

The view from the bridge

Robin Ramsay

*Thanks to Nick Must and Garrick Alder
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new

More Broon

At the end of my comment on Gordon Brown (subhead **Broon** below) I wrote 'I might take Brown seriously if he offered us just a smidgeon of *mea culpa*'. Well, we sort of got that in a profile of him the *Sunday Times* magazine on 20 March. Of the events post 2008 Brown said:

'We didn't explain how culpable the banks were and what we were actually doing to deal with these problems. We had dealt with issues like bonuses. All the leaders of these major financial institutions left – we didn't allow them to stay on. But we didn't really explain that to the public. There should have been prosecutions. Prosecutions can only be a decision of the prosecuting authorities based on the law of the day. You can't interfere in the work of the prosecutors. What you can do, of course, is change the law and make it tougher on people. And obviously we would have done that if we'd got back into power.'¹

Well *obviously* he would have clobbered the bankers had he got back into power. *Really?* His Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, was more candid in his memoir,² repeatedly telling the reader that no matter how incompetent and greedy the bankers were, the UK financial sector employed a million people and paid a lot of taxes, so the government couldn't afford to mess with that. Centrally, there is still no recognition from Brown that his policy of letting industry wither in favour of the financial sector (and the 'knowledge economy') was a mistake. Did he ever explain to his constituents in

¹ <<https://tinyurl.com/6anb767m>> or <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gordon-brown-we-should-have-jailed-the-bankers-w3zp3cmg6>>

² *Back from the Brink: 1,000 Days at Number 11* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011). See my review at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster62/lob62-back-from-brink.pdf>>.

Fife how 'financialisation' was going to going to replace their lost manufacturing and mining jobs? Compare that *Sunday Times* magazine profile of Brown with the Brown described by Steve Richards in the *Times* diary (22 March).

'The Chancellor could be difficult and, days before a big vote on tuition fees, Richards was warned that the chancellor would be "tense". Surprisingly, when Brown arrived, he started gleefully embracing the entire film crew. "He couldn't help himself," Richards tells *Times Radio*. "He was on an uncontrollable high." After he'd finished hugging every journalist in the room a beaming Brown said: "I hear it's been a difficult week for Tony.'" ³

That's the authentic ringing sound of the pure careerist. Lord save us from people who think they should be prime minister.

new

Changing our minds

In an article in *The Times*,⁴ the Ukrainian boxer, former heavyweight world champion Vitali Klitschko, gave a very interesting example of one of our most intractable problems: the difficulty we have in changing our minds when we meet new information.⁵ Klitschko described how, during the Gorbachev period, when he became a successful boxer, he visited America and Western Europe. He came back and told his father, a major-general in the Soviet Army, that the West wasn't as it had been presented to them by the Soviet media. America was 'a very friendly country, a very good country, a very successful nation'. His father did not believe him. 'He argued that what young Klitschko had seen in America were *fake cities set up to deceive people*'. (emphasis added) He only changed his mind when Klitschko Jnr took him to the USA to see for himself.

Stephen Dorril had a similar experience circa 1990 (as I recall it). He told that after the Berlin Wall had come down, he had been involved in taking a group of visiting Russians round Huddersfield. To give them an honest picture

³ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p92ur4d>> or <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-times-diary-reason-behind-gordons-grin-3gkthpt58>>

⁴ 'Vitaly Klitschko: Russians aren't stupid but they have the wrong leaders', 18 March. <<https://tinyurl.com/2mdwrykb>> or <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/vitali-klitschko-the-russians-are-not-stupid-people-but-they-have-the-wrong-government-9dhzt5dzp>>.

⁵ On the brain's reaction to new/challenging ideas, see <<https://tinyurl.com/3pn2juej>> or <<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2016/12/28/14088992/brain-study-change-minds>>.

of the town, he took them to one of Huddersfield's crappier housing estates. They initially refused to believe it was real. They thought that the slummy estate had been built to deceive them.

The idea that reality might have been faked to deceive you seems to be a phenomenon associated exclusively with the former Soviet Union.

new

NATO and all that

I have a lot of time for Peter Hitchens, despite disagreeing with much of his politics. Here he is on NATO and Ukraine.

'As for the famous pledge of Article Five, that each member would come to the assistance of any other if under attack, it is wiser not to read it if you have a sensitive or idealistic disposition. If you do read it, you find it contains a sizable [sic] escape route. A very cunning British diplomat once explained to me that the US Senate would never have ratified the NATO Treaty if it had been a genuine obligation. And that is why it isn't one.

The clause says that each signatory "will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, *such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force*" (emphasis added). The member state remains free to choose whether to deem force necessary, or to use force at all. Action not including force is clearly implied as a possible response. Hence the constant Cold War doubt, especially among Germans, that a US president would sacrifice Chicago or Los Angeles for Frankfurt or Munich, when it came to it. The Europe-based cruise missiles in the 1980s were all about making a shaky nuclear commitment look more credible.⁶

Or, as CND-supporters in the period would have put it: European-based Cruise missiles would ensure that NATO fought to the last dead European.

We have since learned there was another dimension to the 'shaky nuclear commitment'. In a letter to the *London Review of Books*, the military strategist Edward Luttwak wrote the following:

' . . . Reagan did not believe in Mutual Assured Destruction. He would not press the button, period, not even if they bombed Washington DC ("What's the point?"). [. . .] What terrified Bush and the Joint Chiefs was the prospect of the Soviets finding out that the US president had given up

⁶ <<https://compactmag.com/article/how-nato-lost-its-way>>

even on a Second Strike option, thereby ruining the principle of nuclear deterrence. I can't blame them: who, by the same token, could have imagined the KGB was so far gone it accepted the *Washington Post* view, according to which Reagan was a John Birch Society fanatic intent on a First Strike policy? For more than two years, KGB officers were tasked with watching USAF airfields everywhere day and night, ready to report the feared mass take-off of nuclear-armed bombers.⁷

Luttwak might have added that all the talk in the early 1980s of nuclear war-fighting, another response to the implausibility of the NATO nuclear commitment, also helped conceal the fact that Reagan did not believe in nuclear deterrence. How this nuclear war-fighting talk would be perceived by the Soviets does not seem to have greatly concerned the strategic theorists writing the papers. Unfortunately the Soviets took the talk seriously and began to believe in the possibility of a NATO first strike. This led the Soviets to misinterpret the 1983 NATO exercise Able Archer 83 as actual preparations for war and a nuclear exchange was as close as it has ever come.⁸

new

Ukraine

When I first began using the Internet it seemed wonderful: all this information at my desk! Now there's so much information as to be utterly unmanageable. And that's without the plague of *disinformation*. Take Ukraine. This was the heading of an essay on *Covert Action*:

'U.S. Media Decries Brutal Russia Invasion of Ukraine—Yet an Intrepid Reporter Finds that the Russians Were Welcomed as Liberators in the Southern Ukrainian City of Henichesk along the Sea of Azov'⁹

The 'intrepid reporter' is Sonja Van den Ende, 'embedded' with the Russian Army in Ukraine near the border with Crimea. She reports that the population there welcomed the Russians and writes:

⁷ <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n04/letters#175342>>

⁸ See <<https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/nuclear-close-calls-able-archer-83>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/nov/02/nato-war-game-nuclear-disaster>>.

⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/3j2u96sa>> or <<https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/03/25/u-s-media-decries-brutal-russia-invasion-of-ukraine-yet-an-intrepid-reporter-finds-that-the-russians-were-welcomed-as-liberators-in-the-southern-ukrainian-city-of-henichesk-along-the-sea-of-a/>>

'The people that I spoke to all said the same thing: They felt protected from the criminal gangs, with their Nazi ideology, who raged the towns.'

Ukrainian 'Nazis' is part of the official Russian rationale for the invasion. So is this true? Or is Van den Ende merely reporting what the Russians wish her to see and hear? (That is usually what being 'embedded' comes down to.) I had a look for other writing by Van den Ende and found a recent essay of hers describing the demonstrations by the anti-covid restriction/anti-vaccination movement in Germany.

'Every night thousands of people take to the streets in every town, small towns and villages across Germany, from north to south and east and west, it's even bigger as in 1989. The media and politicians would have us believe that they are so-called "Querdenkers", right-wing radicals, "Reichsbürger" or neo-Nazis. This is the fear of the elite, because they know and the media knows that this is not the case, it has become a real revolution, a revolution of the people, to put a sign to the address of the worst totalitarian government that Germany has experienced since WWII and the GDR, under the guise of a virus a new totalitarian system is being created, a technocratic revolution 4.0. Germany, which has been under occupation of the US and deep-state since WWII, is together with Austria the great experiment of the elite in the field of social obedience, which we call a psyop, while the Netherlands is the testing ground of the digital payment system, E-Health and climate madness. You guessed it the United Nations (UN) agenda 2030 and the dream of the World Economic Forum (WEF) are being tested and partly implemented, if this social experiments works, in Germany and Western Europe, the elite can implement their agenda, but people now realize what they are up to and as many of us said before, it's not about a virus, but a virus is used to implement this agenda, without a "big" scare the people had not become so manipulated as they are now.'¹⁰

Evidently, neither Van den Ende nor Oneworld.press believe in editing and/or proofreading. However, if you ignore the writing, this is the same kind of theory as professed by the anti-vaxxers elsewhere in Europe, the UK and the USA. (See below under subhead **RFK Jr.**) If there's evidence for any of this I haven't seen it. This does not encourage me to trust Van den Ende's account of life in the south of Ukraine.

Then there's Caitlin Johnstone. Her 'Re-Visiting Russiagate in Light of Ukraine War' asserts:

¹⁰ <<https://oneworld.press/?module=articles&action=view&id=2377>>

'The most important thing to understand about the Trump-Russia collusion narrative is that it began with western intelligence agencies, was sustained by western intelligence agencies, and in the end resulted in cold war escalations against a government long targeted by western intelligence agencies.

[. . . .]

Trump supporters like to believe that the Deep State tried to remove their president because he was such a brave populist warrior leading a people's revolution against their Satanic globalist agendas, and surely there were some individual goons within their ranks who would have loved to see him gone. But in reality the major decision makers in the US intelligence cartel never intended to remove Trump from office. They'd have known from their own intel that the Mueller investigation wouldn't turn up any evidence of a conspiracy with the Russian government, and they'd have known impeachment wouldn't remove him because they know how to count Senate seats. Russiagate was never about removing Trump, *it was about making sure Trump played along with their regime change plans for Moscow and manufacturing mainstream consent for the escalations we're seeing today.*¹¹ (emphasis added)

The italicised section above, Johnstone's striking thesis, is *not* stood up by her essay. The best she offers is a recent piece by ConsortiumNews' editor, Joe Lauria, 'Biden Confirms Why the US Needed This War'. In this Lauria claims that the Ukraine invasion was deliberately provoked to facilitate the longstanding agenda to oust Putin and 'ultimately restore a Yeltsin-like puppet to Moscow'.¹²

'The U.S. got its war in Ukraine. Without it, Washington could not attempt to destroy Russia's economy, orchestrate worldwide condemnation and lead an insurgency to bleed Russia, all part of an attempt to bring down its government. Joe Biden has now left no doubt that it's true.

The president of the United States has confirmed what *Consortium News* and others have been reporting since the beginnings of Russiagate in 2016, that the ultimate U.S. aim is to overthrow the government of Vladimir Putin.

"For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power," Biden said on Saturday at the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The White House and the State

¹¹ <<https://tinyurl.com/3cude3c2>> or <<https://caitlinjohnstone.com/2022/03/28/re-visiting-russiagate-in-light-of-the-ukraine-war/>>

¹² <<https://consortiumnews.com/2022/03/27/can-russia-escape-the-us-trap/>>

Dept. have been scrambling to explain away Biden's remark.'

But Biden's remark didn't reveal some (barely hidden) agenda, as Lauria would have us believe. Biden didn't mean 'Putin must go and we will depose him'. It was just outrage at cities being flattened.¹³ Almost no-one wants this war – except perhaps China, watching as its two geo-political rivals go at each other, and the energy companies about to make an even bigger fortune. The war will be good for the sectors of the NATO member economies which produce weapons, most notably in the USA. But for many smaller NATO members, to increase so-called 'defence spending' you either increase taxes (already relatively high, thanks to the pandemic) or make cuts in spending elsewhere. No elected politician wants to do either.

Yes, it is important to remember that there is a complex back story to this Russian invasion of Ukraine – one that is largely ignored by the NATO-supporting media. The invasion could have been avoided had the USA (NATO) behaved differently. I even heard former UK Defence Secretary and former head of NATO George Robertson say so on the BBC.¹⁴ But the case has *not been made* that Russia has been manoeuvred into a trap by the USA. President Putin did not have to invade Ukraine. He had other tools available to get NATO's attention, if that was what he wanted, notably his control over gas supplies to much of Western Europe. This is not a conspiracy by the USA's deep state.¹⁵

new

Corbyn, Labour and anti-semitism

In a piece in *The Observer* about the British left and their support for the Soviet Union/Russia, Nick Cohen commented:

'A few [. . .] switched their allegiance from Soviet communism to Putinist

¹³ Garrick Alder read this differently.

'As you say, the Biden outburst ("This man cannot remain in power!") is not a statement of intent. But it has more than a little in common with Henry II's famous line about Thomas a Beckett: "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?"'

¹⁴ I didn't write down the time and date of his comment which I heard *en passant*, as it were. He told the House of Commons Defence Select Committee something similar: 'I just wonder whether or not – this is a radical thought for me to give you – did we goad him into doing it?' <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/former-nato-chief-says-west-26475492>>

¹⁵ In the original P D Scott coinage: 'A hard-to-perceive level of government or super-control that exists regardless of elections'. See <<https://apjff.org/2014/12/10/Peter-Dale-Scott/4090/article.html>>.

gangsterism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and carried on as before. They became Corbyn's senior advisers and led the Labour party to a devastating defeat in 2019.¹⁶

Who are these nameless people who were advising Corbyn? Chief among them must be Andrew Murray, of the Stop the War Coalition. Murray had been in the CPGB in various incarnations for 40 years before joining Labour. After being seen around Corbyn, he became a bogey-man for sections of the British political class for his refusal to exculpate Britain, America and NATO from responsibility for some of our current geo-political ills.¹⁷

Conspicuous by its absence in Cohen's columns over the years is any account of the relentless campaign by all and sundry (including Cohen) to portray Corbyn as an anti-semite.¹⁸ Why the campaign? After Corbyn-led Labour did surprisingly well in the 2017 general election, there arose the (albeit remote) possibility that Labour might win next time around. This offered to the Israeli state the intolerable prospect of a major European power being led by a man who supported the Palestinians. Thus the big drive against Corbyn and Labour; and thus, in part, Labour's failure in the 2019 general election.

Meanwhile, related to that protracted psy-op, the following appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*.

'Laura Murray - Apology

17 March 2022 • 7:18 am

In an article "Rachel Riley deserves every bit of compensation for the hard-Left abuse she's endured" (23 December 2021) written by Ian Austin, we suggested that Laura Murray, a former staff member at the Labour Party, was an "anti-Jewish racist" and part of the "vile anti-Semitism of Corbyn's Labour" who had been stood up to by Rachel Riley during a recent court case. These allegations were and are untrue. We accept that there was and is no basis to suggest that Ms Murray is anti-Semitic. On the contrary; the court heard in unchallenged evidence that

¹⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/yc7w4zyr>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/19/russia-ukraine-war-putin-right-conservatives>>

¹⁷ His views on the Ukrainian situation are at <<https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/03/the-iraq-war-exposes-the-wests-ukraine-hypocrisy>>.

A taste of his political beliefs can found from the (anonymously authored) profile 'Andrew Murray: Who is the ex-communist joining the Labour campaign?', which was in *The Week* in May 2017 at <<https://tinyurl.com/42sazwaa>> or <<https://www.theweek.co.uk/general-election-2017/84573/andrew-murray-who-is-the-ex-communist-joining-the-labour-campaign>>.

¹⁸ See below under subhead **Mark Curtis on the Guardian**.

Ms Murray devoted significant time and energy to confronting and challenging antisemitism within the Labour Party whilst she was employed there. The Telegraph and Ian Austin apologise to Ms Murray. We have agreed to pay her substantial damages.¹⁹

Laura Murray is the previously mentioned Andrew Murray's daughter.

Ukraine

This crisis is having some interesting intellectual repercussions. There was George Monbiot in the *Guardian* criticising some of those on the British left who have questioned the mainstream anti-Russian line of recent years.

'Among the worst disseminators of Kremlin propaganda in the UK are people with whom I have, in the past, shared platforms and made alliances. The grim truth is that, for years, a segment of the "anti-imperialist" left has been recycling and amplifying Putin's falsehoods.

[. . . .]

At the end of last year, the writer and film-maker John Pilger claimed "it was the US that overthrew the elected govt in Ukraine in 2014, allowing Nato to march right up to Russia's western border". This is a standard Kremlin talking point, dismissing the revolution as a US coup. Ukraine, of course, is not a Nato member.²⁰

The assertion by Pilger (and the Russian state) that the USA overthrew the Ukrainian government in 2014 is true-ish. It would be more accurate to say that the US *helped* to overthrow that government. The late Robert Parry discussed this in 2015.²¹

¹⁹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2022/03/17/laura-murray-apology/>

²⁰ 'We must confront Russian propaganda – even when it comes from those we respect' on 2 March 2022 at <<https://tinyurl.com/2p989ubv>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/russian-propaganda-anti-imperialist-left-vladimir-putin>>.

Had he widened his sights a little, Monbiot might have included the *Mail's* Peter Hitchens who has questioned the anti-Russian line on occasion. On Ukraine he wrote (5 March 2022):

'I know that our policy of Nato expansion – which we had promised not to do and which we knew infuriated Russians – played its part in bringing about this crisis. I know that Ukraine's current government, now treated as if it was almost holy, was brought into being by a mob putsch openly backed by the USA in 2014.'

<<https://tinyurl.com/2nczpnvy>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-10581335/PETER-HITCHENS-saw-coming-Thats-wont-join-carnival-hypocrisy.html>>

²¹ <<https://consortiumnews.com/2015/07/13/the-mess-that-nuland-made/>>

It is true, as Monbiot has noticed, that in sections of the British left there is still an instinctive pro-Russian bias. Or, rather, there is an instinctive anti-American bias. I share this prejudice. America has been the supreme imperialist power since WW2; has caused most of the wars and most of the deaths since then; and, until the arrival of the Putin regime, had also told most of the lies. The difficulty is that this reflex (but rational) anti-Americanism can create a reluctance to recognise that Russia *is* the violent kleptocracy depicted in the Western MSM. The other side of this is Monbiot's apparent assumption that anything asserted by the Kremlin is false. If only it was that simple!

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Entirely missing from the Anglo-American MSM is any sense that Ukraine has been a contest between Russia and the USA since the fall of the Berlin Wall.²² There was a letter in *The Times* on 4 March from Roland Smith, British ambassador in Kyiv 1999-2002. Discussing the complex post-1989 history of Ukraine, Smith wrote of 'the Orange Revolution of 2004-05 that forced a rerun of a rigged election; and to the Maidan protests of 2013-14 that led to the downfall of the corrupt pro-Russian President Yanukovich'. Smith did not mention that the Orange Revolution and the events of Maidan a decade later were in large part American operations.²³

At the heart of the Orange Revolution was the USA's National Endowment for Democracy (NED) with money and technical advice.²⁴ I was curious to see what, if anything, the NED had to say about it. Sure enough there apparently is material on this at the NED site. You see this:

UKRAINE'S LESSONS LEARNED: FROM THE ORANGE REVOLUTION TO THE EUROMAIDAN.

Beneath that are buttons offering a Powerpoint Presentation and Event Highlights.²⁵ But both produce '404 page not found' when they are clicked.

²² On which see, for example, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/colour_revolutions_3196jsp/>.

²³ Neither did former SIS chief John Sawer in a talk at the Oxford Union in 1 March. Sawer tells his audience that Putin was reasonable until the 'colour revolutions' – but doesn't explain that they were American operations. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yw5lzKVn3sc>>.

On the Orange Revolution as an American-sponsored and trained event see Ian Traynor, 'US campaign behind the turmoil in Kiev' at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/26/ukraine.usa>>.

²⁴ For a detailed critical look at the NED see <<https://tinyurl.com/yc2w84de>> or <<https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/03/04/if-the-national-endowment-for-democracy-ned-is-subverting-democracy-why-arent-some-of-the-left-media-calling-it-out/>>.

²⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p85vf7d>> or <<https://www.ned.org/events/ukraine-lessons-learned-from-the-orange-revolution-to-the-euromaidan/>>

Oddly, they have left video of a panel discussion, part of which is the text of the Powerpoint presentation they have deleted. My initial assumption was that the site has been (partially) scrubbed to remove the NED talking of its success in Ukraine. But Garrick Alder thought of checking web.archive.org, and the deleted pieces can still be read.²⁶ They aren't the NED discussing its work in Ukraine but a more general analysis of events in Ukraine from 2004 onwards. Quite why they were deemed worthy of censorship is not obvious to me.

Three days after I wrote the paragraph above about Ukraine and the NED, *Covert Action* reported that the NED had deleted all records of the money it spent in Ukraine. That, too, is retrievable through web.archive.org.²⁷

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The excellent Chris Hedges wrote this:

'There was a near universal understanding among diplomats and political leaders at the time [1989] that any attempt to expand NATO was foolish, an unwarranted provocation against Russia that would obliterate the ties and bonds that happily emerged at the end of the Cold War

How naive we were. The war industry did not intend to shrink its power or its profits. It set out almost immediately to recruit the former Communist bloc countries into the European Union and NATO. Countries that joined NATO, which now include Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia, were forced to reconfigure their militaries, often through hefty loans, to become compatible with NATO military hardware.

There would be no peace dividend. The expansion of NATO swiftly became a multi-billion-dollar bonanza for the corporations that had profited from the Cold War. (Poland, for example, just agreed to spend \$6 billion on M1 Abrams tanks and other U.S. military equipment.) If Russia would not acquiesce to again being the enemy, then Russia would be pressured into becoming the enemy. And here we are: On the brink of another Cold War, one from which only the war industry will profit while, as W.H. Auden wrote, the little children die in the streets.'²⁸

²⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/NED12Feb2014>> (the PDF)
<<https://tinyurl.com/NED12Feb2014PowerPoint>>

²⁷ See <<https://tinyurl.com/4ufdrxt7>> or <<https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/03/07/national-endowment-for-democracy-deletes-records-of-funding-projects-in-ukraine/>>.

²⁸ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p95smk3>> or <<https://www.salon.com/2022/02/26/the-ukraine-and-how-we-got-here-chronicle-of-a-foretold/>>

This very important point is never mentioned by the UK's MSM. From the perspective of smaller former Soviet satellites and others close to Russia, NATO – let us resist the attempted rebranding as Nato – NATO may look like protection, but for the Americans it is chiefly a weapons-selling system: the price states pay for joining NATO is that they must buy American weapons.

Broon

This was Gordon Brown in the *Guardian*:

'In all my time in politics I have never witnessed so much poverty and hardship. In Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, the constituency I grew up in and represented for 32 years and where I am patron of the local family centre, there are more children than ever going to school ill-clad and hungry; desperate mothers falling into the hands of loan sharks; and mental health problems escalating with little NHS provision to cope.'²⁹

As I have remarked below, Brown is still pretending that he had no role in all this.

Somebody whom Brown met while Chancellor of the Exchequer is the American economist and former United States Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich. He recently commented thus:

'For the first three decades after the second world war, democracy did this. The US and war-ravaged western Europe built the largest middle classes the world had ever seen, and the most buoyant democracies.

The arrangement was far from perfect, but with the addition of civil rights and voting rights, subsidized healthcare (in the US, Medicare and Medicaid), and a vast expansion of public education, democracy was on the way to making capitalism work for the vast majority.

Then came a giant U-turn, courtesy of Ronald Reagan in America and Margaret Thatcher in Europe. Deregulation, privatization, globalization, and the unleashing of finance created the Full Monty: abandoned factories and communities, stagnant wages, widening inequality, a shrinking middle class, political corruption and shredded social support.'³⁰

Brown would have us forget that he was an enthusiastic supporter of two of Reich's four horsemen, 'globalization, and the unleashing of finance'. (And I do

²⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/5y2cw33d>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/01/food-banks-bedding-banks-worst-poverty-gordon-brown>>

³⁰ <<https://tinyurl.com/y64rupt9>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/13/us-republicans-oligarchs-economics-nationalism>>

not remember him when PM trying to undo any of the privatisation of the preceding 35 years.) I might take Brown seriously if he offered us just a smidgeon of *mea culpa*.

Pinay

Mark Curtis has published an essay on his website about Le Cercle, aka the Pinay Circle. Curtis has assembled some of the extant information on the group from participants Brian Crozier through to Alan Duncan, as well as a list of British MPs who have attended Le Cercle meetings.³¹ This is interesting because Curtis sort of straddles the gap between academic history and politics and academically less reputable sources such as *Lobster*.

After fragments in *Lobsters* 8 and 11, Pinay appeared in these columns in *Lobster* 17 ('Brian Crozier, the Pinay Circle and James Goldsmith'³²), and in issue 18, in David Teacher's 'The Pinay Circle and Destabilisation in Europe'. Over the following 20 years Teacher expanded this into a book which has been revised several times. The latest version is *ROGUE AGENTS: Habsburg, Pinay and the Private Cold War 1951-1991* which is on-line.³³ Oddly, the Curtis essay does not mention Teacher's enormous piece of research.

Same old, same old

There is a regular collection of Russian disinformation by EU East StratCom Task Force.³⁴ In a recent bulletin, under the headline 'False Helmets, Trolling Arm Badges: How Pro-Kremlin Outlets Exploited the Situation in Kazakhstan', was the very small subhead: 'Pro-Kremlin outlets blame the West for a "colour revolution" in Kazakhstan, but hardly anyone is listening'. Not, please note, that the Russian claim about a 'colour revolution' in Kazakhstan is false.

Covert Action was listening and on 12 January ran a report on said 'colour revolution' which included this paragraph:

³¹ 'Secret "CIA-funded" group linked to UK ministers' at <<http://markcurtis.info/2022/01/03/secret-cia-funded-group-linked-to-uk-ministers/>>.

³² Based on some references to Pinay found in the papers stolen from Brian Crozier's Institute for the Study of Conflict.

³³ <<http://www.cryptome.org/2012/01/cercle-pinay-6i.pdf>> See also <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster71/lob71-view-from-the-bridge.pdf>> under subhead **Rogue Agents**.

³⁴ <<https://euvdisinfo.eu>>

'The media almost universally failed to report that political organizations in Kazakhstan in 2020 received \$3.8 million from George Soros' Open Society Foundation, which promotes regime change against pro-Russian leaders in Eastern Europe and Central Asia under the guise of advancing democracy and human rights, and more than \$1.2 million from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). (Data for 2021 is not yet publicly available.)'³⁵

Craig Murray commented on this in a blog entry:

'The narrative on the left is that the CIA is attempting to instigate another colour revolution and put a puppet regime into Nur-Sultan (as the capital is called this week). This also is utter nonsense.'³⁶

Well yes, the NED and the Soros Foundation are not the CIA. But from the Russians' point of view, that is a minor distinction.

Incidentally, the NED has been funding groups in the UK, notably Bellingcat and OpenDemocracy.³⁷ The former isn't a surprise but OpenDemocracy? It received \$150,000 between 2015 and 2018.

'Call from the White House . . .'

Yes, you've probably had enough of Trump and his idiocies. But this about his support among the so-called elite is striking.

'American populism has always been something of a misnomer. For one thing, Donald Trump never won the popular vote. For another, populists tend to be economically left-wing, and the policies of Trump's government did nothing to restrict corporate interests or the tech monopolies. His inner circle was every bit as much a part of the American elite as its opponents – Steven Mnuchin (Yale 85), Ben Carson (Yale 73), Wilbur Ross (Yale 59), Stephen Schwarzman (Yale 69), Jared Kushner (Harvard 03), Steve Bannon (Harvard 85), Mike Pompeo (Harvard Law 94) Trump's inaugural Cabinet had more Harvard alumni than Obama's . . .'³⁸

³⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/y7p75y5r>> or <<https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/01/12/national-endowment-for-democracy-provided-1-2-million-to-kazakhstan-to-help-spark-color-revolution-against-pro-russian-and-pro-china-regime/>>

³⁶ <<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2022/01/what-kazakhstan-isnt/>>

³⁷ See <<https://declassifieduk.org/cia-sidekick-gives-2-6m-to-uk-media-groups/>>.

³⁸ Stephen Marche, 'How Ivy League Elites Turned Against Democracy' at <<https://tinyurl.com/y7p75y5r>> or <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/ivy-league-apologists-january-6-gop-elitism-populism/621153/>>.

Mark Curtis on the *Guardian*

The historian Mark Curtis is editor of Declassified UK.³⁹ He spoke at a conference on the *Guardian* newspaper. Curtis has not yet posted his talk but here is an account of it:

'According to Curtis, the *Guardian* plays a key role in misinforming the British public about foreign affairs and upholding the establishment. It promotes a benign myth of Britain as "the good guys" championing a rules-based international order, while failing to really cover Britain's role in World affairs. Indeed, it had been co-opting liberal-minded people into thinking they are being told the truth.

With its wars in Iraq, Libya etc. and its role in supporting countries with bad human-rights records such as Israel and Egypt, Britain had been failing to uphold the rulings and values of the UN and could be reasonably considered "a rogue state". Curtis also found that the *Guardian* had unreasonably exempted Britain from responsibility for events in Syria, failing to investigate covert support for jihadist groups in the early part of its civil war. While agreeing with the *Guardian's* denunciation of the Trump period and acknowledging the hostile actions of countries like Russia, he thought that the *Guardian* had been excessively enthusiastic about Anglo-American cooperation under Obama and Biden presidencies.

While the *Guardian* sometimes exposes how the establishment behaves, it largely acts in support of it, and in recent years it has shredded its capacity to do more independent reporting. Much of this can be explained by what happened since the Snowden revelations, i.e. Britain's security state took a proactive posture so as to neutralise the independence of the *Guardian's* coverage of foreign affairs It was now running "puff-pieces" on the security services, notably GCHQ and MI6, and was often acting as an amplifier and conduit for the state's media operations of unsubstantiated claims by British intelligence agencies about threats faced by foreign powers.

When in 2015, Britain gained a political leader who might have transformed Britain's policy towards Saudi Arabia, the Yemen War and elsewhere, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* dedicated a huge effort to undermining the prospect of a Corbyn-led Government. The *Guardian's* posture was overtly hostile and it all but accused him of being antisemitic, while demonising the Labour leadership for failing to address antisemitism in the Party. In the four years up to the General Election of 2019, it had published about 1,380 articles on antisemitism and the Labour Party or

³⁹ Curtis is at <<http://markcurtis.info>> Declassified UK is at <<https://declassifieduk.org>>.

Pardon?

Legend has it that the US Department of Defense used to spend a huge amount on buying hammers. I remembered \$200 per item but the putative figure was actually \$435 per hammer. Sadly, on examination this proved to be simply a result of the peculiar way the Pentagon presented its accounts and not a real spend.⁴¹ So our own MoD may have topped the US DoD in ridiculous spending, as reports tell us that it spent £5.7 million on *ear plugs* which were subsequently found to be 'not fit for purpose on Operations'.⁴² It would be excellent indeed if these were being bought to cope with the useless new armoured vehicle on which the MoD has reportedly spent billions, which is so noisy it is damaging the occupants' hearing.⁴³ However the timing of the contracts doesn't seem to work for that scenario.

Check these

Long time friend of this journal and frequent contributor to it, John Booth, now has his own website, <<https://forthzando.com>>.

Another regular contributor, Andrew Rosthorn, has turned his decades of research into the politics (and parapolitics) of Lancashire into a book, *The Oyston Files*, reviewed in this issue.⁴⁴ Some of this will be familiar to those who

⁴⁰ <<https://www.campaign.org/post/great-event-on-the-guardian-but-misses-vital-punch-line>>

⁴¹ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p92x2n4>> or <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/post/the-pentagons-435-hammer/2011/05/19/AGoGKMHM_blog.html>

⁴² <<https://tinyurl.com/yttph7r5>> or <<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/ministry-of-defence-spent-5-7-million-on-faulty-ear-plugs-307143/>>

This comes from a Labour Party dossier on MoD waste and sadly the item on earplugs merely reads: 'The 2014-15 accounts show that the MoD spent £5.7M on ear plugs which were found to be "not fit for purpose on Operations".' We need more details! See <<https://tinyurl.com/y87ptj2u>> or <<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Dossier-of-Waste-in-the-Ministry-of-Defence-2010-2021.pdf>>.

⁴³ *The Sun* broke the story and its headline was 'New tanks which cost army staggering £5.5 billion have trials halted after troops fall sick and damage hearing' at <<https://tinyurl.com/rd7ae4f4>> or <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/15123499/tanks-army-staggering-5-5billion-trials-halted-troops-sick-damage-hearing/>>. For more details see <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57348573>>.

⁴⁴ <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=the+oyston+files>>

have read his *Lobster* pieces on the campaign against Owen Oyston.⁴⁵

Meet the new boss . . .

In the second last paragraph of a 1500 word article about Covid on the *Daily Mail* website, Ian Birrell wrote this:

'Concerns escalated after disclosures that Peter Daszak even sought US funding in 2018 to work in Wuhan on a scheme to insert rare cleavage sites into SARS-like coronaviruses collected in the field, then run experiments on live bats.'⁴⁶

I'm no scientist, but it seems reasonably clear that it is 'cleavage sites' on the Covid virus which make it so dangerous to humans. Yet we are told that US money was being sought to fund a Chinese lab to add such 'cleavage sites' to coronaviruses? This needs some explanation – which Mr Daszak does not offer in the long profile of him at Science.org.⁴⁷

Not a million miles away, why were some British scientists reluctant to suggest that Covid began in a lab in Wuhan? Because it would 'cause harm to China'.⁴⁸

Another big rip-off

The day after *The Observer* reported that the British energy companies had paid £200 *billion* to shareholders since 2010,⁴⁹ Keir Starmer announced in an

⁴⁵ For example <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/online/issue34/lob34-03.htm>>.

⁴⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/4vn9euc3>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-10396419/IAN-BIRRELL-DID-science-establishment-try-silence-fears-Covid-leaked-China-lab.html>> The Department of Defense turned down his request for funding of this research. See <<https://news.yahoo.com/daszaks-coronavirus-grant-rejected-pentagon-200800644.html>>.

⁴⁷ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8z3ewd>> or <<https://www.science.org/content/article/we-ve-done-nothing-wrong-ecohealth-leader-fights-charges-his-research-helped-spark-covid-19>>

⁴⁸ See <<https://tinyurl.com/42f38ard>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-10396419/IAN-BIRRELL-DID-science-establishment-try-silence-fears-Covid-leaked-China-lab.html>>.

⁴⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/y8f5nsb3>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/16/energy-firms-seeking-whitehall-loans-paid-200bn-to-shareholders-since-2010>>

interview that he is not in favour of nationalising the UK energy companies.⁵⁰ At best, Starmer is afraid of antagonising the City of London. At worst . . .

Something similar will happen when the Conservatives complete their privatisation of the NHS, which is well in hand.⁵¹ Getting access to UK health spending is an ideal situation for capital: risk-free, easy money. All it requires is politicians who can be bought (the American model) or who are afraid to challenge the City's ideology (UK model). In our case, with American health care companies moving in, it looks like they are not even going to have to pay much for the politicians.

Pennies dropping

That faint clicking noise you can hear is the sound of pennies dropping among our political class. There was Nick Timothy, briefly Joint Chief of Staff for PM Theresa May, railing against what he has dubbed The Complacent Generation whom he blames for the UK's troubles.

'The whole structure of our economy – too reliant on financial services, too geographically unequal, too exposed to stretched supply chains, poorly connected, with low productivity and too little investment – is as it is because of the decisions and indecision of the Complacent Generation.'⁵²

To which we might add: and too reliant on imports of all kinds, especially those from China with whom the UK economy had an annual balance of payments deficit of £42.4 *billion* in 2021.⁵³

On 14 February Labour leader Keir Starmer chipped in.

'For too long, the decline of manufacturing has been treated as if it was inevitable and irreversible. I will never accept that. But these figures show how the government's failure to back British business has led to a

⁵⁰ <<https://tinyurl.com/44w7ccwy>> or <<https://labourlist.org/2022/01/starmer-on-rising-energy-bills-im-not-in-favour-of-nationalisation/>>

⁵¹ On which see (one of many) <<https://tinyurl.com/3mysjf6b>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/03/government-pandemic-privatise-nhs-by-stealth>>.

⁵² <<https://tinyurl.com/yeypwr4x>> or <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/06/foolish-politicians-have-made-life-easy-enemies-west/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr>

⁵³ See page 3 at <<https://tinyurl.com/b5u6c9zb>> or <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1042886/china-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2021-12-24.pdf>.

shocking decline in the number of jobs.

The next Labour government would support our manufacturers with practical plans to buy, make and sell in Britain. We would be as ambitious for towns and cities across the country as they are for themselves, investing in skills, technology, and quality jobs – so that people once again feel the benefits of British industry.⁵⁴

Starmer blames all this on Conservative governments since 2009: 93,000 manufacturing jobs lost between then and 2021, he asserts. But the real damage to the manufacturing base was begun by Mrs Thatcher and continued by her Labour acolytes Brown and Blair. With no economic knowledge, Mrs Thatcher believed that high interest rates would reduce inflation. They did, a bit – by causing a recession. But they also raised the international value of the pound and British exports became uncompetitive. Blair and Brown, with no economic knowledge, believed that ‘the knowledge economy’ was going to replace manufacturing – and manufacturing was very ‘old Labour’ – and its decline could be ignored. Does Starmer not know this? Or is he merely playing politics?

TIs

I had a long telephone conversation recently with a Targeted Individual (TI) – someone who claims that s/he is being talked to by voices only s/he can hear. I have done nothing on this subject since the death of Harlan Girard, the TI who originally got in touch with me nearly 30 years ago.⁵⁵

I am no more able now to decide if TIs are crazy than I was the first time round. All I can say is what I said then: for the most part they don’t *seem* to me to be crazy. I remember meeting Harlan Girard and three others about 25 years ago – all men, all intelligent and apparently rational – and asking how many of them were being ‘talked to’ at that moment. Three of the four put their hands up. The man I spoke to on the phone for over an hour recently didn’t seem crazy.

This latest TI emailed me a bunch of links to internet postings by other TIs. The most significant of which is one who seems to have been able to record on a tablet the voices he has been getting. He plays this on the video

⁵⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/wmzsmm8w>> or <<https://labourlist.org/2022/02/starmer-labour-will-reverse-shocking-manufacturing-decline-caused-by-tories/>>

⁵⁵ Girard was featured in a strikingly sympathetic piece in the *Washington Post* in 2007. See <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8pjnxn>>. The full-length URL is three lines long!

which is on YouTube.⁵⁶ My caller said he could also do this. What I hear is a kind of babble. How an electronic device records sounds which are inaudible to the human ear I don't know. Nonetheless this might be the first step towards some TIs being able to show that they are not merely suffering from hallucinations.

If this is a genuine phenomenon, and not just cases of mental illness, what is the objective of the people organising this? Why are they still monkeying around in the same way as was being done 30 years ago? I have no idea. Garrick Alder reminded me that some of the CIA's MKUltra experiments, the best known of these programmes, were shifted overseas in the 1960s.⁵⁷ Some of it apparently went to Sweden, where the unfortunate Robert Naeslund had a device implanted in his skull.⁵⁸ Sweden was an obvious choice: the Swedish state was practising eugenics until 1976, so a little tinkering with the human brain for their American allies would have gone through on the nod.⁵⁹

Naeslund was first mentioned in these columns in *Lobster* 23 and as far as I can tell, has yet to persuade anyone in the Swedish state or its major media to pay attention to his experiences. On a trip to Sweden about a decade ago, I met one of its investigative journalists. He had never heard of Naeslund and expressed no interest when I explained what had happened to him.

*

Another group of 'targeted individuals' are employees of the governments of the USA and Canada who have been experiencing so-called 'Havana syndrome', apparent assaults by electro-magnetic (em) or sonic devices.⁶⁰ It is reported that some 200 U.S. staff – military, diplomatic, intelligence – have been affected in 11 countries in the last 5 years.⁶¹ There is even a report of an event in Washington.

⁵⁶ Start at around 7 minutes 10 seconds here:
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FjTKUEqO8Q>>.

⁵⁷ See <<https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2017/dec/14/cia-mkultra-lies/>>.

⁵⁸ See <https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/esp_sociopol_mindcon29.htm> and <<https://icaact.org/articles-robert-naeslund-brain-project.html>>.

⁵⁹ <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/06/stephenbates>>

⁶⁰ The Canadian victims are mentioned in Matt Stieb, 'The Havana Syndrome Mystery and How the U.S. Plans to Solve It', at <<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/what-is-havana-syndrome-symptoms-causes.html>>.

⁶¹ However it is possible that it had been going on for longer than that. See <<https://tinyurl.com/3b4uywxk>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/02/havana-syndrome-nsa-officer-microwave-attacks-since-90s>>.

There are a number of possible explanations. One is mass hysteria – now called mass psychogenic illness. Among those who have mooted this is Robert Baloh, professor of neurology at the University of California, Los Angeles.⁶² The difficulty with this theory is that it is hard to see how it can explain this:

‘The *New York Times* reports that in 2019, a military officer overseas drove into an intersection and felt intense nausea and headaches, which subsided once they drove off.’⁶³

If it is merely a psychological phenomenon, why would a specific location produce it?

Another hypothesis is that ‘the symptoms are an unintended consequence of an energy device to collect data from smartphones or laptops’.⁶⁴ But is *this* consistent with the reports (one cited above) of the radiation being in fixed outdoor locations? Nonetheless this explanation is likely to be officially favoured because the obvious alternative to that is an offensive operation by a state – China perhaps, or Russia, or North Korea – and few want to face that possibility. Not only would this produce a diplomatic/military confrontation, the British writer David Hambling made the point that another danger for the Americans is ‘It might also open a Pandora’s Box of new cases, real or imagined, simply by suggesting that microwave harassment is a real thing. It would also raise questions of whether U.S. agencies possess similar technology and whether it has ever been used.’⁶⁵

If this *is* an offensive operation by a state, it is extraordinarily risky. Running a secret operation, using sonic or microwave devices, in a dozen countries? Chances are good it will get exposed. For that reason the idea of an offensive operation by another state strikes me as implausible: the risk of exposure massively outweighs any conceivable advantage.

Is there another possible explanation? There might be. What’s left, I suggest, is the electromagnetic soup we all live in these days. When I switch on my wi-fi, my computer can see the signals of 7 of my neighbours’ routers. Plus there are the em-fields of phones, tablets, TVs and phone masts and all

⁶² <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8e9vx6>> or <<https://theconversation.com/havana-syndrome-fits-the-pattern-of-psychosomatic-illness-but-that-doesnt-mean-the-symptoms-arent-real-167275>>

⁶³ See note 60.

⁶⁴ See note 60.

⁶⁵ David Hambling at <<https://tinyurl.com/bddtyy8f>> or <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/10/20/the-microwave-weapons-that-could-explain-why-havana-syndrome-report-is-not-being-released/>>.

the other radiating digital devices we use. (And, if we get full-scale 5G, there will be a mast every 100 yards or so.) Officially all this radiation is harmless. But we would be foolish to believe the official story. The telecommunications industry is rich enough to buy most of the science and the dissenting scientific voices are faint sounds off the main stage. A serious scare might change that.

In this column in the previous *Lobster*,⁶⁶ I noted that one of those apparently assaulted was carrying three cellphones at the time it happened. It might just be that the effects being experienced by US and Canadian officials are accidental by-products of a combination of the electromagnetic devices they are exposed to, and the em-rich environments they are in. This will be the last thing to be considered because the official line, that em radiation is harmless, is almost universally assumed to be true.

Much ado about not very much

A press release arrived from Ipsos/MORI about their new report Tackling Conspiracy Theories.⁶⁷ If there's anything less interesting than most conspiracy theories, it's analysis of who believes them and why. Still: I skimmed it. The survey shows that people are not quite as stupid as they are sometimes portrayed by the major media; and most of them treat conspiracy theories pretty rationally.

With the press release was a graphic showing the percentages of the people who thought various conspiracy theories 'plausible'. *Not* among the conspiracy theories they were asked about was the granddaddy of them all, the assassination of JFK. Too old hat to be considered? Apparently so.

Corruptistan

Nick Cohen coined 'corruptistan',⁶⁸ to 'cover Russia and the ex-Soviet states, the kleptocracies of Africa and the Middle East and probably soon China as the communist elite learns how to expatriate its wealth'. London is the favourite destination of corruptistan's money for the laundering and investing thereof.

⁶⁶ Under subhead **Who's beaming who?** at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster82/lob82-view-from-the-bridge.pdf>>.

⁶⁷ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8b3822>> or <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2021-12/Ipsos_MORI_Tackling_Conspiracy_Theories.pdf>

⁶⁸ In the *Observer* at <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8wkhp5>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/04/murky-deals-with-corruptistan-fast-becoming-quintessentially-british>>.

This subject was touched on in a report, *Russia*, by the House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee in 2020.⁶⁹ Two consecutive paragraphs said this:

'Whilst the Russian elite have developed ties with a number of countries in recent years, it would appear that the UK has been viewed as a particularly favourable destination for Russian oligarchs and their money. It is widely recognised that the key to London's appeal was the exploitation of the UK's investor visa scheme, introduced in 1994, followed by the promotion of a light and limited touch to regulation, with London's strong capital and housing markets offering sound investment opportunities. The UK's rule of law and judicial system were also seen as a draw. The UK welcomed Russian money, and few questions – if any – were asked about the provenance of this considerable wealth. It appears that the UK Government at the time held the belief (more perhaps in hope than expectation) that developing links with major Russian companies would promote good governance by encouraging ethical and transparent practices, and the adoption of a law-based commercial environment.

50. What is now clear is that it was in fact counter-productive, in that it offered ideal mechanisms by which illicit finance could be recycled through what has been referred to as the London "laundromat". The money was also invested in extending patronage and building influence across a wide sphere of the British establishment – PR firms, charities, political interests, academia and cultural institutions were all willing beneficiaries of Russian money, contributing to a "reputation laundering" process. In brief, Russian influence in the UK is "the new normal", and there are a lot of Russians with very close links to Putin who are well integrated into the UK business and social scene, and accepted because of their wealth. This level of integration – in "Londongrad" in particular – means that any measures now being taken by the Government are not preventative but rather constitute damage limitation.'

Nick Cohen stated that 'Labour certainly believes that tolerance of fraud is now part of the government's economic strategy and the Treasury wants to loosen what few protections exist to compensate the financial services industry for the Brexit debacle.' If this is true, it would be good if a Labour spokesperson actually said it out loud and often. What Cohen didn't mention is that the present situation was largely the creation of the Blair government's decision to ignore the British manufacturing sector in favour of – remember this? – 'the

⁶⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/ycknyk3k>> or <https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CCS207_CCS0221966010-001_Russia-Report-v02-Web_Accessible.pdf>

knowledge economy'. That then led to Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown's promise to the City that they would be beneficiaries of 'light touch' regulation. The Intelligence and Security Committee report nods at this in their phrase 'light and limited touch to regulation'. Which in real terms meant almost no regulation at all.

Somebody noticed

In Jonathan Marshall's essay in this issue, footnote 148 includes this:

'148 . . . For a detailed analysis of Air America's changing Wall Street Links, see Peter Dale Scott, "Private War Enterprise in Asia: Air America, the Brook Club and the Kuomintang", ms. in files of CIA Deputy Director for Plans, attached to September 14, 1970 routing slip. Declassified September 30, 2009.'⁷⁰

Yes: the CIA had filed one of Peter Dale Scot's early analyses of its operations – and it's now available on-line at the CIA's website:
<<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/197017.pdf>>.

Wikileaks needs editors

Thanks to Andrew Rosthorn for sending me <<https://file.wikileaks.org/file/>>. This is a vast, apparently randomly assembled collection of material. For example, there are the notorious Hilary Clinton emails. There are also thousands of emails, in Spanish, to and from a Venezuelan ambassador, Freddy Balzan, between 2005-2008. But there is also a 2009 list of the addresses and emails of the members of the British Society of Homeopaths. (Huh?) I don't have the patience to process this list. If you find anything striking, do let me know.

RFK Jr

In the beginning there was President Eisenhower's phrase, the military-industrial complex, used in his 1960 televised farewell address to the American people. (It has since been reported that it was going to be military-industrial-congressional complex but he was persuaded to drop 'congressional'.) Since then there have been other variations: for example, military-industrial-

⁷⁰ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster83/lob83-wall-street-supermob-cia.pdf>>

intelligence complex, which I have occasionally used. Some kind of peak hyphenation was reached recently with the 'political-intelligence-media-money-medical-corporate-pharmaceutical conspirators' in an essay about Robert Kennedy Jr. by Edward Curtin.⁷¹ This, apparently, is the theme of Kennedy's new book, *The Real Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health*.⁷²

RFK Jr. has only occasionally caught my attention. I noticed him recently arguing that Sirhan Sirhan, the alleged killer of his father, should be released. Other than that all I could have told you is that he is a rich, apparently radical lawyer with a famous father. The essay by Edward Curtin cited above includes this quote from Kennedy.

'There is nothing in the CIA's history, in its charter, in its composition, or in its institutional culture that betrays an interest in promoting either public health or democracy. The CIA's historical preoccupations have been power and control. The CIA has been involved in at least seventy-two attempted and successful coup d'état between 1947 and 1989, involving about a third of the world's governments. Many of these were functioning democracies. **The CIA does not do public health. It does not do democracy. The CIA does coups d'état.**'⁷³ (emphases in the original)

That someone with RFK Jr.'s visibility writes things like this is rather cheering. However Kennedy is an anti-vaxxer; he had joined the existing anti-vaxx movement in America before Covid. Two detailed analyses of his anti-vaxx writing seem to me to show that he doesn't really understand the science and has been sloppy (at best) when writing about it.⁷⁴ The website of the organisation which he founded and supports, Children's Health Defense,⁷⁵ has a digital newsletter, *The Defender*, which carries a mixture of news and something awfully like conspiracy theories. For example, there is an essay on it arguing that a campaign, pre-dating Covid, funded by Bill Gates and others, to

⁷¹ <<https://tinyurl.com/acx8zaxu>> or <<https://off-guardian.org/2021/12/12/rfk-jrs-heroic-resistance-to-the-cias-continuing-covid-coup-detat>>

⁷² A summary of the contents by the author is at <<https://tinyurl.com/26r44355>> or <<https://frankreport.com/2021/09/01/robert-f-kennedy-jr-has-new-book-the-real-anthony-fauci/>>.

⁷³ See note 71.

⁷⁴ See <<https://tinyurl.com/hamcty3j>> or <<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/05/how-robert-f-kennedy-jr-became-anti-vaxxer-icon-nightmare>> and <<https://tinyurl.com/mt35prf7>> or <<https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/covid-19-health-pseudoscience/anti-vaccine-propaganda-robert-f-kennedy-jr>>.

⁷⁵ <childrenshealthdefense.org>

get children across the world vaccinated, has the real aim of 'fold[ing] the current generation of children into the blossoming global digital identity system'.⁷⁶ But you don't need a vast operation to do this. The huge majority of them will own a mobile (cell) phone, become dependent on it for almost everything they do, and thus be trackable in a much simpler, non-biometric, way.

To me the anti-vaxx thing seems profoundly irrational. But Dick Russell,⁷⁷ whom I take seriously, is writing what appears to be a defence of the thinking behind said 'political-intelligence-media-money-medical-corporate-pharmaceutical conspirators'⁷⁸ and this below is from a statement issued recently by the black caucus of the US Green Party:

'Vaccine mandates and vaccine passports are among the most vile, unconstitutional, immoral, unscientific, discriminatory, and outright criminal policies ever enforced upon the population and goes against everything the Green Party stands for under Social Justice. **These policies are coming from an out-of-control government at the behest of the pharmaceutical industry.** The mainstream media and social media are also working in lock-step to censor any and all doctors, scientists, and investigative journalists who have an opposing view or who even question the current mainstream media orthodoxy.'⁷⁹ (emphasis added)

The highlighted section above seems to me to be the clue. I haven't followed this closely enough to know if Big Pharma *is* dictating Covid policies in the USA but some intelligent people evidently believe this to be true; and there is ample evidence of Big Pharma bullying the politicians in the past.⁸⁰ On this side of the Atlantic I don't think the drug companies are dictating policy on Covid. They may be making more money than they should be allowed to from the manufacture of vaccines but the policies are coming from scientists via politicians.

⁷⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/yckzut3c>> or <<https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/digital-surveillance-motive-behind-vaccinate-kids/>>

⁷⁷ Author, most notably, of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, about Richard Case Nagell. The first of his two essays on RFK Jr.'s thesis appears on RFK Jr.'s anti-vaxx website.

⁷⁸ <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8py4m2>> or <<https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/cia-liberal-media-outlets-the-real-anthony-fauci/>>

⁷⁹ <https://www.blackcaucusgreens.org/we_say_no_to_mandates>

⁸⁰ See, for example <<https://tinyurl.com/47enct37>> or <<https://www.salon.com/2021/10/29/pro-pharma-democrats-bill-to-lower-costs--advocates-ask-what-did-they-get-for-that/>>.

Banksters

As so often in this society, when something happens which reflects badly on the City of London, if it gets reported at all, the story gets buried in the financial pages. (This particular story didn't make it onto the BBC News website at all.) It begins in the City's go-go years before the big crash of 2008. British banks, notably Lloyds, RBS, HSBC and Barclays, were attaching conditions to business loans and mortgages. Thousands of small and medium-sized businesses were persuaded to sign-up for – were mis-sold – interest rate swap 'products', and some 3 million individuals were mis-sold payment protection insurance (PPI), often as a condition attached to the loans.⁸¹ When these 'products' unravelled and backfired on the customers who had signed up to schemes they didn't understand, the scandal was so big the banks involved were eventually forced by the financial authorities to begin repaying the money in 2012.⁸²

But not everyone was compensated. Around 10,000 business owners were excluded from compensation for the mis-selling of interest rate swap products. Those were the businesses that had bought credit swaps worth £10 million or more and were thus deemed to be 'sophisticated' – i.e. presumed to be witting, and not easily manipulated by the banks' slick selling techniques. However, a recently published report by John Swift QC has found that this criterion was adopted after extensive lobbying by . . . the banks.⁸³ In 2015 *The Times* reported rumours that the regulators had reached a secret deal with the banks. Mr Swift's report shows this to be true. The banks lobbied Conservative politicians in the government who, in turn, lobbied the Financial Services Authority to find a formula which would reduce the banks' liability.⁸⁴ This saved the banks an estimated £10 billion.

This latest scam by the banks is a classic example of 'the finance curse'. John Booth pointed me towards a report on this by the Political Economy

⁸¹ The details of these schemes are not relevant here but on PPI see <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/may/05/how-ppi-scandal-unfolded>> and on interest rate swaps see <<https://tinyurl.com/37fjtjvd>> or <<https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-2278697/FSA-tells-banks-compensate-firms-rate-swap-mis-selling.html>>.

⁸² You may remember years of TV ads and emails asking if you been mis-sold PPI, and if so to get in touch with this or that group of solicitors who would handle it all for you.

⁸³ Text of Swift report at <<https://tinyurl.com/yeym358m>> or <<https://www.fca.org.uk/publication/corporate/independent-review-of-interest-rate-hedging-products-final-report.pdf>>. This is 500 pages long. The executive summary is just about manageable.

⁸⁴ James Hurley, 'Mis-selling payouts cut to save banks', *The Times* 14 December 2021 and James Hurley, 'Watchdog rejected payments for swaps victims "at the stroke of a pen"', James Hurley, *The Times* 15 December 2021.

Research Institute at Sheffield University.⁸⁵ The report's thesis is this:

'The data in the report suggests that the UK economy, may have performed much better in overall growth terms if: (a) its financial sector was smaller; (b) if finance was more focused on supporting other areas of the economy, rather than trying to act as a source of wealth generation (extraction) in its own right.

This evidence also provides support for the idea that the UK suffers from a form of "finance curse": a development trajectory of financial over dependence involving a crowding out of other sectors and a skewing of social relations, geography and politics.'⁸⁶

'Finance curse' rang a faint bell and I went to *Lobster's* search engine. There it was, in this column, in *Lobster* 66.⁸⁷

'Nicholas Shaxson wrote *Treasure Islands: tax havens and the men who stole the world* (London: 2011). He is the co-author, with John Christensen, of *The Finance Curse: how oversized financial centres attack democracy and corrupt economies*.⁸⁸ This is a wonderful piece of work which, *inter alia*, critiques in great detail the various claims made about the significance of the financial services sector to the British economy and examines the negative effects for the rest of us of having what is essentially an unregulated global casino in our midst. That this country is now set on a course of absolute decline is largely down to the City's dominance of the economic conversation in this country since the 1970s (and the gullibility of the politicians who believed what they were told).'

Gullible politicians? Yes, gullible because they are ignorant. In the last 30 years of the Labour Party's history, how many of the Party's shadow cabinet or cabinet members understood elementary macro-economics? Well there was Bryan Gould . . . but other than him, who else comes to mind?

Lest we forget

In the final lines of a detailed account of the failure of American PEN to

⁸⁵ <<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2018/10/05/uk-finance-curse-report/>>

⁸⁶ I referred briefly to this report in this column in *Lobster* 78 under the subhead **The future of Britain's crisis** at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster78/lob78-view-from-the-bridge.pdf>>.

⁸⁷ Under subhead **Important Reports** at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster66/lob66-view-bridge.pdf>>

⁸⁸ On-line, free, at <https://www.taxjustice.net/cms/upload/pdf/Finance_Curse_Final.pdf>.

support Julian Assange, Chris Hedges notes:

'As for [CEO of PEN America, Suzanne] Nossel's claim that "in the beginning they [Wikileaks] worked with journalists to be careful about redacting names of individuals", she should be aware that the decryption key to the unredacted State Department documents was not released by Assange, but Luke Harding and David Leigh of the *Guardian* in their book *Wikileaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy*'.⁸⁹

True that; and to my knowledge never explained by messers Harding and Leigh.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ <<http://www.pen-international.org>>

⁹⁰ <<https://tinyurl.com/57m96d8u>> or <<https://www.salon.com/2021/12/28/pen-america-the-human-rights-careerists-and-the-betrayal-of-julian-assange/>>