



## Disinformation officer

WHO FRAMED COLIN WALLACE?

Paul Foot

Macmillan £12.95

*Duncan Campbell*

Colin Wallace was an army information officer who worked on black propaganda activities in the army's Northern Ireland Headquarters in the mid-1970s. He left the army's employment in 1975. In August 1980, he was accused of murdering a Sussex antique dealer, Jonathan Lewis, whose wife worked for Wallace and with whom Wallace was alleged to have been having an affair. Wallace was subsequently convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. In 1986, Wallace was released on parole after spending nearly six years inside Lewes prison.

Paul Foot has investigated and written this biography because of disturbing events with which Wallace was associated in Ulster between 1970 and 1975. Wallace was an army press officer at Headquarters Northern Ireland during

this, the "cowboy" era. It was a time when the security and intelligence services in the province were more than ever running amok, fighting between themselves for supremacy, challenging the authority of ministers and the government itself, and operating in persistent and reckless disregard of propriety, law and public safety.

The implication of the title of Foot's book is extraordinarily serious—that MI5 murdered Jonathan Lewis in order to frame, jail and thus silence Wallace about the events in which he participated. It is a thesis that Foot himself does not really seem to believe, far less find evidence to support. Foot points out that the suggestion of a frame-up might make some incompatible evidence about the murder "fit"; but everything he then suggests is speculation. In concluding

### Wallace: only speculation on offer

the section of the book about Wallace's trial, Foot calls the frame-up proposition "hideous and fantastic beyond belief".

And so it is. It would be the first case of MI5 knowingly murdering someone on the UK mainland in postwar history. They would moreover have killed a quite innocent man, Lewis, in a ludicrous and, in fact, unsuccessful plot to silence their major target, Wallace. Why not simply kill Wallace himself? In a lamentably weak, single sentence analysis of this critical question, Paul Foot offers no answer other than to suggest that it would be "to invite all sorts of awkward questions". That's just not true. No one would ever have heard of Colin Wallace if, in August 1980, he had died in an arranged "accident".

The "awkward questions" about the frame-up hypothesis pile up. Why, once Wallace was in prison did they not ensure that he was then silenced? In 1984, only three years after he went to prison, Wallace was able to write to me at the *New Statesman*. He sent out more than 20 long, detailed letters about events around his trial and his times in Northern Ireland. I and others visited him repeatedly and openly in Lewes prison. He gave us much information, and arranged for us to receive copies of documents which were held by friends. None of this activity was concealed from MI5 or the prison authorities, nor did I use a false name when visiting the prison. If MI5 were so desperate to stop Wallace from communicating with the press that they were prepared to kill an innocent man, why weren't they even keeping check on whom he was seeing after they had got him safely into jail?

And if MI5 still have so much to fear, why has Wallace now been allowed out on parole, when he could still be inside a cell? Most tellingly—given the arbitrary power of prisoner governors and parole boards, and the ease with which events can be manipulated inside prisons—it would have been perfectly easy to use planted prisoners or stoolies to set Colin up on charges against prison discipline that would have curbed all his parole and usefully extended his sentence. All of this would have been far easier to arrange than a faked-up murder and legal frame-up. The frame-up hypothesis is surely untenable.

A second, subsidiary hypothesis might be that, though Lewis was killed by third parties not connected with Wallace or MI5, the security agency then took advantage of the incident by fabricating evidence to load the case against Wallace. Foot points carefully at some real deficiencies in the prosecution case against Wallace. But are these deficiencies attributable to more than police zealotry on the one hand, or incompetence on the other? Once again, any evidence that MI5's hand was on the scales of justice against Wallace is absent; there is only speculation on offer.

But the book's failure to live up to its title does

not mean there is nothing of importance in it. In fact, less than half of the text is concerned with the death of Jonathan Lewis. Properly, Foot is much more concerned with the intelligence services' dirty washing, about which Wallace has provided important original information.

In particular, Wallace is among those former NI officers and officials who were aware that the longstanding abuses at the Kincora boys' home were well known to and exploited by the intelligence services. He has also produced handwritten notes he took at the time which show that he was privy to the right-wing and often ludicrously paranoid slanders then circulating against Heath, Wilson, Thorpe, the Labour Party *et al.* Much of this information either came from or was circulated by a right-wing clique of conspirators who—as we now know—were at the time ascending in power and prestige within MI5, the security service. This, he says, formed part of a disinformation plot called "Clockwork Orange".

In May 1984, after investigating many similar allegations by former Captain Fred Holroyd, an undercover intelligence officer in Northern Ireland at this time, I reported here (and with Christopher Hird on *Diverse Reports*) on assassinations, bombings, sabotage and propaganda activities in which Holroyd had been involved. Many of the events described were as remarkable for their callous ineptitude as for their lawlessness. Holroyd did not know Wallace at this time. But when Wallace read our reports, he got in touch with me and then with Holroyd. My colleagues and I then examined and reported some of Wallace's allegations about Kincora and dirty tricks activities in Northern Ireland.

As Senior Information Officer at army HQNI, Wallace, like Holroyd, was one of the cowboys of the era. Though his official and public role was simply to be a press officer, his orders went wider. He fabricated smears, propaganda documents and false press stories. At least part of the time he did this, he was acting on direct official instructions.

Paul Foot argues that Colin Wallace has done "far more" than Peter Wright to expose the almost untrammelled conspiracy that was MI5 at the time. I disagree entirely. Wright worked at a high level within MI5 for many years and was intimately familiar with—indeed, obsessive about—the allegations concerning Harold Wilson. He was, more than he readily admits, a key conspirator in the plots to unseat Wilson that senior MI5 officers discussed in 1974-76. Wallace, by contrast, was a minor official, who had been recently recruited to "information policy" (ie, propaganda) work more than 300 miles away from the centre of the action in London.

The government has assiduously ignored what Wallace says, while critics say he is a "Walter Mitty" fabricator who merits no attention at all. Not so—Wallace does merit attention. Paul Foot has done a careful job of analysing the documents and information Wallace has provided, in particular notes he made for the work he called Clockwork Orange. Foot has spent a lot of time meticulously analysing the textual and political significance of these manuscript notes. Like Foot, I am quite sure that neither these documents nor the claims Wallace makes about

Kincora are fabricated. They are an important part of the secret history of intelligence and Northern Ireland.

But how much can one make of them? Wallace's papers are not official army documents, let alone MI5 orders. They are source notes for fantasies about the political left of the sort often fed to gullible journalists and newspapers. They are an interesting read, and some of the information therein does clearly come from inside security and intelligence circles. I know that there was, in the early 1980s, some real anxiety in the security service about Wallace's disclosures. But this, I suspect, was their paranoia. Even if all Wallace's material had been disclosed in 1980, it would have added little to our proven knowledge of what was going on inside MI5. It only proves what was going on inside Colin Wallace's files.

On first visiting Colin in prison in Lewes in 1984—when he asked me to investigate his conviction for manslaughter—I was struck that he never protested his innocence. His demeanour totally lacked the passion, the rage, and the burning sense of anger expected from and seen in those who have endured years of suffering through injustice. That was odd. I was also aware throughout that I was dealing with a professional dissembler, paid and trained by the government to lie. Like Paul Foot, I was always

alert to this but never proved him to be lying about particular events in Northern Ireland.

But I was, and remain, extremely uneasy, particularly about much that Wallace cannot provide first hand evidence for. I feel particularly uneasy that a key series of events which Wallace described to me in 1984—especially a wider plot against Harold Wilson, supposedly called Clockwork Orange II—are not covered in Foot's book. Wallace has also produced documents which have been prepared since his army days ended, and which he says are based on his inside knowledge from that time. But they clearly draw on wider sources.

It is unfortunate that the important analysis of Wallace's Northern Ireland material by Foot (and before him, by the magazine *Lobster*) is now overshadowed by the misleading suggestion that evidence has been found to implicate MI5 in a frame-up against him. Wallace suggests that he was framed to discredit him and to prevent his allegations about Northern Ireland being believed, because he was a convicted killer. My view is different. I believe (and have reported) many of his allegations about Northern Ireland—and I also believe he may very well have killed Lewis. His case against MI5 and the black propaganda chieftains for whom he worked is discredited not by his manslaughter conviction but by overselling what he has to say.

## In praise of Paris

### FRENCH BLUES

Paul Rambali

Heinemann £11.95

### IN SEARCH OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

John Haycraft

Secker and Warburg £14.95

Martyn Harris

Both these books pretend to be about France, but are really about Paris, the city of Hemingway's "moveable feast" which, once you have lived there, you carry with you for the rest of your life.

Paul Rambali, a half French journalist, lived there as a student in the last echoes of the *événements* of 1968, and has returned, he says, because he is fed up with conversations about London property prices. Haycraft, who is the founder of the International House language schools, lived there as a child before the war.

Both writers are balanced between cultures. Each is enchanted by the sensuality, rationalism and cultural boldness of the French. Each is uneasy with the Gallic appetite for political and intellectual extremes, which are represented for Rambali by the resurgence of the *Front National*, and for Haycraft by the revolutionary terror.

A typical Rambali chapter begins: "Roland Barthes was killed by a milk van. A curious fact it seems to me, for everyone knows that the French don't drink milk." It represents exactly the book's flavour of amusing reportorial detail,

mild intellectual pretension and sparkly sociological *apercu*.

He visits a Le Pen rally and remarks on the tins of *Front National* cassoulet for sale in the foyer. He discusses the English rediscovery of France sponsored by Terence Conran and Elizabeth David, and spikes it with the delightfully malicious observation that David's enthusiasm reminds him of "an English schoolmistress, freshly seduced".

Rambali drops into a *maison close*, an orgy house in the Chinese quarter. He investigates the sexual underworld of Minitel, the hugely successful French Prestel. He interviews "Betty Blue", Beatrice Dalle, and discusses Hyper-Reality with Jean Baudrillard.

Cheerfully, he celebrates the tolerance of Paris but reminds you it is "the city that supplies planes and bombs and stylish uniforms to one-arm republics led by Sandhurst-educated buffoons" and has been happy to provide homes for half the dictators of the world, from the Shah and Khomeini to Bokassa and General Noriega.

Haycraft's book takes the form of a chatty guided tour around the key sites of the revolution, part of which I followed last week in Paris, and found extremely accurate. He is shorter on stylistic flourishes than Rambali but strong on anecdote. I didn't know, for instance, that Louis XVI had a disorder of the foreskin which prevented him having an erection—a fact to which Haycraft attributes the promiscuity of Marie Antoinette.

He is very good, too, on the mixture of anarchy and legality which characterised the early days of the revolution. The rebels who took the Bastille first had lunch with its governor, De Launay, but afterwards cut his head off.