

# Christopher Booker RIP

Christopher Booker has died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 81 at home in Somerset, surrounded by his close family.

Many of us who started to take an interest in the political world in the early Sixties were influenced by Christopher Booker without realising it. He was one of the team producing the enormously popular satirical TV programme *That was the Week that Was*, which blew a gale of fresh air into the rather stuffy pretensions of politicians of the day and destroyed many of the comfortable assumptions in our view of the world.

He was founding editor of *Private Eye*, which denounced hypocrisy of right and left in impartially acerbic terms. His idea of the magazine was, as he recalled on the magazine's fiftieth anniversary, "to question all orthodoxies, all the conventional wisdoms – it didn't matter whether they were left, right, smart or trendy." But many were not really aware of him personally from the early days because he often wrote under pseudonyms, including the *Way of the World* column in the Daily Telegraph where he was known as Peter Simple II .

In the field of Euroscepticism his weekly column in the *Sunday Telegraph* became indispensable reading in the Nineties. Businesspeople were feeling the effects of the new, harsh, inflexible style of regulation which began to be applied. Officialdom had changed its character and some well-run businesses were destroyed or deeply damaged by thuggish enforcement practices. Many were quite *ultra vires* and arose from the feeling of impunity to which the inspectors had become accustomed in a world where ministers did not understand regulations or where they had come from. Officials sometimes claimed the justification of "EU regulations" which did not exist.

This was the time when Booker's journalistic flair was joined

with the expert knowledge of Dr Richard North in public health legislation, resulting in books such as *The Castle of Lies* and *The Mad Officials*. It was an era of food and health scares, beginning in 1988 with Edwina Currie's stoking up of the scare about Salmonella in eggs, and followed by similar scares over Mad Cow Disease (BSE), Foot and Mouth Disease, Listeria and others.

Many firms and farms had cause to be grateful for the assistance they received from Booker and North's publications. Such a combination of expert knowledge and the ability to shine the light of publicity into official dark places was not available elsewhere. They combined their accumulated experience with detailed historical research to produce the impressive, jointly authored book, *The Great Deception*, the fullest available account of the origin, history and development of the European superstate project.

Booker also applied his talents to the fate of children in care behind the veil of secrecy operated by the family courts – intended for the protection of children but often shielding official failings too. He put in an enormous amount of work, opposing the astronomically expensive policies arising from the official doctrine of man-made climate change – the biggest of all the scares which he investigated closely. Ten years after the policy was discredited by the revelations of the "Climategate" emails, the theory still remains officially enforced doctrine.

Booker conducted a case study of "groupthink" – where people come to share a fixed view of the world which they defend against all comers, regardless of evidence. Because they have shut their mind to evidence, people in the group rely on "consensus" and cannot tolerate anybody questioning it. So anybody who does hold contrary views, however reasonably founded, must suffer the fate of the heretic.

Latterly he felt that some groups of independence campaigners

were themselves falling into this way of thought and simply would not consider the detailed evidence which he had accumulated so carefully over so many years. In the event of a no-deal Brexit we shall learn whether his fears were well-grounded or not.

The independence movement has lost a remarkable restless intellect, grounded in considerable generosity of spirit and rather more traditionally-minded than his early days might suggest.