

IRISH TIMES ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

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THE IRISH TIMES published a short, sanitised report of the book launched by junior foreign minister Conor Lenihan last month, entitled *The Irish Times: Past and Present*. While it quoted Lenihan's comment that the book was an "alternative view" of the newspaper, the report omitted to mention the central points of the book, which amount to a damning account of the *IT*'s political, editorial and financial behaviour, past and present.

According to the newspaper's Carl O'Brien, the book describes the *IT*'s coverage of Irish nationalism in the 19th century as well as the Treaty negotiations and the founding of the Free State. Sounds like a dry tome that might find its way into the TCD library at some point. However, the book is a far more provocative read than this account suggests and the author, John Martin, refers to former chief executive Major Tom McDowell's membership of MI5 – as quoted in the *The Cecil King Diary* – as well as his despotic and profitable role at the paper.

Martin also deals with the Major's dealings with the British Government, his description of his own editor, the late Douglas Gageby as a "white nigger" and the view of former British premier Harold Wilson that McDowell was willing to offer intelligence to HMG.

It also accuses the newspaper of playing a role in the "resignation of (An Taoiseach) Ahern" and that this was "only the latest coup inflicted by the newspaper against democratically elected Irish leaders".

The workings of the mysterious trust that controls the *IT* and the financial arrangements that benefited McDowell and a few others, (much of it covered in past editions of *The Phoenix*) are also recounted in the book. And Martin writes about the oath of secrecy that directors of the Irish Times Ltd and the Trust are obliged to swear.

One awaits with interest a comprehensive review of this fascinating book in the paper's *Weekend Review*.