

## Ian Cameron

Ian Cameron has died. He wrote one piece for *Lobster*, a book review in issue 31<sup>1</sup> and every once in a while I would get a call from him – usually asking for information I didn't have. An obituary by his friend **Julius Hogben** is on-line.<sup>2</sup> Here is an essay he wrote.<sup>3</sup> RR

### In the eye of the beholder

[Review of *The Angry Brigade* by Gordon Carr]

**B**ook reviews, like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. So too the authorship that produced this indexed, expanded new edition of Gordon Carr's *The Angry Brigade: a history of Britain's first urban guerilla group*. My meaning here is simply that, inevitably, there is a degree of subjectivity on all sides, including my own.

Carr's own 1975 text remains virtually intact. The additions are 'Prefatory' pieces by John Barker and Stuart Christie, numerous photographs and a concluding 14 page itemised 'Angry Decade' (1966-75) chronology. It has 500 plus entries for events then currently in the news, the purpose of these being to contextualise the background against which the Angry Brigade events unfolded. In addition, by way of 'Post-Script' there is a piece by Special Branch Sergeant Roy Cremer and, much more interesting, the full text of Barker's revealing, reflective critical review of a separate (1997) Angry Brigade volume by Tom Vague. This is the most remarkable of the book's new items.

At moments this brought Ali G to mind. Barker writes with obvious



<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/online/issue31/lob31-18.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> <<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/wh72sw>>

<sup>3</sup> This originally appeared in newsletter of the Kate Sharpley Library.  
<<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net>>

and very welcome sincerity that the Angry Brigade, which he now owns to having been an active member of, were not as serious as other European urban guerilla groups. At the same time (and I accept that he's right about this) he also clarifies that his co-brigaders *were serious* – his meaning being that the Angry Brigade did really care about what and they were doing and why. What they were doing, of course, was fighting back against what they claimed was an extremely repressive State. Christie's Preface pointedly stresses this. Indeed he argues (not convincingly in my view) that the radical movements of the time became demoralised and therefore declined very significantly because of that repression. Yet Barker writes that the Angry Brigade went on with their youthful bombing campaign recklessly believing that if caught they wouldn't find themselves in that much trouble. He also adds that they were naïve about the prison system. These are astonishing and extremely revealing admissions.

Barker and Christie's outlooks differ significantly on certain matters. For example the development and significance of the women's and anti-racist movements. Barker argues that they were right to develop in the way that they did while Christie argues an opposite view. Barker and Christie both argue that the Angry Brigade weren't hoping to instigate revolutionary change whereas Carr posits the opposite (as at times Angry Brigade Communiques also seem to) while Cremer, more in line with Barker and Christie, contradicts Carr. This text is riddled with no end of imponderables.

Christiebooks have got behind the republication of Carr's text because they believe it is the best account of the Angry Brigade events to date. But the question still arises as to whether new work needs to be put in hand; and Barker makes the interesting point that focus now needs to be shifted away from those who were prosecuted and focused on the achievements of those who formed the Stoke Newington Eight Defence Campaign. From personal knowledge I wonder how many of those who could contribute something worthwhile would much care to do so. Of course they would have their reasons for and against doing so. In this respect a 2002 Angry Brigade television documentary was disappointing, Ian MacDonald QC opined that nothing had come out of the campaign – which I know is incorrect. For instance the MacKenzie Advising, George Ince Campaigning, PROP supporting and 'one bad appleing' (police corruption exposing) Up Against The Law Collective came out of the defence campaign.

Carr's 1975 text still ends with the assertion that the real significance of the Angry Brigade events would not become clear for any number of

years – so the implication must be that the jury is still out on this one. This brings us back to Barker's point. If those who could assist choose not to do so they make it easier for those who are antagonistic to write the Angry Brigade and all its works off.

In the past 35 years or so an enormous amount of politically inspired effort has gone into making the police more accountable than they previously were but in my experience Special Branch have remained the least accountable and least visible part of the police service. Structures that have evolved have rarely put them in the spotlight and partly this has been because of the outlook and disposition of those who engage in the processes. This has some bearing on this re-edition of Carr's text because Carr expresses gratitude to Special Branch for their assistance. But against this has to be set the longer term perspective that I have alluded to. The contribution by Special Branch to this book represents peanuts and the danger is that those without experience might misjudge it.

I had occasion recently to look again at Gordon Winter's *Inside BOSS* and Peter Hain's book on the attempt by BOSS and our own spooks to frame him for the Putney Bank snatch. There's not a lot of Special Branch action, insight or accountability there; and even in the Kenneth Lennon case the Branch eventually produced shoddy goods. Then there was the 1973 Scotland Yard/Special Branch secret solicitors blacklist. And finally when Essex Police mounted Operation Century (1996), using undercover Special Branch to role-play as life threatening IRA terrorists, there was no police accountability. Those on the receiving end of this spot of Special Branch adventurism complained but Essex Police got the Police Complaints Authority to waive aside any police complaints investigation.

Anyone starting from scratch to inform themselves about the subject matter which this volume in its various ways covers would find it worthwhile and of some obvious value. It is interesting enough to engender regrets on my own part that I never looked in on the trial. It is clear from Carr's text that certain parts of the trial were more interesting than others. Although convicted, Barker still finds the welcome generosity of spirit to comment charitably on the task the jury faced and took on board.

I think Situationists ought to offer similar condolences to their readers too, 'cos as one of them I ain't that much endeared to what they had to offer. I joined the Up Against The Law Collective, which came out of the heart of the Stoke Newington 8 defence campaign and I can't recollect that Situationism got much of a UPAL innings. When George

Davis's wife's brother Colin hit on the idea of sabotaging the Headingly Test Cricket wicket, I suspect that he and the other East Enders who did the job would have been greatly delayed as well as miffed if we'd lectured them about Situationism.