

# Ghost of Profumo scandal haunts John Major government in Britain

by Mark Burdman

As 1994 opens, the specter of the 1963 Profumo scandal is hanging over the government of British Prime Minister John Major. That scandal brought down the Harold Macmillan government, ending 13 years of Conservative rule and opening the way for the Labour Party's Harold Wilson to become prime minister in 1964. Thirty years later, the view from London is that Major's chances of surviving the year in power are very slim.

The Profumo scandal was a sex-and-espionage case, centered around call-girl Christine Keeler, who was having affairs both with the married John Profumo, then Britain's defense minister, and Soviet military attaché Ivanov. That raised questions of ministerial impropriety and national security. Today, the political effect of the array of scandals erupting around the Major cabinet and the Conservative Party is likely to be similar to what it was then, given the methods that the British establishment uses to engineer changes in regimes.

The real issue today, as seen by influential circles in London, is that the gray non-entity Major is regarded as completely inadequate to deal with a world beset by increasing strategic challenges from Russia, a range of financial and economic crises, and the growing sense of disarray and drift in the West as a whole. He is being held responsible, as well, for clumsily handling Britain's cherished relations with the United States, the so-called "special relationship" that is worshipped with religious fervor by the U.K.'s power syndicates.

The British establishment is now, indeed, paying the price for their own policies of the past years. As one Scottish influential stressed to *EIR*, Thatcherite free trade policies have "deconstructed" much of British institutional life, placing the budget-cutting exigencies of the British Treasury and City of London financial institutions above all other considerations. That has had a devastating effect on certain institutional continuities and on the quality of political leadership, as well as on whatever remains of a real economy in the British Isles. The catalogue of nightmare horrors of the British economic collapse could fill volumes, whether it be the breakdown of entire sections of the London subway (underground) system in November, or the threefold increase in children on welfare relief in the 15 years of Thatcherite policy hegemony, or the constantly growing unemployment. It is

becoming politically and economically impossible to continue imposing more and more austerity.

The intent to dump Major is one aspect in the shifting arrangements within the British establishment overall, which are profoundly affecting such hallowed institutions as the monarchy and Church of England. On Jan. 11, Britain was rocked by the news that the Duchess of Kent, wife of the Duke of Kent, would convert to Catholicism Jan. 14; the Duke of Kent is first cousin to Queen Elizabeth II and Master of the United Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in Great Britain. In Britain, such matters are of great sensitivity, given the 1701 Act of Settlement that legally encodes, in effect, a Protestant/Church of England theocracy over the U.K. (the Sovereign being the Supreme Governor of the church), including forbidding a Catholic from being the sovereign. The influential Lord William Rees-Mogg suggested, in a Jan. 13 London *Times* commentary, that the Duchess of Kent's conversion could pave the way for phasing out the Act of Settlement, and allowing a "Catholic to become king" in the future.

## 'Weasel words of a wily wimp'

What is significant about the woes besetting the Major government is the *array* and *density* of these cases all happening around the same time. The most publicized case has involved Secretary of State for the Environment Tim Yeo, who has been forced to resign following the publication of stories—obviously known to the press and domestic MI-5 secret service for a long time—about his having fathered an illegitimate child before his marriage. As reports begin to filter into the press that other ministers were also implicated in similar activities, it was revealed that on the night of Jan. 8, the wife of junior Transport Minister Lord Caithness was found dead, evidently having shot herself in the head. Caithness resigned from office Jan. 10. What has since come out, is that Caithness was having an extramarital affair with a woman in the employ of the royal family.

Major has been caught in a trap partially of his own making, but one which was also laid for him at last summer's annual Conservative Party convention. In the weeks leading up to that event, there was a drumbeat building for him to be dumped, and there were expectations that an alternative Tory leader and prime minister would be anointed on that occa-

sion. To avoid this, Major made a Faustian bargain with the Thatcherite "right-wing" of the party, whereby he would agree to their demands for a "moral crusade," based on a revival of "Victorian values"—which were hardly ever practiced in reality in the highly immoral Victorian period of High Empire.

Major's "moral crusade" was enshrined in three words, "Back to Basics," which words, charged *Financial Times* senior commentator Joe Rogaly Jan. 11, have become "a deadly mantra" incessantly repeated by Major, who now rules over a "morally bankrupt government." Rogaly said that Major's proclamations were increasingly sounding like "the weasel words of the wily wimp," especially as "the social disintegration" that Major claims to be crusading against has occurred under 15 years of Conservative rule. "In short, the government has been in office too long," Rogaly affirmed.

### **'Sleazy administration run by a pygmy'**

The attacks on Major, in many cases from pro-Tory newspapers, have been devastating. On Jan. 9, the Murdoch chain's *Sunday Times* lead editorial was entitled, "Going Down." It wrote: "John Major is becoming increasingly like the Grand Old Duke of York, that risible character from the Book of Basic Nursery Rhymes, who marched his troops to the top of the hill, only to march them down again. . . . We hardly know whether we are coming or going." The paper advised that when Parliament reopened during the week of Jan. 10, "Major's entrance might well be greeted by the chorus of the old rhyme: 'And when he was up, he was up/ And when he was down, he was down/And when he was only half way up,/He was neither up nor down.' "

The paper went on: "Such is John Major's Duke of York leadership—a retreat into hypocrisy on a scale that even the nominally Tory press finds impossible to swallow. This simply will not do. The stench over this government is already foul enough. . . . Marooned in muddles of its own creation over the past 14 years, the Tory high command has no idea of the depth of the resentment felt in the country—especially among the middle class—about its performance. It is no wonder the government is heading for disaster in the local and European elections [in June]. It will deserve its fate. Unless Mr. Major takes a realistic stock of his position and acts to retrieve it without delay, he risks going down with this party." A government that behaves the way Major's government is doing "cannot last long. . . . It may already be too late for this government to show some remorse and regenerate itself. . . . Time is starting to run out for Mr. Major."

*Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil stated Jan. 11 that what was happening in Britain was "the highest level of hostility for a Conservative government and prime minister" in the post-World War Two period.

The tabloid *Sun*, known for its fierce loyalty to the Conservative Party, editorialized, "This country desperately needs leadership." Columnist Richard Littlejohn charged,

"Major has forfeited the right to lead the Conservative Party and the nation. He is a weak, mediocre man, surrounded by unprincipled spivs [sic] and chancers. . . . This is a sleazy, dishonest administration led by a political pygmy. A country crying out for leadership is given spineless prevarications and platitudes."

### **Another 'annus horribilis'?**

The broader issue, a London source connected to the circles of the Trilateral Commission stated in a discussion with a journalist Jan. 11, is that Major is "inadequate" when new strategic dangers are threatened from Russia, and other profound crises, economic and otherwise, are about to erupt over the coming months.

Said this individual, who deals foremost with transatlantic strategic affairs: "What is preoccupying me more than anything, at the moment, is our domestic crisis, rather than the international issues. There are definitely parallels between what is happening now and the Profumo affair of 1963, in the sense of the press both generating scandals and shaping an atmosphere around them, even if some of the details of the scandals now are too absurd and outrageous to comment on. Just like then, you now have a pattern of rumors about rumors, all stoked by the press. . . . It is possible that John Major will go by high summer of this year."

The issue, he stressed, is Major's "inadequacy for the job. He's not up to the test. Some people are looking for a bruiser, a real knock-down type, to replace him. The competence question is uppermost, particularly at a time when we face so many challenges ahead of us."

This source went on: "I would agree with the analysis that Russia is now reverting to its traditional Third Rome posture." He said that the Russians believe, devoutly, that "history is on their side," and they will profit more from the "disarray in the West" than the West will profit from Russia's troubles. He warned that such factors are "greatly underestimated in the West. . . . The reciting of self-consoling formulae about democracy and the free market by western leaders won't suffice." A shakeup would be required in western thinking.

What alternative do the British elites have in mind? If they insist on the policy axioms of past years—which prioritize financial speculation, wars against the countries of the southern hemisphere, geopolitically motivated opposition to economic development on the "Eurasian landmass," support for tyrannies like Milosevic's Serbia, appeasement of Russia—then a change of leadership would amount to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Under such conditions, the British profile is to thrash out, to bring others down with them, by igniting new wars and destabilizations. A post-Major "bruiser," in this light, is an ominous prospect.

1993 began with Her Majesty moaning that 1992 had been an *annus horribilis* for herself and Britain. Will 1994 be even more horrible, or will a significant faction of the British establishment come to its senses?