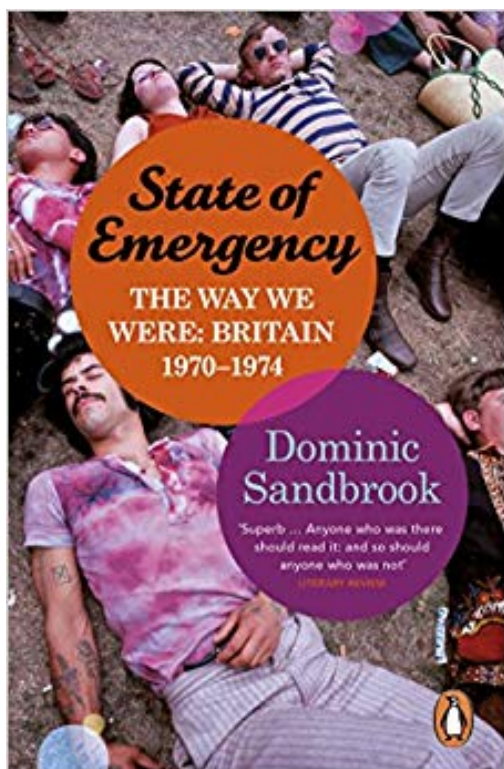


## State of Emergency: The Way We Were by Dominic Sandbrook



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The book behind the major new BBC2 series "The Seventies In the early 1970s", Britain seemed to be tottering on the brink of the abyss. Under Edward Heath, the optimism of the Sixties had become a distant memory. Now the headlines were dominated by strikes and blackouts, unemployment and inflation. As the world looked on in horrified fascination, Britain seemed to be tearing itself apart. And yet, amid the gloom, glittered a creativity and cultural dynamism that would influence our lives long after the nightmarish Seventies had been forgotten. In this brilliant new history, Dominic Sandbrook recreates the gaudy, schizophrenic atmosphere of the early Seventies: the world of Enoch Powell and Tony Benn, David Bowie and Brian Clough, Germaine Greer and Mary Whitehouse. It was an age when the unions were on the march and the socialist revolution seemed at hand, but also when feminism, permissiveness, pornography and environmentalism were transforming the lives of millions. It was an age of miners' strikes, tower blocks and IRA atrocities, but it also gave us celebrity footballers and high-street curry houses, organic foods and package holidays, gay rights and glam rock. For those who remember the days when you could buy a new colour television but power cuts stopped you from watching it, this book could hardly be more vivid. It is the perfect guide to a luridly colourful Seventies landscape that shaped our present from the financial boardroom to the suburban bedroom.



## Reviews of the **State of Emergency: The Way We Were** by Dominic Sandbrook

Lightseeker

This is the third in a series of histories of Great Britain by the author. It follows on, and is in similar style, to his previous two books that covered the period from the late 50s to through the 60s.

Sandbrook writes history from the ground up. He is the master of the interesting detail, the telling anecdote. Reading his work is like viewing an impressionist painting: a series of incidents adds up to a larger impression.

His is a political and cultural history, and one that is not afraid to look at pop culture as it reflects larger trends. Dr. Who figures several times in this narrative as episodes offered comment on contemporary events. And he certainly covers in detail feminism, the crisis in Northern Ireland, and the ecology movement among other issues.

He does make sustained arguments on several occasions, notably to argue that the sexual revolution came to fruition in the 70s more than being part of the 60s and that the crisis of 74 with its three day weeks turned out not to be as severe as people tend to remember it. He also has some interesting comment on the role that personal stress and exhaustion was a factor in the performance of Heath and government ministers during the crisis of 74.

The book does have the defect of its virtues. There is not always a larger perspective. There is too much, for my tastes, on the details of specific football matches, and not enough on education or culture. On occasion there are three paragraphs where one would do nicely. Oddly, for the importance of unions and their tactics during this period, there is not enough on what was going on inside the unions. He does however, at points, sympathetically describe the perspective of the working class.

His work is engaging, energetic, accessible and generous in his understanding of human failings. He brings much forgotten detail to light. Reading it, you feel you're in an animated conversation with a very well informed friend: one not afraid to offer opinions and judgments, but always one who has evidence to back them up.

I look forward to more in the series.

Perongafa

An excellent book about a very turbulent time in UK politics and history and one that I am almost old enough to remember. Certainly I remember sitting and having dinner by candle light thinking that this was 1974 only to learn that it was probably 1972 as the much derided three day week, and a mild winter, contributed to the maintenance of electricity during the later miners strike (which my own Grandfather was taking part in). This book abounds with nuggets such as this.

If you want to know how unlucky Edward Heath actually was as premier and how things could have been so very different. If you want to be taken back to the negotiation for Britain to enter the EEC, when the Tories were for and it was Labour who were against and if you want the lot served up in an eminently readable and witty style that never disguised the sheer research that must have gone into this and the other books of the series then this is the book for you.

Cerana

Very disappointing after White Heat. This is a dryer and more political affair. I honestly don't skip parts of books, but in this case it was necessary to get past the dull and uninspiring political commentary. Sandbrook excels in social history, he is not an academic however, and he seems to be trying to go in that direction here. Ultimately I should have bought the book that followed- Seasons in the Sun.

nailer

Excellent and detailed description of the events in the UK from 1970 to 1974. I have ordered the next Dominic Sandbrook book which continues from this one

Ubrise

Sandbrook weaves together events, politicians and pop culture to paint a complete and compelling picture of the UK in the early 1970's. How good is this book? He makes Ted Heath seem interesting. Now that's impressive.

Lestony

The excellent phrase 'conflicted attitudes' occurs on p 452 of this excellent book, and it seems to sum up a lot of the story of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland during the early 1970's in just those two words. The main thread concerns the premiership of Edward Heath, culminating in the way his electorate first supported him in the opinion polls and then deserted him at the election which he called to confirm the support we seemed to be offering him. Dominic Sandbrook's typically level-headed conclusion seems absolutely on the mark to me - the public were broadly in favour of Heath's policies and attempted reforms, but in the event they decided to postpone any further conflict these might create after enduring so much of that during Heath's time in Downing Street - less than 4 years measured by the calendar but seeming like aeons.

One of the many admirable aspects of this book is the way Sandbrook deflates a lot of the hot air balloons that passed for political comment at the time. What I would say he underplays is the emancipated spirit of satire - the mentality of true-Brit deference had come under assault, and while this was an outrage to certain true Brits it was a manifestation of something deeper and wider, namely a new sense of liberation that showed itself in the bold wage demands and general proletarian assertiveness. The government's attitudes were conflicted in one sense, the general public's in another. On the one hand the government were very properly concerned with inflation; on the other they were far more liberal and sympathetic than they often looked, and actually understood the workers' wishes better than many of the workers' compatriots did or wished to. Heath and his ministers started with some standard conservative measures designed to 'reward merit', 'not support lame ducks' and the rest of it, but ended up throwing untold fortunes to ducks lame and other, not to mention some fouler fowls out of sheer expediency that Harold Wilson would have stopped short of.

Thus the government got the worst of every world and no credit from anyone. Heath's abysmal communicative skills obviously didn't help, but Sandbrook confirms my own view that most of the 'support' they had was soft and based on their not being Labour after Wilson had seemed so much of a disappointment. Gung-ho entrepreneurship of the kind Heath espoused in Britain appeals only to a dwindling gung-ho minority, and it arouses a much more lasting British trait, namely snobbery and derision, and not just from the 'upper classes'. I well remember canvassing for Labour in a lower-quartile area of London in 1966 and the dowdy middle-aged woman who said to me "That Mr 'eath isn't married, is 'e? Wonder wot 'e does." Like John Major later, Heath was viewed as a bit naff. And there was much worse. Actually Sandbrook is dead right in pointing out that this Conservative administration was far more thoughtful and far less uptight than most Conservatives at large. The government could see that there really was a question why coalminers should not be paid much more, given the work they did, but your average middle-class Conservative in his golf clubhouse was a mass of confused anxieties that erupted in hysteria about takeovers, anarchy, communism and so forth. In Swift's phrase, they knew not if communism was man or horse, as Sandbrook again says left-wing extremism was mainly a matter of noisy students and geeks, and the actual Communist Party HQ would have reassured most folk with its peeling wallpaper and air of decrepitude. Also, in a familiar right-wing way, bog-conservative philosophers ventriloquised on behalf of entities known as 'the country' or 'the nation', institutions that they equated with themselves. In a disastrous error of judgment, some of Heath's lieutenants favoured an onslaught on the miners on behalf of their 'nation', 'country' or whatever, Heath himself accepted this only half-heartedly, and the public in general, after seeming to go along, in fact partly favoured giving the miners their money and seemed to lose interest in the subject, worrying more about food prices. It was the economy stoopid, even then.

When asked what was wrong with paying miners more after meekly swallowing the demands of OPEC, Heath simply was dumbstruck. From a 'market-forces' perspective, there obviously was no answer. Also the miners were breaking no law, but there were voices calling for a strongman, troops in the streets etc, and one C of E vicar stated that if necessary strikers should be shot. I wonder what 'necessary' meant. However in Ulster there were plenty of laws being broken, and plenty of people breaking them. Contrary to common belief, British governments would gladly be rid of Ulster, but the resistance to a united Ireland comes from the loyalist Ulster majority. The entire situation called for delicacy of touch, not Heath's strong point, such were the errors of judgment, perhaps more military than political, that the British army, originally called in to protect the nationalist minority, came to be seen as a hated occupation force, and the situation rapidly deteriorated into one in which anyone seeing the other side's point of view was labelled a traitor. Conflicted attitudes with a sinister difference.

One thing seemed to go right, joining the Common Market. By 'right' I mean that I support this strategy, but again this was Heath, and he had the wrong kind of knack. Sandbrook rightly says that the British public have never either understood this situation or taken much interest, but I would add that Heath, Jenkins and other advocates of joining Europe were simply not being straightforward about the loss of sovereignty involved, while agreeing that Wilson had done most of the preparation. Altogether, I think Wilson is going to get credit from history for his cynical flexibility, however undignified occasionally.

There is much more about various 'liberations' at the time, all showing typical British ambivalence, but no question about this book's sheer quality.

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