on the best of terms – quite apart from the generational conflict and the political turmoil caused by the war against Vietnam. The author’s father was not among those proud veterans with stories or anecdotes (real or fabricated) from their days in ‘the War’. He belonged to none of the typical veterans organisations, viewing them more with contempt than respect. Had Douglas Sr.’s GP not prescribed telling his story as a way to relieve his illnesses – after multiple heart attacks, open heart surgery and decades suffering from malaria

\(^3\) The Boy Scout Law: ‘A Scout is: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.’ There have been different formulations since the first one promulgated in Scouting for Boys (1908). This is the version I learned.
(which officially he never had) – he may never have lived to tell it. Father and son had to create a basis of communication virtually from scratch. This is probably why the book is so successful in presenting the story accurately and why it is free from the sentimentality that makes treacle out of most memoirs. Although unsentimental, The Hotel Tacloban is saturated with unstated but real empathy for the person whose story is recorded. This empathy was so powerful that former CIA director William Colby, who had read the book, hoped Valentine Jr. would bring that empathy to his book about the soldiers in Phoenix, and granted him the key interview that led to his landmark study The Phoenix Program.4

The Hotel Tacloban is a short book, 173 pages comprising nineteen chapters. In the beginning the background to the deployment that brought the 16 year-old to New Guinea is told. Intermittently the exploits of the big Douglas, the great self-promoting, warrior chieftain and third generation mass murderer in the commission of the United States, Douglas MacArthur, are summarised for context.5 This serves to remind the reader of the difference between the war story for public consumption and the war stories that are suppressed because they neither flatter the mass murdering class nor make good advertising for cannon fodder. At the same time it is important to see that Douglas Valentine Sr.’s suffering is a direct result of the uncontrollable egotism, class and caste arrogance, and blood lust of the Big Mac, who was fond of posing as a soldier’s soldier but in fact considered any and all servicemen who did not immediately benefit his career to be worthless. Douglas MacArthur was probably the most theatrical of the mass murdering class in his day and so it might be unfair to make him a bigger, easier target than he already was. Eisenhower liked to keep a low profile, letting generals like Patton ‘play Macbeth’. From a stylistic point of view it is highly appropriate to focus on MacArthur also because of the coincidence of their first names.

4 William Colby (1920-1996) Director of Central Intelligence, i.e. head of the CIA (1973-1976) Prior to that he had served as chief of the Far East Division and Chief of Station in Vietnam, with particular responsibility for the creation of what became known as the Phoenix Program.

5 Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964), just to avoid any confusion. MacArthur had served under his father Arthur MacArthur while the latter was Military Governor of the Philippines, a colony in the US Empire until 1948, when it became a puppet state under US suzerainty. Prior to the outbreak of World War II Douglas held a commission from the nominally independent Commonwealth of the Philippines by which he had de facto command of Philippine colonial forces. The West Point graduate from Arkansas came from a long line of professional mass murderers. He would become the virtual military governor of the US dominated Pacific from 1945 until he was relieved of duty by Harry Truman in April 1951. MacArthur’s career was one of ruthless self-promotion both in battle and in the political sphere. He is probably the epitome of the military officer caste as it developed in the US.
The story is an investigation in the depravity of war, not only for those upon whom it is waged but also for those who are just there to obey, kill and die. It is also something like what the Germans call a *Bildungsroman*, a novel in which the protagonist is educated and developed into the character central to the narrative. At the same time this book has the brilliance of Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*. Douglas Valentine Sr. is not executed like Melville’s hero but the story is full of the contradictions of class and caste in the military (the only place in American society where both class and caste are even acknowledged). Beginning with Valentine’s landing in New Guinea and the patrol in which all but him are brutally killed, the story includes details that suggest explanations for events but remain riddles unsolved. For instance, before going out on patrol the lieutenant leading the squad orders Valentine to remove a military patch displaying crossed swords (perhaps a cavalry badge) from his uniform. Grudgingly he assents but apparently forgets to actually do it. When the squad is ambushed, every soldier is brutally bayonetted until the Japanese come to him. The Japanese officer commanding appears to recognise the crossed sword patch and his life is spared. Yet the story offers no explanation for this anywhere, leaving the attentive reader to wonder what the significance of this trivial detail has, if any.

To arrive at the prison camp, the young Douglas Sr. has to be transferred by ship from New Guinea to Leyte and is blindfolded the entire route. Here again we notice that a fact becomes a narrative device because the capture and transfer were alienating but the reader has to understand how alienation occurs in the person who experiences it. This use of detail to construct preponderance in a situation has become a characteristic of Douglas Valentine Jr.’s work. Although there is nothing sinister in the transfer itself, the stages of entering the hell that Douglas Sr. would inhabit for three years are just as important because the violence of war is not accidental activity. It is planned and depends on a myriad of ordinary operations, which if viewed in isolation conceal the concept of mass murder to which these acts also belong.

Douglas Sr. arrives in a camp, originally constructed by the US colonial regime to detain Filipinos and hence woefully ‘undersized’ for white folks, the Australian and British inmates. Because he is a private and still a youth, and because he is the only American, he is taken under the wing of the Australian

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6 Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, an apparently unfinished last prose work by Melville (1819-1891). Published posthumously in 1924.

7 In *The Phoenix Program*, Valentine applies this attention to detail masterfully by presenting the organisation of operations and their components – to reveal structure in which facts first acquire any useful meaning. Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program*, reviewed in *Lobster* 68 by this author.
majority in the camp. Thus we learn about the way Australians behave and the lack of filial love between HM Australian Forces and the British Army. Douglas Sr. begins to learn about social organisation in this sweltering and infested, disease-ridden patch of earth. The British are the best organised and therefore dominate the camp despite their inferior numbers. However this organisation is based on rigid class distinctions and the capacity to demand not only military discipline but also fealty and subservience according to rank and station. If there is a hell and it is organised, then it will be commanded by a regular British Army officer of at least field grade (major or above). This plot of hell is commanded by the graduate of HM Royal Military College Sandhurst, Major R L Cumyns.\(^8\)

As Valentine Sr. related it:

‘I suppose it’s a cultural foible with the English (certainly any nation that nurtures and glorifies a royal family, at huge public expense, necessarily develops an unnatural devotion to figures of authority), but it was embarrassing to watch the Brits grovel at the Major’s feet. For their part the Aussies looked down upon the Brits with disgust and wondered how any self-respecting man, especially a soldier, could allow himself to accept such a demeaning, subservient role. No Aussie in his right mind would ever play the toy soldier, or yield to someone regardless of his merits. Aussies rendered their loyalty to individuals of proven worth, not to abstractions like office or rank.’

Of course what also separated the British from the Australians (and Valentine) was the fact that most of the British were professional soldiers – the Army was their business. The Australians were serving because Japan – at least New Guinea – was on their doorstep. When the war was over the Australians would return to civilian life. The sergeant major, those company grade officers and NCOs had to play by the rules – the rules of the mass murdering elite who control the professional armed forces. They could not afford Australian libertarianism – even if it had occurred to them.

Valentine Sr. also learned a subtle lesson, one which is not openly taught, but essential for survival. All militaries are organised hierarchically and the most salient distinction is between officers and men. Major Cumyns was

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\(^8\) Sandhurst is the British Army’s officer training college: RMA Sandhurst. It is the United Kingdom’s equivalent of USMA West Point. The main differences are that Sandhurst is not a degree-granting university like West Point and of course the graduates of Sandhurst take the Queen’s commission, defending the monarchy and not just the nation. In day-to-day operations this does not affect the lethality or banality of the officers each institution produces. However, in the United States the ultimate subordination is to the bureaucratic chain of command. In Britain this is personified in the quasi-feudal subordination to the British sovereign and its extensive system of rank and honours.
first and foremost an officer and then he was British – at least as far as ordinary soldiers were concerned. This may be extreme in the British Army but it is common to virtually all war machines. Valentine was to learn at high cost to himself what it meant to violate the rules of this hierarchy – of class in an absolute system like the Army.

At this point it is important to note that although war is essentially a lawless condition – organised murder and destruction, in which the criminals who run the State authorise those they rule to commit virtually unlimited violence against chosen targets with whatever state of the art weaponry prevails – there has been a tradition in most societies that regulates even the limits of this authorised murder. (If only to keep the organised hordes from turning on their leaders or interfering with the State’s objectives by mere wanton violence.) This lawlessness is governed by what are generally called the ‘laws of war’. In ancient times, i.e. before industrial mass slaughter (middle of the nineteenth century), these mainly unwritten rules were based on the sentimentality of chivalry. Knights were supposed to be subject to codes of conduct including respect for the unarmed or those who surrender in battle. However with the abeyance of ‘knightly combat’ new instruments were developed. In fact the chivalric codes for war only applied to combatants of equal rank and station and never extended protection to foot soldiers of the rank and file.

The unpleasantness of the British war in the Crimea led to the establishment of the Red Cross, which, among other things, was supposed to ameliorate the conditions of soldiers sick or wounded and later those captured in combat. This was initially only a national solution intended to dampen public disgust at the British Army’s mismanagement of the war. Eventually this model was extended to cover most countries for whom professional trans-border murder and mayhem were standard. (Of course little aid was afforded those in the colonies or wherever non-whites were resisting conquest by force of arms.) The exceptional slaughter among white folks in the years 1914–1917 served to reinforce arguments for rules to govern the conduct of mass murder by uniformed servants of the State. Today we still have The Hague and Geneva

9 Crimean War (October 1853 – February 1856) fought by Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire against the Russian Empire in the Crimea, a peninsula in the Black Sea. Russia was defeated but at enormous cost of life to the belligerents. Much of this was due to conditions on the battlefield and less to actual combat deaths. Florence Nightingale became famous in Britain for her contributions to organised nursing of wounded and sick soldiers. In 1863, the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded in Switzerland.
Conventions governing the conduct of war and the treatment of prisoners of war.

Part of this law was pragmatic. Neither belligerent had an interest in the wholesale slaughter of captives. If recalcitrant union members were to be massacred by machine guns and mortars at the Somme, the terrified survivors should be kept alive to return to work in the mines in a more disciplined manner when hostilities ceased. Just as important, however, was the need of the State to maintain morale and recruitment quotas for mass armies. If it were clear that death was the only result of mobilisation even the most patriotic peasant would sooner or later say ‘No’. At the same time, strict obedience is necessary to get thousands to run, crawl or walk to their deaths. Were war to mean utter lawlessness, soldiers could abandon their duty upon capture or surrender so it was necessary to assure that capture and non-combatant status did not eliminate class control.

As a result the laws of war codified the practices of class (and race) distinctions too. In a POW camp it is generally prohibited to assign officers to manual labour. Within the scope of the camp’s resources, officers are to be accorded the courtesies and privileges due to their rank even in captivity. US soldiers remain subject to military law (UCMJ, the Uniform Code of Military Justice) while in captivity.\(^{11}\) De facto they also remain subject to every kind of brutality and chicanery that the military hierarchy has ever invented for the subordination of the ordinary soldier. One could argue even more so than in combat. The officer in prison is no longer able to simply order his subordinates into battle from which he can expect they will not return – a common practice during the so-called Great War. He is leader in a defeated unit. The imputed bravery which is the officer’s ritual claim to authority not only cannot be exercised, it can be seriously questioned as having been inadequate to prevent captivity in the first place. For these reasons it is all the more urgent that POW officers maintain those class and caste distinctions of rank since they have been deprived of any other sort of legitimation; and by their own subordination to the enemy also their freedom to arbitrarily dispose of unpleasant members of the lower ranks.

\(^{10}\) The Hague Conventions (1899) and (1907) Laws and Customs of War on Land; the four Geneva Conventions: First ‘for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick in the armed forces in the field’ (1864, 1906, 1929, 1949); Second (1949) ‘for the Armed Forces at Sea’; Third (1929, 1949) ‘relative to the treatment of prisoners of war’; Fourth (1949) relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (based on 1800 and 1907 Hague Conventions updated).

\(^{11}\) During WWII, the Articles of War would have applied. On 5 May 1950, Harry S. Truman signed 64 Stat. 109 which codified US military and naval law for the entirety of the US Armed Forces as the UCMJ.
Neither the victorious nor the vanquished among the officer class (and the larger class of mass murderers to whom they belong) can afford to risk breach of discipline – especially since, unlike in peacetime, the rank and file have already been issued a license to kill.

Hence Major Cumyns was afforded all the privileges of his class, rank and station, even in the hell of Hotel Tacloban. The Japanese captain commanding knew as well as Major Cumyns that officers belong to the ruling class and are to be treated accordingly. Major Cumyns also knew that the proper conduct of an officer is always to kiss ass upward and to kick ass downward. Hence in the management of the camp both Major Cumyns and Captain Yoshishito behaved essentially as if they were in the same army while only the ordinary soldiers were prisoners – to be treated accordingly.

Although *The Hotel Tacloban* is not written as an allegory or even a history of British intra-imperial relations, it is easy to surmise that the antagonism between the British, with Cumyns at the apex, and the Australians, led by Lieutenant Duffy, has its own history pre-dating the camp. Ordinary Australian military history records the anger of many soldiers who fought in the First World War and died gratuitously under British command.\(^{12}\) The ethnic composition of Australia – leaving aside other immigration – included not just those stigmatised by penal servitude and transportation for ‘crimes’ but also the components of the British population which the English upper classes (and before them their Norman forebears) had been taught to despise – especially Scots and Irish. Douglas Sr. was dumped into this pot of dysentery-inducing gruel for three years.

And when it all seemed over, when the US Army collected him from the camp after Leyte had been returned to MacArthur’s control, the next round began. His very existence became an indictment, but of a crime he could not imagine. Here *The Hotel Tacloban* may remind the reader of *Caleb Williams*.\(^{13}\) The eponymous hero of William Godwin’s novel is accused of a crime by the principal landowner on whose estate he works. Not only is the charge unfounded but also the machinery by which he is to be tried and judged is so blatantly corrupt that he cannot be acquitted. Having been decreed a criminal,

\(^{12}\) The Australian and New Zealand Establishment commemorate annually the slaughter of their soldiers in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli (February 1915 – January 1916) as ANZAC Day. Some 30,000 Australians were killed or wounded in this campaign, one of the more notorious catastrophes of the long class war. The unrepentant patriots and royalists treat this as a kind of bloodbath for national identity. Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister while Douglas Sr. was wasting away on Leyte, was largely responsible for the political decision to attack Turkey on these insurmountable slopes. Churchill’s last active military rank before leaving the British Army was also that of major.

\(^{13}\) William Godwin, *Things as They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 1794.
his subsequent life becomes one endless flight from treachery to treachery, to
the point where the reader is forced to ask is there not one person, one
instance capable of acknowledging the blatant injustice and that the
perpetrator both of the supposed crime but of all the consequences is none
other than the master of the estate from which Williams was forced to flee.
Nowhere in the great hierarchy is there a hope of appeal. Godwin argued that
there can be no appeal since the hierarchy cannot condemn itself.

One reason this story is so remarkable is that Douglas Sr. was on the
verge of taking the secrets with him to the grave. He had been spared a
kangaroo court by the Army high command on the condition that he never tell
the story to anyone and also consent to having his entire service record
'sheep-dipped'. This seems strange given that he was a POW in an enemy
camp for whom mere survival had been the only accomplishment of his three-
years in the Pacific Theatre on behalf of the USA. This had been an official war
against a declared enemy – just like the US Constitution prescribed, unlike
every US war since then. In the 'Good War, where so much nostalgia and
patriotic humbug prevails to this day, and where every US veteran is supposed
to have been a hero in the face of the yellow savagery of the Japanese imperial
forces, the brutally inhumane treatment of a 16 year-old for three years should
have been one more glorious sacrifice for freedom and democracy about which
every patriotic American should know. Why was Douglas Valentine Sr. not to be
immortalised like the POWs of Bataan?

Another remarkable quality of *The Hotel Tacloban* is that it goes beyond
mere transcription. After years of abysmal health, Douglas Sr. had to recount
events which, by his own standards, filled him with shame. The story he told
his son could not be uplifting or evidence that indeed the father's conservative
ideals had triumphed or were in any way worthy of emulation. Of course some
of the feelings burdening the principal in the story cannot be attributed to
ideology or personal opinion but must be seen in the overall trauma of war.
Where soldiers are taught to obey, kill or die, the failure to die while comrades
are killed, or the inability to kill when ordered to do so, or even to kill when
there have been no orders but necessity, is worse than original sin. One can
cease to believe in God, but the military remains and with it all the capacity to
punish those who violate its codes of conduct. The book that resulted is a small
effort to transcend that closed immoral world and the control it exercises over
the souls of those who have spent any serious amount of time in it. It is not a
story of familial or generational reconciliation but a partial purging of the
military parasite that, like the malaria parasite, had destroyed the youth and
most of the adult life of Douglas Valentine Sr.
The Hotel Tacloban is remarkable in one last sense, too. The author was able to grasp in his conversations with his father the scepticism toward any official description or explanation or report of the ‘facts’ while retaining the respect needed to let those speaking tell their story. That has been the overwhelming strength of all his later work. It studiously avoids all tendentiousness whether in form or argument. ‘Facts’ do not speak for themselves, but people do. What is needed is careful attention to detail, organisation and presentation. This makes it possible to discern fact and fiction, insight and deceit. Ultimately the listeners and therefore the reader have the ultimate responsibility for making sense out of history. An honest and comprehensive presentation with an intelligent structure is what makes The Hotel Tacloban and all Douglas Valentine’s subsequent work good history.

Dr. T. P. Wilkinson blogs at
https://www.blackagendareport.com/blog/1871
`A frenzy of reasonableness`

*Adults in the Room*

*My battle with Europe’s deep establishment*

Yanis Varoufakis

London: the Bodley Head, £20, h/b

The title of this essay is a quote from the author. This is what he told the EU officials he was bringing to the negotiations with them about the debts of the Greek state. And it did him no good at all.

Put briefly, the Greek state (it’s public life, politics, civil service) was corrupt, with tax evasion common, especially among the rich. The public sector was feather-bedded and the state’s pension system was unaffordable. Rather than confront any of this, successive governments simply borrowed and then borrowed more. Despite being virtually bankrupt, Greece had been allowed to join the European Single Currency in 2001 after faking its public debt figures (with the help of Goldman Sachs) to meet the entry criteria. Essentially a poor, under-developed country, Greece joined the Euro zone at too high rate for its economy, which made its exports uncompetitive. By the time Varoufakis got involved, unable to devalue its currency, Greece had been forced into what is euphemistically called ‘internal devaluation’ – wage, pension and welfare cuts. Such cuts, in turn, reduced demand in the economy and so began the downward spiral, which has now been operating for 7 years without any sign of the theoretical spontaneous upturn which such ‘internal devaluation’ is supposed to bring.

The global financial crisis of 2008/9 pushed the Greek economy off the cliff and into six years of crisis, borrowing new money to pay the interest on old loans, and the immiseration of much of the Greek population. This led to a coalition of the left, Syriza, taking office in 2015. Top of the list of things they had to do was reduce Greece’s debt payments which were crippling the Greek government. The author, an economist, was teaching at an American university when his friend, Alexis Tsipras, the Syriza prime minister, asked him to come back and negotiate with the EU. A smart guy, who understood international debt and debt financing, Varoufakis returned, was elected to parliament and became finance minister.

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2 Known to economists of a Keynesian bent as the reverse multiplier.
With more debts than can be repaid there are three possibilities. One is simply to default on them. This was rejected by Syriza. The second is to reduce them, offer to pay part, a ‘haircut’. This was rejected by the banks and the EU governments to whom the money was owed. Which left the third option: converting the existing debt into longer term debt with lower interest payments. This book is a detailed account, meeting by meeting, memo by memo, four hundred hundred pages worth, of the author’s attempt to persuade the EU to do this.

Varoufakis’ problem going into the negotiations was that Greece only had one card to play – the threat of leaving the single currency, a.k.a. Grexit. There were a host of domestic difficulties. Personal and political conflict within the government: Syriza was an unstable coalition of left groups, some of whom wanted Grexit or refusal to pay the debt. During the negotiations members of the Greek state acted as spies for the EU; and the EU constantly briefed against Varoufakis personally and against Syriza collectively, and went round Varoufakis to other cabinet members to undermine him. While the economics ministers of some EU states agreed with the Varoufakis plan in private, none had the courage to challenge the EU officials in public and became nodding dogs at the endless meetings. Lastly – and this had the biggest impact – the EU simply dragged out the negotiations for month after month until the various internal pressures and conflicts forced Prime Minister Tsipras to give up on Varoufakis and go along with the EU’s demands that its officials run the Greek economy. When it came to it Tsipras was unwilling to play his only card, the Grexit threat.

As he quits the job Varoufakis learns that the EU has forced the Greek government to abandon its plans to make tax-evaders pay up. On this account the EU is simply a front for the rich and the bankers, no matter how reckless their lending was.

How bad was the EU? I noticed this headline recently: ‘IMF takes “unusual” steps for Greece’. The story began: ‘The IMF has again departed from its usual procedures to support Athens, exposing itself to accusations of giving the country special treatment’. This is how bad the EU was: Varoufakis’ only ally in the plan to reorganise the Greek debt burden was the IMF, whose then head, Christine Lagarde, used the expression ‘adults in the room’ (the book’s title) in a meeting with Varoufakis. But even the IMF was unable to persuade the EU’s core economic officials – fundamentally fronting for German

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3 Some which the author recorded on his mobile phone, as he acknowledges in his introduction.

and French banks which had made stupid loans to an already bankrupt Greece – to change the policies which are destroying it.

If you look at the Wikipedia entry for Syriza, under ‘Government formation’ you will see this doom-laden but hilarious subhead:

‘See also Tenth austerity package (Greece), Eleventh austerity package (Greece), Twelfth austerity package (Greece), Thirteenth austerity package (Greece)’.

Thirteen austerity packages, applying the same failed policies! But Varoufakis is generous. He believes no-one wanted this outcome: they just couldn’t find a way to avoid it. He writes in his introduction:

‘There are no “goodies” or “baddies” in this book. Instead it is populated by people doing their best, as they understand it, under conditions not of they chosing.’ (p. 2)

He offers the current Greek tragedy as... Greek tragedy. This is not supported by the evidence he presents. His book is populated by politicians agreeing to policies they didn’t understand and EU officials imposing policies they knew would fail but from which they were afraid to dissent for fear of damage to their careers.

Robin Ramsay
Britain’s military record over the past two centuries is pretty patchy overall. She has probably lost more wars than she has won, apart from little ones against poorly armed ‘natives’ (and she lost quite a few of those), and prevailed in none of the major ones without the help of more powerful allies. She would certainly have been defeated by Germany in 1939-45, for example, had it not been for the vastly superior force – and sacrifice – of the Soviets, and material and military help from the USA. That is partly because she was never a particularly militaristic nation, always rather looking down on those that were. The brightest Britons rarely joined the armed forces, at any level. (Which is not, of course, to detract from the effectiveness of some of them and the bravery of many.) Militarism offended against most of the values her people professed to hold dear, such as individual liberty and enterprise. Which made it difficult when that individual liberty had to be defended by military means, because there was no alternative. And it may also be why it is more comforting to believe, as my immediately post-war British generation did, that ‘we’ had won the war not through brute force and blind discipline – those ‘Prussian’ characteristics – but by outwitting the militarists; turning our native individualism – even our much mocked eccentricities – against them. It was like David with his clever sling.

The story of Bletchley Park, when it eventually emerged, was part of that. Max Hastings points out in this new book that Britain is the only country to have proudly sponsored an official history of her wartime secret services; and now there’s a splendid new museum on the actual site to commemorate this branch of it. (If, that is, you can bear the bit of it that is made up, quite falsely, to replicate the bar in The Imitation Game. Hastings thinks that film is ‘absurd, as defined by its relationship to fact’.) Bletchley, of course, was where all those ‘sallow, tweedy, pipe-smoking’ young intellectuals – Alan Turing et al: the ‘et al’ is important – broke the crucial German ‘Enigma’ code, and along the way invented (or re-invented) the computer. The claim is often made that they shortened the war by up to two years. Hastings is sceptical of this, though he corroborates the general view of their brilliance.

This stands out particularly by contrast with the stupidity of Britain’s main overseas espionage organisation at that time, MI6 (SIS), staffed by ‘men of moderate abilities, drawn into the organization by the lure of playing out a pastiche of Kipling’s “Great Game”, and often after earlier careers as colonial policemen.’ This was natural. ‘You wouldn’t want to suppose, would you’, Harry Hinsley – once of Bletchley and later Master of St John’s College, Cambridge – asked Hastings, ‘that in peacetime the best brains of our society wasted their
lives in intelligence?’ Hugh Trevor-Roper, another brainy historian seconded to intelligence work in the war, memorably compared the old lags in MI6 to a ‘colony of coots in an unventilated backwater of bureaucracy . . . A bunch of dependent bumsuckers held together by neglect, like a cluster of bats in an unswept barn . . . the high priests of an effete religion mumbling their meaningless rituals’; who, obsessed as they were by the ‘Red’ menace in the interwar years, almost totally failed to spot – to put it at its kindest – the threat of Nazism. (Some may not have seen it as a threat.) They were leavened with a few more gifted amateurs during the war, but rarely got along with them. Hastings has few kind words to say for MI6. Unfortunately they were allowed to carry on largely unreformed after the war, partly, Hastings implies, because they were allowed to take the credit for Bletchley’s achievements, in order to keep the very existence of the latter an ‘official secret’ for years to come.

But then, according to this account, which is the first to make extensive comparisons between British and foreign wartime intelligence agencies, most of the latter were scarcely any better. Germany’s Abwehr was ‘incomparably worse’ than any of its rivals, and its chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, not even a competent or consistent traitor, the role for which he is best known. One of Germany’s problems in this field, one it shared with the Soviet Union and Japan, was that her Führer only wanted to hear intelligence that suited his prejudices. Japan and the Soviet Union also suffered from this and it blunted the effects of Stalin’s incomparably better ‘humint’ (human agents) and informer networks – better because of the ideological appeal of communism in the West – together with his paranoid suspicion that Britain was only using the War to turn on the USSR after it was won.

Japanese intelligence was similarly weak, except in China where Japan had been fighting for years; possibly, Hastings suggests, because of the Japanese ‘ingrained sense of cultural superiority’ which led them to underestimate their enemies. The USA secret service learned quickly, after a sluggish beginning, especially its signals interception, but was not as good as it boasted (the FBI claimed to have invented and run the ‘double-cross’ system, which I always understood was a British achievement – insofar as it didn’t go back to Biblical times), and was thought to be porous, because of the openness of American society. It is partly for this reason that MI5, MI6, SOE, the FBI and OSS – the US’s new, swashbuckling foreign intelligence agency – found it difficult to co-operate. Two other reasons were American (especially J Edgar Hoover’s) fierce Anglophobia, which, to be fair, was reciprocated: the (ubiquitous) Trevor-Roper once described his American co-workers as ‘callow, touchy, boastful, flatulent invaders’; and jealousies, animosities and ‘turf wars’ that existed between agencies of the same nation.

In view of all this it may seem surprising that any of the belligerents’ secret intelligence proved of any value at all. Their problems were exacerbated by the difficulties that are intrinsic to humint in particular, which is why Britain
quite rightly trusted more to sigint (signals intelligence) once Enigma was cracked. 'In every neutral capital, intelligence officers puzzled over the perennial enigma of their trade: which side was this or that source really serving?' Hastings suggests that more was learned through ordinary diplomatic contacts in neutral countries: 'probably a good deal of information goes west', wrote MI5’s Guy Liddell, 'over the second glass of port'. Espionage attracts liars, obviously, and also some very 'weird’ people, which can be confusing. The English are not the only people who produce eccentrics, and Hastings’s narrative features dozens; best among them probably the British double – or triple – agent Ronald Seth, aptly codenamed 'Blunderhead', who gets a chapter to himself. Apart from a liar and a fantasist he was – or portrayed himself as – a serial philanderer, justifying this to his SOE handler on the grounds that ‘for me “practical love” is a PHYSICAL NECESSITY’. On surviving the war, surprisingly, he went on to become a prolific author of spy and travel books, and – under a pseudonym – of Sex Manners for Advanced Lovers (1969), The Sensuous Couple (1971) and Mainly for Wives (1963). It is characters like this who make the spy genre fun; even Hastings, however, admits that Seth’s ‘doings did not influence the struggle in the smallest degree’, apart from absorbing ‘countless man-hours among the senior officers’ of both the British and German secret services. But his case does illustrate the virtual impossibility of placing any reliance on spies and informants. Probably half of them were incompetent, or easily captured and shot; or had been ‘turned’ by the other side in order to deceive their supposed masters; or invented or exaggerated – ‘sexed up’ – their exploits for kudos or profit (who was to know?); or – in many more cases than it’s comfortable to read about – gave in to torture and spilled all. At least Ultra (the machine that cracked Enigma) didn’t do that.

Ultra was the undoubted intelligence success story of these years, especially when it came to spotting U-boats threatening Allied convoys; although Hastings also dutifully records its failures, gives credit to its American equivalent, and points out that Germany’s Kriegsmarine’s B-Dienst wasn’t all that far behind. On the British side they were also good at strategic deception – those clever young men again (and a very few women); and at encouraging resistance in occupied countries – at least once it looked like Germany would lose. The Soviet Union was good at infiltration – apparently she still had 97 active agents in Germany in 1944, more than anyone else – and Germany, followed by the Soviets, was tops when it came to spying on their own citizens, as one would expect. Hastings gives us the details. They make a fascinating read, as intelligence history is almost bound to be, with all those ‘weird’ people involved.

But of course that doesn’t necessarily make it important. Hastings tends to play down its material contribution to winning – or losing – the war, though on reading this book one can never be sure. ‘Perhaps one-thousandth of 1 per cent of material gathered from secret sources by all the belligerents in World War II contributed to changing battlefield outcomes’, he writes; before going
on to say that that 0.001 per cent could be vital. That throws the question up in the air again. We all want to believe the ‘two year’ claim for Bletchley, but the truth is that we can never know for certain. What Hastings is sure about, however, is that intelligence was never a ‘magic key’, a game-changer on its own, but always required solid force – armies, navies, air forces – to take advantage of it. He makes this point repeatedly. I imagine this is because Hastings was a military historian before he became a secret service one, and so can put the latter into a broader perspective than intelligence historians pur. Either that, or he is anxious to restore some of Britain’s glory at helping to win the war to the conventional forces that the brilliance of the intellectual achievements of the ‘amateur’ spooks can tend to put into the shade. In either case, he must be right.

But it doesn’t end there. The secret goings-on of the war years had other effects, both positive and negative. At a trivial level, but important to those who participated, they gave them a thrill it was hard to find in any other calling. Many agents joined SOE for the sheer Boys’ Own Paper adventure that it seemed to promise, or GC&CS (the official acronym for Bletchley Park) simply to indulge their passion for solving puzzles. Afterwards many looked back on their time at Bletchley as ‘the most interesting job we’ve ever had.’ These people’s lives – even those that their activities brutally shortened – would have been greatly impoverished without these opportunities. In addition, in countries like France and Norway, however ‘marginal’ the practical contribution of SOE-aided resistance movements may have been, it proved vital after the war – ‘beyond price’, Hastings calls it – in restoring the national self-respect of defeated and demoralised peoples. To Charles de Gaulle, for example, ‘la résistance’ was France. Most of the wartime occupied countries have monuments and museums devoted to their resistance heroes and martyrs today. If myth is as important to a sense of national identity as ‘true’ history, which it generally is, SOE played a crucial role.

For Britain in her post-war decline – masked early on by her pride in having ‘won’ the war – the achievements of GC&CS encouraged the David/Goliath trope that was so necessary to her national self-regard, showing that British brains and ingenuity – even eccentricity – were superior to Teutonic jackboots any day. Hastings attributes this to Britain’s (and the USA’s) national ‘culture’ of ‘intellectual honesty’, which is something else for us to congratulate ourselves upon. It also helped that Churchill and Roosevelt were more open-minded than Hitler and Stalin. Reinforcing this trope were the exploits of the brave ‘few’ in the Battle of Britain – ‘few’ against the Nazi ‘hordes’ – and the much bruited morale and good humour of the little English people in their slums – ‘never mind, dear, put on the kettle and we’ll have a nice cup of tea’ – under the impact of Blitzkrieg. That’s the popular British version. The saturation bombing of Dresden seldom features.

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1 From Beyond the Fringe.
According to the historian of its American side, quoted by Hastings, who also disputes its military effectiveness, the code-breaking episode also represented ‘an indisputably brilliant episode in the history of ideas, of intellectuals, and of intelligence’, which was to have peaceful repercussions shortly afterwards. That is well known: its contribution to computer science, with ‘Colossus’, widely regarded as the world’s first proper computer, being conceived at Bletchley Park. Unfortunately the authorities’ obsession with secrecy led to its being dismantled after the war, though some of its parts found their way to Manchester University’s new Computing Machine laboratory, followed by Alan Turing, before the prurient Manchester police hounded him to his shocking death. At that time his contribution to the war was still a state secret.

The cloak of secrecy that blotted out all these achievements for so long afterwards also had repercussions. The reason given for that, of course, was to hide them from the Soviets, Britain’s new enemy (as Stalin had predicted, and indeed provoked), even though the Soviets had actually known about Ultra almost from the beginning, through their spies. So that was pretty pointless. Secrecy could also be counter-productive. It left the way open for the most unreliable versions of events to surface in public without contradiction: much of it mere ‘romantic twaddle’, and self-serving lies. The official history, published from 1979 onwards, was supposed to correct this; but as all the volumes were penned by ‘trusties’, and vetted, it didn’t convince everyone. (That was unfair; it seems reliable as far as it goes.)

Secrecy also wasn’t good for the agencies themselves. ‘The record suggests’, writes Hastings, ‘that official secrecy does more to protect intelligence agencies from domestic accountability for their own follies than to shield them from enemy penetration.’ (Despite this, he can’t resist a stab at whistle-blower Edward Snowden at the end.) Even the very existence of GCHQ and MI6 was supposed to be secret, never to be even whispered in parliament, for example, until 1994. That made them effectively unaccountable – to the democracy, at any rate – and gave them a thick veil behind which they could simply carry on as before, as inefficient and perhaps corrupt as the new boys like Trevor-Roper had found them when they had joined. When the bright amateurs returned to their professorships, and despite MI6’s no longer being able to ‘wax fat on the achievements of the code-breakers’, little seems to have been done to reform them. Stella Rimington’s recollections of the lazy old blimps she found manning MI5 when she first joined it in the 1970s (she later of course became its Director-General) match up pretty well with Trevor-Roper’s picture of MI6 in the 1940s. Hence the scandals and suspicions of scandals – ‘conspiracy theories’ – that plagued them in the inter-war years, from the ‘Cambridge Five’ fiasco to the alleged ‘Wilson Plot’. One hopes they’ve learned their lesson by now. Our lives may depend upon it.

Secrecy is also, of course, the enemy of the historian. It is especially problematic in this field because of the culture of deception that was intrinsic
to it – indeed, a professional necessity. New recruits to the secret services were asked on interview whether they had any moral objection to lying, to which the correct answer – the one that would get them in – was the opposite to what would be expected in most other professions. So, as Hastings rightly cautions at the beginning of his ‘Sources’ section, ‘it deserves renewed emphasis that scepticism is essential about all accounts related to intelligence in every nation, and thus to the memoirs of agents, official reports, published history and even contemporary documents’. That covers not only the celebratory but also the critical accounts of wartime intelligence that Hastings has drawn on here – like Trevor-Roper’s mockeries, perhaps. Nothing is certain in this area. But Hastings has done a great job of applying a military historian’s mind to the uncertainties of what used to be called – before it became worked over so thoroughly - the ‘missing dimension’ of the history of World War II.

Bernard Porter

Bernard Porter’s *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain 1790-1988*, was reissued by Routledge a couple of years ago.

In December 1945, George Orwell wrote in *Tribune* wondering what happened to Special Branch, MI5 and MI6 when a Labour government was in office. This was when he still thought the Attlee government might attack the bastions of ruling class power in Britain by closing down the secret state, taking over the public schools, abolishing the House of Lords and confiscating the wealth of the rich and super rich. The short answer in 1945 was that Special Branch, MI5 and MI6 actually began working for the Labour government. This is the story that Daniel Lomas chronicles, breaking considerable welcome new ground in the process. He makes the point that accounts of the Attlee government have usually focussed on welfare reforms, the NHS, and on decolonisation. These celebrations of Attlee and of the so-called ‘Spirit of 45’ have ‘overlooked his support for Britain’s independent nuclear deterrent, Cold War foreign policy and... the development of Britain’s Cold War “secret state”, and his intimate relationship with British intelligence’. Overlooked is arguably too weak a term because the fact is that many of today’s Labour enthusiasts, both old and young, seem determined not to know, or at least acknowledge, anything to Attlee’s detriment. And this is the man who not only initiated Britain’s nuclear weapons programme but also kept it secret from both Parliament and his own Cabinet, something that even Blair would have thought twice about!

What of the ‘secret state’? By the time Attlee took office, the bad old days of the ‘Zinoviev Letter’ had been forgotten and a new relationship had been forged during the War. Attlee himself, Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton and Ernest Bevin all had dealings with the intelligence agencies during the War. The politicians regarded them as valuable instruments of government and, contrary to some accounts, the intelligence agencies, whatever disagreements might have arisen, trusted the new Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. It is not true that Attlee was suspicious of MI5 and bought in a policeman, Percy Sillitoe, to take over as Director General in order to make sure there was no repeat of the ‘Zinoviev Letter’: Attlee was not involved with Sillitoe’s appointment. Attlee developed a particularly close relationship with the new head of MI5, saw him at least once a fortnight and was the first Prime Minister to ever visit MI5’s headquarters. When Sillitoe retired and wrote his memoirs, it was Attlee who provided the Foreword.

As far as Attlee was concerned there were a number of Labour MPs who needed keeping a eye on (some were much too close to the Communist Party, much too left-wing). There was communist influence in the trade unions that needed to be monitored and there was the problem of Communist Party members and sympathisers in sensitive positions in the civil service, scientific establishments and elsewhere. As relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated...
and Britain became increasingly dependent on the United States, these concerns moved up the agenda.

Attlee was very worried about communist activity in the trade union movement in late 1947, for example, concerned that they intended to call strikes ‘to sabotage the Royal Wedding’. He was reassured when Sillitoe told him of the extent to which MI5 had penetrated the CP. This was a recurring concern, exacerbated by the government’s imposition of domestic austerity combined with massive rearmament, something that Attlee’s current admirers generally forget. The government took steps to root out communists and communist sympathisers within the civil service, introducing ‘extensive vetting . . . first “positive” and then “negative”’.

One case, not discussed by Lomas, which shows the way the wind was blowing is that of Monica Felton, a Labour Party member, feminist and pacifist, and town planning expert, who was chair of the Stevenage Development Corporation. She was sacked from her post by Hugh Dalton on trumped-up charges in June 1951. The real reason for her dismissal was her taking part in a visit to North Korea with a peace delegation that then reported back on how the United States was conducting the war, singling out for particular condemnation the US bombing of civilian targets. There is no doubt that the communists made use of people like Felton (she was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize!), but the fact remains that indiscriminate US bombing of North Korea levelled much of the country and killed perhaps as many as a million plus people. This was not something the Attlee government wanted publicised. Felton was not only sacked, but was threatened with prosecution, with some Tory MPs demanding she be hanged. Every effort was made to intimidate and discredit her. This brief account of the Felton affair is not intended as a criticism of Lomas, but future scholars building on his work should certainly investigate the fate of Felton and others at the hands of MI5 and similar agencies.

As Lomas points out, the number of British people who were victims of this was very small compared to the United States and Eastern Europe. Stalin’s anti-Titoite purges swept up hundreds of thousands, many of them imprisoned, tortured and often executed. Nevertheless, when compared with the discussion of the subject in Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones recent book, We Know All About You, a case can be made that Lomas plays down the British purge. Jeffreys-Jones writes of Britain having a ‘silent McCarthyism’, what he calls the ‘Great British Silence’. Whereas the US purge was accompanied by considerable histrionics, the much smaller British version was carried out more covertly and consequently was able to continue for much longer.

Why was the purge here so restrained, compared to the situation in the United States, where even ‘Comrade Attlee’ was to be condemned by Senator McCarthy? Partly it was the relative strength of the Left in Britain that would

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have resisted a more full-blooded purge. Many Labour MPs would have opposed it. And a British McCarthyism would have inevitably engulfed many people in the Labour Party who might have once flirted with the Popular Front – or even with communism – but had since moved to the right. Denis Healey is an obvious example. The government actually rejected Conservative attempts to establish an Un-British Activities Committee in the House of Commons, almost certainly because they were aware that it would be used to smear the Labour Party itself with the enthusiastic support of the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*.

We have to also bear in mind that if Labour had been re-elected in 1951, then we would have certainly seen a serious stepping-up of the British purge, extending it into the field of education and elsewhere. By 1951, the government was concerned by the presence of some 2,000 ‘subversives’ in education and there would certainly have been a move to deal with this problem. The Korean War, contingency plans for war with the Soviet Union and subordination to the United States would have all required more offensive action against the domestic Left.

Ironically, the Conservative election victory in 1951 actually returned to office a government that did not yet recognise the extent of British dependence upon and subordination to the United States. It was to take the Suez Crisis of 1956 to bring this reality home to the Conservatives. And while the ‘silent McCarthyism’ continued uninterrupted, there was no dramatic increase in attacks on the Left. If Attlee had bee re-elected, his government would have had to decisively crush opposition from the Left to its pro-American stance. The Conservatives faced no such problem.

The government was very much concerned to counter anti-British propaganda, much of it communist-inspired; and to this end established the Information Research Department. This was intended to covertly advocate a ‘Third Force’ approach, portraying Britain as a reforming alternative to Soviet communism and American capitalism. The man responsible for this initiative was Christopher Mayhew MP; and what would have particularly delighted Attlee was that he was, like the Prime Minister himself, an Old Haileyburian. Attlee took great pleasure in promoting chaps from his old school through the ranks of the labour movement! Whatever the ideological colouring of the propaganda, the IRD was defending foreign, colonial policy and defence policies that were indistinguishable from those a Conservative government would have followed. All that was different was the rhetoric.

One other area where Lomas challenges the accepted wisdom is with regard to the notion that Attlee was unsympathetic to covert operations. He insists that the closing down of the Special Operations Executive was all about saving money and that when ministers felt it necessary, covert operations were given their full support. The covert operation aimed at Albania is a case in point. Even more remarkable is the fact that when the Labour government decided not to intervene militarily in Iran after the nationalisation of the British-
owned oil industry by the nationalist government (because of shortage of
troops and US pressure), they instead authorised a covert operation to bring
down the government and hopefully replace it with a puppet regime. Once
again, this is something that Attlee’s admirers prefer to forget.

Lomas’s book is to be heartily welcomed, making an important
contribution to a subject of vital importance, not least because of the cult of
‘Attleeism’ that seems to be in fashion within parts of the Left today. It is a
great shame the cost of the book is prohibitive, pretty much limiting its
readership to people with access to a good university library.

John Newsinger

John Newsinger has a new book,

‘Hope Lies in the Proles’: Orwell and the Left,
coming out early next year.
The first use of aerial bombardment took place on 1 November 1911 in Libya. An Italian airman, Giulio Gavotti, dropped a hand-held bomb onto an Arab encampment and supposedly ‘revolutionized warfare’. This was an inevitable revolution, but Gavotti has the dubious honour of having led the way. As Thomas Hippler points out, a hundred years later almost to the day, Libya was once again being bombed, this time by NATO, but still with Italian participation. In the intervening hundred years, we have seen aerial bombardment go from being primarily used as a way of policing/punishing ‘native’ populations in the colonies, to being unleashed as a strategic weapon on a horrific scale by the British and Americans against civilian populations in the Second World War. This culminated in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And since 1945, we have seen aerial bombardment regularly used in both roles, sometimes in the same conflict, for example in Vietnam where the United States both bombed an insurgent peasantry in the South and the country supporting that insurgency, North Vietnam.

*Governing from the Skies* is at its most interesting when actually focussing on the military history of aerial bombardment. His discussion of the early days of air policing, using aerial bombardment to put down rebellion and insurgency, is well done. As early as 1909, in his *Airships in Peace and War*, R P Hearne was advocating that airships be used to ‘strike terror into the tribes’. They could be used ‘to pour shells into points unreachable by any other means’, ending within days campaigns that might otherwise drag on for months. Such bombardment ‘will create the most terrifying effect on savage races, and the awful wastage of life occasioned to white troops by such expeditionary work would be avoided, whilst the cost would be considerably reduced’. The fact that such bombardment would inevitably kill non-combatants was more than compensated by the reduction in troop casualties and the comparative cheapness of the use of air power. And this seemed to be borne out by the post-World War 1 experience.

The use of air power against insurgents led by Mohammed Abdullah Hassan (known as the ‘Mad Mullah’ by the British) in Somalia was considered a great success. The British made use of aerial bombardment in Iraq, Egypt, Russia and the Sudan, and even considered making use of it against any revolutionary outbreaks in Britain itself. It was not just deployed against insurgents, but was also used against recalcitrant ‘native’ rulers. British aircraft bombed Kabul in Afghanistan in 1919 and Sanaa in Yemen in 1928. It was not so successful when used against Palestinian rebels in the late 1930s, however. At a time when German bombing of civilian targets in Spain was exciting outrage in Britain, the British machine-gunning and bombing of civilian targets in Palestine went almost completely unnoticed. ‘Guernica’ remains a potent
symbol of military excess to this day, but the Palestinian villages bombed by the British are forgotten.

The Second World War saw Britain and the United States embrace strategic bombing as a way of defeating Germany and Japan, inflicting a horrendous toll in civilian dead in the process. The methods that had been used against the ‘natives’ in the colonies were now made use of against the peoples of rival Empires. The number of civilian casualties is still a contested subject. Hippler argues that Allied bombing of Germany killed ‘approximately 380,000 people’, but he also refers to German estimates of 410,000 civilians killed along with 55,000 others – soldiers and police, prisoners of war and foreign workers, including, of course, slave workers. It is worth pointing out that Richard Overy, in his magisterial volume, The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945 (2013), which is not referenced by Hippler, gives a figure of 353,000 for German fatalities at the hands of Allied bombing, and this is likely to become the generally accepted figure. Japan suffered even more with its wooden cities devastated by incendiary bomb attacks – even before the dropping of the atomic bombs. Hippler gives a figure of 900,000 Japanese fatalities, considerably more than the number of Japanese combat fatalities (780,000). And this death toll from aerial bombardment was inflicted over only a six month period. It was without doubt one of the most horrendous military assaults on a civilian population ever.

What was the military effect of this aerial bombardment of cities and towns? Did it even shorten the war, let alone win it? Was its effect on military production and on civilian morale in any way decisive? Hippler makes the point that the Third Reich was, in the end, brought down by ground troops occupying Berlin, not by the bombing. He judges strategic bombing to have been ‘militarily ineffective in Germany’ and even with regard to Japan, he considers its role as ‘largely exaggerated’. This is not to dismiss air power as a factor in the conflict, but rather to see it as most effectively deployed in support of ground troops, and not used in a futile attempt to defeat the enemy on its own. It is fair to say that this is the generally accepted view regarding the use of air power during the Second World War. The War was not won by Anglo-American strategic bombing, but by the Red Army.

But is it as simple as this? Certainly that was this reviewer’s belief, but a recent book that appeared too late for discussion by Hippler, Phillips O’Brien’s challenging How The War Was Won (2015), has raised some interesting points. With apologies for putting O’Brien’s argument somewhat crudely, he argues that while Germany’s war in the East was certainly the more labour intensive, which accounts for the Wehrmacht’s huge death toll on that front, it was much more capital intensive in the West. The demands on Germany of the war in the West included the investment of material resources, of production and technology (such as the submarine war, the resources squandered on the futile development of jet aircraft and rocket technology), plus the considerable resources deployed to try and protect the Reich against Allied bombing. These
all starved the Axis powers of equipment on the Eastern front and certainly helped make the Russian success there possible. O’Brien’s arguments will certainly need to be taken into account by future histories of the Second World War.

What of the post-1945 period? Surprisingly, Hippler does not discuss the use of air power in the Korean War. Here, once again, we saw aerial bombardment on a massive scale in the confident belief that it provided the key to victory. This conflict was certainly not a negligible affair. According to General Curtis LeMay, US aerial bombardment destroyed just about every city in both North and South Korea and killed over a million civilians. This is almost certainly an understatement. Surely the Korean was worth some examination by Hippler? He does look at the Vietnam War, where, once again, the United States unleashed an unprecedented aerial bombardment and the very same Curtis LeMay urged bombing North Vietnam back to the ‘Stone Age’. Nevertheless, while the scale of the bombing was certainly enormous, the figures Hippler provides seem exaggerated. During Operation Linebacker alone, which lasted from May until October 1972, he says the US dropped nearly 7 million tons of bombs on Vietnam. This figure for the tons of bombs dropped is much larger than is generally accepted. According to the late Marilyn Young’s authoritative account, the US dropped a total of some 8 million tons of bombs on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the high explosive equivalent of 640 Hiroshima atom bombs, killing between 2 and 4 million civilians. This aerial bombardment, the heaviest in history, is one of the greatest crimes of the post-1945 period, and the Americans still lost!

What about the British experience? The British still used aerial bombardment in their post-1945 colonial wars. How effective was it? In Malaya, the RAF dropped 35,000 tons of bombs and claimed to have killed 700 Communist guerrillas. This number of fatalities was almost certainly inflated, but even so this means that it took 5 tons of bombs to kill one guerrilla. The attempt to use air power against the small Communist guerrilla movement, hiding out in the jungle, was clearly an exercise in futility. Much the same was true of the bombing of the forests in Kenya during the Mau Mau Emergency. The suspicion remains that the use of heavy bombers on these occasions was as much about finding them something to do, as it was about any impact they might have on the course of the conflicts themselves. Instead, in both Malaya and Kenya, the outcome was determined by other factors: a successful divide and rule strategy and the patient application of overwhelming force over an extended period against a weak, poorly armed enemy, for example. Hippler does not discuss this British experience.

And what of wars to come? Hippler tells us that the wars of the future ‘will be long, even interminable, decentred and lacking a national basis’ so that they will ‘potentially involve the whole of the world population’. This seems very much like a spin-off from the Great War on Terror mythology, itself an ideological construct to justify the exercise of global power by the United States.
States, rather than a serious assessment of a world where inter-Imperialist conflict seems to be once again reasserting itself. At a time when the Trump administration is threatening an attack on North Korea, which would almost certainly involve the use of nuclear weapons, and an attack on Iran as well, the future looks like business as usual. We shall see.

Given its subject matter, this is inevitably an interesting history and Hippler does have much of interest to say on particular topics. Nevertheless, the book remains unsatisfactory, disappointing, with too much philosophy and not enough military history.

John Newsinger

John Newsinger has a new book, 'Hope Lies in the Proles': Orwell and the Left, coming out early next year.
One image recurred throughout my reading of this closely-argued and finely-written book. The elegant but deadly assassin, played by Edward Fox in The Day of the Jackal (1973), is despatching one obstacle after another as he approaches his ultimate target. Cravat carelessly knotted, cigarette dangling between his fingers, his aim is faultless. Not, perhaps, the sort of image automatically associated with a history professor. Yet as one cherished post-war economic myth after another is gunned down, it is an irresistible one.

The 1964-1970 Labour Government was fatally compromised by a foolish refusal to devalue sterling right at the start?

Bang!

Its Seventies successor buried social democracy after the 1976 sterling crisis and paved the way for Mrs Thatcher?

Pow!

Say what you like about Maggie, but she gave Britain its own economic miracle?

A melon is shredded as Fox’s exploding bullet finds its mark.

Professor Newton’s title is something of a misnomer, as he identifies two reinventions. The first is the embrace of a form of European social democracy by Harold Macmillan and his successors, notably Harold Wilson, from 1960 onwards. The second is the plotting of a new course from 1979 onwards, away from economic planning, intervention and – critically – support for full employment, and towards wholesale, market-based solutions for the shortcomings of the British economy.

There is a clear policy line that he draws through the Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home and first Wilson governments, one that Edward Heath, Wilson (again) and James Callaghan sought to maintain. Those latter three did so through during the less propitious period that can probably be dated from the work-to-rule in power stations in the winter of 1970-1971 that introduced Britain to the alarming experience of widespread blackouts.

The author is good on Macmillan, a champion house-builder in the post-war years who detested unemployment:

‘Macmillan was an uncomfortable Tory; between the wars he had opposed
the party leadership on the appeasement of Germany and on economic policy. Surveying the wreckage of traditional British industries, Macmillan had urged politicians, industrialists and investors to abandon their commitment to liberal economics and pursue not self-interest but a “national economic policy”, their actions guided by a State planning structure capable of taking a synoptic view.’

As ‘Supermac’ was to joke many years later, he was at odds with his party. This was awkward, but he solved the problem by becoming the party’s leader. Installed as Prime Minister, Macmillan could, and did, put his ideas into practice: establishing the ‘tripartite’ National Economic Development Council (‘Neddy’); setting up permanent dialogue among Ministers, trade unions and business; and embracing French-style ‘indicative planning’ to direct efforts to sectors and regions favoured by the government. Science and education were given a high priority, presaging the emphases of the 1964-1970 Labour years.

Macmillan’s earnestness belies the image that has subsequently settled on his time in office, that of an enjoyable but faintly disreputable ‘affluence’ epitomised by the ‘candy floss summer’ of 1959, the ‘never had it so good’ era of easy credit and beer in the fridge.

Labour’s return to office in 1964 (narrowly) and, more convincingly, after a second election in 1966, saw many continuities with the post-1960 Conservative administrations but also some important differences: ‘Macmillan’s version of social democracy notwithstanding, the Conservative Party and its allies retained both their connections to the City and their commitment to its economic internationalism. Its core voters were still linked to finance, the service sector and light industry.’

He goes on:

‘Set against this was the Labour coalition which brought Harold Wilson to power, rooted in manufacturing industry, the unions and the growing middle-class salariat educated in the grammar schools. The long-standing identification of these groups with Producer’s Britain and a political economy which privileged growth, social justice, industrial efficiency and innovation led voters to give Labour the benefit of the doubt.’

Those who like to portray the 1964-1970 Labour Government as a failure tend to use two sticks with which to beat Wilson and his colleagues: the National Plan and the initial refusal to devalue sterling.

The Plan envisaged an expansion of the economy by a total of 25 per cent between 1965 and 1970. In the event, growth was to total just over 14 per cent. ‘By 1970, few of the projections set out in the National Plan had been achieved, since (it has been argued) the tough economic regime discouraged rather than stimulated private investment.’

And the key motive behind this ‘tough economic regime’, say critics, was the defence of the pound. Almost from the moment sterling was devalued at the end of 1967, it has been argued that Wilson and his colleagues had wasted
three years in a futile attempt to prop up an indefensible pound/dollar rate. Furthermore, is is claimed they had done so to appease the Treasury and the City by demonstrating their ‘soundness’.

Professor Newton is having none of it.

‘This political distaste [for seeing Labour depicted as the party of devaluation] was reinforced by Wilson’s limited faith in the price mechanism: he believed that altering the value of the currency would not lead to an efficient allocation of resources in the economy so that they shifted into the production of goods for the export market. This was a process which required planning and intervention in industry.’

Labour’s difficulties, not least on the industrial-relations front, helped create the conditions for a surprise win by Edward Heath and his Conservative Party in the summer of 1970. ‘Despite appearances, Labour’s defeat did not herald a fundamental shift away from social democracy. Nor did it mean any weakening in the commitment to modernise Britain embraced by Macmillan eight years earlier.’ It did, however, usher in a ragbag of confused and mutually contradictory policies that propelled the country into perhaps its most chaotic period since WW2.

Heath was a great admirer of West German ‘partnership’ embracing government, business and the unions; his 1971 Industrial Relations Act was hated by the unions, who vowed to oppose it by all means. Similarly, Heath hoped to see British banks adopt the same ‘patient’, long-term approach to lending to industry as did their German and Japanese opposite numbers; he introduced a package of credit-market reforms that instead fuelled a deranged spiral of real-estate deals and share-price speculation.

Heath proclaimed a ‘quiet revolution’, deliberately based on the disciplines of a free-market economy; he ended up imposing pay and price controls and bailing-out insolvent businesses. His time in Downing Street ended with a state of emergency that ran from November 1973 to March 1974.

‘Heath’s experiment had been a failure. The combination of financial liberalisation with industrial dirigisme had been contradictory . . . [these contradictions] stemmed from the historic fracture between Consumer’s and Producer’s Britain.’

Labour’s 1974-1979 term in office has been caricatured as having prepared the intellectual ground for Thatcherism, especially after the autumn 1976 sterling crisis. Not so, according to the author: ‘During the [1979 election] campaign, Labour made clear its continuing commitment to the values of 1945, modified by the social-democratic reforms pursued since the early 1960s.’

Indeed, as the new Tory government took office, there was every reason to believe that a re-run of the Heath years was in prospect. Initial abrasive talk about getting tough with the unions and with failing businesses would give way, in the face of politically unacceptable levels of unemployment, to a U-turn. History would note that, twice since 1965, the Tories had turned to
leaders from lower-middle class grammar schools who staged confrontations with the social-democratic order – and lost.

That this did not happen is not to be taken as meaning that the Conservatives’ economic blueprint survived its first contact with reality. In fact, the medium-term financial strategy (for control of the money supply) and the commitment to curb the public-sector borrowing requirement were every bit as much failures as had been Labour’s National Plan and defence of sterling. In what amounted to a (largely) unheralded U-turn, they were dropped and the Tories concentrated on the red meat of defeating the unions, tax cuts, ‘enterprise’ and, of course, financial deregulation.

‘[T]he Thatcher governments’ many supporters in the mainstream media. . . . have maintained that the era from 1979-1990 saw Britain’s long-term economic prospects transformed for the better. Yet the evidence does not support them. Notwithstanding the rapid expansion of output between 1985 and 1989 the annual average level of growth during the Thatcher years was just 1.8 per cent, less than the 2.6 per cent reached by Labour and Conservative social democracy between 1969 and 1979.’

But if the ‘monetarist’ experiment was rapidly abandoned, the anti-union, pro-business, pro-privatisation ethos certainly was not. Indeed, the sell-off of State industries was perhaps Britain’s most successful export at this time, with privatisation programmes established in, among other places, France, Malaysia, South Africa and the former Soviet bloc.

Thatcher suffered only one public economic policy defeat in her last years, when she had to acquiesce in tying Sterling to the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), a currency system anchored to the German mark. What followed could be described as like something out of a Greek tragedy – were that hackneyed expression not attached to every imaginable setback from a lost test match to rather dull machinations in an obscure company boardroom.

The Prime Minister lost her long-serving Chancellor Nigel Lawson on this point, only to replace him with John Major, who was also committed to ERM membership. Sterling joined in October 1990, and a month later Thatcher was out of office, to be replaced by. . . . John Major.

ERM membership was congenial to that new Prime Minister for two reasons. One, it helped fulfil Major’s ambition to put Britain at the ‘heart of Europe’. Two, it exerted a powerful downward influence on inflation, which Major, according to Professor Newton, ‘viewed as a threat to the aspirations of the very people the Conservatives should be defending: responsible, hard-working members of the electorate. . . .’.

Unfortunately, the ERM’s success in this second task came at the price of crushing the life out of the economy and triggering the second ‘Tory’ recession in ten years. With German interest rates rising, for reasons unconnected with the UK economy, the pressure became intolerable and speculators propelled sterling out of the ERM in September 1992.
Not only was Britain not at the heart of Europe, but the image of the Major government was irreparably damaged. The central plank of its economic policy had been shattered, yet Ministers seemed to want to be thanked for the gently rising prosperity that followed leaving the ERM when they had consistently claimed such an event would prove disastrous. ‘Many voters who had been attracted by Major’s brand of Conservatism became disenchanted and drifted away from supporting the Conservatives.’

This drift was actively encouraged after 1994 by Labour’s new leader Tony Blair and his business-friendly, pro-‘aspiration’ policy stance. Blair’s May 1997 victory was widely expected, although its scale was probably not. Labour’s majority in the House of Commons was larger than the entire Parliamentary Conservative Party.

Defenders of Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown like to cite the introduction of the National Minimum Wage and to point to steady increases in public spending along with more generous welfare arrangements. The long lasting upswing in UK growth, which had originated back in the fourth quarter of 1991, was produced in evidence that Labour’s ‘third way’ between full-blooded Thatcherism (however defined) and traditional social democracy was working. Professor Newton has a different take:

‘New Labour’s embrace of the economic liberalism of the third way . . . [created] a version of social democracy incapable of challenging the power of domestic or global capital since its objectives could not be achieved without the co-operation of either.’

The credit crunch of August 2007 heralded a financial crisis and Great Recession that ended the myth of ‘Britain resurgent’ that had been sedulously fostered by political leaders since about the time of the 1983 General Election. Politically, the crisis despatched Gordon Brown’s apparent view that, on replacing Tony Blair in 2007, huge electoral rewards would be reaped by presenting the world with a more serious and stolid version of his predecessor. It also destroyed David Cameron’s equally illusory notion that imitating Blair - e.g. by staging one or more of his own versions of Blair’s ‘Clause 4 moment’ – would deliver the sort of victory which Blair achieved in 1997.

Economically, the Conservative-led Coalition that took office in 2010 bears more than a little resemblance to the Heath administration in terms of internal contradictions. It talked about austerity but kept putting off its deficit-reduction targets; it was keen to rebalance the economy away from financial services and debt but ended up presiding over an easy-credit spree. George Osborne, the Chancellor, had pledged to end the Treasury’s ‘imperial’ behaviour in Whitehall, but ended up taking it into policy areas even arch-fiddler Brown never contemplated, such as whether school pupils should have to study maths to 18 and a huge re-organisation of local government in built-up areas.

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1 Tony Blair persuaded the Labour Party in 1995 to drop the clause in its constitution committing the party to common ownership of industry.
As with the Heath government, the Coalition took flak from the left for being hard-faced and uncaring and from the right for its fiscal incontinence.

Wisely, the author leaves any verdict on the post-Cameron management of the economy to future historians. Unwisely, he delivers a verdict on the outcome of the 2016 EU referendum that is almost a caricature of the outraged university professor, stating that the post-1979 ‘neo-liberal’ (never a very useful expression, in my view) order ‘left large areas of the nation not only relatively poor and deprived but open to a xenophobic and chauvinistic form of popular politics manipulated by ambitious and unscrupulous politicians in alliance with . . . . media barons and editors.’

Yes, only the poor and thick supported Brexit, apparently, dumbly following assorted pied pipers like so many dim-witted children.

There are rather smaller beefs as well. I’d have liked more on how 1970-1979 differed from the previous decade. The ’70s was a time of transition rather than simply a continuation of social democracy under less promising conditions.

I’d have liked more also on the question of what came before 1960. After all, Macmillan and his successors did not turn to social democracy from the position of a full-blooded capitalist economy. The 1945-1951 Labour governments described themselves as socialist and, in domestic policy, acted the part, whether in terms of nationalisation or the welfare state. The Tories, pre-1960, left the post-war settlement largely untouched, grafting on to it manifestations of the ‘affluent society’ such as commercial television and legalised betting.

Professor Newton suggests that Britain had been, to pinch the old slogan of the Victoria and Albert Museum, an ace welfare state with a world power attached. Superpower status was rendered hollow by the Suez crisis in 1956, and economic underperformance spurred a search for more modern tools than public ownership and strong trade unions.

That is fair enough, but it should be borne in mind that social democracy, as practised from Macmillan onwards, was to the right of the 1945 settlement. Hence the impatience of Labour romantics such as Michael Foot with social democracy’s accommodative approach to private industry.

All that aside, this is an excellent book, intensively researched and with a strong narrative line that gives powerful support to the central argument. An ideal festive gift for anyone interested in the recent economic history of Britain.

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