

Editorial

Regime Changers Anonymous

A new popular history has been attracting some considerable critical attention. It is the 'authorised history' of MI5, the alleged Security Service, and it has been written by Christopher Andrew, the Cambridge don who has, for the purpose, been given the run of the Service's classified files. It has revealed some hitherto unknown facts, but concealed more than a few others. The book has been well assembled, and has attracted plaudits for the lucidity of its exposition. We have reviewed it below, in a consideration by Tony Simpson. But here we are not engaged in duplicating a review, but in considering some other aspects of the significance of this work.

The Security Service was officially launched in 1909 with a staff of two, who were supposed to defend the realm against Germany. Later they made a painless adjustment and began to defend it against Russia. As the two engaged ever larger numbers of accomplices it became clear that the realm which they defended consisted of ever smaller tracts of establishment England, setting its bounds somewhat short of the area occupied by the masses of the British common people. As if with satirical intent, two senior officials are portrayed in the book in full cricket regalia, upholding the dignity of the empire on the field of play. Patrick Walker and Stephen Lander both became Directors General of MI5, after they had opened the batting for the MI5 cricket team in 1984. 'Running a team of double agents', said the wartime Chairman of the Twenty Committee, J. C. Masterman, 'is very like running a club cricket side'. Maybe.

Of course, the initial recruitment of MI5 professionals took place from a fairly closed circle of colonial officials and accredited patriots. Russian intelligence quickly understood this all-too-often half-witted mentality, and was able to add a substantial contingent of recruits to the mixture, thus contributing to a general confusion. In fact, the Russian spies who were to play such an important part in the Service in the post-Second World War years were distinguished, if anything, by their superior intelligence and political acuity. They shone among a group who were not infrequently dimmer than themselves. Their upper-class credentials were impeccable, rendering their exposure the more unthinkable. This intelligence Service certainly generated a lot of information for the Russians, but perhaps rather less for those who were negotiating the difficult disengagement from empire.

But MI5 had got the message that Communist subversion was a very

present danger, and if it was tardy in the pursuit of Mr. Philby or Mr. Burgess, it could compensate for omissions in this field by all the greater zeal in the pursuit of mouthy shop stewards in the motor industry, or avid students of Marxism in the redbrick universities.

Christopher Andrew is prone to admit that perhaps the Service overspecialised in this area of enquiry. He admits to mistaken priorities. But all this does raise some other important questions which go far beyond the imperatives of literary criticism.

The Labour Party became the Government in 1945, promoting a number of bright working men to senior positions, some of whom might possibly have been placed above their thresholds of competence. The Labour Party itself was never short of disputatious supporters, and it had indeed quite a lot of quarrelsome members, some of whom rightly suspected that, given the chance, they might make a better fist of governing the country than a number of those presently charged with this task. Some Ministers were thus inducted into a fairly insecure, not to say fidgety, state. How fortunate that the spooks who haunted the anterooms of power were so sympathetic. We can imagine that there began a fevered set of exchanges, in which certain of the lower grade Ministers could have sought the help and guidance of spooks on how to deal with their Party critics. Joe Haines was to draw attention to this phenomenon in his review of the Andrew book in *Tribune*.

‘George Brown was a *Daily Express* “leak” for many years and was involved in passing to MI5 a list of sixteen Labour MPs whom the leadership alleged were secret communists, plus another nine “possibles”. Some of them were Soviet agents, some were ridiculous and some were too stupid.

The “certainties” were: Will Owen, fortunate to be acquitted at the Old Bailey of passing secrets, William Warbey, Leo Abse, Frank Allaun, Julius Silverman, John Baird, John Mendelson, Tom Driberg, R. Parkin, Stephen Swinger, John Rankin, Harold Davies, Leslie Plummer (both close to Wilson), R. Kelley, Tom Swain and Judith Hart.

Possibles were Konni Zilliacus, Victor Yates, Arthur Lewis, S. O. Davies, Barnett Stross, Emrys Hughes, Will Griffiths, Sidney Silverman and Ernie Fernyhough.

Are you shocked? You should be. Apart from several on that 1961 list, each and every one of these men, and more I haven’t mentioned, were looked up to and respected within the Party. Some betrayed you and the country. Their treachery makes *The Defence of the Realm* compulsive reading.’

Of course, George Brown was a famous hater, and this list demonstrates how catholic remained his taste. But actually, although Brown’s list is

reproduced on page 414 of Andrew's book, he does not make any convincing effort to authenticate it. Indeed, he tells us that Brown was not satisfied with the co-operation forthcoming from secret intelligence, and turned instead to his friend, Chapman Pincher, the *Daily Express's* kept bloodhound, who had made various statements about the decisions of secret intelligence to follow up on the pursuit of crypto-communists by the Services, which Andrew says are all false.

Who cares? Well, all the people who were traduced by Mr. Brown might very well care. Since I knew and was indeed a friend of many of them, I can affirm that most of them were a million miles from complicity in any of the causes of the British Communist Party. Notably, Konni Zilliacus became the pre-eminent defender of Tito's Yugoslavia when Stalin pronounced an anathema on all its works. For his pains, the official Communists accused Zilliacus of spying for the British, and indeed indicted him before a kangaroo court in Prague. John Baird, the persistent advocate of Algerian independence, had numerous friends on the French Left, to say nothing of the Algerian liberation movement, but his inclusion on Mr. Brown's blacklist is a sick slander. Subsequent Ministers in Mr. Wilson's Government included Stephen Swingle and Judith Hart, both of whom followed distinguished careers while George Brown was disgracing himself in various high offices.

Joe Haines clearly does not wish to enter into detailed discussion about the allegations he sees fit to repeat. Even more surprisingly, he has no critical questions to put when considering the filthy stories in this book about Jack Jones, a genuine Titan of the Labour movement, who neither Andrew nor Haines can approach in rectitude and integrity. Jack Jones is accused by the double agent Gordievsky of having been a Russian agent. Tony Simpson has discussed these accusations in his review. It is Mr. Andrew's privilege as the historian of institutional duplicity to display models in excrement if they serve his purpose. But it is not easily explicable that Joe Haines, a trusted Labour functionary, should endorse this activity, and this lapse shows a complete want of judgement and decency, leave alone loyalty.

This complaint is not about Mr. Andrew's denigration of various old friends of the Left. Their reputations will survive this ordure. But it is about the role of the alleged Security Services. When senior politicians appeal to the Security Services for help in policing the turbulent ranks of their own Parties, what is going wrong with our democracy? George Brown was by no means the only establishment figure in the Labour Party who enjoyed hunting witches. After all, did they not attempt to expel

Bertrand Russell and Joan Robinson for talking to the Russians?

But other examples of this kind of persecution have been more sinister. In particular Tony Simpson documents, in part, the sleazy story of the persecution of the Militant Tendency.

Merlyn Rees was in danger of being ousted from his Parliamentary seat by young rebels, and he called upon the Services to investigate their background. The Services were in some doubt about this, knowing very well that acting as inner Party policemen was not within the conventional remit of their job descriptions, but feeling insecure about ignoring requests from the Home Secretary. So the Militant Tendency was in fact investigated. We are informed by Mr. Andrew that files were kept on some thousands of Militant members. He does not inform us that the average age of those featured in the files might be seventeen and three-quarters. The precise age of those threatening the job security of senior politicians could have been even lower. Various highly qualified and doubtless well-paid servants of the State were evidently employed to follow a small phalanx of teenage plotters from pub to pub whilst they laid their nefarious schemes against law and order. Mr. Andrew is strong on plots but somewhat weaker on doctrine.

What were the precise beliefs of the young Militants in Leeds? Their principal conviction was that the politicians who exercised authority in their Party were somewhat wanting in commitment to basic Socialist values. Are we sure that they were wrong? As Oliver Cromwell might have said: 'I beseech ye, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible ye may be mistaken'. But then, the Services of bygone times failed to apprehend Oliver Cromwell, too. As has happened since, they could only catch him when he was dead. What the official doctrines of the Militant involved, far from the overthrow of Parliamentary democracy, was the passing of an Enabling Act to permit the Parliament to extend its powers in a way conducive to the implementation of Militant policy. This may be an unthinkable thought, or it may, more probably, be a somewhat utopian expectation. But it was not the job of the Services to enter into political refutations of the subversives they were supposed to monitor. This was the job of the responsible politicians in charge, who were totally incompetent to face the task.

Here there is a severe crisis. The official doctrine of the governing Party of today consists of a ragbag of admen's intuitions about what might pass for higher thought. There is no way that the intelligent young could be detained by such a farrago for one minute. There is no body of doctrine to inspire the young in the official structures of the Parliamentary Parties.

Therefore they will quite possibly invent their own, which will doubtless threaten the established powers.

It is not necessary to read too closely between the lines to see that Christopher Andrew does not wish to volunteer for the task of policing these insecure structures. Indeed, there is some evidence that some of his colleagues might well wish to contribute to deepening their insecurity.

But there is a more serious problem for the Services, which begins to bear down on us with a degree of urgency. Former colonial policemen possessed a distinct advantage over modern spooks. By and large, they knew their place. There is a gathering volume of evidence to show that modern spooks do not. There is, of course, the scandalous episode of Peter Wright, who was himself subverted by members of an alien intelligence community, in order to subvert the constitutional power for which he was supposed to be working.

But then there was the bizarre story of Airey Neave, who made it his business to act as campaign manager to ensure the preferment of Mrs. Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party. Neave was not only a celebrated spy, but also a very competent intriguer and lobbyist in the corridors of political power. Mrs. Thatcher put herself in good hands, and was duly elected. But Neave had an agenda of his own, and was himself assassinated rather quickly. The official story is that he was killed by dissident Irish Republicans who resented his activities in their territories. But Enoch Powell gave it as his opinion that Neave had been removed by the British intelligence community because he was threatening the consensual policies of successive British governments about Northern Ireland policy.

After making a variety of allegations about the Neave murder, Powell told Conservative students in Birmingham (in October 1986) that Neave had met his death

‘at the hands of “high contracting parties” made up of “MI6 and their friends”.

Neave had to be eliminated, he argued, because he was committed to a programme of integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.’

Neave’s death was, according to Powell, calculated to shock the British Government into adopting policies more friendly to the United States, which aimed to secure a united Ireland formally situated within Nato.

Enoch Powell’s theories about the assassination were widely ridiculed, but other writers were also convinced that the British secret state had Neave’s blood on its hands. Kevin Cahill said that Neave, fresh from securing Thatcher’s mandate, was determined upon a massive overhaul of

the security services, possibly merging MI5 and MI6, and possibly justified by strong allegations of corruption within those services. Paul Routledge, in his biography of Neave, tells us:

‘Cahill’s extraordinary story begins in March 1979, at the annual St. Patrick’s Day party at the Irish Embassy in London, less than a fortnight before Neave died. Cahill was then working for Singer & Friedlander, the merchant bank. “About eight in the evening, I came out into the downstairs foyer to get a taxi. None was available and I found myself in the company of an Englishman I recognised as Airey Neave. He was, as the Irish say, half-cut, but well in control of himself.” Cahill introduced himself as ex-army and an admirer of Neave’s escape books. “He said something to the effect of army, hmmm. And then, quite out of the blue and almost to himself, said words to the effect, ‘There are going to be changes here, big changes, soon. There is going to be cleaning of the stables, a cleaning of the Augean stables. There has been serious corruption.’ He then offered that the war was ‘all wrong. We have to change all that. No use playing games. We have to win. We have to make changes, big changes. We will win, when the [corruption] is sorted out. Count on that.’” ’

For the sake of this argument, it is not really material whether Neave was killed by MI6 in association with the CIA, or by the Irish National Liberation Army, or by someone else entirely. What is clear is that the intelligence services had given rise to freelance activities which had brought about the most serious changes to the political leadership of the country, and which were thence able to intervene in the most serious elements of policy formation. If it is a mistake to have security services which can plot to defend or torpedo the reputations of relatively junior political figures, it is all the more impermissible to have them appointing Prime Ministers and writing their policies.

But did not something very close to this happen in the elevation of Tony Blair to the leadership of the Labour Party? Early in Blair’s career, he recruited as his Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, the brother of Thatcher’s Sir Charles Powell. Jonathan was, at the time, head of Chancery in the British Embassy in Washington, and it was generally assumed that his task was to co-ordinate the activities of British intelligence with the relevant American intelligence officials. By an inevitable progression, we had Mr. Blair and Mr. Powell sitting on the same sofa with John Scarlett* to write the dodgy dossier and blast us into the offensive against Iraq.

In short, this kind of intelligence operation is too much of a good thing.

* John Scarlett was then chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and subsequently appointed head of MI6.

What can be done to clip the wings of all these spooks? Well, first of all, as far as the junior members of the team are concerned, substantial cuts can be made in their budgets. What precisely is all this intrigue for? How is it to be justified? It should surely be possible to control the expenditures of this kind of service in such a way as to reduce them to a minimum.

Then we shall be told that we need an intelligence service to apprehend terrorists. There are, unfortunately, numerous problems which the anti-terrorist services closely share with the warriors against subversion who made a comprehensive list of all the members of the Militant Tendency all those years ago. At the very least, there is a case for a close enquiry into this aspect of intelligence work. To learn the lessons of the wave of student arrests in Lancashire early in 2009 might be to discover some arguments for stringent budgetary controls.

But, disturbing though the activities of junior officials may be, the huge and overriding question which hangs over our political system is how to get the spooks off the Downing Street sofas and to put politics in command. As things are, Big Brother is not content to watch us any more. He is pulling our strings, and sending our coffins in convoy to the official funerals.

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We may not get answers to this question from the Chilcot Inquiry, which was established to examine the war in Iraq, which already ranks as a major calamity for British foreign policy. But we have certainly seen a parade of top spooks, and been able to form an impression of their comparative adroitness. At the end of 2009 all eyes are on Tony Blair, who is scheduled to appear in the New Year.

From the beginning one of the main questions in the frame of the Chilcot investigators concerned the legality of the war in Iraq, and here the role of the then Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, assumes great importance. We have documented below some of his various statements on whether the coming war would be lawful or not. A growing consensus thinks not.

Now Tony Blair has given an interview to a religious correspondent on the BBC in which he said that

‘he would still have thought it right to depose Saddam Hussein even if he had known that he did not have weapons of mass destruction.’

Obviously, thought Blair, you would then have to deploy different arguments about the nature of the threat that might justify an attack.

Perhaps, he hazarded, this might be located in ‘the threat to the region’.

Maybe it is a good job that only Blair is on trial before Chilcot. If his accomplices had been arraigned, life would have become instantly more difficult. Mr. Rumsfeld, for instance, when asked how he knew about Saddam’s WMD, is said to have replied that he still had the receipts for them. But the argument about the threats to the region had clearly changed since the days when the Americans were supplying the gas which Blair ritually invokes to accuse Saddam of ‘gassing his own people’. At that time, Iran was America’s official threat to the region, and Saddam was Washington’s upstanding defender of peace and freedom. What Rumsfeld and Blair have succeeded in doing in their war has been to remove a principal obstacle to Iranian influence, and to unleash a veritable renaissance of Shia, which is to say Iranian, sympathies in Iraq.

Those who follow closely the interests and sympathies of the United States are likely to perceive all this to be a threat to the region, perhaps incomparably more potent than a broken-backed Iraqi regime, heavily impaired by its adventures in Kuwait. But Blair still has room for some fancy footwork before he arrives in front of the Chilcot team.

The close questioning of underlings would produce a rich crop of contradictions. But Chilcot does not do close questioning, or at any rate not very systematically. Even so the official Blair story is being dented here and there, day by day. Blair’s foreword to John Scarlett’s dossier said:

‘What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons.’

Chilcot rightly pointed out that

‘The Butler Committee, I think, came to a view that it was not a statement it was possible to make on the basis of intelligence.’

On the second day of the hearing, the Foreign Office official with whom Chilcot raised this matter said that he had not seen the foreword before it was published, even though he was part of the group which drafted the main dossier. But Sir John Scarlett had no such excuse. This is what he said:

‘I saw the foreword as quite separate from the text of the dossier itself. The foreword was an overtly political statement by the Prime Minister so it was his wording and his comments throughout.’

He went on:

‘I don’t see it as something that I would change. My memory of the time is that this was clearly something that the Prime Minister wrote.’

None the less, Scarlett had in fact recommended other changes to the foreword, so that his decision to take his distance from Blair on this particular matter is not insignificant.

At the time that the dossier was presented, the Government was at pains to insist that the whole document, including the introductory remarks, had been signed off by the intelligence community. Now bit-by-bit that community has gone absent without leave.

Close enquiries into the legal advice offering support for war has also been flaking away the official position. It has therefore been appropriate that in his capacity as spokesman of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, Mr. Blair seems to be beginning to explore new avenues of self-justification.

As Chilcot breaks off his labours for the Christmas intermission, we can see that some useful information has emerged during the opening session of his Inquiry, even if there is a strong consensus that the war was hatched at the fateful meeting in April 2002 in Texas between Tony Blair and George Bush.

A great deal of evidence has come out about the lack of preparation for the war, and the astonishing incompetence of the post-war occupation. Major General Tim Cross, the British officer responsible for reconstruction efforts, told us that post-invasion planning was conspicuous by its absence. Lt. General Frederick Viggers said that the Provisional Authority in Baghdad was led by 'amateurs'. Sir Jeremy Greenstock embarrassingly disclosed that Britain was regarded as an add-on by the American Generals, was not consulted or even kept informed of pending developments, and was sidelined in a most humiliating way.

Sir Jeremy still has a song to sing, and will revive some public interest in his suppressed autobiography which would presumably have been candid about these matters.

But undoubtedly the star who has appeared in the earliest days of Chilcot's enquiries has not yet been called. But his impact has been electric, even in his absence. We must all hope that Clare Short's proposal that he should be invited to testify will be taken up by popular demand. Dr. Brian Jones, who has been shabbily treated by the authorities in Britain, has maintained a constant running commentary on Chilcot's progress. Tony Simpson has been following this closely, and below he summarises some of the more crucial developments.

Ken Coates

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