

Between The Waves

The Hidden History of a Very British Revolution 1945-2016

Tom McTague

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The 'revolution' in the subtitle is the UK's relationship with the EEC/EU – a huge subject, covered in great detail, in a very big book. Including notes and index, this is 544 (decently-bound) pages. The tracking of the UK-EU relationship is embedded in a political history of the period and so there is a detailed account of the Tory right, the core of the anti-European forces, particularly since the arrival of Mrs Thatcher. Much of the detail here was new to me.

What the 'hidden history' refers to, I don't know. The one part of the story which might be so described is the operation and funding of the Brexit campaign and the author does very little with that. To take the obvious example, there is now a substantial literature on Arron Banks who claimed to have given £8 million of his own money to fund the Leave.EU campaign. None of this is used by McTague.¹ (Banks is mentioned twice in passing.)

Mr McTague has made some surprising choices. The late Roger Scruton, the philosopher, has two thirds of a column of citations in the index; and the late Norman Stone, the historian, half a column. Yet the dominant force in UK economics and politics since 1970, the City of London, has only 7 entries in the index. Scruton and Stone may have influenced several of the leading Tory Brexiteers, but what they inculcated into ambitious young Tories like Michael Gove is piffle compared to the fact that City-friendly policies damaged the British economy for Edward Heath in 1973/4 and reshaped it under Thatcher, Blair and Brown, destroying much of the manufacturing sector. It's not that Mr McTague is entirely unaware of the City's significance. He writes on p. 468:

Britain did not radicalize itself in a vacuum. Had the City of London and immigration been *better regulated*, and the European Union more

¹ See <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/how-did-arron-banks-afford-brexit/>> and <<https://bylinetimes.com/2022/08/25/on-the-frontline-of-exposing-the-truth-about-russia-and-brexit/>> which almost show that the Banks money came from Russia.

limited its ambition, the conditions for Britain's rebellion would not have existed. (Emphasis added.)

But such is its influence, 'regulating' the City of London would have entailed something like a political revolution. The last substantial politician who proposed that was Bryan Gould. His rejection as leader by the Labour Party in favour of the late John Smith marked the end of serious political thinking about regulating the City.² And that was almost 40 years ago. In any event, had such regulation been applied, most of what we now think of as the City, the foreign-owned companies which arrived after Mrs Thatcher's deregulatory 'big bang' in 1986, would have departed. They are there *because* it is unregulated. It is one of the great political ironies that Remain lost the Brexit referendum even though PM Cameron had done a deal with the EU which protected the City from EU regulation. The dominance of the City is one of two important 'hidden histories' of our time.

Mr McTague occasionally wanders into areas where there is something like a hidden history but doesn't know enough to deal with them. For example, he tells us of Brian Crozier's role advising Mrs Thatcher in the 1980s but accepts Crozier's story of being – as his memoir's title has it – a free agent. But as I wrote in reviewing *Free Agent*:

. . . his 'independence' is finally revealed as simply a cover story on p. 92 when he writes of contacting his main 'case officer' in the CIA. Independents or genuine free-lance journalists don't have case officers.³

For example, he discusses the formation of the pro-EEC/EU Social Democratic Party in the early 1980s without mentioning the 'Gang of Four's' extensive connections to the Americans.⁴ These went back to the days of Hugh Gaitskell when one of the Four, Bill Rogers, led the struggle against the unilateral disarmers in the Labour Party. There was always a suspicion on the spook-wise Left that the formation of the SDP had the CIA's fingerprints on it;⁵ that it had

² I discussed this in 'The two Goulds' in *Lobster* 63.

<<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/63/the-two-goulds/>>.

³ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/26/crozier-country-free-agent-the-unseen-war-1941-1991/>>

⁴ On this see Tom Easton in *Lobster* 31 <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/31/who-were-they-travelling-with-sdp-the-birth-life-and-death-of-the-social-democratic-party/>>.

⁵ Issue 52 of *The Leveller* had as its cover story 'Exposed: the CIA and the Social Democrats'. But they had suspicion, not real evidence.

been created to prevent the Labour Party, led by Michael Foot at the time, from gaining office and possibly threatening the Americans' military presence on its 'unsinkable aircraft carrier'.⁶ This was one of the most significant events in our post-war history: for without the SDP's intervention, Mrs Thatcher would have lost the 1983 election⁷ and we would not have had the deregulation of the City in 1986, the creation of London as a global financial centre, the subsequent decades of City dominance of economic policy, and the destruction of much of the manufacturing economy. Although there is as yet no *conclusive* evidence of the CIA's role in the genesis of the SDP, in the course of a drinking session London CIA station chief in the 1970s, Cord Meyer, boasted to Ray Fitzwalter, head of Granada's World in Action, that the CIA helped create the SDP.⁸ The other 'hidden history' of British politics is the clandestine role of the US state.

So Mr McTague has written a very good book which I recommend to anyone with an interest in post-WW2 British politics. He's just missed out two important pieces of the story.

⁶ The title of Duncan Campbell's 1984 book, still available on Amazon.

Former Labour MP Brian Walden wrote in 1987:

'The Anglo-American relationship and the future of NATO depend upon the result of the next British general election. . . .The value of the Social Democrats is that if no single party has a majority in the next House of Commons, they can be relied upon to prevent Britain from being unilaterally disarmed.'

Quoted by Easton in the citation in note 4 above.

⁷ No way of being certain of this but the stats do suggest it.

⁸ I was told this by Fitzwalter in 1989 but was asked not to attribute it. He died in 2016. Meyer may have been bullshitting Fitzwalter, of course, but such an operation is well within known CIA activities in the post-WW2 era.