Tory wet dream

A Tory reformer takes over. He dumps Parkinson and Baker. Raises taxes. Invests in schools and hospitals. Is a good European. And wins the next election? RW Johnson sees a way out for the Tories.
Mum's the word

This week, Duncan Campbell challenges the new Official Secrets Act—by talking to Mary X

Miss Mary "X" was employed by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) for three years. Three days after the 1989 Official Secrets Act became law, I interviewed her about her intelligence work. She told me that, as a 22-year-old junior ATS (women's army) officer, she was posted to the top secret Special Communications Unit 3, where she plotted radio signals from continental Europe.

Special Communications Unit 3 (SCU-3), at Hanslope Hall, Bucks was then commanded by Colonel Ted Maltby. It lay at the centre of a web of listening and direction-finding stations spread across the British Isles from St Erith in Cornwall to Thurso in Caithness. The heart of SCU-3 was a map room where bearings were plotted on two giant displays.

Transmitter sites were usually located overseas, but if a newly found hostile transmitter was found in Britain, there was a "flap"; had an enemy agent set up operations?

Two weeks later, General Marshall-Cornwall sent Miss X a typed document, via SIS intermediaries. The document bears the names of other members of the secret service who passed it on, or commented on its contents. It says, a new Ponting will not also be acquitted "perversely" by a jury who finds his action public-spirited.

The unfairness of the new law will restrain the government's hand in prosecuting harmless disclosures or those about which there is clear public concern. To take the most recent and obvious example, neither Colin Wallace nor Crispin Aubrey were prosecuted in the 1977/78 ABC trial for learning too much about government secrets from open sources—for which I once faced a 14-year espionage sentence, has not been made illegal by the new Act. This is what the document says:

Meet our Megacycle Mary
Where the dipoles cluster tall
Blond and blue eyed as a fairy
(Though her timbre is Sauciehall)...

Mummy, what did you do in the war?

If someone tells you that he has done tests and identifies voice signal deterioration, that still makes you think that it would work?

I think there is a possibility that it would work.

Later on he was asked to estimate the frequency for which the 30-inch car aerial would be the correct length. Mr Feraday hazarded a guess—30MHz? At that frequency the aerial would have needed to be over eight feet long.

So there it is. The three IRA members were shot dead because it was believed they were carrying "buttons" (which they weren't), which if pressed wouldn't have detonated a car bomb, which didn't exist anyway.

Two other points are relevant. First, the "car bomb" could have been effectively defused by simply unscrewing the aerial or cutting it off.

Second, to cause the required transmission from an ICOM IC-2E, the power must be switched on, the tone encoder must be switched on, the frequency must be set using three thumb switches, three other switches must be in the correct position and, finally, the "transmit" button must be depressed.

The instrument could have been deliberately set in advance to work on a single push of the "transmit" switch. But the "transmit" switch, which has no guard, could easily have been pushed by accidental contact—or by its holder being shot and falling to the ground.

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