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# Left, Right: The March of Political Extremism in Britain, by John Tomlison

published by John Calder at £4.95 [Book review]

Stuart Christie

1982

Just how important are the extremist groups in Britain today? Are they compatible with Parliamentary Democracy? These are some of the questions John Tomlinson, academic ex-labour M.P. and Junior Minister at the Foreign Office sets out to answer in this book — or does he? At the end of it, the reader is left wondering just who the extremists are; the medicine the author prescribes would serve only to further polarise society and kill the doctor as well as the patient.

In spite of his self-styled impartiality and objectivity, Tomlinson's position is that of an "extremist of the centre." By damning Left and Right equally he hopes to infer that he is the guardian of the mythical middle ground and epitomises the spirit of compromise and sound commonsense. However, the true nature of Mr. Tomlinson's authoritarian politics soon reveal itself, like a shark's fin breaking water. "The concern of this paper, then is to encourage awareness and discussion of

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*those political attitudes which are incompatible with or counter to the interests of a free and liberal democracy, and to disclose as far as possible those extremist activities which are subversive and illegal, and actually and immediately prejudicial to the well being of this country and all its citizens.”* (my italics) Where have we heard this before? I wonder just which attitudes and which sanctions the author has in mind. Is he suggesting that the police are dilatory or are deliberately not prosecuting illegal actions, let alone those which are prejudicial to the well-being of the country?

*Left, Right* is essentially an update of an earlier study of extra-parliamentary politics in this country by an American post-graduate, George Thayer (“The British Political Fringe”, London 1965). Although riddled with inaccuracies, the earlier struggle was an interesting and useful piece of original genuine academic research. The present study is simply compilation. In spite of his assertion “that in the necessary research for this paper, the author was not able to call upon a single comprehensive source or survey of the current political fringe,” all the information on the Right appears to be culled exclusively from back copies of the anti-fascist journal *Searchlight* and *State Research*. The material on the Left, on the other hand, reads like a rehash of ex-Conservative MP, Geoffrey Stewart Smith’s *East West Digest*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and hand-outs from the Economic League, the Institute for the Study of Conflict, and other suspect sources who earn their living peddling apocalyptic scare stories which are totally at odds with reality, all part of the softening up technique designed to raise political and social tensions to a sufficiently intolerable level – the strategy of Chile, Indonesia, Poland, Afghanistan etc.

Although the book does provide a useful reference source on the extra-parliamentary groups and organisations in this country, the real fascination this book had for me was the insight it provides into the manipulative thought processes and black propaganda of the liberal/social democratic extremists.

first to Special Measures, Diplock Courts, Military Assistance to the Civil Power – and from there it is a short step to the “National Government” type plots such as those prepared by senior Army officers, politicians, businessmen and public figures in 1968, 1974 and again in 1979. Links between the “National Government” type conspirators and the fascist paramilitary groups do exist, mainly through right-wing think tanks such as the CIA funded Institute for the Study of Conflict, the Freedom Association, the Clarendon Club, the Focus Policy Group, the Economic League, right wing regular and retired army officers with their private army and security organisations, right wing elements in the TAVR, the Special Branch, the SIS and the Security Service – but this very real aspect of the potential danger to democracy is not touched on, or it has been deliberately ignored.

If we are to avoid becoming another Chile or Afghanistan, or if we are to prevent the terrorism of the Bologna Railway Station, the Munich Beer Festival or the Rue Copernic synagogue [all attacks in 1980] happening here today then it is imperative that we are able to recognise and resist all totalitarian trends in our daily life – be they from the left, right or centre.

Scratch a liberal and you’ll find a fascist, they say – this book does just that, not only with the author but with the Rt. Hon. Joe Grimond M.P. who provided the introduction to the book. Tomlinson’s main thesis is a classic of elitism. It is a thesis which condemns extra-parliamentary groups (i.e. those who don’t believe the political infrastructure of Westminster can provide a just and satisfying solution to the problems facing society) as subversive of the common good, and predicates that only those who possess knowledge, understanding and right-thinking can effectively manage society. Any person or group who presumes to question the authority of the mandarins of Whitehall or who shows signs of “political attitudes which may not be compatible with the interests of a free and liberal society” are obviously agents of shadowy Ahrimanic [evil] forces. Mr. Tomlinson’s own experiences in the smoke-filled backrooms of Westminster, and his close liaison with the Special Intelligence Services (M16) as Junior Minister at the Foreign Office must have been quite traumatic if they have jaundiced his views of politics so dramatically.

The section on the Left is a mishmash of truth, half truth and wishful thinking on the part of the author and his friends. I’ll go along with his premise that both sides need each other or rather one calls the other into being – after all both Left and Right do represent real social forces which exist in all hierarchically structured societies. It is a nonsense to think of an Anti-Nazi League without fascists – but the opposite is a chilling possibility which is always with us. The fact that the Socialist Workers’ Party may use the ANL as a recruiting ground is totally irrelevant and a deliberate red herring to further confuse the real issues involved. However, it is when Mr. Tomlinson claims that *both sides are funded by the same source* that the reader may begin to wonder if he is reading Len Deighton rather than an allegedly serious guide to contemporary politics. An allegation that such a master conspiracy existed would be earth shattering if there were some solid proof to substantiate

it, but as we read on we find nothing to indicate just how the author arrived at such a startling conclusion.

Eventually, the plot unfolds to reveal the spider at the centre of the global web – the Palestine Liberation Organisation backed up with the enormous financial and diplomatic resources of Colonel Gaddafi and the Soviet Union. That this is a gross nonsense has recently been proved with the revelations that Gaddafi's terrorists have been trained by CIA agents Frank Terpil, Ed Wilson and the U.S. Special force with explosives and special terrorist equipment supplied by U.S. companies and cleared by the U.S. State Department. The source of this information is also revealed, the ubiquitous Robert Moss – a known apologist for every murderous and reactionary regime in the Western sphere of influence. He is a journalist who is equally at home lecturing the Argentinian and Chilean military on “western” values or directing the NAFF campaign against the Grunwick strikers – a public voice for the paranoid obsessions of MI6 and the CIA. According to Tomlinson/Moss, the PLO control an “endless” list of terrorist and subversive organisations across the world – but again the reader is not provided with any evidence to permit independent evaluation of the facts. This is quickly followed up by what has to be the Catch 22 of all time “... even if extreme groups do not of themselves engage in terrorist campaigns, there is no assurance, they may or do not lend local and logistical support to international guerrilla groups.” He goes on. “... The existence in Britain of extremist groups of either right or left is in itself regrettable... (they are) at the very least a national liability, and at the worst a committed and efficient Fifth Column.”

If this were a genuine attempt to isolate the enemies of democracy and to “disclose those extremist activities which are subversive, illegal and actually prejudicial to the well being of this country”, I would have expected at least a passing reference to the activities of both the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission, the two major examples of

anti-democratic forces at work today who wield enormous power and influence over political and monetary power in the Western world, but nary a word. That omission, however, may well have something to do with the fact that John Tomlinson's ex-boss and political mentor, Dr. David Owen is a “Bilderberger.” John Tomlinson's interpretation of the information contained in *Left, Right* should not be dismissed as nonsense, however. It is a deadly serious work which plays to that gallery of public opinion which lives and thrives on conspiracy theories. The ingredients of this particular one are no different to any others which have trod the boards of history – be it the restoration of the Merovingian Kings by the Priory of Sion or the infiltration of the Labour Party by the Militant Tendency at the behest of 33° Freemasonry and/or the KGB – a few facts, ignorance, misinformation, speculation, paranoia – and the myth becomes a reality. Seventy years ago it was the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion which fanned the flames of pogrom and genocide, today it is the turn of the Libyan Illuminati.

Hopefully, most readers of *Left, Right* will use their common sense in appraising its value as an index of the extra-parliamentary movement in this country, but no doubt it will also fulfil its real purpose in reinforcing the prejudiced fears of people who lack the critical ability to distinguish between fact and fiction, and those who deliberately close their minds to dialogue when it furthers their own self-interest. We can only speculate as to whose interests Mr. Tomlinson's theories serve.

The real dangers of a rapidly polarising society in which consensus is breaking down are not dealt with, however. Organisations such as those described in *Left, Right* can be used wittingly or unwittingly by “extremists of the centre” as important and necessary tools in the Strategy of Tension. Violent confrontations between left and right on the streets, tit for tat reprisals, racist murders, nationalist bombings, etc., lead