

Reviews

Plague

Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5*, Allen Lane, 1056 pages, ISBN 9780713998856, £30.00

‘I think it is a thundering disgrace and an abdication of our responsibility in this House that there is no parliamentary oversight of all of the security and intelligence services.’

Andrew Mackinlay MP, House of Commons, 22 May 2008

Andrew Mackinlay declared himself ‘somewhat nervous’ about probing the security and intelligence services on the floor of the House of Commons (see *Spokesman 101*). And, indeed, he was constantly harried by Conservative and Labour Members as he spoke. But he managed to tell us some important facts: for instance, that the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is supposed to provide some kind of Parliamentary oversight, is in fact ‘clerked by a spook’, and not by the Clerk of the House of Commons. ‘When does it meet? We do not know. We do not know the parameters of its jurisdiction, as the term “security and intelligence services” is a generic one: does it include the special branch of the Metropolitan Police and other forces, or does it involve just MI5, MI6 and GCHQ? We do not know.’

Mackinlay was most concerned about the ‘slow undoing of our human rights and civil liberties in this country’, entailed by the conduct and actions of the security and intelligence organisations. Such concerns are certainly not at the heart of Professor Andrew’s ‘authorized’ history of MI5, indeed they are scarcely mentioned. But what he tells us about the targeting of trade unionists such as Jack Jones and Mick McGahey, or the membership of the Militant Tendency, to take just a few examples, gives some small insight into how far the ‘undoing’ of our rights had already advanced in the 1980s.

Certainly, there is little to smile about in Christopher Andrew’s lengthy boiling-down of selected episodes from the history of Britain’s secret police, as recorded in their mountainous archives. So it does come as some small relief, among the tales of derring-do and bureaucratic inertia, to learn that Mrs McGahey’s broad Scots and ‘... interminable telephone conversations with friends and relatives ...’ around Scotland helped frustrate the ‘girls’ who were snooping, listening in on the McGaheys’ home telephone.

The spooks wanted to know what Mrs McGahey’s husband, Mick, vice president of the National Union of Mineworkers, was up to. Their intrusions continued for years, from 1970 right up to the miners’ strike of

1984-85. This lengthy surveillance was occasioned, apparently, because, as well as being an active trade unionist, Mick was a prominent member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was Cathy Massiter, herself a shining example to all would-be whistleblowers, who revealed the buggers' frustration at having to be privy to all the familial goings-on of the McGaheys as they eavesdropped on his poor wife.

Why did MI5 snoop on people in this way? Did they claim that Mick McGahey might be 'subversive', according to their organisation's 1972 definition of activities 'which threaten the safety or well-being of the State and are intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means'? Perhaps they thought his Communist Party membership might have rendered him susceptible to Soviet influence, which ticked the counter-espionage box, another MI5 preoccupation? Counter-terrorism, the organisation's third main task, was certainly not relevant: this was largely concerned with Ireland and the Middle East in the years from 1970 to the present.

Whatever the reason, prodigious public resources were squandered on trying to decipher the McGaheys' private family matters.

MI5's preoccupation with the Communist Party derives from its permanent focus on the Soviet Union, during much of the Twentieth Century, and the activities of its intelligence organisations in Britain. Membership of the CP pretty much equated with a pro-Soviet stance, as far as MI5 was concerned, notwithstanding what people actually thought or said. The Party's telephones were bugged, and the organisation penetrated by informants. Even as the Party's influence waned, especially during the 1980s, MI5 continued to lavish considerable attention on it. One explanation Andrew offers for this is the ease with which they could spy on the Party, no matter that it didn't signify very much in the real world. Is that not a subversion of MI5's own stated purpose?

Trotskyist organisations also attracted the 'subversion' specialists among the spooks. In particular, MI5 claimed to know 75 per cent of the membership of the Militant Tendency in the 1980s, during its period of expansion prior to Neil Kinnock's purge of 1985. Merlyn Rees, Home Secretary in the Callaghan Government of the 1970s, had set this hare running. He was worried about Militants in his own Leeds constituency, in case they might depose him, so he had the spooks spy on them. Was this a proper use of MI5? They duly reported that officers of his local party were, indeed, Militant supporters. Rees then commissioned the spooks to conduct a much wider investigation of Militant activities around the country. A whole generation of young socialists was identified as potentially 'subversive'. So, all those highly trained intelligence operatives devoted their lives to spying on young Militants, average age

sixteen years, elder statesmen eighteen-and-a-half. Peter Taafe's 'merry tendency', which booked the Albert Hall for its get-togethers, and organised sell-out discos at Labour Party Young Socialist conferences in Blackpool, got the full MI5 treatment. And there's no suggestion from the author or his sources that all this may have been just a wee bit over the top. Ted Grant's revolutionary utterances were taken literally. Professor Andrew comments,

'Militant was thus unquestionably subversive: a secret organization with a covert strategy designed to undermine the future of Labour as a democratic political party and turn it against the "parliamentary road to socialism".'

Really? Wasn't some reality check in order? None seems to have been made.

Andrew's want of perspective with respect to any real subversive 'threat' posed by Militant seems to reflect MI5's own distorted perceptions. Distorted perceptions on the part of the organisation, as well as its official historian, also skew the discussion of terrorism and Ireland. Andrew seems to try to downplay the gravity of the Provisional IRA's long campaign against the British State and the United Kingdom, which was indeed avowedly subversive and violent. He doesn't want to concede any ground, but does reveal that MI5 was, initially, extremely reluctant to become involved. They would rather have left matters to the Special Branch of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. But, once the British Army had been deployed to Northern Ireland on Harold Wilson's orders, MI5 formed an Irish Joint Section with MI6, the foreign intelligence organisation, which was to endure well into the 1980s. Crucially, MI5 provided the intelligence liaison officer for the Northern Ireland Secretary of State. Thereafter, the organisation was at the centre of official, as well as clandestine, affairs in the area.

Ireland was an unpopular posting for MI5 staff, but it was one of the two locations (the other was the Middle East) which drove MI5's increasing emphasis on counter-terrorism work. The Provisionals' long bombing campaign in Britain, which, in 1993, destroyed a large part of Bishopsgate in the City of London, revealed how much more counter-terrorism work MI5 had to do. Not that it was to be entirely successful in this: in July 2007, in the days before the London Tube and bus bombings, the security services' threat alert was down-graded for the first time in several years. MI5 apparently had no inkling of the imminent bombings. We still do not know fully what MI5 knew about the London bombers who travelled from Leeds via Luton. There has been no independent public inquiry into 7/7.

MI5 knew a little more, it seems, about Libyan support for the Provisionals, which manifested itself in arms supplies over an extended period, albeit with some interruptions. MI5 had a lead role in monitoring,

and seeking to intercept, such shipments. Tony Blair's new business associate, Colonel Qaddafi, had been impressed by the hunger strikes of 1981, early in the Thatcher premiership, when Bobby Sands died. Five other Republican prisoners were dead by July, as the rolling protest continued. Qaddafi remarked the depth of Provisionals' hostility to the English, and duly stepped up arms supplies once again.

It was a very dirty war in Ireland. Andrew hints at this as senior MI5 personnel complain of the nightmare that is Northern Ireland. But he does not delve very deeply. Nevertheless, the gravity of the subject matter is of an altogether different order to Militant.

Professor Andrew is more expansive when it comes to his long-time collaborator, the Russian defector Oleg Gordievsky. Gordievsky was recruited by MI6 in 1974 whilst working for the KGB at the Soviet Embassy in Denmark. He was eventually posted to London in 1982, where he was to become head of the KGB station. All the while he was spying for the British. In 1985, he was recalled to Moscow, seemingly under suspicion, but was somehow allowed to escape the country with MI6's help. Once back in Britain, Gordievsky was given a lengthy debriefing. MI6 shared with MI5 Gordievsky's intelligence on Soviet spies, and their sources, in Britain.

One contact was Jack Jones who had retired as General Secretary of the TGWU four years prior to Gordievsky's arrival in London. Gordievsky was distinctly underwhelmed by Jones. He wrote in his autobiography, published in 1995, that Jack Jones

'... was absolutely useless. By then he was a pensioner – and what good was that to the KGB? ... he really was not aware of who we were.' (*Next Stop Execution*, p.285).

It was a different story 14 years later, when Professor Andrew's book was launched, on 5 October 2009. A memorial meeting for Jack Jones, who died in April, had already been scheduled for that day, with Prime Minister Gordon Brown due to lead the tributes. (In the event, Neil Kinnock stepped in for Brown). The BBC ran a story, based on Andrew's new book, that Jack Jones had spied for the Russians and taken payments. The story was picked up by the newspapers and splashed. Gordievsky had more to say, alleging that Jones had spied for the Russians for years. He subsequently claimed, in the *Daily Mail*, that Jack Jones had supplied the KGB with secret details of a new rifle sight for the British Army. No explanation is offered of how Jack Jones might have come by such secret information.

More probable and more interesting in Andrew's book is the account of MI5's spying on Jack Jones long before Gordievsky entered the scene.

Back in October 1970, Andrew informs us, at a meeting with the then Tory Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, the Director General of MI5 ‘renewed the application for an HOW (Home Office Warrant) on the general secretary of the TGWU, Jack Jones, which had been turned down by Wilson a year earlier’ (*Defence of the Realm* p. 588). Andrew goes on:

‘... the HOW on Jones, discontinued after just over a year, proved to be reassuring, revealing not merely no sign of a continuing Soviet connection but also positive evidence of growing distance between him and the CPGB’ (*Defence of the Realm* p.589).

According to Andrew, Gordievsky first reported on Jack Jones in December 1976, to the effect that ‘Jones had been regarded by the KGB as an agent for a number of years in the “latter half of the ’60s”. All contact with [Jones] had been dormant for some time’ (*Defence of the Realm* p.657 citing Security Service Archives). Gordievsky makes no mention of this first report about Jack Jones in his own autobiography.

As we have seen, Gordievsky was posted to London in 1982. He writes in his autobiography:

‘One day, instructions came to renew our efforts with one particular potential “confidential contact”: Jack Jones, the veteran trade union leader, who was then over seventy and retired.’ He says they eventually met in the Jones’ flat in Peckham, South London: ‘a typical council flat, and a typically philistine environment, with few books, and everything in an exaggerated state of tidiness. After I had twice visited the apartment, we started to meet in restaurants, but, grateful as the former union official was, he was also absolutely useless.’

Gordievsky adds that at one meeting he took with him a brochure from the Trades Union Congress, which gave a long list of union leaders, and he asked Jack Jones to comment on them, which he duly did to the extent that Gordievsky ‘was later able to write a three-page summary’. According to Gordievsky, his document for the KGB made it appear that Jack Jones had been ‘outstandingly helpful’ and he ‘volunteered many facts of the greatest value’. Gordievsky explains his puffed-up report in these terms:

‘You can see from this what the facts really were and how, by careful reporting, success can be created out of very little’ (*Next Stop Execution*, p.285).

Jack Jones responded to the general allegations when they were first published in Gordievsky’s autobiography in 1995. He said ‘I met Soviet officials at embassies and on visits to Russia on behalf of my members ... They might have been KGB. I did not realise I was a target. If I had known I was a target for the KGB, or the CIA, I would have had nothing to do with them. I cannot recall any direct approach from the KGB’. *The Daily Telegraph* included this

quote in its story of 22 April 2009, the same day that it ran a lengthy obituary of Jack Jones, who had died a few days earlier. *The Telegraph* had been talking to Gordievsky who said, according to the newspaper, that ‘he asked Jones to tell him the names of other left-wingers who would make good recruits for the Soviets. “For that I paid him £200,” Mr Gordievsky told *The Daily Telegraph*.’

Gordievsky’s caution in waiting until Jack Jones was dead before publicly alleging that he accepted money might, perhaps, be better understood in the light of another experience. On 5 December 1996, the *Daily Record* in Scotland reported that ‘Shadow Scots Secretary George Robertson has won damages for claims he tabled questions for the KGB. Former Soviet spy Oleg Gordievsky and his publisher apologised at the High Court in London.’ Unlike the future Secretary General of NATO, Jack Jones was not afforded a proper opportunity to defend himself.

None of this finds its way into Andrew’s weighty history. Indeed, *The Defence of the Realm* reads rather like a very expensive exercise in public relations. MI5 and, to a lesser extent, MI6, have in recent years sought to come in from the cold, in the sense that they seem to want their roles to be more publicly acknowledged, appreciated, and expanded, no doubt with more money, too. So we have a softening-up exercise, which dodges the hard questions about civil liberties and human rights posed directly by Andrew Mackinlay. Indeed, Mr Mackinlay seems to have a clearer perspective when it comes to spooks. Back in 2008, he went on to tell the House about the time Robin Cook, when he was Foreign Secretary, had instructed a man called C to meet the Foreign Affairs Committee, of which Mackinlay was a member:

‘... I did not know that there really was a guy called C,’ said Mackinlay. ‘I thought such things were confined to films, but there really is one. I remember going down to the MI6 building, and the Committee was made as welcome as people with bubonic plague. It was clear that the then incumbent C deeply resented the fact that the Foreign Secretary had instructed him to see the Foreign Affairs Committee. Frankly, the meeting was not very productive ...’

Tony Simpson

Afghanistan I

Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The world’s most unstable region and the threat to global security*, Penguin, 560 pages, paperback ISBN 9780141020860, £10.99

The failure of the United States and its allies to establish a stable and effective pro-western government in Afghanistan, after eight years of war

and colossal expenditures, is the central theme of this book. Its author, Ahmed Rashid, is a leading Pakistani journalist with a personal knowledge of most of the key figures, who is expert in the politics of Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. His account of an incredibly complex situation highlights both the immensity of the problems and the incompetence of those who shaped the policies pursued by the western powers.

Afghanistan is a conglomeration of ethnic groups whose tribal and religious affiliations are more deeply rooted than their national consciousness as Afghans, and extend across the country's frontiers into neighbouring territories. Article 4 of the new, sixth, Constitution, approved on 4th January, 2004, states:

The nation of Afghanistan is composed of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashay, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Kyrgyz, Qizilbash, Gujar, Brahui, and other ethnic groups. [p. 217]

In 1978, Communist military officers seized power in a bid to achieve land and educational reforms, which the author considers unrealistic. However, the bloody internecine struggle which ensued between the Khalq and Parcham factions of the Communist Party led to the intervention of the Soviet Union, which soon found itself grappling with an Islamic revolt headed by the Mujahedin. This was backed by the United States under President Reagan, who supplied the rebels with arms and other forms of aid worth billions of dollars. All this was channelled through Pakistan, then under the oppressive military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq.

Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) was already training Islamic fundamentalists to conduct a jihad against the Afghan regime and to intervene in Kashmir. US aid enormously expanded the programme until Soviet troops finally withdrew. Two years later, when the Communists under Najibullah fell from power, they were enabled to take over much of the country as the Taliban. Osama bin Laden, who established al Qaeda, allied with them and was then able to use Afghanistan and Pakistan to train an estimated 30,000 militants and begin launching terror attacks elsewhere in the world. The Pakistani authorities and the US thus played a key role in creating the monster which achieved its greatest success when it crashed airliners into the Twin Towers in New York on 11th September, 2001.

This provided President George W. Bush, who knew very little of foreign affairs, with a pretext for invading Afghanistan. He sought, as one of his allies, President Musharraf of Pakistan, who had come to power in 1999 by ousting the elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, when the latter tried to dismiss him as chief of the army. Under Musharraf, despite his professions of support for the US and its war against al Qaeda, Pakistan

continued to support the Taliban and give sanctuary to its personnel who escaped from Afghanistan, until his final resignation.

Astonishingly, once the Taliban and al Qaeda had mostly been driven out of Afghanistan, the US wound down its commitment. The American Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, was happy to leave the country to the government of Hamid Karzai and the warlords who controlled the vast territory outside of Kabul.

Afghanistan desperately needed aid and nation-building assistance. It was 172nd out of 178 countries in terms of poverty. Infant mortality was the highest in the world. Life expectancy was 45 for men and 44 for women. Only 32% of men and 12% of women were literate. Seven years later it was still in the same basic position, and very vulnerable.

By this time, the Taliban had been given the opportunity to regroup and train more forces within Pakistan, which enabled them to launch a devastating offensive in the south of the country – above all, in Helmand province. Such has been their success, despite huge casualties, that the war has begun to look unwinnable for the Americans and their allies.

The record which Ahmed Rashid traces is of a succession of badly mistaken policies, although he suggests in his conclusion the lines he believes the West should follow to retrieve a desperate situation. As he indicates, the possibility exists that Central Asian countries – in particular, Uzbekistan – may become vulnerable to Islamic militant infiltration in due course, if the Taliban are victorious in Afghanistan.

The author of this review led a deputation to the Soviet Embassy in London when the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan, to argue that it was making a terrible mistake. It was also a fundamental error for the West to arm, finance and support the Taliban's military campaign against the Communist regime, thus nullifying reforms and helping to create a deadly force that was turned against it. Furthermore, the US should never have embarked on military intervention in Afghanistan and Britain should never have supported it.

Sooner or later, we have to extricate ourselves from this folly, which is imposing a heavy cost in terms of lives, money and environmental damage that we can ill afford. We should have no illusions about the utterly reactionary, oppressive and inhuman character of the methods and objectives of the Taliban, al Qaeda and their allies, but the policies initiated by Reagan and Bush have proved a ghastly failure as a means of moving Afghanistan forward, which they claimed to be their objective.

This book is a fount of information. It provides a solid basis for a clear understanding of the huge problem of Afghanistan. Despite the fact that the author's stance is not that of participants in the anti-war movement, they

should still read it. The author has made a most important contribution to the study of the modern history of Afghanistan, and I recommend it to all who seek enlightenment on the problems of the whole region.

Stan Newens

Afghanistan II

Malalai Joya, *Raising My Voice: The extraordinary story of the Afghan woman who dares to speak out*, Rider & Co (Random House), 288 pages, paperback ISBN 9781846041495, £11.99

Afghanistan has endured over 30 years of unremitting civil war and foreign invasion, rivalling in length that of another nation, Vietnam, which also had the misfortune to suffer the attentions of the American war machine. So it is with added irony that we can now view the thrust of Brzezinski's entrapment of the Soviet Union in that region, a snare which his successor strategists seem unable to resist. This book notes the geopolitical context but concentrates on the lived experience of the ordinary Afghan assisted by the personal story of one extraordinary Afghan. We rarely hear the authentic voice of the long-suffering Afghan people and that is what is so refreshing in this book by Malalai Joya. It is written with obvious honesty and passion, cutting through the obfuscation and misrepresentation of much of the media.

Malalai Joya first came to the attention of a wider audience when she attended, in 2003, as an elected representative for her province of Farah, the tribal council or *Loya Jirga* at which Hamid Karzai's constitutional authority was endorsed. She ruffled many feathers by criticising the composition of the assembly containing, as it did, many warlords, war criminals and corrupt officials. Her speech was short but provoked initially a stunned silence followed by uproar and a rush by several angry male delegates to silence her.

She is the daughter of a progressively minded medical student at Kabul University who fell foul of the Soviet-backed administration of Hafizullah Amin and joined the mujahedin. In 1982, having by some good fortune escaped long-term incarceration, he, together with all the family including Malalai, fled to Iran initially before subsequently moving to Pakistan. In Pakistan the family fortunately settled in a non-fundamentalist refugee camp near Peshawar where education for girls was available. Encouraged by her father she read avidly, in particular biographies of oppositional Third World figures: the lives of Gandhi, Mossadegh, Che Guevara, Lumumba, Mandela and many others. She quickly put her classroom knowledge to good use, in the evening instructing many of the adult women in literacy

skills. Unable, for financial reasons, to go to university, she concentrated on helping in activities associated with the Organisation for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities (OPAWC), which was active in some of the camps. Working as a 'full-time social activist' for OPAWC, she decided to return to Afghanistan and take up the covert position of 'underground teacher', an extremely dangerous occupation in 1998 Afghanistan, now under Taliban rule, apart from a small enclave held by the Northern Alliance.

The book describes the sort of social strictures the Taliban imposed on women, which were often repressive in the extreme, together with the difficulties and dangers of operating as an 'underground teacher'. Having experienced Taliban rule at first hand, added credence is given to her assertion that the present dispensation is worse for women and for most of the male population as well. After the 9/11 atrocity she witnessed the American bombing campaign and subsequent invasion which 'took many blameless' Afghan lives (and still does). Following the fall of the Taliban, her organisational talents and commitment were increasingly recognized by OPAWC, and in the new context she was appointed to establish a medical clinic and to act as its director. Subsequently, an orphanage was founded and again was placed under her authority. The new provincial government offered no financial support to these two initiatives; in fact, we can describe them as actively hostile as they refused to give any security or financial assistance. Her undoubted popularity propelled her, firstly, to be elected to the *Loya Jirga*, and, after a rapturous return from this assembly, to be a candidate for the new National Assembly, to which she was duly elected in September 2005. So, to her surprise, she became a spokesperson for the aspirations of many ordinary Afghans, which include ending the occupation and foreign interference, security from violence, keeping religion as a personal matter, ending corruption, and freeing Afghanistan from being the fiefdom of warlords, governmental and non-governmental.

This new political career did not cause her to alter her stand *vis-à-vis* the composition of the National Assembly, which, like the *Loya Jirga*, she denounced as full of warlords, drug barons, placemen, the corrupt and war criminals. From this point onwards her interventions in parliament were restricted, and often abruptly curtailed by the Speaker switching her microphone off to the accompaniment of shouted insults such as 'communist', 'prostitute', 'infidel', and threats of physical violence. When her remarks, taken out of context, referring to the National Assembly as a 'stable' and a 'zoo', were aired on a TV programme, she was expelled from parliament and stripped of any parliamentary privileges. Her life now was seriously threatened, she had to be guarded by supporters and relatives as

the government bodyguards could not be trusted, and each night she slept at different locations. (There have been four serious attempts on her life, one involving a bridge being blown up.) Support for her reinstatement has come from many sources: street demonstrations by ordinary Afghans, human rights organisations, and from the international Left, Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein, all to no avail.

This is a book which deals with the facts on the ground, and woven into the autobiographical narrative are illuminating testimonies as to the real position of the long-suffering population of Afghanistan. The author has been rightly called 'the bravest woman in Afghanistan' and, in spite of all the obstacles, she continues to bring the reality of Western interference in her country's affairs to the attention of a generally misinformed Western public. Speaking at a recent Stop the War meeting at Conway Hall, along with Joe Glenton, the brave British soldier now in a military jail awaiting trial for refusing to return to Afghanistan, she said 'our history shows that we will never accept occupation – we want liberation'. Let's hope she gets it!

John Daniels

Diego Garcia

David Vine, *Island of Shame: The secret history of the US military base on Diego Garcia*, Princeton University Press, 282 pages, hardback ISBN 9780691138695, £20.95

I got angrier and angrier as I read this book. It is a story of ruthless military and economic imperialism, Cold War driven, and underpinned by servile British governments. Diego Garcia is today only one of a thousand military bases which the United States has in other countries. No wonder the Russians and the Chinese see themselves as encircled.

Diego Garcia is a large island military base which dominates the South Asia region, and played a major part in both the Iraq wars. It first came to the attention of US military planners because they were looking for locations for air and naval bases which would not be subject to opposition later on from hostile populations or nationalistic governments. Unoccupied islands were ideal for that purpose.

So Diego Garcia came into focus. There were, however, two problems. It was part of Mauritius, a British colony, and it certainly was populated, if by only a few thousand inhabitants – but they had been there at least for two centuries.

The colonial problem was solved, on behalf of the Americans, by the

British, who made a major financial grant to the future leaders of Mauritius with the promise that independence would be speeded up. The price tag was that the islands, of which Diego Garcia was one, would be cut off from Mauritius. This involved ignoring the spirit, if not the letter, of article 73 of the UN Charter, which said that, in the transition period from colonialism to independence, 'the interests of the inhabitants ... are paramount'. The division was effected, and a new administrative structure was set up in 1965: the British Indian Ocean Territory.

At least one British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Francis Pakenham (the author does not know that he is naming our Lord Longford) was quite honest. He suggested that we should just tell the UN that, in this case, we did not intend to accept that Article 73 was binding. Other civil servants and government officials were more devious. Said one: 'The legal position of the inhabitants would be greatly simplified from our point of view – though not necessarily from theirs – if we decided to treat them as a floating population'.

Another, Alan Brook Taylor, suggested turning them into residents of Mauritius. 'This device, though rather transparent, would at least give us a defensible position.' Worse comments came from Sir Paul Gore-Booth and D.A. Greenhill (later Baron), whose racist and sexist comments have to be seen to be believed. The aim was clear: empty the islands and prepare for US occupation.

That is exactly what happened. The first some Chagossians knew about it was when they were told, when trying to return from a hospital visit to Mauritius, that there was to be no return. So it went on, until in 1971 an entire ship-full were dispatched, in disgraceful conditions, away from their homes for good. In a disgusting piece of brutality, their pet dogs were gassed in a shed as the inhabitants were leaving. An empty island means just that.

The future of those expelled has been hard. They have been given minor compensation grants but, for the most part, they have lived in poverty. Unemployment has been the norm. Their efforts to get the legal right to return at one stage looked hopeful, but this was eventually blocked by the House of Lords.

Meanwhile, the base now employs other imported workers, and the harbour has become a yacht haven for tourists as well as a military location. There are strong indications also that the island has been used for 'rendition' flights.

Ironically, the American who promoted the whole idea of safe US island bases had a change of heart at the end of his days. Too late, Stuart Barber came to understand how his schemes had ruined the lives of innocent people far away, and wanted justice to be done. His pleas were not heeded, and his letters ignored.

There is one gap in the story. What were international human rights non-governmental organisations doing at the time, both in the United Kingdom and on Mauritius, to protect these victims? Bishop Trevor Huddleston, whose name does not appear in this book, was actually Bishop of Mauritius for some years immediately after the expulsion. Did he, with his anti-apartheid record, not speak out? We are not told.

This moving and very informative book is not well served by its maps. They are quite inadequate. If there is to be a second edition, as I hope and recommend, then let there be more detailed maps of the Indian Ocean area. For instance, where are the Seychelles, another set of islands which might also have been turned into a base?

Bruce Kent

‘All Keynesians Now’?

Robert Skidelsky, *Keynes: the Return of the Master*, Allen Lane, 240 pages, hardback ISBN 9781846142581, £20

Lord Skidelsky, Emeritus Professor of Political Economy at Warwick University, is the author of the prestigious three volume biography of John Maynard Keynes (1983, 1992 and 2000). He has now been persuaded by his agent to write, with help from a group of researchers, a new book on the importance of Keynes’ ideas for the current financial and economic crisis. The book is certainly timely, as many government members and state officials have been saying that we have to go back to the days when Keynesian thinking on managing the economy predominated in the 1960s and 70s, before it was superseded by the so-called ‘Washington consensus’. This meant going back to the pre-Keynesian idea that all economic activity should be left to the free working of markets. It was the failure of this idea, revealed in the deep slump of the 1930s, which led Keynes to propose the so-called ‘Keynesian revolution’. This involved governments taking active steps to regulate the economy, and particularly to use public expenditure to maintain employment when demand in the private sector fell off.

Keynes believed that the cause of economic crises was the failure of demand for goods, and especially for investment in producing goods, when a glut of savings built up, and investors lost confidence in future prospects for the productive use of their capital. Instead, they preferred to hold on to their money – so called ‘liquidity preference’ – and often turned to financial speculation. The heart of Keynes’ thought, which he had learnt from his own activities in the money market, was the existence of uncertainty about the

future. A thriving economy needed unbounded confidence. New discoveries, like new technologies, helped. So did wars and expenditure on arms. The market was supposed to help by making money cheaper if there was a glut of it, but, while higher interest rates, making money more expensive, could check investment, lower rates, making money cheaper, did not necessarily help. That needs demand. In a famous Keynesian analogy, a piece of string can pull things down but it cannot push them up. Keynes advocated governments increasing expenditure when private demand was failing, and reducing it when there was a danger of over-heating. Then a surplus could be built up in the good times to spend in the bad times.

In his new book Skidelsky asks whether the 'Keynesian revolution' was a success or a failure, and shows that, although governments hardly did what he had advocated – at least in the UK; Scandinavians did better – government spending was high, and this created a general atmosphere of confidence. Lack of this in a period of uncertainty was Keynes' explanation for slumps, and the failure of governments to take up the slack was the cause of such prolonging of recessions. In the event, after twenty years of growth, confidence collapsed in the 1970s when oil prices shot up. Price inflation became a major anxiety, and a combination of high government spending and trade union power to raise wages came to be blamed. At the same time, monetarism – the theory that the quantity of money determines economic activity – took the place of Keynes' emphasis on aggregate demand. During the Thatcher and Reagan years government spending and government regulation were reduced. In the UK nationalised industries were privatised and the City of London was freed, so that capital could move in and out, as in the USA, without state control. The age of 'globalisation' had dawned.

This globalisation quite undermined Keynesian state management of the national economy, and put the banks and their managers into the driving seat for the whole world economy. Henceforth, instead of the banks exercising only a retail function of taking deposits and lending to investors against a safe margin of assets, they began themselves to invest at home and abroad like merchant bankers, and also to speculate. At the same time, these bankers claimed bonuses for their activities on top of receiving salaries. This was to become a major element in the widening of inequalities in the last years of the Twentieth Century and into the Twenty-first. Skidelsky recognises Keynes' concern for the economic as well as the moral implications of such inequalities. In the post-Thatcher and Reagan years, Skidelsky quotes figures for the US showing that the top 24,000 families received three times as much income as the 6 million at the bottom. One could add that, despite counter claims, inequalities in the UK, under 'New' Labour, increased. None

the less, it is Skidelsky's view that 'later Keynesian analysis would emphasise more than Keynes did the role played by unequal distribution in causing the crisis'. This is certainly true of J.K. Galbraith in his book *The Great Crash 1929*, where he shows that, while wages had hardly risen in the 1920s, profits had soared. Similar contrasting figures can be shown for the last two decades before the crash of 2008.

Skidelsky, in making recommendations to meet the current crisis, does include income redistribution as part of a full employment policy which has an international as well as national remit. He insists rightly that Keynes was not just concerned with the national economy. He in fact devoted the last years of his life to advocating the construction of an international framework for supporting national economic management. Thus, in the 1940s, Keynes put forward proposals for a world bank, a world money (bancor), a monetary fund to help countries in trouble, and an international trade organisation, all to be under United Nations control. These, however, were watered down by the US negotiators in the Bretton Woods agreements. The US dollar was to be the world's money, the US would control a World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and there was to be no international trade organisation, only a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to reduce tariffs and other national protective devices.

For today's needs Skidelsky follows Keynes in recommending an International Clearing Union to bring to an end global imbalances, and bring China and India and other developing economies more closely into world economic management. Currencies could then become more stable, and the pace of globalisation slowed down. But he recognises that those who see no alternative to the Washington Consensus will regard such ideas as 'purely utopian and even fraught with dangerous potential for protectionism and war'. As a teacher, however, Skidelsky's main interest is in rescuing economics from the mathematicians and their calculations of risk, to bring the subject into relation with history, sociology, philosophy, where uncertainty rules. The belief in rational expectations, upon which modern economic analysis depends, is a myth.

What is particularly interesting in Skidelsky's new book is his emphasis on the moral implications of Keynes' thought. The pursuit of economic growth, which has dominated economic policy for many years, does not consider what growth is for. Escaping from poverty is one thing. More and more consumer goods is quite another, and does not necessarily make for happiness. Skidelsky does not pursue this line of thought, which would have led him to a much more radical response to the current crisis. This is surely a moment for a change of paradigm. The old system of centralised, top downward decision making has

failed, in its extreme form in the Soviet Union. The unregulated market, based on the love of money, has now collapsed. Perhaps, we have to look next to building the economy from the bottom up in ways that Robin Murray and others have explored in their book on *Social Ventures*, published by the Young Foundation. That requires another review.

Michael Barratt Brown

Prime Time Politics

Trevor Griffiths, *Bill Brand: the screenplays*, Spokesman, 300 pages, paperback ISBN 9780851247632, £18

Another magnificent and timely offering: the screenplays of Trevor Griffiths' eleven-episode series, *Bill Brand*, shown on ITV in 1976. The screenplays follows the political and personal journey of a newly elected, young left-wing Labour MP in the Seventies as he challenges the politics and programme put forward by the Labour Party in government.

What makes this publication so timely is that as we, the readers, follow the debate that Brand and fellow members of the Labour Party – left, right and centre – and Trade Union movement engage in, we are led inevitably to reflect on, and take up our own positions, on those and more recent Labour Party government politics and decision-making.

In the series Griffiths explores social democracy in practice, drawing on the actual governments of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. He creates a complex, dense and convincing picture of the MP's life, in Parliament, in his Constituency, in Committee meetings, the Whips Office, the tearoom, at the Party Conference, and so on. As Griffiths explains: 'We're investigating the stuff, the actual tissue and texture, of the social democratic processes within a major party. About which people know next to nothing.'

So, as we engage with *Bill Brand*, and the men and women he interacts with, we also learn a lot about the inner workings of the system, the compromises and deals, and the personal and political prices paid if you are unwilling to compromise your principles.

The writing, as always with Griffiths, is sharp, richly textured, truthful, often very funny, and very moving. He demonstrates his deep understanding of the socio-political and cultural issues that underpin the series – which remain remarkably similar 30 years on. The holders of different points of view within the Party and the trades unions, and in Brand's private life, are given the space they need to air them, and we, as readers, are thereby also given the space to make up our own minds.

For example, we witness Bill Brand's frustration with the party's economic policies:

'A Labour government kept in power by the likes of me, is currently fulfilling – yet again – its historic role as the supreme agent of international capitalism in Britain. And all the classic features of that process re-emerge: chronic large-scale unemployment, massive sustained cutbacks ... coupled with the steady, sheltered recovery of profits in the private sector ... [and the] definition of the Left ends with a Labour government ... which they must then keep in power at all costs ...'

We also read/listen to the chair of his Constituency Party Executive Committee voice his frustration at Brand's vote against the government's attempt to extend temporary measures introduced under the Prevention of Terrorism Act [1974] for detention without trial from seven days to ten:

'You've gotta stay in touch. You can't run all the time. So that people can see where you're going. [Brand looks down at his boots again, head on hands] Do you know what Gorki said when he arrived at some godforsaken spot in outer Russia to lecture the peasants on socialism? He said "Is this the rabble on which we are to build a revolution?" Well, the answer's yes, Mr Gorki, yes Mr Brand. Because without them there is no revolution. We're all you've got, comrade.'

Don't be put off reading *Bill Brand* because it is a screenplay: as always, Griffiths includes detailed scene descriptions which give us insights into the characters and help us visualise their complex interactions; it's almost as if we were reading a novel in eleven chapters and animating it in our own heads. It engages us *dramatically* because we, as readers/viewers, are constantly pulled in different directions by the arguments, and wondering whether Brand, too, will end up compromising his principles.

One small caveat about the published text: it would have certainly helped me to have the positions of the characters included next to their names in the cast list. I found myself backtracking a lot and writing in the information next to their names. But a great read.

Romy Clark

Frankenstein

Peter Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, Chatto and Windus, 304 pages, hardback ISBN 9780701182953 £16.99

One stormy and decadent evening beside Lake Geneva, in 1816, a conversation between Mary Shelley and her husband Percy, Lord Byron,

and some other friends turned to experimentation on human subjects. They discussed rumours that Erasmus Darwin had re-animated the dead, and then began reading Germanic ghost stories to one another. It is said, on this night, that Mary Shelley had a terrifying dream which gave birth to Victor Frankenstein. The next morning she recounted her nightmare. She had seen ‘the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together’.*

The ‘pale student’, recreated in Peter Ackroyd’s novel, is a man obsessed with raising the dead, due to the untimely death of his twin sister, followed closely by that of his father. He has a split personality (Jekyll and Hyde style), and has been given no soul (evil or otherwise) by his creator.

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein begins in stormy Geneva, and quickly transfers to rural Oxford. Here, the titled protagonist meets a certain young Bysshe, whose characterisation by Ackroyd, I feel, lacks the depth and impetuosity of the well-known poet. Shelley introduces Frankenstein to his secular view of the world, which prompts the latter to begin dismantling his religious background and start to question the essence of life. ‘What if it were possible to endow the human form with life by means of the immortal spark. Would it be deemed unholy? This claim I dismissed’, ruminates Victor in the very first chapter.

Shelley disappears for a few chapters, leaving Frankenstein, and the reader, alone to follow an unholy path towards scientific discovery. Frankenstein moves from Oxford to Jeremy Street in London, and obtains a ‘manufactory’ in Limehouse, a dodgy area by the docks. It is here he begins to get serious about his studies. He procures dead bodies from a thinly described trio of ‘resurrectionists’, Miller, Boothroyd and Lane, whom he seeks out in the Smithfield Tavern. They bring him bodies once a week to the watery residence on the Thames where he conducts his experiments. After a few gory tests on subjects of varying sizes, Frankenstein finally acquires the body of a young doctor by the name of Jack Keats. Thus, the monster of Ackroyd’s novel is born.

What ensues – the murder of Shelley’s first wife, the meeting of Byron and Polidori, and then travelling with them and Shelley to Geneva – does not capture the terrifying tale told by Mary Shelley in her own writings. The physical and mental torment suffered by the monster and Frankenstein is simply not portrayed in Ackroyd’s novel. The night that originally gave birth to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein is represented here as little more than a parlour game, which left me wondering why Ackroyd had included these

*From Mary Shelley’s introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*.

famous figures at all.

The nightmarish element that I had expected from the title was not forthcoming. In fact, the only hairs that stood on end during the description of the electrical experimentation upon dead bodies were the ones on the dead themselves! Even the shadows, which follow Frankenstein around on his lonely evening walks, do not convey any of the menace for which they were contrived.

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein adds nothing new to what we already know about Frankenstein and his monster, and it fails to flesh out the background to its central figure in any inspiring way. Numerous exchanges with Shelley detract from the development of a great idea – the fictional autobiography of a classic literary figure. Ackroyd's altering of the monster is simply unnecessary. The novel could have taken us up to the point of creation, and not beyond – Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* requires no rewriting.

Abi Rhodes

Inequality

Vicki L. Birchfield, *Income Inequality in Capitalist Democracies: The interplay of values and institutions*, 256 pages, Pennsylvania State University Press, hardback ISBN 978027034409, £40.50

This is an important book, but before starting to read it you need to know something of the language employed in American philosophical discourse. Such words as 'ideational forces' and 'societal values', which refer to the beliefs held in different societies, and phrases like 'mutually constitutive and interdependent' or in 'dialectical tension', which describe forms of agreement and disagreement, are not explained until pages 62-4. 'Majoritarianism' and 'consensual institutions' appear in a chart on page 3 and are explained after page 139. Even more troublesome is the grid employed in the chart on page 3, which has two axes: one horizontal, distinguishing political institutions as 'majoritarian' or consensual or mixed/ambiguous; and one vertical, distinguishing a society's values as being based either on 'market justice' or on 'political justice', in each case there being a range of 'high', 'medium' and 'low'. 'Majoritarian' means government by a party with a parliamentary majority, rather than supposedly 'consensual government', by a coalition of different parties. Belief in 'political justice' implies public desire for government intervention to achieve more equality, while 'market justice' means public preference for leaving distribution of capital and income to competition in the market.

This grid is said to explain degrees of inequality in different countries, measured according to 'Gini coefficients', that represent greater inequality with higher numbers and less inequality with lower numbers. Countries with greatest inequality – USA, Australia and New Zealand, Switzerland and Ireland – are those where 'market justice' is most highly valued, and also have the most majoritarian political institutions, except for Switzerland with its consensual politics. At the other extreme, countries with least inequality – The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Belgium – have fairly consensual politics and some degree of belief in 'political justice' rather than 'market justice', but Germany also has low inequality with rather less consensuality in political institutions and rather less belief in 'political justice'. France and the UK have moderate degrees of inequality with majority party rule and fairly high belief in 'political justice'. There are two troubles with this kind of categorising; the first is that the factors in the two axes are not necessarily independent. Belief in values held about justice may influence the structure of political institutions. That this is so, rather than the other way round, with institutions influencing beliefs, is the central argument of the book, and accepted in the book's conclusion. It is a striking fact that Australia and the USA have both strong beliefs in the market and strong two party systems. The exception of Switzerland shows belief in markets combined with political institutions that reflect the language and religious differences of the several nationalities which make up the country. The second problem with the two axes is that opinions change, especially about public belief in governments, or in markets as determinants of justice. This changing trend is obvious in the case of the United Kingdom over the last few decades, but this author believes that, whatever governments may do in the UK, leaving more and more to markets to determine income distribution, public opinion generally still believes that government should intervene to correct injustices. This may also be true of France and Germany.

The greater part of this book is taken up with disentangling the interaction of the two axes of beliefs and institutions, by examining the writings of the leading historical exponents of political economy – Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi, Maynard Keynes – and distinguishing the 'pure' or 'neo-classical' economists, led by Leon Walras (who is mentioned on page 36, but whose name surprisingly does not appear either in the bibliography or in the index) and followed by Milton Friedman and the exponents of 'rational choice theory'. Political economy by its very name implies a major role for political beliefs and political institutions in the decisions about the use and distribution of economic resources, and not leaving these decisions to competition in markets. But whether the beliefs or

the institutions have the dominant political role is not necessarily determined in political economy. Vicki Birchfield argues strongly in favour of beliefs.

This emphasis on the priority of beliefs is not, however, widely held by political economists. Institutions which represent class, regional and ethnic groups appear to most students of political economy to be the main determinants of the relations and, particularly, the distribution of wealth and income between different members of any society, and not the ideas they hold. Thus, we saw in discussing the chart which appears at the beginning of the book that the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, where two political parties compete for power, believe strongly in market forces deciding the distribution of resources, and presented the greatest degrees of income inequality, while The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Belgium, where government was typically consensual by coalitions, believed strongly in government action to ensure social justice and showed corresponding low degrees of inequality. Why, the author asks, should it be the differing political institutions that made the difference, and not the differing beliefs?

The answer which the author gives comes from her examination of the generally accepted fact of increasing degrees of inequality appearing in the last few decades in all the sixteen capitalist economies that she has studied. While political institutions have not changed over this period, whether in countries with majority party rule or in those with coalitions, beliefs certainly have changed. Much more of the allocation of resources, including incomes, has been left to the market, and government intervention has been reduced everywhere. This only confirms the author's historical study of the origins of any country's political institutions in some revolutionary change of beliefs. Such a change obviously took place in the English, American, French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, but also in what might be called the 'Thatcherite revolution'.

Birchfield singles out two countries for special examination, as what she regards as exceptions. These are Switzerland and the UK. Switzerland is chosen because it has a consensual coalition system of government, but strong belief in market forces; the UK because it has single party government, but believes in government intervention to maintain justice. The Swiss case is explained by the religious and language differences, combined with remarkable financial market success owing to its pursuit of neutrality in times of European wars. The UK case is explained by the continuing British belief in government intervention to protect the poor, even after Mrs Thatcher's revolutionary assault on the welfare state society. In fact, Birchfield gives rather more credit than the New Labour

Government deserves for correcting inequalities, as the bankers' ramp revealed just after her book went to the press.

The gap between rich and poor incomes in the UK had continued to widen, especially that between the top 1% of income earners and the rest of us. It seems unlikely that, if a Tory Government is elected in 2010, there will be any change in this trend. Rising levels of unemployment can only worsen the condition of the poor, while the better off executives award themselves bonuses. It may be, as Birchfield reports, that in opinion polls the British people continue to give overwhelming support to the Welfare State and to greater income equality, but they also continue to do nothing about ensuring this outcome, except in Scotland and Wales, where appropriately for Birchfield's argument, government has become more consensual. As a result, the Thatcherite revolution, perpetuated by New Labour, remains unchallenged, allocation of resources is increasingly left to the market and to private enterprise, and Messrs Brown and Darling and their fellow ministers can retire to their well-deserved seats on the boards of the leading City companies which they rescued from bankruptcy with our tax-payers' money and that of our children and grandchildren.

Michael Barratt Brown

China

Zhao Ziyang, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, Foreword by Roderick MacFarquhar, 336 pages, Simon and Schuster, hardback ISBN 9781847376978, £20

Zhao Ziyang was Prime Minister of China throughout the 1980s, becoming General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1987. His principal claim to fame in the West was espousal of market principles, which he introduced very widely throughout the Chinese economy. But he was also able to promote liberal views, and ensure that they had space to flourish, right up to April 1989 when the student demonstrators converged on Tiananmen Square during Mr. Gorbachev's visit to China. Zhao courageously advocated dialogue with the students, and after an initial standoff he paid the price for this. Not only was he deposed, but he was placed under house arrest.

This book chronicles these events, and those which followed. It is the first account by a Chinese leader of life after the years in power.


Zhao appears to have dictated it on thirty hour-long audiotapes, which

recorded his thoughts during the years he fell from power.

Prisoner of the State therefore offers a unique picture, from an independent viewpoint, of life inside the Chinese directorate. Zhao presents a chaotic picture of the Chinese power élite, subject always to the arbitrary whims of those with ultimate authority. During this time, ultimate authority lay with Deng Xiaoping, to whom all lesser mortals deferred. At the time of Zhao's ascendancy, Deng was anxious for the hasty implementation of reforms in the economy: but he was adamantly opposed to any diminution of the political ascendancy of the Communist Party. These commitments of Deng survived the downfall of Zhao and continue in force, so that this book describes a crucial moment in the emergence of present day China.

In fact, Zhao's memoir portrays developments at a crucial turning point, which was missed. Present day China is an economic colossus, but a puny mechanism for political self-expression. Could Zhao have addressed this problem? Will modern China address it? It is difficult to believe that the vastly inventive and ingenious Chinese people will continue indefinitely along their present lines.

KC



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