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Tragedy and Hope

On a number of occasions, most notably during his inaugural address as President, Bill Clinton has paid tribute to one of the people who taught him as a student, a man called Carroll Quigley.¹ To at least 99% of those who heard the speech, the name meant nothing. But it sent a major *frisson* through a section of American conspiracy theorists. They knew who Carroll Quigley was; what they didn't know was why the President of the United States was naming him in such a public way.

The American conspiracy theorist has always known that there were people out to destroy the paradise that was mythical America, land of the brave, home of the free. But they kept changing their minds about the identity of the evil conspirators. Was it the Catholics? The Masons? The Jews? The bankers? The East coast elite of "old money"? Fabians? After 1917 they knew it was International Communism but they weren't sure if there was someone else behind the Red Menace. Some suspected that Communism was merely a front for international Jewry (weren't Marx and Engels Jews?). Sometimes all the suspects were amalgamated into one vast, muddled, fudge as in this early 1950s formulation in which the threat was a 'Fabian, Rhodes Scholar, Zionist, Pinko, Communist, New Deal, Fair Deal, Socialist-minded gang'.²

In the mid-1960s the most important of the American conspiracy theory groups of the time, the John Birch Society, discovered the 1920s writing of a dead English writer called Nesta Webster. Webster had been quite widely read in Britain just after WWI and she claimed to detect behind both French and Russian Revolutions the presence of an 18th century Masonic lodge called the Illuminati. On finding Webster, the Birchers looked as though they were about to move from being the most fervent exponents of the Great Communist Conspiracy Theory—Birch leader Robert Welch famously called President Eisenhower a 'conscious agent of international communism'—to a belief in the Illuminati as the all-powerful secret group pulling the strings behind the facade.³ But just as the organisation was about to make this shift, the Birchers' discovered a book by the aforementioned Professor Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope*. Which is where the story gets interesting.

Quigley's *Tragedy and Hope* was published in

New York by Macmillan in 1966. It was 1300 pages long. Its subtitle, a history of the world in our time, gives a sense of its ambition and scope; yet the 1300 pages carried no documentation, no sources of any kind. Educated at Harvard and Princeton, Quigley taught at the School of Foreign Service, Harvard, Yale, the Brookings Institute and the Foreign Service Institute of the State Department—all major league, American ruling class institutions.⁴

Despite his impeccable academic credentials, the book being published by a major firm, and its unusual length and scope, *Tragedy and Hope* attracted only two tiny, dismissive, reviews from Quigley's peers.⁵ The American academic world blanked the book. Having had no reviews, the book didn't sell and Macmillan destroyed the plates from which the first edition had been printed.⁶ When the American writer Robert Eringer tracked Quigley down just before his death, Quigley warned him that writing about him and his book could get Eringer into trouble.

What had Quigley done to deserve this extraordinary treatment? He had done two things. First, unusually for a mainstream American historian, Quigley had described in some detail the rise of what he calls 'finance capital' in 20th century history. Second, more importantly, he included two sections, amounting to less than 20 of the book's 1300 pages, which described the formation and some of the activities of an organisation known as the Round Table and its origins in the megalomaniacal fantasies of the 19th century British imperialist Cecil Rhodes.

In the sections of *Tragedy and Hope* which caused Quigley problems, he claims that an organisation, variously titled the Rhodes-Milner Group, the Round Table, and just the Milner group, had virtual control over British foreign policy for much of the first half of this century when Britain was one of the world's leading powers. The inner core of this group, the Round Table, was a secret society founded by Cecil Rhodes. Using Rhodes' money, this group set up the Round Table groups in then British Dominions; the Council on Foreign Relations in the U.S.; the network of Royal Institutes of International Affairs; the various Institutes of Pacific Relations; controlled *The Times* and the *Observer*, All Souls in Oxford and the Rhodes Scholarship program; was largely responsible for the destruction of the League of Nations and the appeasement policies of the 1930s and converted the British Empire into the Commonwealth. These 'gracious and cultivated men of somewhat limited social experience' as Quigley describes them, 'constantly thought in terms of Anglo-American solidarity, of political partition and federation... were convinced that they could gracefully civilise the Boers of South Africa, the Irish, the Arabs and the Hindus... and were largely responsible for the partition of Ireland, Palestine and India, and for the federations of South Africa, Central Africa and the West Indies.'⁷ And so on and so on.

It is not that the Round Table people have been unknown. The names Quigley gives—e.g. in the inner group: Rhodes, Rothschild, William Stead, Viscount Esher, Milner, Abe Bailey, Earl Grey, H.A.L. Fisher, Jan Smuts, Leopold Amery, the Astors—are well known.⁸

The Round Table group are conventionally viewed as a group of enthusiastic imperialists who had a period of some visibility and influence in the 1910-20 period. Their journal, *The Round Table*, was well known between the wars, and is in many university libraries. (It continued until the mid 1970s, folded and was relaunched in the 1980s.)

Orthodox historians who have written about the Round Table people offer accounts of the peri-



the logo of The Trilateral Commission

od which are, more or less, consonant with Quigley's thesis.⁹ Toynbee, for example, attributes the Royal Institute of International Affairs to the Round Table people; and Butler, himself part of the group in Quigley's longer account, acknowledges that the so-called 'Cliveden Set' of the 1930s were, as Quigley claims, merely the Round Table at one of their regular meeting places.

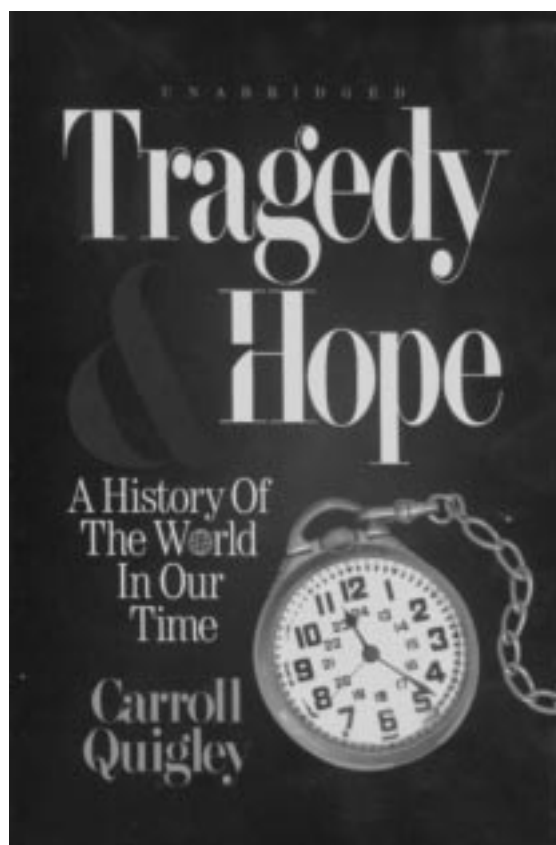
In his biography of Rhodes, Flint gives a good deal of room to an account of the size and possible influence of the Rhodes Scholar network. He writes of 'the excessive number of Rhodes Scholars in the Kennedy Administration' and of the Rhodes Scholars forming 'a recognisable elite in Canada.'¹⁰ Apparently unaware of Quigley, Flint notes that 'in each of the white settled Commonwealth countries, South Africa and the United States, a similar, if less influential elite, had emerged... and since 1948 India, Pakistan and Ceylon may be experiencing a similar development... Rhodes Scholars created links between American, British and Commonwealth "establishments" ... and they have played a role in creating the "special relationship" between the U.S., Britain and the dominions after 1945.'¹¹

Kendle, although he dismisses Quigley's thesis without an explanation, is of particular interest: he, at least, had read *Tragedy and Hope*. No other historian of the period seems to have done so.¹²

Enter the 'radical right'

The one group of people who took Quigley to heart were the conspiracy theorists of the 'radical right' in America for whom *Tragedy and Hope* became a kind of bible. Here was the proof, the academically respectable proof, of the great conspiracy. It may not have been quite the conspiracy they had in mind, but it was a conspiracy none the less.¹³ Only a handful of academics have taken Quigley on board—Shoup and Minter, Carl Oglesby, Pieterse and van der Pijl—and none of them are mainstream Anglo-American historians.¹⁴ To that august body Quigley remains unknown—or unmentionable.

Quigley's sketchy account of the Round Table in *Tragedy and Hope* comes to a halt after WW2. The Round Table was one manifestation of the power of the British Empire and, as that disintegrated after the war, to be replaced by the new American economic empire, so the Round Table network's influence waned. The Rhodes Scholar network is still there;¹⁵ the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is still the single dominant force



in the formation of American foreign policy;¹⁶ and from the CFR grew the Trilateral Commission in the early 1970s. President Clinton has been a member of both—as well as a Rhodes Scholar.¹⁷ Even without the article of endorsement by the Trilateral Commission founder, David Rockefeller, just before the 1992 presidential election,¹⁸ Bill Clinton was obviously Jimmy Carter 2—another southern Democrat governor, sponsored and groomed by the Trilateral/CFR networks.¹⁹ The Royal Institute of International Affairs is still going strong in this country but much of its standing as an ‘unofficial foreign office’ has declined with the rise of other foreign policy think tanks. The last sighting of the Round Table as an organisation I have seen is a reference to it in the early 1970s.²⁰

Quigley’s thesis presents the familiar problems raised by the existence of all such elite groups: how to decide whether any particular policy outcome advocated by such groups was in fact the result of their advocacy. Even in his book solely about the Round Table network, Quigley mostly alleges rather than actually proving, the causal connections. (But the fact that he was so comprehensively blanked by academic history is, of course, a rather substantial hint that was on to something.)

In a sense what Quigley describes as the Round Table’s conspiracy is merely the traditional behaviour of the British ruling class—only systematised slightly. Instinctively secretive, until recently more or less protected from public scrutiny by its control of the mass media and from academic investigation by its control of the universities, in a sense the British ruling class is the most successful ‘conspiracy’ ever seen. But Quigley claimed more than that. He actually asserts the existence of an honest-to-goodness secret society operating at the heart of British foreign policy in the years between the war whose activities can be traced across the British Commonwealth and the United States. For an establishment professor of history this was a remarkable thing to have done in 1966 when discussion of the influence of elite management groups such as the CFR, RIIA and Bilderberg—especially the latter—was confined almost exclusively to the far right. These days such groups are discussed a little more openly; but the fact that the minutes of the 1999 Bilderberg meeting were leaked and posted on the Internet was not reported by any of the major British print media. It is thus perhaps not a surprise that Anglo-American historians remain almost completely ignorant of, or silent on, the existence of Quigley’s two books.

Notes

1. An early sighting of Clinton’s esteem for Quigley is in *Antaeus: Journals, Notebooks and Diaries*, ed. Daniel Halpern (London: Collins Harvill, 1989). This is on p. 73 from the then largely unknown Governor Bill Clinton: ‘I had a course in western civilisation with a remarkable man, the late Carroll Quigley. Half the people at Georgetown thought he was a bit crazy and the other half thought he was a genius. They were both right.’ This is discussed in Daniel Brandt, ‘Clinton, Quigley, and Conspiracy’, in *NameBase Newslines*, no. 1 April 1993—a supplement to subscribers to Brandt’s NameBase data base. This is available on line at www.pir.org
2. Cited on p.77 of *George Thayer, The Farther Shore of Politics* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1968).
3. On Nesta Webster and the Bircher’s discovery of her, see Richard Gilman, *Behind World Revolution: the Strange Career of Nesta H. Webster*, (Ann Arbor: Insight Books, 1982), especially pp. 4-6.
4. Quigley’s entry is in *Who’s Who in America*, 1966 through 1977.
5. In *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Spring 1966, and *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 1966.
6. Robert Eringer, *The Global Manipulators* (Bristol: Pentacle Books, 1980) p.9. *Tragedy and Hope* was eventually reprinted in 1974 by the ‘radical right’ and has been in print ever since.
7. *Tragedy and Hope* p. 954.
8. Quigley wrote a book exclusively about the Round Table network which, though written in 1949, was not published until after his death. It is in this book, *The Anglo-American Establishment* (New York: Books in Focus, 1981), that the details of the group’s membership and alleged activities are given.
9. D. C. Ellinwood Jnr., ‘The Round Table Movement and India 1909-20’ in the *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, November 1971; A. L. Rowse, *All Souls and Appeasement* (London: Macmillan, 1961); M. G. Fry, *Illusions of Security* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972); W. B. Nimocks, ‘Lord Milner’s Kindergarten and the Origins of the Round Table’ in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Autumn 1964; D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies* (London: Longman’s, London 1965); J. Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975); J. R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London: Macmillan, 1960); F. Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse (eds.) *Oxford and the Idea of the Commonwealth* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); David Astor, *Tribal Feeling* (London: John Murray, 1964); Arnold Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).
10. John Flint, *Cecil Rhodes* (Hutchinson, London, 1976). In the US, six in the State Department and at least 12 in the upper reaches of the administration. See Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (London 1975) p. 181. JFK’s father was close to the Round Table people while U.S. Ambassador to London in the 1930s. In Canada, Flint provides a list, circa 1973, beginning with the Governor General, three cabinet ministers, head of the armed forces, most of the permanent officials in the civil service, etc etc. Flint pp. 244-5.
11. Flint p. 245.
12. Kendle p. 305—the last paragraph of the book.
13. See for example the best known of the Bircher’s books, *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* by Gary Allen and Larry Abraham (Seal Beach, California; Concord Press, 1971).
14. Carl Oglesby, *The Yankee and Cowboy War* (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1977); Laurence Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust* (London and New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Kees van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* (London: Verso, 1984); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Empire and Emancipation* (London: Pluto, 1989). Shoup and Minter are American Marxists and are only interested in the Round Table as the parent body of the Council on Foreign Relations; Oglesby is a maverick historian, former SDS activist, so far from mainstream intellectual life as to be publicly interested in the Kennedy assassination; Pieterse and Pijls are Dutch Marxists.
15. They had a great reunion in Oxford, attended by the Queen, in 1983. See *Time*, July 11 1983. When that article was published, *Time* had six Rhodes Scholars on it.
16. This is extensively and repeatedly documented by the Website calling itself roundtable at www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2807
17. So obvious has Clinton’s education in the Anglo-American elite become, even the *Sunday Telegraph* had a long piece on the Rhodes Scholars connection, sneering at the Rhodies in the Clinton administration as ‘charming dreamers’. See 21 March 1983, p. 22.
18. *New York Times*, October 16 1992.
19. On Jimmy Carter and the Trilateral Commission, see for example, Jeff Frieden, ‘The Trilateral Commission: Economics and Politics in the 1970s’, in *Monthly Review*, December 1977.
20. Cecil King, *Diaries* (London 1975) p. 52.