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Industrial Democracy—Out Of The Shadows?

This issue of Labour Affairs devotes a lot of attention to industrial democracy, a topic long off the agenda in union and labour circles, but no less relevant for all that. We reprint a shortened version of the new TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady's Attlee Lecture, given in April. This speech is remarkable in that it shows some evidence of fresh thinking within the union movement and, what's more, thinking along the right lines.

Frances has been bold in drawing attention to the strategic error made by the unions in 1945 of sticking to collective bargaining and wage militancy instead of taking steps to take control of the economy as the unions aspired to do and actually did in Germany. She glosses over the painful history of the 1970s and of the offer of the Report on Industrial Democracy (the Bullock Report) in 1977 of giving worker representatives one third representation on boards of directors (only union members eligible to vote), together with a third representation by shareholders and a third picked by government, unions and employers in negotiation, turned down by the majority of the union movement. It is perhaps understandable that this disaster should be too painful to mention when the subject of industrial democracy is so new and unfamiliar to this current generation of trade unionists. But the events of 36 years ago and the lessons that they teach will have to be faced up to eventually.

In 1977 the trade union movement was the dominant economic and political force in the country. It had the power to bring the economy to a standstill and potentially the power to revive it. But trade unionists in the main refused to see things that way. They preferred to portray themselves as a weak and oppressed group struggling to get concessions from a nearly all powerful management. Some, like General Secretaries Jack Jones (TGWU) and Clive Jenkins (ATMS) realised that this was a fantasy but they could not prevail against the oppositionist majority. The Communist Party of Great Britain played a destructive role in mobilising trade unionists against the Bullock recommendations. At that time the Party was a significant force within the movement and its legacy to capitalism was a great

one for which it should be duly acknowledged. First the suffocating of Bullock and then, seven years later, the promotion of the disastrous miner's strike of 1984, that allowed Thatcher to really get into her stride in the second half of the 1980s. Eric Hobsbawm, a leading Party intellectual helped things along with his article 'The Forward March of Labour Halted', which suggested that the days of the labour movement were done just at a time when they could have done something useful for the working class. The Communist Party is long gone, but the destruction it wrought remains with us.

Bullock was developed as a solution to the problem of trade union strength. A year earlier the unions and the Social Democratic party in Germany had succeeded in putting a co-determination act on the statute book which gave unions near parity of representation on supervisory boards of firms with over 2,000 employees. There was fierce opposition to this but as Philip O'Connor argues in this issue of Labour Affairs, the Christian Democrats, the 'right wing' party are now staunch supporters of codetermination. German firms usually have two tier boards: one a supervisory board and another, a management board. German co-determination gives 50% worker representation on the supervisory board and some say on appointments on the management board. Bullock's recommendations were designed with British unitary board of directors in mind and would have given trade unions a decisive say, not only in the strategic direction of a company but in its day to day management as well. In that sense it proposed a situation more radical than that now enjoyed by German trade unionism.

The result of the unions turning away from Bullock was their almost immediate decline. They were not even interested in plant level works councils which would have given unions some say in such matters as health and safety and supervision of apprentices. Now of course Britain has some of the weakest union plant representation in Northern Europe and non-existent representation at board level. Their role in vocational education is negligible and they are nowhere to be seen when it comes to

industrial regeneration. Ironically, a partial exception is the case where British trade unions are represented on the supervisory boards of German companies operating in the UK, under the provisions of the German law on co-determination.

Thatcher was the logical outcome of the unions' inaction in 1977. If the workers were not prepared to be the decisive force in the British economy it had to be the only viable alternative, management and shareholders. In due course the Conservatives succeeded in reducing the trade unions to irrelevance and this was not too difficult as the unions themselves had little idea how to make themselves relevant once they had attained the pinnacle of negative power in 1977. Now, 36 years after Bullock, the unions in Britain are weak and most employers are likely to laugh at the idea of engaging with them in social partnership, let alone industrial democracy. Bullock handed industrial democracy to the unions on a plate. The union movement dashed that plate on the floor.

After Bullock had been rejected there was only one way for the unions - down. Frances acknowledges that the movement made huge mistakes that led to Thatcherism, but the movement needs to look at its own history quite soon if it is going to take industrial democracy seriously. It is all very well talking about mistakes made after the Second World War. While making this point is fair, it ignores the fact that those mistakes could have been rectified thirty years later and it was clear that the movement had learned nothing during that period. One has to ask, what have they learned since Bullock? At the moment the inspiration for the TUC seems to be Germany, which is a successful, job creating industrial society. It is certainly about time the British unions paid more attention to what their neighbours in Europe are doing. The German 1976 Act was passed almost without anyone in Britain noticing, as if what the German trade unions thought was important was of no relevance to Britain. This insular and chauvinistic attitude has cost us dear over the decades and it still persists through swathes of the British trade unions.

Frances O'Grady has put a challenge to British trade unions. She has been bold in doing so and deserves support. How-

ever, the thinking of a small élite within the TUC will not make much impression without the backing of some of the big unions. It is within such unions as UNITE, the GMB and others that she will need to find support. At the time of writing there are limited grounds for optimism. She has a few allies, 'Blue Labour' has expressed an interest in industrial democracy and its founder, Maurice Glasman, has written about the rise of industrial democracy in Germany before and after the Second World War. Blue Labour are advocates of industrial democracy but their attitude to trade unionism seems hostile. Unless they are prepared to talk to trade unionists they will make no impact. Essentially though, it is up to the unions to make the running with industrial democracy. There is a long way to go before unions' claims in this area are going to be taken seriously.

They need to start by taking seriously the idea of social partnership, the recognition that there is some potential common ground for negotiation on matters of mutual interest to management and unions that can form the basis for union representatives to have some say in the day to day running of businesses. Raising the issue of vocational education, so vital to any prospect of regeneration of the British economy and to ending the scourge of youth unemployment in Britain, is one excellent place to start. Experience with that might give unionists the confidence to think in more ambitious terms. Closer dialogue with and a willingness to learn from colleagues in countries like Germany and Austria will help provide some expertise in these areas, but only if British trade unionists stop behaving as if they are a left wing version of UKIP.

Above all though, big unions need to provide support to the TUC and Frances O'Grady in trying to move out of the cul de sac in which the unions have been stuck for decades. This journal will do all it can to support such moves, but in the end, the fate of the trade unions lies with themselves and no-one else.

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Labour Affairs

Published by the Ernest Bevin Society

Editorial Board

Dick Barry Christopher Winch
Jack Lane Peter Whitelegg

labouraffairs@gmail.com

Distribution

Dave Fennell

Editorial Address

No2 Newington Green Mansions
Green Lanes
London N16 9BT

“From Attlee to Miliband: can Labour and unions face the future?”

Frances O’Grady, General Secretary of the British Trades Union Congress.

The two sides of the labour movement don’t always agree on everything, and indeed our history has been punctuated by periods of tension. But there can be no doubt that party and unions will always be stronger together. As the late, great leader of the T&G Jack Jones once said of our relationship: “murder yes, divorce never.” I’m also always pleased to be back in Oxford, the city where I grew up. My mother worked for the NHS at the Churchill hospital, and my father worked for British Leyland on the production line at Cowley. And, following a disastrous experience of serving at table in a college, this is the place I first joined a union.

I want to talk to you this evening about where next for Labour and the trade union movement.

About what we can learn from Clement Attlee and his great 1945 government. About why the post-war consensus it established broke down. About how both Labour and unions can learn from the lessons of the past, and forge a new ideological settlement for post-crash Britain.

A Clean Break With New Labour.

And the argument I want to put to you is this: if we are to build a future that works for all, then both sides of the labour movement need to change. For the Party, there must be a decisive break with New Labour managerialism, the notion that deregulated markets can somehow be given a human face. And for us in the trade unions, there can be no retreat into a comfort zone of narrow sectionalism or oppositionism. Because our long-term viability ultimately rests on our capacity to shape a new economy, not from the sidelines but from within. With the general election now just two years away – an election that could be as seminal as those in 1945 and 1979 – this is a good

time to be having this discussion.

Both in its broad brush strokes and its fine print, the Attlee government set out the contours of a new social democratic, Keynesian consensus that lasted a generation. And that changed Britain for the better. That post-war settlement is always said to have run out of steam at the end of the 1970s.

But there was nothing automatic about the UK’s path. Indeed the ‘working together’ spirit helped us absorb some of the oil shock in the mid-1970s. And the Social Contract managed to both bring down inflation and limit unemployment. It is a testament in fact to the strength of the post-war settlement that Mrs Thatcher’s most powerful criticism of Labour was that they had allowed unemployment to go over a million. A figure that soon came to be seen as nostalgic.

Of course the victors get to write history, and the 1970s get a bad press today. But even allowing for all the strife, we should not forget it was the most equal decade Britain has ever known. A period when ordinary people shared in economic growth. And while the Social Contract broke down, that was by no means inevitable and was as much due to ministers not being flexible enough, as shopfloor frustration.

Europe: A Different Course.

But most of Europe – from Mitterand’s France on the left to Kohl’s Germany on the right – took a very different course. Yes, other countries experienced industrial restructuring but it was more planned and less painful, better managed and kept more manufacturing capability. Inequality was not allowed to rocket out of control. Rather than tax cuts for the rich, there was investment in infrastructure for the future. So why did Britain

– like America – embrace the neoliberal model with such gusto? Why was the Conservative government here able to rip up Attlee’s post-war settlement so quickly and recklessly? Well, there are a number of reasons, but for me business culture offers one compelling explanation.

What The Unions Should Do.

While unions have never been strong in the individualistic ethos of the USA, union density in the UK was at its highest in 1980. Arguably unions in this country were reaping the consequences of a strategic error made in failing to seize the opportunity of the European model of co-determination and industrial democracy. Ernest Bevin was acutely aware of the German system. As Foreign Secretary he played a large part in creating it. But alas not here.

In 1945, we had an important opportunity to lift our gaze beyond the immediate task of improving terms and conditions and play a different role within the emerging mixed economy: giving workers a voice and a stake in strategic decision making, in the newly nationalised industries and the new welfare state. But it was one that we squandered. Rather than rising to the profound challenge of collective ownership – not just redistributing power to workers, but also to those who depended on the goods and services we produced – we chose instead to take the easy option.

The historian Martin Francis wrote: “Union leaders saw nationalisation as a means to pursue a more advantageous position within a framework of continued conflict, rather than as an opportunity to replace the old adversarial form of industrial relations. Moreover, most workers in nationalised industries exhibited an essentially instrumentalist attitude, favouring public ownership because it secured

job security and improved wages rather than because it promised the creation of a new set of socialist relationships in the workplace.”

And it was this strategic failure than led eventually to the breakdown of the Social Contract, the subsequent Winter of Discontent and the Thatcherite counter-revolution. All disasters both for the Labour Party and trade unions. Our desire to rely purely on shopfloor power in order to avoid the charge of cooption proved insufficient when we faced mass unemployment and growing inequality. Legal changes that reduced union influence did not help either, although in my view they were secondary to the economic onslaught. With no institutional stake and a collapse in our bargaining power we were no longer part of the solution, and instead were easily and systematically vilified as the problem.

Into that gap came a bubble economy, where people prospered not by making things, but by speculating in the property and financial markets. Self evidently, this economic restructuring reduced union membership and so influence, and marked the beginning of a slow erosion of living standards. But it also had a big impact on our politics. It was always a caricature that Labour won elections purely on the union vote, but undoubtedly organised labour was the biggest component of Labour’s electoral support from the end of the war to the 1970s. This was why the political Right was always so keen to divide non-union workers against union workers – just as they try to divide private sector against public sector workers today.

But the Right’s success in making unions a political problem, even while we retained support for our representational and industrial role, has turned Labour’s traditional alliance with us into a challenge.

New Labour responded with a strategy of triangulation. Tony Blair ran against old Labour as much as against John Major. As my predecessor but one John Monks once said, unions were sometimes treated as “embarrassing elderly relatives”. With union members desperate for change in the run up to 1997, that caused few problems. And of

course Labour won a huge majority in 1997. Polling evidence suggests that the great British public had already made up its mind to put Labour in Number Ten when the party was led by John Smith. But New Labour’s narrative became that distancing itself from the unions was a necessary ingredient for success.

But it also stored up problems, as it took traditional supporters for granted rather than actively building an electoral coalition. Triangulation can only ever be a tactic – it cannot work as a strategy, as no party can continually run against its own past and values. And of course we know now that Labour’s valiant attempts to bolt social justice on top of the neoliberal economic model – a sort of humanised Thatcherism – would end in tears when the bubble burst. Even after 13 years of Labour government, even after the convulsions unleashed by the collapse Lehman Brothers, Britain’s rabid model of financial capitalism survives to this day essentially unchanged.

Today, taxpayers spend billions subsidising employers who pay poverty wages. Billions more go on Housing Benefit, ending up in the pockets of private landlords. But in a sense this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. As the coalition government undermines the benefits of millions of people, multinationals gain from what can only be described as corporate welfare on an epic scale. Subsidies to privatised rail operators now far exceed those paid to British Rail. Companies such as G4S and Serco are paid a king’s ransom to run outsourced public services, with limited evidence of value to the taxpayer. And many of our banks – heralded during the boom as exemplars of private sector efficiency and innovation – continue to survive on massive taxpayer bailouts.

The Thatcherite right always liked to castigate nationalised industries such as coal, steel and indeed British Leyland for their reliance on handouts. But the reality is they enjoyed a fraction of the public largesse now lavished on our banks. The masters of the universe in the City are always quick to dismiss state subsidies – except that is when they’re the beneficiaries. What we have today is a model of capitalism that privatises gains and socialises losses. Capitalism has suc-

ceeded in reinventing itself time and time again: it’s been said that the first phase of modern capitalism was profiting from manufacturing and industry; the second was profiting from finance; and the third, where we are now, is profiting from our public realm.

So today’s Labour party faces a big challenge – admittedly not as great as recovering from a world war, as in Attlee’s time, but still huge. And we need to be alert to the powerful vested interests that stand in the way of progress. Those who benefitted from the neoliberal era have not gone away – and are keen to go back to business as usual. Many in the current government seem to have retreated to their default position in which they deny that inequality, deregulation and letting markets rip were in any way the causes of the crash. Instead they want the same old policies, but to an even greater degree.

That’s why we need to be bold in winning the battle of ideas, setting out our alternative vision for post-crash Britain. A new start – comparable to the change offered by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and Clement Attlee in the 1940s. So far, so obvious. But the difficult bit is how we achieve this amidst austerity, with the public finances in a mess, and with the costs of social democracy rising in an ageing society. For the TUC, none of this ought to preclude radicalism. The central lesson of the Attlee government is that even when times are tough, great things can be achieved. We may be in crisis; but remember crises offer a genuine window for change.

Just after Attlee died in 1967, Harold Wilson remarked that: “Fainter hearts than his would have used the nation’s economic difficulties as a reason for postponing social advance. He felt, on the contrary, that the greater the economic difficulties, the greater the need for social justice.” The same is true today.

So What Would A Bold Vision For Change Look Like Today?

In the long term, though, our task is surely to build a new and very different economic model. One that works for ordinary people in all parts of Britain. We need an economy that is fairer – because

in place of spiralling inequality, we need just rewards for all. A living wage. Fair wages set by modern Wages Councils. A new duty on companies to report pay ratios. Worker representation on the remuneration committees that set top pay. We need an economy that is greener – because in place of environmental degradation, we need a bold plan to decarbonise Britain. A strategy to deliver green skills, jobs and industries in the regions that need them most. Investment in emerging technologies such as clean coal, financed by a proper Green Investment Bank. And a bold vision for world-class public transport: integrated, affordable, publicly-run.

And we need an economy that is stronger – because in place of free market fundamentalism, we need an active, intelligent role for government. A smart industrial strategy to rebalance our economy, nurturing new sources of manufacturing strength, with the creation of decent jobs at its heart. A State Investment Bank to provide funding for new infrastructure and industrial development. Fundamental reform of the rest of the banking system, so we have banks that serve us not themselves.

Industrial Democracy.

Above all, economic strength demands economic democracy, a recalibration of the relationship between capital and labour. New models of corporate governance that empower all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Greater worker and union involvement in corporate decision making – as in Germany. New institutions to promote pre-distribution otherwise known as collective bargaining, so that wages start rising once again and we get away from the debt-fuelled growth that led to the crash.

The aim? To move away from American-style Wild West capitalism towards best practice in Europe. The equality of Scandinavia. The collaborative industrial culture of Germany. The quality of life ...

What then does all of this mean in practice for Labour and the unions?

I'll start with the union side.

We need to be smart and realistic about what we seek from a new settlement. Much as we would like the next Labour government to be like a videotape run backwards undoing all the coalition policies we dislike, we have to recognise that there will be a difficult and different starting point. Of course we need to undo the damage done by this government and the crash, but there will need to be new thinking and a recognition that not everything will be achieved at once.

That does not mean that Labour or trade unions should be timid in what we seek. We know that even with an end to forced austerity, there will no longer be the illusory resources generated by the finance bubble. But if there is less to spend, then we need to look for precisely the big structural changes in the economy that the last Labour government shied away from. We will have to tackle problems such as low pay at root, not spray money at them by subsidising low-paying employers.

And in seeking radical economic change, we need to avoid the strategic error we made after the war. We should embrace industrial democracy and take up every chance to re-shape economic relationships. Trade unions cannot afford to stand aside as we did after 1945. This time, history would simply pass us by. As even some Conservatives recognise, industrial relations in many companies is very good. Of course there are differences of interest and opinion, and imbalances of power still characterise the employment relationship. But there is also a wide recognition of mutual interest in generating good, rewarding jobs, investing in skills and tapping the undoubted expertise of the workforce.

In the future, unions and working people need to be at the heart of the economy, having an effective voice, winning fairness, building the businesses that will deliver our prosperity in the decades to come. That poses a challenge to government, to business and to managers. But I make no apologies for that. We have too many complacent business leaders who run organisations that are coasting, using command and control to avoid the chal-

lenge of inclusive decisions we all need to take to raise our productivity.

But most of all, industrial democracy poses a challenge to us in the trade union movement. It implies a role that is not just more ambitious, but more demanding, than the one we usually have now. It means accepting responsibility, moving out of a comfort zone of short-termism, to taking the long view and championing the greater good. We already play such a role in the best workplaces, and also in policy areas such as the environment, pensions, skills and health and safety, where mutual advantage is clear for all to see. Of course none of this means giving up on our defining purpose of winning a better deal for workers. The majority of EU countries now guarantee workers seats on company boards. It doesn't stop them from fighting maltreatment and exploitation. Nor from taking industrial action where there is no other option.

Challenge For The Labour Party.

I've been frank about the challenges facing us in the unions. But what about the Labour Party?

It too needs to recognise that limited resources means we need more, not less, structural change. And it needs to recognise that some of the electoral tactics and approaches that worked 10 and 15 years ago are now as much old Labour as what worked in 1945 or 1966.

Labour instead needs to start where the people are – and the problems of stagnation, declining living standards and poor prospects now afflict a huge majority of the electorate, whether they tick the traditional supporter box or not.

So rather than a rainbow coalition of different promises and messages for different groups, Labour needs a compelling vision and lived values that demonstrate the benefits of a new approach.

And while ministers would of course need to be clear what they will do when the red boxes arrive, the wider challenge is not to build a Labour policy encyclopaedia but to rediscover the inspirational language of progressive change. Attlee's political genius was to give people a sense

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



Tapie and Lagarde

This affair started a very long time ago.

In 1992 the businessman Bernard Tapie sold his businesses in order to get into politics. He asked his bank, Crédit Lyonnais, to handle the sales, including that of the sports equipment firm Adidas. Tapie later found out that Crédit Lyonnais had in fact bought Adidas itself, through off-shore societies, and sold it on later, making a large profit.

Tapie sued Crédit Lyonnais, claiming he has been defrauded.

A long court case got underway, complicated by the fact that Crédit Lyonnais, almost bankrupt, was then rescued by the State. The government was now involved, via a public body responsible for sorting out Crédit Lyonnais's affairs.

In 2007 the minister for the Economy, Christine Lagarde, ordered that public body to resolve the question through private arbitration rather than the ordinary judicial process. The three arbitrators found in favour of Tapie and the public

body was told to give Tapie 390 million euros compensation, including 45 million for "préjudice moral" (distress caused), out of public funds, the highest sum ever awarded for 'distress caused'. To put this sum in context, a parent might be awarded 30 000 Euros for distress caused by the accidental death of a child. "Préjudice moral" compensation is not subject to tax.

In 2011 the Court of Justice of the Republic started a court case against Lagarde for misuse of public funds. The argument was that there was no need to go to a private arbitration, that the arbitrators were not impartial, and that in fact Tapie was unfairly given a large sum out of public funds.

In 2007 Tapie supported Sarkozy's presidential campaign. In 2013, the offices of Sarkozy's then secretary were raided and diaries seized. They showed a number of weekend dates with Tapie.

The centre-right

François Bayrou, leader of the MoDem (MOuvement DEMocrate), a quite new centre-right party, made much of this case; he is also very exercised by tax

evasion. Politicians found guilty of tax evasion, he said, should be treated pitilessly, as pitilessly as "les petits" (the little people), like the mother bringing up her children made to give back the extra money she earned cleaning, over and above the allowed weekly amount.

Bayrou's main contention is that there is no real difference between the two main parties these days; the gay marriage issue according to him served for the two main parties to make themselves appear different, and to galvanise their supporters along party lines as well as to divert attention from more pressing problems. Bayrou is right, since François Hollande supported the law, and the present, possibly temporary, leader of the UMP, François Copé, opposed it. In reality, there are supporters of the law in both camps. We can also agree that on the main points, the economy and foreign policy, both camps take similar stands: the Socialist Party and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) are both liberal, and both support foreign interventions, the latest one being Mali.

But there we find that Bayrou himself is a liberal and supports the intervention in Mali. That is not a contradiction: what Bayrou advocates is a government of national unity gathered not on party lines but around a number of projects. This would be on the model of city councils like that of Lyon and Dijon and even Bordeaux. Gérard Collomb, Mayor of Lyon, François Rebsamen, Mayor of Dijon, and Alain Juppé, Mayor of Bordeaux, have all gathered a multi-party team around city based projects, to great effect. The first two Mayors mentioned are indeed excellent models of politicians: active, well informed, involved in local initiatives, useful to the local population, and keeping away from the media. They also have a voice and a presence in Paris, since they are Senators.

It is surprising to find therefore that Bayrou is against the "double mandate", that allows politicians to hold more than

of hope, a clear route map out of depression, war and austerity towards the social and economic justice they craved.

Re-reading the 1945 manifesto, I was struck not just by the directness of the language, but the relevance of the message now. There is criticism of the "hard faced men" who "controlled the banks, the mines, the big industries and largely the press". These were people who "felt no responsibility to the nation". It talks of how the interwar slumps "were not Acts of God or blind forces, but the sure and certain result of too much concentration of too much economic power in the hands of too few".

And the 1945 manifesto restates Labour's commitment to freedom in its most meaningful sense. "The Labour

Party stands for freedom . . . but there are certain so-called freedoms that Labour will not tolerate: freedom to exploit other people, freedom to pay poor wages and push up prices for selfish profit, freedom to deprive people of the means of living full, happy, healthy lives". Of course this is a different era, and we may be fighting an economic war rather than recovering from a military one, but for Labour that sense of conviction is as necessary today as it was seven decades ago.

I started this lecture with a quote from Jack Jones, and I want to finish with one.

He said of Attlee: "His message was clear, forthright, honest, dignified and essentially humane . . . he was a great patriot and socialist".

one mandate, eg Mayor and M.P. or Mayor and Senator. The double mandate is what distinguishes French politics and keeps politicians connected to the population to a greater extent than in other places, where the connection happens only through the intermediary of the media.

The Nord Pas de Calais region.

It is good for Bayrou to praise local politicians and take their activity as a model of what could happen on a national level. The following story however shows how local initiative can be thwarted by international trends.

Philippe Vasseur, President of The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Nord Region, has called in a consultant, the American economist, Jeremy Rifkin. Rifkin is the author of *The End of Work* 1995 (about automation) and *The Third Industrial Revolution; How Lateral Power is Transforming Energy, the Economy, and the World* (2011). The third industrial revolution takes the world beyond coal and oil, and into renewable energy; the Nord Region of France has potential for wind, solar, tide and geothermic energy, and this is what the Rifkin strategy will help develop, in order to transform the ex-coal field of France into a prosperous region. So far he and his team have worked eight months on the task.

How will the new industries be financed? They estimate that the population of the region has 200 bn Euros in savings; if they invest just one per cent of their savings in the third revolution schemes, this will be enough to create jobs and prosperity. The team also advocates collaborating with Germany, which is a pioneer in the field of renewable energy.

Bosch-Vénissieux

Meanwhile further south, near Lyon, a firm making solar panels is on the verge of closing. This firm converted to solar panels two years ago, from diesel pumps. It is a French branch of the German firm Bosch. Bosch in Germany is also withdrawing from the manufacture

of solar panels. This is apparently due to China giving massive subsidies to its solar industry, and being able to sell more cheaply. The USA have reacted to this by applying a 250% tariff barrier against Chinese solar panels entering their country. Europe is thinking in terms of a 45% tariff, but has done nothing so far. According to an early morning news item on France Inter radio (29.5.13), Germany is opposing European tariffs, because Chinese solar panels are made using German machines. The conversion into a post oil and post coal industry is not happening easily and the difficulties in the Nord Pas de Calais will not be less than in Vénissieux.

The minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Energy, Delphine Batho, has declared that the workers of Bosch-Vénissieux will not be abandoned to their fate. This is the sort of declaration that makes people despair, coming after countless similar declarations of support from the government which in fact herald actual closures, and contribute to the feeling that those who govern are not in charge of the things that matter.

End of Work

The end of work prophesied by Jeremy Rifkin has not happened; automation has caused unemployment in Europe, but so has the use of labour forces abroad in circumstances of extreme cost cutting, from the Western point of view an external proletariat, as seen in the disaster in Dakha, capital of Bangla Desh, in the Rana Plaza clothing factories building.

In parts of India, people traditionally buy clothes only at specific times of the year, coinciding with religious festivals. Then you have a regulated, sustainable production. Shopping as a recreational activity has produced on the contrary a demand for constant change and novelty, and consequent need for cheapness and mass production. A tee-shirt can cost less than a newspaper, and it gets thrown away like an old newspaper. Virtues like respect for work, and for the work embedded in a manufactured product don't exist, or respect for the human beings involved in the production of garments or nature that produces the raw materials.

Western clothes firms gives their orders to overseas firms at the latest possible moment: that way, if the product sells well, they can increase the size of the order, if not, they can stop the order. The factory for example in Bangla Desh then has to work at speed: the only thing that matters is to get the order for the items that sell well done on time, because if it is not, then the contract is not renewed. As long as consumers and companies insist on the lowest price and endless variety, there'll always be factories that are willing to cut corners to get the business. What about regulations?

Richard Locke, a political scientist at M.I.T. who is an expert on global supply chains and the author of the new book *"The Promise and Limits of Private Power,"* says that research shows that smart regulations work, particularly when they're backed by international pressure. According to a report about Locke's work, a recent study of reforms in Indonesia in the nineteen-nineties demonstrated that they improved conditions without increasing unemployment. Locke points to the Dominican Republic, where an "incompetent and corrupt labor inspectorate" has been overhauled, working conditions have improved, and the country's export industries have become more competitive. And in Cambodia the Better Factories Cambodia program, administered by the I.L.O. in collaboration with the Cambodian government, has significantly improved not just working conditions but also workers' rights, even as Cambodia's exports have grown briskly. The program has its critics, and Cambodia is still no workers' paradise. But, concludes the same report, when you consider that these reforms happened in a country with a shaky government, recovering from tremendous civil strife, and building a garment industry from scratch, their success suggests that change is possible.

The onus is here put on the developing countries. The suggestion that Western companies and consumers might have some responsibility, and could change their ways to improve the situation, is not even considered. It is taken for granted that companies and consumers could not restrain their desire for profit and for ever-changing fashion.

White Knights in Blue-Collar Armour

Gwydion M. Williams

When the USA joined World War Two, many US citizens wondered why they were suddenly allies of the Soviet Union. Why they were committed to destroying Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which had been widely admired up until then.

The USA as it then was had quite a lot in common with the Fascist powers. It fought the war as a racist power with a segregated army.

History was revised somewhat during the Cold War. The USA found it had to move a long way to the left to cope with the Soviet challenge. It became convenient to pretend that this had always been what they wanted.

This rewriting of history was helped by the bulk of the Hard Left denouncing Stalin for the imperfections of what he had achieved. Not shifting from this notion when experience should have taught them that it is very hard to achieve anything positive in real-world politics. They excuse themselves for achieving nothing and not even holding onto what they had. They still insist that Stalin was inexplicably wicked. And then they wonder why socialism has lost favour!

Stalin was ruthless, certainly. But not without reason. And with vast positive results from a Leninist viewpoint.

Had Stalin been milder, the Soviet Union might well have been overrun by the German invasion. The contrary view comes from Trotskyists who achieve nothing, or Khrushchevites who failed to preserve the grand legacy Stalin left them.

The challenge of a powerful Soviet Union forced the USA to move a long way from its original intentions. British North America had been created to be an extension of England, with pragmatic acceptance into the community of other

white settlers who were already there and would adapt to English ways. This didn't really change when the main colonies rebelled and became the United States of America. It was always intended to be "White Man's Country", with Anglo-Saxons dominant among the Whites. White women were necessarily there as well, as the wives, sisters, daughters and mothers of the dominant white men. No one else was wanted, though attempts to get rid of them were not systematic.

The result of the growth of White America was that most Afro-Americans and some of the surviving Native Americans ended up as plantation slaves in the South. In the North, Afro-Americans were mostly denied political rights, sometimes by intimidation but also by legal exclusion. On the eve of the Civil War, most Northern states had laws forbidding Afro-Americans men from voting. They were also not allowed to enlist on the Union side: it was intended to be a White Man's War. They'd been accepted in previous wars, the War of Independence and the War of 1812. But the War to End Secession was intended to be an all-white matter. Only when the North ran out of suitable white males did they let in blacks.

The crushing of the Confederacy was followed by a brief bout of radicalism that established legal equality for Afro-American men. Votes for women were also considered, but the radicals decided that only one big reform was likely to get through all of the checks and balances of the Constitution. They opted to let the women wait. But even radicals in the North still mostly saw the USA as "White Man's Country". Not many people objected when the South restored the old method of intimidating their Afro-Americans so that they didn't try exercising their legal right to vote.

This had been noted by de Tocqueville in the 1830s in his *Democracy In America*, and it lasted till the 1960s.

The United States accepted votes for women at around the same time as Western Europe and the various European colonies. New Zealand was first and the USA was middling. And votes did not mean equality for women, nor for Afro-Americans in the north who mostly did have a vote after the 1860s. The US military was strictly segregated and Afro-American soldiers never rose higher than Sergeant. Nor did they ever command whites of any rank: the Abraham Lincoln Legion of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War was the first place this happened among US citizens.

Democracy became part of the US ideology from the 1830s. It was not the intention of the Founding Fathers, who sought an oligarchic Republic. But first Jefferson and then Andrew Jackson established that the "White Man's Country" was also going to be a "White Man's Democracy".

Jackson's vice-president was John C. Calhoun. He went beyond mere inferiority for Afro-Americans, and insisted that they must remain slaves for ever. Argued that slavery was an excellent system, one that whites benefited from. It took four years vicious warfare in the 1860s to defeat this idea, with most of the North repelled by slavery and its many abuses.

Non-white inferiority was the wish of the white majority, including those keen on crushing secession and ending the embarrassingly primitive and abusive system of slavery. It remained solid through to the 1950s.

The USA backing the British Empire in 1917 and 1941 was one "White Man's Country" helping another that was the root of most of its dominant traditions. Official anti-Imperialism was lukewarm.

The USA had repeatedly joined in the humiliation of China, when it tried to act as the equal and independent state it officially was. They did do some educational work, but the avowed aim was to erase the local culture. Process the Chinese into a copy of the USA, though still unequal even then. (I doubt if it's much different even today, though they put more diplomatically.)

The USA also didn't push for a quick end to Imperialism at the end of World War Two. They helped France recover Indochina and the Dutch restore their rule in what later became Indonesia.

World War Two was not a war for democracy as we understand it now. Had Hitler not attacked the Soviet Union and had the US-British alliance somehow managed to defeat Germany and Japan, perhaps with the aid of atomic weapons, Imperialism and official racism might have lasted a lot longer. They might still be the norm today.

In my article "*Britain's Purely Imperialist War Against Nazi Germany*", I showed how World War Two began as a rear-guard action by Britain's ruling class to save their empire. It was not about preserving Parliamentary Democracy, never mind extending it. Churchill's speeches said a lot about the Empire, but very little about democracy.

I also detailed how Professor Neil Ferguson misrepresented the standard British attitude in his book *Empire*, which should have been called *My Beautiful Imperialism*. He uses a stray remark by George Orwell to argue that the British Empire nobly sacrificed itself to defeat the much worse imperialism of Japan and Nazi Germany. It would have been admirable if the rulers of the Empire had intentionally done that. It is pretty much what Professor Tolkien imagines the High Elves doing in his *Lord of the Rings*, speeding the final end of their fading realms as the price of destroying the Dark Lord and his Ring of Evil.¹ But in the real world, even Orwell was expecting the British Empire to survive for many decades after the war, assuming the war was won.

Gandhi and the Congress Party refused to support the war without a

definite guarantee of self-rule. But the famous Cripps Mission offered nothing more than the meaningless promise that Indians could rule themselves when their current rulers in the Westminster Parliament were confident that the Hindu majority would not oppress minorities. It was obvious that if this was the best offer when the British Empire was on the verge of defeat, then if the British Empire survived the Hindu majority was going to be viewed as unfit for an indefinite time in the future. The House of Commons at that time was dominated by Tories. A Labour landslide of the sort that happened in 1945 would not have seemed possible ahead of time. And Labour anti-imperialism was always lukewarm.

Being offered no freedom for themselves, those Indians who thought about politics broadly stayed neutral. George Orwell was recruited by the BBC as part of a propaganda radio service to try to convince them otherwise. He showed a genuine enthusiasm for this work, though he was offended by the normal routines of office life. But in fact Orwell's work there achieved nothing.

India got independence after the war, mostly because there was a genuine fear of an uprising if it had been denied. And because the British Empire suffered a string of disasters that left it full of self-doubt. First failure in Norway (where a British invasion was planned regardless of what the Germans had done). Then the Fall of France. Then failure in Crete, and defeat by Rommel in North Africa after some initial successes against the Italians. Finally the Fall of Singapore in 1942, which meant the empire was doomed. Yet it lingered on into the 1950s and fought a vicious war in Kenya before finally accepting that it was doomed.

A global empire based on English culture might have worked – indeed a revised version of it is working up to the present, thanks to the USA. But the British Empire had chosen in the 19th century to reverse the limited racial integration of the 18th century and run their Empire on purely racist lines:

"The high status of Europeans was maintained by not employing Europeans in the government or European-owned businesses below a certain grade, and

by seldom allowing Asians to rise above that level."²

Britain's final few generations of Imperialists were short-sighted fools, hanging on to an unsustainable position of privilege in a thoroughly reactionary manner. Ignoring the fact that lots of Africans and Asians had been to Britain and found that they could rank fairly high there, with no clear colour-bar ever established. There was prejudice, but a rich non-white in Britain would be accepted. Their children could be pupils at fee-paying schools well out of reach for most Britons. Some non-white aristocrats, mostly from the Indian subcontinent, got accepted into British aristocratic circles where very few colonial officials would have been admitted. More ordinary non-white subjects of the Empire found active radical and anti-imperialist circles among Britons who assured them their treatment was unfair.

The fact that Britain up to the 1950s was less democratic and egalitarian than the USA also meant that the US pattern of "Democratic Racism" never did get established. Non-whites were few and often rich. When it became an issue with major non-white immigration, an important battle was fought and won to prevent formal racism getting established. This was mostly done by Labour and the Far Left: most of the centre and centre-right preferred to evade the tricky topic. There was occasional use of racism: one group of Tories won a byelection with the infamous slogan "if you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour".³ But in the end, most Tories looked to wider Cold-War concerns and would not embrace open racism.

I said last time that the democratisation, de-colonisation and general levelling that happened after World War Two should be credited 60% to Stalin's Soviet Union, 30% to the United States and 10% to the British Labour Party. This will obviously be disputed. If the British Empire was still mired in the past, surely the United States was gloriously upholding the concept of democracy? Or at least democracy for white males everywhere?

No, on the whole they did not.

US citizens liked their own sort of

electoral politics and their own inalienable right to vote. But overseas was something else, with the wrong people sometimes getting elected. This outlook has lasted up till the present day, and no other country has organised as many coups against duly elected governments as the USA.

The USA attended the Nazi-fest of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. They upheld democracy only sometimes, and very imperfectly. They upheld it with an assumption of continuing white male hegemony. With a general view that no one should be allowed to use Parliamentary Democracy for un-American ends.

Consider Roosevelt's famous *Four Freedoms* speech, delivered at the start of 1941, before Japan's foolish attack on them. Delivered before Hitler's even more foolish declaration of war at a time when many in the USA just wanted to fight Japan. Roosevelt wanted to support Britain in the war in Europe, but his view was very much of his time, alien times:

"Since the permanent formation of our government under the Constitution in 1789, most of the periods of crisis in our history have related to our domestic affairs. And, fortunately, only one of these -- the four-year war between the States -- ever threatened our national unity. Today, thank God, 130,000,000 Americans in 48 States have forgotten points of the compass in our national unity."⁴

Saying "war between the States" was a friendly gesture to the Southern Democrats, heirs to the Confederacy and upholders of racism and segregation. They mostly supported the New Deal, since the bulk of their all-white electorate were poor and needy. For them, the war that most people call the "US Civil War" was always the War Between The States, an assertion that the Confederate cause was a righteous defence of State Rights. Segregation of the races was virtuous. Afro-American – almost always called "niggers" in those days – also got something but always less, on the view that they were an inferior sort of human and less deserving. Roosevelt chose to go along with this, and that may have been the best choice. Had the USA stayed out of the war and had the Nazis then won it, the USA might never have changed. But

is also would probably not have changed without the powerful existence of the Soviet Union as an alternative.

The Four Freedoms were a useful advance in the world that then existed. But when Norman Rockwell in 1943 did his well-known portraits of these Four Freedoms, each of them was dominated by a white middle-aged male. Two of the scenes are domestic; the crowds in the other two are all white. Unless I've missed something, there is nothing that the typical white racist of the era would have objected to.

Rockwell's pictures do celebrate Plebeian values, the worth of people who were not rich or well-educated, just so long as they were white. Much of the "Blue Collar" or Working Class section of US society had a genuine commitment to freedom, but didn't wish to extend it much beyond white males. It wasn't bad for its time – but without the Soviet Union as a grand antagonist to the USA in the Cold War, would things ever have gone further?

It's also true that Roosevelt had trouble getting the USA involved in the war in Europe, regardless. He had to make a case in his Four Freedoms speech:

"It is true that prior to 1914 the United States often has been disturbed by events in other continents. We have even engaged in two wars with European nations and in a number of undeclared wars in the West Indies, in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific, for the maintenance of American rights and for the principles of peaceful commerce. But in no case had a serious threat been raised against our national safety or our continued independence..."

"While the Napoleonic struggles did threaten interests of the United States because of the French foothold in the West Indies and in Louisiana, and while we engaged in the War of 1812 to vindicate our right to peaceful trade, it is nevertheless clear that neither France nor Great Britain nor any other nation was aiming at domination of the whole world..."

"Even when the World War broke out in 1914, it seemed to contain only small threat of danger to our own American

future. But as time went on, as we remember, the American people began to visualize what the downfall of democratic nations might mean to our own democracy."⁵

This confuses the two World Wars, something that has happened ever since. Both the German Empire and Austria-Hungary had extended the vote to all of their male citizens, whereas Britain had only extended it to three in five in the British Isles and denied any sort of self-government to the non-white majority in the empire.

Breaking up the German Empire and Austria-Hungary into smaller fragments was not good for Parliamentary Democracy. Almost all of the successor states had dropped it well before Hitler started his drive to conquer. The big exception was Czechoslovakia, a hegemony of Czechs over many minorities, yet the best of a bad lot. They were abandoned by Britain, which then went to war to defend Poland. In Poland, conventional democracy had been overthrown by Pilsudski in 1926, with general popular approval. Pilsudski's heirs were distinctly hostile to Jews, though they were willing to assimilate those who would abandon their Jewish traditions and become at least nominal Roman Catholics.

The USA did not go to war in 1916 to defend Parliamentary Democracy, which would probably have developed faster if the Kaiser's Germany had won. But Britain was seen as a natural ally in 1916, and Franklin Roosevelt continued to see it so:

"We need not overemphasize imperfections in the peace of Versailles. We need not harp on failure of the democracies to deal with problems of world reconstruction. We should remember that the peace of 1919 was far less unjust than the kind of pacification which began even before Munich, and which is being carried on under the new order of tyranny that seeks to spread over every continent today. The American people have unalterably set their faces against that tyranny."

"I suppose that every realist knows that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly assailed in every

part of the world -- assailed either by arms or by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord in nations that are still at peace. During 16 long months this assault has blotted out the whole pattern of democratic life in an appalling number of independent nations, great and small. And the assailants are still on the march, threatening other nations, great and small...

"Armed defense of democratic existence is now being gallantly waged in four continents. If that defense fails, all the population and all the resources of Europe and Asia, and Africa and Austral-Asia will be dominated by conquerors. And let us remember that the total of those populations in those four continents, the total of those populations and their resources greatly exceed the sum total of the population and the resources of the whole of the Western Hemisphere -- yes, many times over."⁶

Hitler had overrun Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway, but would probably have been ready to let them decide their own form of government as part of a general peace. Nor was it likely that he could have conquered or controlled the vast colonial empires that Holland, Belgium, France and Britain controlled. Only the French Empire was on his side, because most of the colonies viewed Vichy France as the legitimate government.

Roosevelt spoke about defending existing democratic regimes. He does not speak of extending democracy. And even this was for the domestic audience, where democracy was part of the rhetoric. Later practice has shown that this has never been a genuine belief of the US elite. No country has organised more coups against inconvenient elected governments than the USA.

Italy's fascist government was welcomed when it overthrew Mussolini. Had Franco offered to join the war against Hitler, it is unlikely he would have been refused. Despite his neutrality and despite letting Spanish volunteers help Nazi Germany by fighting against the Soviet Union, Franco was protected by the USA for the rest of his long rule. An older dictatorship in Portugal was allowed to be a member of NATO, as

was Turkey during its various lapses into military rule. As was Greece during the dictatorship of the Colonels, which the USA is generally viewed as having encouraged and perhaps organised.

What existed in Europe in the 1930s were mostly democratic authoritarian systems. Systems that had closed down open political competition, but did so with the support of the majority, often the enthusiasm of the majority. The idea of choosing your own rulers had been greeted with initial enthusiasm, but when people tried it they found it mostly produced weakness and deadlock. So when competent authoritarians took over, this was generally welcomed. Franco's Spain was the only real dictatorship, based on winning a Civil War with most of the army but slightly less than half the population,⁷ and never tested in a referendum.

Had France and Britain stalemated Nazi Germany, and perhaps later won with US support, it seems unlikely they would have had the same (imperfect) commitment to extending democracy and winding up empires that occurred in the actual war, in which the Soviet Union destroyed about two-thirds of German power. Churchill was scornful of the Soviet Union as late as January 1940, when the Maginot Line seemed secure and the Soviets were having trouble against the Finns, who were even better adapted to cold-weather warfare than the Russians were. He saw it as a confirmation of all of his prejudiced -- the same prejudices he had set aside a couple of years later:

"The service rendered by Finland to mankind is magnificent. They have exposed, for all the world to see, the military incapacity of the Red Army and of the Red Air Force. Many illusions about Soviet Russia have been dispelled in these few fierce weeks of fighting in the Arctic Circle. Everyone can see how Communism rots the soul of a nation; how it makes it abject and hungry in peace, and proves it base and abominable in war."⁸

By the autumn of 1940, things were very different. France had surrendered. Churchill wanted to fight on, but had little hope of victory. He had to widen the war to have any hope of winning it.

If one could go back in time (very unlikely) and if one wanted to see the war end with a compromise peace in 1940 (very moot), one might have drafted a speech for Hitler that might have made all the difference. Something like:

"People of Britain, I never wanted a war with you. I do not wish to harm your empire. Before the war, I was in favour of you keeping all you had, except perhaps for Ireland's desire for full independence and Spain's claim to Gibraltar. But since neither country helped Germany when the war's outcome was doubtful, I see no need to do anything for them.

"The issue is no longer doubtful. France has been defeated and made peace. If you insist on a long war, German power can destroy you. But I do not wish this. I do not want to create a legacy of British bitterness for future German leaders to face, perhaps incompetently.

"Since you made war on me, I cannot let things go back to what they were. But I would be satisfied to have military control of Gibraltar, Malta and the Suez Canal, without demanding changes in how the non-military population is governed. And I want a binding promise that never again will your navy impose famine on Germany or any other countries by blocking imports of food which we have become dependent on. As for Germany's former colonies, I am moderate on the issue and might be willing to see existing arrangements continue with suitable concessions.

"I do not seek any occupation of any part of Britain, and will gladly withdraw from the Channel Islands. Likewise from France, Holland, Denmark and Norway, as soon as I am assured that any restored exiled rulers will not be hostile. And I must insist that you do not permit Poles or other hostile forces to operate from your territory. You are otherwise welcome to keep them, ship them out to your colonies or otherwise get rid of them, just as it pleases you."

Such a moderate offer would almost certainly have been accepted. It's unlikely that Hitler wanted any more. It would at least have been foolish for him to carry on a war in the hope of more. For unclear reasons, he never said it. And so the war

widened.

Note also, had the war ended in 1940, millions of Jews would have survived who were in fact killed in the later extermination program. This began when Nazi Germany realised that Britain would not make a compromise peace. Knew that Nazism was either going to win decisively or be crushed utterly, so they had nothing to lose by going to extremes.

Of course the British decision to continue the war had nothing to do with the Jews under Nazi control. These could have continued to be a useful labour force doing ordinary jobs within Germany, had Hitler chosen to play it that way. Most German Jews had fought loyally for the Kaiser, and it's likely that many would have decided they were German first, had Hitler given them the option. Jews elsewhere would have mostly cooperated in the hope of surviving the war. Instead he chose to deport them to some unspecified location in the east. He create the conditions in which mass extermination occurred, almost certainly with his knowledge and approval.

Mass killing of Jews in Germany, Poland etc. would have been unlikely to have happened had Britain not fought on in 1940. But most people get this reversed and think that this sad consequence of the war continuing past 1940 was the noble and self-sacrificing reason that the British Empire went on fighting.

The British government was fighting to save its Empire, and to preserve the remnants of the global dominance it had had since 1759. It showed a striking lack of interest in the fate of East European Jews, even though the Poles and others told them just what was happening. Only when the war was almost won was it realised that this would make good propaganda. That was one way of evading British guilt.

Another defence is to say that the war was somehow caused by Stalin's Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany. It's a truly absurd notion, though fed by the bitter resentments of those who thought they were better Leninists than Stalin, and in fact achieved nothing. Stalin could do little to prevent the war, not unless the British Empire was to ally it-

self with him in late 1938 and early 1939. Stalin sought this. Many Britons wanted it, but the British government seemed intent on going through the motions while making sure that nothing came of it.

It's moot if even this would have prevented war in the longer term. The war of 1914-18 had left too much unresolved: Germany was neither treated decently nor broken up into the separate elements that had unified in the 1870s. Some sort of Second World War would have been likely even if the White Russians had won their Civil War and there had been no Soviet Union. But if the West's partner in defeating Hitler had been a right-wing Russia that believed in Imperialism, Racism and hostility to Jews, the post-war world would have been very different and not at all congenial to left-wing causes.

A war was widely expected from the early 1930s, expressed in books as different as Wells's *The Shape Of Things To Come* and Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*. The boom of the 1920s had given some grounds for optimism, but then there was the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression, so people feared that they were on the path for war regardless.

The situation in the late 30s was a bit like the 3-way standoff at the end of that famous Western, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. The older Imperial powers – Britain and France – were keen to save their empires. This applied even to many non-Communist left-wingers like George Orwell, and is set out in his 1941 essay *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were out to destroy this hegemony, but for different reasons and with utterly different visions of what should replace it.

In both Britain and France, Centre-Right parties including the British Tories (then ruling as the strongest element in a National Government) felt less threatened by the Nazis than by the left. No one apart from Republican Spain chose to boycott the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which Hitler used as an advert for his New Order. This already included stripping German Jews of their citizenship and erecting of an absolute dictatorship in place of conventional Parliamentary

Democracy. Not to mention the mass killing of more moderate Nazis and some uncooperative conservative politicians in the Night of the Long Knives. (Most accounts nowadays just show the odious Brownshirts being killed: it went much wider than that, removing everyone Hitler felt he could not control.)

Hitler had planned the conquest of large parts of Russia in *Mein Kampf*, as necessary for Germany's future. He was likely to try to do it eventually, regardless. Stalin had every reason to fear that the West would stand neutral in such a war, or maybe back Hitler. His response was unscrupulous but highly successful: when the West would not work with him he combined with Hitler to destroy Poland, and then let Hitler and the West weaken each other while he continued to strengthen the Soviet Union. In terms of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, he secured the Clint Eastwood role for himself.

Where things went wrong was that the German War-Machine was unexpectedly effective. It overran Poland within weeks, whereas destroying Serbia had taken more than a year in World War One. Then overran France just as easily, and came close to managing the same when Hitler did finally launch his anti-Soviet crusade. Stalin was wrong on this, but so was almost everyone else. Including Hitler: he assumed that his early success was due to inherent superiority and that his enemies would be unable to learn and adapt, as in fact they did.

Facing the Soviet Union during the early years of the Cold War, the USA were for a time quite happy to be "White Knights in Blue Collar Armour". They might have taken the phrase as praise, had anyone used it.⁹ But all of the talk of Freedom led to strong demands for this same freedom from women and Afro-Americans, people who had been expected to know their place, but could not easily be crushed with the world watching. With Africa full of independent-minded rulers and with the Soviet Union in the 1960s way ahead on women's rights, it was risky to refuse to change. So they shifted, but later managed to write the shift out of history.

The big trouble with lying is that it

is not true. Someone who believes their own lies – as many clearly do in the USA – will blunder by thinking they have a shining past example when in fact they do not. Hence the blunders in Iraq and other places.

(Endnotes)

¹ This is left much vaguer in Peter Jackson's films.

² Warren, Allen. Singapore 1942: Britain's Greatest Defeat. Hambledon and London 2002. Page 8.

³ [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1999/02/99/e-cyclopedia/1292973.stm]

⁴ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, The Four Freedoms, delivered 6 January, 1941. [<http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm>] I assume the "points of the compass" refers to the traditional difference between North and South, and also the lesser contrast between East Coast and West Coast.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Spanish election of 1936 was narrowly won by the Popular Front, but most of the opposition supported the military uprising. (Not initially led by Franco: several of the alternative leaders died during the fighting.)

⁸ [<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winstonchurchill/1940-finest-hour/98-the-war-situation-house-of-many-mansions>]

⁹ As far as I can tell, it is new. I found nothing when I googled for it. I do acknowledge an indirect inspiration from an episode of gangster-comedy *The Sopranos* entitled *Knights In White Satin Armour*.

It's A Fact

The number of new medical students entering undergraduate training programmes since 1996/97 is as follows: 1996/97 - 3,594; 1997/98 - 3,749; 1998/99 - 3,735; 1999/2000 - 3,972; 2000/01 - 4,300; 2001/02 - 4,713; 2002/03 - 5,277; 2003/04 - 6,030; 2004/05 - 6,294; 2005/06 - 6,314; 2006/07 - 6,401; 2007/08 - 6,264; 2008/09 - 6,477; 2009/10 - 6,437; 2010/11 - 6,418; 2011/12 - 6,393. The provisional number for 2012/13 intake is 6,262. Parliamentary Written Answer 13/5/13.

The number of NHS Doctors in England - full time equivalent 1996 to 2012 - is as follows: Year 1996 - 81,783 (Of which there were 27,550 GPs and 54,233 Medical & dental staff); Year 1997 - 84,758 (27,660 & 57,099); Year 1998 - 86,594 (27,848 & 58,746); Year 1999 - 88,693 (28,033 & 60,338); Year 2000 - 90,638 (28,154 & 62,094); Year 2001 - 92,910 (28,439 & 64,055); Year 2002 - 97,415 (28,740 & 68,260); Year 2003 - 102,344 (29,777 & 72,260); Year 2004 - 109,483 (30,762 & 78,462); Year 2005 - 114,470 (31,683 & 82,568); Year 2006 - 119,359 (33,121 & 85,975); Year 2007 - 120,878 (33,345 & 87,533); Year 2008 - 125,316 (33,730 & 91,586); Year 2009 - 132,368 (35,770 & 96,598); Year 2010 - 132,710 (35,074 & 97,636); Year 2011 - 134,570 (35,175 & 99,394); Year 2012 - 136,615 (35,716 & 100,899). PWA 13/5/13.

The number of NHS Nurses in England - full time equivalent 1996 to 2012 - is as follows: Year 1996 - 249,573 (Of which there were 239,751 Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visitors and 9,821 GP practice nurses); Year 1997 - 247,635 (237,553 & 10,082); Year 1998 - 248,128 (237,768 & 10,359); Year 1999 - 251,907 (241,218 & 10,689); Year 2000 - 257,429 (246,717 & 10,711); Year 2001 - 267,381 (256,218 & 11,163); Year 2002 - 280,212 (268,214 & 11,998); Year 2003 - 290,971 (278,003 & 12,967); Year 2004 - 300,403 (286,841 & 13,563); Year 2005 - 308,205 (294,412 & 13,793); Year 2006 - 310,383 (295,767 & 14,616); Year 2007 - 308,516 (293,962 & 14,554); Year 2008 - 313,879 (299,917 & 13,962); Year 2009 - 320,469 (306,887 & 13,582);

Year 2010 - 323,783 (309,139 & 14,644); 2011 - 321,143 (306,346 & 14,797); Year 2012 - 319,755 (305,060 & 14,695). PWA 13/5/13.

Estimates of UK unemployment levels of people aged 16 and over by ethnic group, for each quarter of 2012 are: Total 1st Quarter 2012 - 2,594,000 (8.2%). Of which White was 2,144,000 (7.5%). Mixed Race - 43,000 (14.5%). Indian - 77,000 (9.8%). Pakistani - 71,000 (18%). Bangladeshi - 19,000 (12.9%). Chinese - 13,000 (10.2%). Black/African/Caribbean - 141,000 (18.4%). Other - 85,000 (11.1%). Total 2nd quarter 2012 - 2,519,000 (7.9%). Of which White was 2,075,000 (7.3%). Mixed Race - 50,000 (17.3%). Indian - 74,000 (9%). Pakistani - 69,000 (16.6%). Bangladeshi - 18,000 (13.5%). Chinese - 18,000 (13.3%). Black/African/Caribbean - 123,000 (15.5%). Other - 91,000 (11.6%). Total 3rd quarter 2012 - 2,601,000 (8.1%). Of which White was 2,134,000 (7.4%). Mixed Race - 40,000 (13.1%). Indian - 82,000 (9.9%). Pakistani - 66,000 (15.1%). Bangladeshi - 30,000 (18.8%). Chinese - 15,000 (10.9%). Black/African/Caribbean - 134,000 (16%). Other - 100,000 (12.2%). Total 4th quarter 2012 - 2,471,000 (7.7%). Of which White was 1,997,000 (6.9%). Mixed Race - 48,000 (15.5%). Indian - 67,000 (8.3%). Pakistani - 78,000 (18.4%). Bangladeshi - 33,000 (20%). Chinese - 14,000 (9.3%). Black/African/Caribbean - 135,000 (15.8%). Other - 99,000 (12.2%). Note: The total includes people who have not stated their ethnic group. 'White' also includes respondents in England, Wales and Scotland identifying themselves as 'White-Gypsy or Irish Traveller' and respondents in Scotland identifying themselves as 'White-Polish'. 'Other' includes respondents in Northern Ireland identifying themselves as 'Irish Traveller'; respondents in all UK countries identifying themselves as 'Arab' and any other ethnic group not elsewhere classified. PWA 14/5/13.

The scheduled closing date and the net generating capacity for each nuclear power station is as follows: Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactor (AGR) - Dungeness B (1985 to 2018, 1,040 MW); Hartlepool (1989 to 2019, 1,180 MW); Heysham 1

Angela Merkel and the Export of Industrial Democracy

"If this is allowed to happen, we'd soon have private European companies in Germany without any [worker] participation rights."—Klaus-Heiner Lehne, Christian Democrat MEP

An initiative by EU Commissioner Michel Barnier in August 2012 to establish a new form of company—the *"Europe-Co.Ltd."*—collapsed after concerted opposition by the German and Swedish Governments because it would undermine industrial democracy structures in their countries. The German Christian Democrats led the charge.

Much commentary on the Euro and the attempts to consolidate the Eurozone is handicapped by a fundamental misunderstanding of what Angela Merkel is. As a Christian Democrat it is assumed that she and her party are *"right wing"*, *"conservative"*, or even *"reactionary"*. This is a fundamental misinterpretation that explains much of why the commentators on the Euro crisis have continually got it all so wrong.

The Christian Democratic Party in Germany (CDU) is generally dominated by middle class interests. But it also has

(1989 to 2019, 1,155 MW); Heysham 2 (1989 to 2023, 1,220); Hinckley Point B (1976 to 2023, 810 MW); Hunterston B (1976 to 2023, 890 MW); Torness (1988 to 2023, 1,185 MW). Magnox - Wylfa (1971 to 2014, 490 MW). Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR) - Sizewell B (1995 to 2035, 1,198 MW). Total net capacity of operating reactors - 9,168 MW. PWA 15/5/13.

The estimated number of £5 notes in circulation in each of the five years 2009 to 2013 is: 2009 - 260 million; 2010 - 293 million; 2011 - 327 million; 2012 - 354 million; 2013 - 365 million. PWA 16/5/13.

The following information relates to pensioner concessions on winter fuel payment, TV licences, and bus passes. 1)

Philip O'Connor

substantial bases in constituencies with working class populations, a legacy of the old Christian Trade Union movement. After the Second World War the German Trade Union movement was re-created as a united single structure, combining former Socialist, Christian and other strands. This tradition still plays a significant role in the politics of the CDU, despite the generally Social Democratic inclinations of most Trade Unionists.

Industrial Democracy is the core aspect of the social contract in Germany. The failure of attempts to establish it in the late 1920s is regarded as one of the reasons for the collapse of the Weimar Republic. It has been a core *"principle"* of the Social Democratic party and the Trade Unions for over a 100 years. Its introduction in the late 1940s was a vital element in securing German Trade Union support for the creation of the Federal Republic. In addition, the 1951 law introducing Parity Boards in the Coal and Steel Industries and the 1953 Works Council Act were major developments ensuring Trade Union cooperation with

Each winter around 12 million receive a winter fuel payment, over 95% of these are paid automatically without the need to claim. 2) Anyone aged 75 or over is entitled to a free TV licence for their main address. The free licence is not issued automatically and needs to be applied for. Once issued, licences are renewed automatically every year unless the customer does not have a national insurance number in which case TV licensing will contact them to confirm their circumstances have not changed each year. 3) The concessionary travel benefit is optional. An eligible person can choose not to take up the entitlement. The National Travel Survey 2011 shows that in Great Britain, 79% of people eligible for an older persons' bus pass held one. PWA 16/5/13.

the Adenauer Government. Adenauer himself later wrote that *"The support of the DGB {German Trade Union Congress} would never have been secured for the Schumann Plan if it had not been satisfied on the issue of co-determination"* (quoted in a recent DGB publication referred to in greater detail below).

The European "Corporation" and Industrial Democracy

A case in point is the issue of European company law and worker involvement in company management and boards, and Merkel's position on these questions. Business interests have sought for decades a unified system of company law across the EU. In 2001 the EU introduced regulations allowing for the formation of EU level corporations (known by the Latin title, *Societas Europaea* or "SE"). This allows a company to change its status to an SE, which must then be treated in every EU member state as if it were a public company formed in accordance with the law of that state (EU Regulation 2157/2001/EC). The regulations technically allowed companies re-organised as SE's to opt in or out of employee participation at management or board level (EU Directive 2001/86/EC). Following German pressure, the initial proposals for the SE were amended to ensure that, where a company has a two-tier system of Supervisory and Management Boards, and where employees under their domestic law have an entitlement to representation on such Boards, this must be continued in the SE. In Germany the Supervisory Boards of large companies have 50/50 representation of workers' and shareholders' representatives. Smaller companies (Co. Ltd.) have 33% worker participation on their Boards.

There are many business advantages to the European SE structure, including the ability to transfer headquarters abroad for tax reasons, the introduction of a more 'dynamic' UK model of single-board companies, ease of doing cross-continental business, cost reasons,

etc. But, as the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*—not noted for its defence of Trade Union positions—editorialised, the rate at which German corporations were opting to re-form as SE's was greater than in any other country, and the reason was straightforward: to “escape from worker co-determination”. Corporations which have taken this step include well known brands such as BASF, Porsche, Eon and Axel Springer (*Das Geheimnis der “Europa-AG”*, FAZ, 30.01.2013).

But the extent to which they actually escape from industrial democracy requirements is limited. The move enables them have a smaller Supervisory Board, with an accompanying smaller Trade Union presence in the overseeing of the company management. What the law does allow for is the restructuring of companies into corporations, while retaining the 33% participation formula, and a provision that it remains at this level unless an agreement to expand it is reached. In addition, according to the same commentary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, companies use the clause which enabling Trade Unionists in the outsourced countries to participate in the company to discourage their participation. This is especially the case where labour movement traditions are hostile to being implicated in company management decisions, or where the use of English as the language of management rather than the ‘local’ language operates to exclude workers’ representatives.

Barnier’s initiative collapses

Last year Michel Barnier, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, sought to extend European company law from corporations to the much greater potential field of limited companies (Co. Ltd.—the EU version to be called “SPE”). He intended to use the process of “enhanced cooperation” allowable under the Lisbon Treaty to circumvent German and Swedish opposition to a new system of European companies that could evade the requirements for worker participation under their national legislation. But German Minister for Labour, Ursula von der Leyen (CDU), prevented this happening on the basis that companies formed in this way operating in Germany would breach German law. A CDU member

of the European Parliament declared in outrage, “If this was allowed to happen, we’d soon have private European companies in Germany without any {worker} participation rights” (*Brüssel will Europa-GmbH auch ohne Deutschland*, Handelsblatt, 22.08.2012). The German Unions were the source of their Government stance and Sweden backed that approach too. Barnier’s initiative collapsed.

Merkel on Industrial Democracy

Recently the German Trade Union Federation—which with 7 million members (a third of them in the engineering union IG Metall) is the largest in the EU—published an online booklet reminding politicians of their commitments on the issue of worker participation or ‘co-determination’: “*Zitatesammlung Pro Mitbestimmung*” (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, January 2013). It is important to remember that there is a persistent and robust opposition to co-determination from business circles and the Liberal Party (partners of the CDU in the Merkel coalition Government), and continued attempts to weaken it. During the coalition negotiations of 2009 the Liberals had sought to have its *anti-Mitbestimmung* line brought into the Government programme. This is what makes Merkel’s position on the issue all the more notable.

That German Christian Democrats had anything but a reactionary stance on Industrial Democracy was revealed by John Minahane in the *Irish Political Review* in August 2012 when he reproduced an interview with Angela Merkel from the newspaper *Die Welt* in 2009. This article was subsequently quoted by Irish Trade Union representative, Manus O’Riordan, at a meeting of the European Economic and Social Committee—the partnership body of the EU—on 28th August 2012 (see ‘Clear on Co-Determination but muddled on Middle-East’, *Irish Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 4, Dec. 2012). That interview is also included in the DGB pamphlet. But in the light of that DGB publication, Manus’s doubts regarding the sincerity of her remarks given the “fact that she has not since repeated them” needs some correction.

Here are some of the statements attributed by the DGB pamphlet to Angela

Merkel, generally regarded as a woman of few words:

“Worker participation—and I want to stress this from the very start—is a substantial component of the social market economy ... I am one of those who do not question it, but regard it as a great achievement As a result of it, Germany, compared to the rest of Europe, has the lowest rate of days lost through strikes. I believe I can say without contradiction that this is a result of co-determination.”

— Speech at the Trade Union event, “30 years of the Co-Determination Act”, 30.08.2006.

“I believe that Germany has an advantage in that we are a country that has learned to be able again and again to resolve even very complex contradictions in a peaceful manner—when I think of {our system of} collective agreements, co-determination or many other things in our country.”

—Speech on the 250th Anniversary of MAN AG, 17.10.2008

“Social partnership, the system of collective agreements through company level co-determination and plant level worker participation, are foundations of our economic and social order and an expression of the social ethos of the Christian Churches. Our understanding of the dignity of working people demands participation in the decisions which shape the conditions of their world of work.”

— CDU Basic Programme, December 2007.

WELT ONLINE (newspaper): “Does the German system of co-determination belong among the principles of the social market economy which you want to see adopted worldwide?” ... *Merkel*: “I believe that in the worldwide crisis the special value of a cooperative approach between workers’ and employers’ representatives has proven itself. It can’t be a simple 1 : 1 {transfer} internationally of the German co-determination system. But I would regard a fair cooperative relationship between workers’ representatives and company management, and more participation in company ownership by workers, as interesting elements

which could be spread more widely internationally. Trade unionists tell us that even in the ILO, the International Labour Organisation, our trade unions were long greeted with a smile when they proposed that the principles of the social market economy should be established in international convention. Following the global crisis this response has disappeared to a considerable extent. I myself have engaged with this issue for many years. When I took over as chair of the CDU in the year 2000, I established a Working Group on the 'New Social Market Economy' to work out ways in which the social market economy could be complemented with an international dimension. That was why, during the German presidency of the G8, I as German Chancellor put the issue of regulation of the financial markets on the agenda. While at that time this found little resonance, the pressure for action has grown with the crisis. And I won't let go until we have progressed decisively in this matter."

—*Welt Online*, 27.08.2009

"I am of the opinion that we will not be changing anything in regard to co-determination."

— Statement to Mining Union Conference, 14.10.2009, on her coalition talks with the Liberal Party (which in the election campaign had sought a weakening of co-determination law).

"For this we will need not least a responsible co-operation between workers and employers. The system of collective agreement had proven itself precisely in the crisis, in adapting to sometimes extremely difficult production situations. It is one of the most important social achievements in Germany. Many countries have been looking almost in wonder at our culture of cooperation between employers and workers. So I would like to say here very clearly: we will not change the co-determination system or the system of works councils. We will also not weaken the protective effects of our redundancy law. This creates trust and also contributes to improving the relationship of citizens with the State."

—Government Statement,
10.11.2009

"Co-determination is one currency in which we could speculate, a currency that we have and which is the substance of our social market economy—hence our clear avowal of it."

—Merkel, speech to the DGB congress, 2010

On her own website, Merkel has described the social market economy as an "export winner" (*"Exportschlager"*):

"The social market economy ... has made our country strong and ensured widespread prosperity. And it is our societal model for the future—including beyond Germany. This is because the international financial and economic crisis has shown what happens when the principles of the social market economy are disregarded. This must never be allowed re-occur. The social market economy must become an export winner. And that is why I have been endeavouring to ensure that the principles of the social market economy are brought to bear internationally. This is what will enable us shape globalisation in a human way." (www.angela-merkel.de/page/117.htm).

These quotations—translated here—show that the German commitment to promoting co-determination at home and abroad cannot be doubted. However, the language barrier will have to be overcome and these views given wider currency. With the world increasingly talking English, the Anglo-Saxon outlook—including its model of industrial relations—tends to spread. Only a determined effort to promote these ideas in other languages can overcome this block on moving forward.

Exporting the social market economy

Angela Merkel has clearly indicated that the German model of the "social market economy" could have wider application in the world and could be beneficial in world development. Such sentiments have to be expressed with some caution. This economic model arose as the political and social contract on which Germany recovered after the devastation of World War Two. It involves capitalist energies being enabled to function and

develop within a framework that also provides high levels of social security, a uniquely egalitarian pension system, extensive worker participation and co-determination in industry, and an advanced system of vocational training. This was the 'price' German capitalism had to pay for labour to allow it revive at all after its role in the war. All systems thus have their particular contexts in which they develop and emerge.

But, since the Western economic crisis, and leaving their isolation at the International Labour Organisation behind them, the Germans—and particularly the Christian Democrats—have been suggesting that other countries learn from their "proven" social system. In 2010 Merkel's Minister for Labour, Ursula von der Leyen, told a Conference at the Volkswagen plant: "*In the era of globalisation co-determination is a brand that we should export*" (quoted in the DGB pamphlet). And in 2012 the same Minister, addressing the issue of the drastic levels of youth unemployment that had emerged in southern European countries as a result of the crisis, called for the development of a common "*Euro system of vocational education*", adding:

"... the North (of Europe) must help the South in developing a system of vocational education something along the lines of the dual system in the workplace and at vocational school as is common in Germany, said von der Leyen. Several {German} companies with subsidiaries elsewhere in Europe had already expressed an interest in this idea. 7.3bn euro of unused resources from the [European Social] Fund would be made available for this ..." (*Welt Online*, 22.06.2012)

But, if such aspects of the social market economy are now being regarded by Germany as "*export goods*" they will also need markets interested in importing them.

One of those who have listened to this message would appear to be Christoph Mueller, who as chief executive of Aer Lingus oversaw the re-introduction last year (after 20 years) of an apprenticeship system for aircraft maintenance technicians and engineers, designed on the German dual system of apprenticeship education. In an interview with the

Far-right.com

The dot in the title of this pamphlet is the same size as the print and contains a Nazi-style (i. e. left-tilted) swastika. The sub-title is Nationalist Extremism On The Internet. It is part of a book series Mapping the Far-Right. It is probably useful to keep tabs on some of the crazier elements (especially those prone to violence) on the extreme right. But most readers' problem is that these groups are as faction-ridden as the far left, and they, and the Left groups tend to cancel each other out. The editors are Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable. Dr Jackson is a Lecturer in History at Northampton, and Co-ordinator for the Radicalism and Mew Media Research Group at the university. The other writers are from the same Group, except Gerry and Sonia Gable (of the anti-fascist Searchlight magazine).

In many ways they don't

continued from page 16

Irish Independent he said that, while he admired a lot about the Irish business model, he thought Irish industry should be much more involved in skilling its workers, especially through proper apprenticeship education. He was "*also puzzled that Irish industrial relations run along Anglo Saxon lines where unions and management appear trapped by permanent antagonism ... I believe Ireland would be much better off without the Anglo Saxon system*" ("Turbulence holds no fears for the king of calm", *Irish Independent*, 9th August 2012).

And another good listener seems to be our own Minister for Social protection, Joan Burton TD. At the biennial "*Social Inclusion Forum*" on 26th March she laid out her perspective on the Youth Guarantee programme she intends to launch. She said that an essential tool in combating youth unemployment was a properly developed vocational education system, and for this she would not be looking to Britain but to the dual system that had proven so successful in Germany and Austria.

S McGouran

have a lot to say, the reference to 'radicalism' is interesting, as one writer remarks the Right has always been interested in new, or newish media. Referencing Mosley's attempt to set up a radio station. (The Fascists, especially the Nazis, had a deeply ambiguous, Janus-like attitude to new media - radio and movies. Some of the films Goebbels oversaw are watchable, and one, Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, is one of the greatest movies ever made, (and has quite blatant Cubist undertones)).

The New Right (a tricky term, there is a New Right in mainland Europe, largely a French, but also Italian phenomenon, which intellectualises standard bigotry - aimed at Arabs, Africans, Roma, and other minorities) is simply using what is now commonly available. ('Internet cafes' in London are used largely by African, Asian, Latin American - and some southern and east European people). But the subjects of these essays can be quite wary of the Internet. Some American sites are so over-the-top bigoted, that they are comical. One claims the Jews are, - naturally - responsible for Communism and capitalism. The collapse of Bolshevism is only a blind. Obama is running America as a Soviet Republic, and Russia is as powerful as it was in 1992. China is a bit problematical, it was destined to be a US colony for centuries. Now the US is looking rather like a Chinese colony. Their problem is that China doesn't rattle a sabre so much as a credit card - and owns America's currency, Chinese people are problematically largely light skinned.

As Sonia Gable writes, the BNP has a 'love-hate' relationship with the Internet. Cadres have a bad habit of saying what they actually feel about wogs, bog-wogs, and the large number of categories of people they hate. Driving away the (largely Labour supporters) they have gathered-in by blaming 'immigrants' for the shortage in housing, and not the Thatcher / Blair / Brown policy of refus-

ing to build affordable housing. Apart from unsavoury attitudes to non-Aryans, many BNP supporters are not the sort a respectable football supporter would want to encounter on the terraces.

The EDL is dealt with. Like the BNP, many individual members have their own websites. That sort of situation does neither entity much good. Some people are simply innocents abroad, who probably leave shortly after finding the websites of party colleagues. Many of these people can contain themselves for quite long periods of time. But having to be relatively civil about Jews (in particular), 'Asians', blacks, or Muslims becomes unbearable and actual feelings about such people gush out like a burst sewer pipe. The leaders of the EDL (English Defence (from whom?) League) have dubious backgrounds in openly racist groups. And Irish surnames; Gerry McGeough Ireland's own Green Fascist is noted. He published a magazine called *The Hibernian*, that was not new media, but it guided readers to vast quantities of racist rubbish on US-based sites.

Some other essays here are about the sort of music poured out by Aryan Force, Skrewdriver and other subtly named bands. As they reject anything with an Afro-American or Caribbean connection they are left with punk. The problem with punk is that while it was vigorously 'do it yourself' and was anti-bland (and Anglo pop was blancmange-bland at the time - the mid-70s), it seemed, too, to be anti-music. Rowdiness is not a substitute for even 'soft-rock'. Listening to such bands is likely to make the ears bleed (that's even before their members, or their audience, don't make ones ears bleed the standard way, in the first place).

An interesting read, but not one you'd want to linger over - it is rather like what happens when a stone is turned over; vaguely unpleasant, but not particularly important entities mill about. But it is useful that somebody is keeping an eye on them.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

In May, the House of Commons sat for just eight working days, between the 8th and 21st; while the House of Lords sat for nine days, between 8th and 22nd. This point seems to have been lost on Michael Gove who wants teachers to work more days and take shorter holidays. His proposal would have more supporters if he suggested that MPs should lead by example.

The Queen's Speech : An Exercise In Cant

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government's legislative programme will continue to focus on building a stronger economy so that the United Kingdom can compete and succeed in the world. It will also work to promote a fairer society that rewards people who work hard.

My Government's first priority is to strengthen Britain's economic competitiveness. To this end, it will support the growth of the private sector and the creation of more jobs and opportunities.

My Ministers will continue to prioritise measures that reduce the deficit---ensuring that interest rates are kept low for homeowners and businesses.

My Government is committed to building an economy where people who work hard are properly rewarded. It will therefore continue to reform the benefits system, helping people to move from welfare to work.

Measures will be brought forward to introduce a new Employment Allowance to support jobs and help small businesses.

A Bill will be introduced to reduce the burden of excessive regulation on businesses. A further Bill will make it easier for businesses to protect their intellectual property.

A draft Bill will be published establishing a simple set of consumer rights to promote competitive markets and growth.

My Government will introduce a Bill that closes the Audit Commission.

My Government will continue to invest in infrastructure to deliver jobs and growth for the economy.

Legislation will be introduced to enable the building of High Speed 2 railway line, providing further opportunities for economic growth in many of Britain's cities.

My Government will continue with legislation to update energy infrastructure and to improve the water industry.

My Government is committed to a fairer society where aspiration and responsibility are rewarded.

To make sure that every child has the best start in life, regardless of background, further measures will be taken to improve the quality of education for young people.

Plans will be developed to help working parents with child care, increasing its availability and helping with its cost.

My Government will also take forward plans for a new curriculum, a world-class exam system and greater flexibility in pay for teachers.

My Government will also take steps to ensure that it becomes typical for those leaving school to start a traineeship or apprenticeship, or go to university.

New arrangements will be put in place to help more people own their own home, with Government support provided for mortgages and deposits.

My Government is committed to supporting people who have saved for their retirement.

Legislation will be introduced to reform the way long-term care is paid for, to ensure the elderly do not have to sell their homes to meet care bills.

My Government will bring forward legislation to create a simpler state pension system that encourages saving and provides more help to those who have spent years caring for children.

Legislation will be introduced to ensure sufferers of a certain asbestos-related cancer receive payments where no liable employer or insurer can be traced.

My Government will bring forward a Bill that further reforms Britain's immigration system. The Bill will ensure that this country attracts people who will contribute and deters those who will not.

My Government will continue to reduce crime and protect national security.

Legislation will be brought forward to introduce new pow-

ers to tackle antisocial behaviour, cut crime and further reform the police.

In relation to the problem of matching internet protocol addresses, my Government will bring forward proposals to enable protection of the public and the investigation of crime in cyberspace.

Measures will be brought forward to improve the way this country procures defence equipment, as well as strengthening the reserve forces.

My Ministers will continue to work in co-operation with the devolved administrations.

A Bill will be introduced to give effect to a number of institutional improvements in Northern Ireland.

Draft legislation will be published concerning the electoral arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales.

My Government will continue to make the case for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will work to prevent conflict and reduce terrorism. It will support countries in transition in the middle east and north Africa, and the opening of a peace process in Afghanistan.

My Government will work to prevent sexual violence in conflict worldwide.

My Government will ensure the security, good governance and development of Overseas Territories, including by protecting the Falkland Islanders' and Gibraltarians' right to determine their political futures.

In assuming the presidency of the G8, my Government will promote economic growth, support free trade, tackle tax evasion, encourage greater transparency and accountability while continuing to make progress in tackling climate change.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

The Elephant In The Room

Europe heads the political priorities list for the Tory eurosceptics who expressed concern that it was missing from the programme set out in the Queen's speech on 8 May. Some months ago Cameron promised a referendum on UK membership by the end of 2017, but the sceptics are not convinced it will happen and want the holding of a referendum written into law. On 13 May, in an attempt to head off a Tory rebellion, Cameron promised to publish a draft Bill to guarantee a referendum will held before the end of 2017. But even this was not enough. On 15 May John Baron tabled an amendment to the Queen's Speech aimed at support for a Parliamentary Bill that would achieve that objective. The amendment read : "This House respectfully regrets that an EU referendum bill was not included in the Gracious Speech." The amendment was defeated by 277 to 131 votes.(The 130 votes recorded in Hansard is incorrect). The breakdown by party of those against the amendment was: 1 Conservative, 220 Labour, 45 Lib Dem, 5 Scottish Nationalists, 3 SDLP, 2 Plaid Cymru, and 1 Alliance. The lone Conservative was Kwasi Kwarteng who claimed that his vote against was a mistake and that he had intended to abstain. The 131 MPs who supported the amendment were: 114 Conservative, 11 Labour (Rosie Cooper, Jeremy Corbyn, John Cryer, Natascha Engel, Frank Field, Roger Godsiff, Kate Hoey, Kelvin Hopkins, Grahame Morris, Dennis Skinner, Graham Stringer.), 4 Democratic Unionists (Nigel Dodds, William McCrea, David Simpson, Sammy Wilson.),1 Lib Dem (John Hemming), and 1 Respect (George Galloway).

An Aspect Of The Speech

A number of debates on aspects of the Queen's Speech took place in the days following. One of the better speeches was

delivered on 14 May by Labour's David Anderson, a former member of the National Executive Council of Unison, the public service trade union. His speech, during a debate on the cost of living, reflects the feelings of his Blaydon constituents on Tyneside. It also exposes the empty words of the Government about being on the side of 'people who work hard.' Here it is in full:

"Eleven hundred days into the fruitcake Parliament, we have the mid-term report. How did we get here? Everybody knows that the cost of living is going through the roof, while the standard of living is going backwards. The Government obviously have a narrative; they say it is all the Labour party's fault. I agree with them to some extent. I agree that my party, when in power, was far too lax with the banks. Its light touch regulation was far too light. The Conservative party then said we were too severe, so how can they now say we got it wrong?"

"The truth is that it was working. In 2007, the net debt in the UK was only 38% of GDP - the second lowest in the G7 and almost the lowest in our history. Obviously the whirlwind that hit the world when Lehman's collapsed affected everybody, but the Labour Government at the time did not become paralysed in the way that the current Government have. We went for growth. We cut VAT to 15%. We introduced the car scrappage scheme. We brought forward capital schemes, some of which were still going after the election only to be stopped by this Government, including £80 million-worth of new school building in my constituency which could have put people into work and given kids better schools. We have gone from growth at 1.8% when we left power, to the Government breathing a sigh of relief over the past three years just because we have not gone into a triple-dip recession; they were even happier with only a double-dip recession. The best that we have is stagnation."

"It is clear that the programme put forward by the Government has not helped this country and we need to see changes. Why do we need change? Who is paying? It is the same people who always pay: the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. Let us look at what has happened in the past three years to affect the poor, the weak

and the vulnerable. VAT has gone up. The child trust fund has been taken away. The educational maintenance allowance has been taken away. Working tax credits have been frozen or cut. Pensions and benefits have been changed from RPI to CPI. Child tax credit has been cut and child benefit frozen. The sure start maternity grant has gone. The health in pregnancy test has gone. Child benefit has been cut for better-off earners. We now have the bedroom tax and cuts in council tax benefit. There is lots and lots more. This is not about scroungers; it is about working people who are trying to get on in the world and who are struggling.”

“On top of that, almost 750,000 public sector workers have been sacked. They have been taken out of income tax all right: they have been sacked and are not paying it. They have been taken out of good, strong and stable jobs. People have been put into 1.25 million poor-quality jobs where they are underemployed and underpaid. Pensions have been cut, wages frozen and increments stopped. Why is it right to incentivise the rich but not the workers? The worse thing is that the strategy has failed; it has flat lined. Even worse, the Government knew that it would fail, because it has always failed. It has been tried before and has always failed. Martin Wolf said last year: ‘What is clear from UK history is that growth is a necessary condition for successful management of public debt. The cuts...of the early 1920s failed to lower the debt... the economy then collapsed.’”

“Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman said that the infuriating thing was that, half a century ago, any economist could have told policy makers ‘that austerity in the face of depression was a very bad idea’, and millions of workers are paying the price for that mistake. Barrack Obama, the absentee Prime Minister’s new friend, said that some people would say that ‘The market will take care of everything...if we just cut more regulations and cut more taxes...our economy will grow stronger...And that theory fits well on a bumper sticker. But here’s the problem: it doesn’t work. It has never worked. Another Nobel prize winner, Joseph Stiglitz, said that ‘austerity as the solution is just wrong. There won’t be a return to confidence - quite the contrary. So the direction Europe is going is...I think the wrong

direction.”

“There we have it: three Nobel prize winners - but they are wrong aren’t they, because our Chancellor thinks that he is right? He ignores what happened in this country the last time we had a major recession. Keynes proved that you could not win with austerity and Roosevelt proved it in the United States. But we have a Government whose arrogance is only matched by their ignorance and now, as a result of his posturing, the Chancellor - even if he thought he was wrong - cannot back off. He has painted himself into a corner and he knows that if he puts in place Plan B, he will be skewered by the shadow Chancellor. Pig-headed obstinacy, pride and ideology have combined to the detriment of this country. The job is far too big for the Chancellor. Now the Government are paralysed not only by their ideology and obstinacy, but by their internal fighting yet again about Europe. We are seeing the people of this country struggling to get by, with tax cuts for the wealthy and tax hits for the poor. The poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. It is, sadly, the same old Tories.”

They Don’t Count

Labour’s Lindsay Roy asked Foreign Office Minister Alastair Burt on 13 May for an estimate of the number of Iraqis who have died since the 2003 invasion. Burt referred him to an answer to a similar question asked in the House of Lords by Tory peer Lord Dobbs on 18 March 2013. Dobbs asked how many Iraqis they (i.e. the Government) estimate to have died as a result of terrorism and war-related violence since the invasion in 2003. Replying for the Government, Baroness Warsi, Senior Minister of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said: “The Government have not produced any estimate for the number of Iraqis killed as a result of terrorism and war-related violence since 2003. While the security situation in Iraq has greatly improved since the violence of 2006-07, the threat from terrorism remains high and attacks do sadly continue. We utterly condemn such violence and call for those responsible to be brought to justice.”

Acts of terrorism and war-related vio-

lence in Iraq are the result of the 2003 invasion. But if Warsi admitted it she would also have to admit that George W Bush and Tony Blair are the guilty parties. So she blames terrorism, as if it were unconnected with the invasion, and calls for the perpetrators, rather than Bush and Blair, to be brought to justice. And like Blair and his wretched government, Warsi and the coalition government are indifferent to the deaths of Iraqis. It’s easy to condemn violence, words are cheap. But the fact that no record is kept on the number of Iraqis killed, for which those who voted for the invasion bear responsibility, means they simply don’t care; however much they beat their breasts and wring their hands. It’s particularly galling that Warsi, a Muslim, is a willing participant in this obnoxious exercise. And her comment that the security situation has greatly improved is risible, given the regularity of killings on a mass scale.

Immigrants And Social Security Benefits

PNs makes no apologies for returning to the question of immigrants and benefits. The Government, with the support of their friends in the right wing press, have made this a key political issue. The position relating to entitlement to benefits has been clearly stated on a number of occasions by government ministers, yet the press have continued to misrepresent it with the result that there is widespread ignorance among voters. The position on entitlement to social security benefits was stated again on 13 May by Work and Pensions Minister Mark Hoban in answer to a question from Tory backbencher Philip Davies. Davies asked if an estimate had been made of the additional amount of benefits to be claimed as a result of any increase in the number of Romanian and Bulgarian nationals expected to migrate to the UK over the next three years.

Hoban told Davies: “It is not possible to accurately forecast the likely inflow from Romania and Bulgaria once restrictions are lifted, the inflow will depend on a variety of factors. Therefore we are unable to predict the additional cost of the benefits. From 1 January 2014 Romania and Bulgarian nationals will have the same benefit entitlement as other migrants who are a ‘qualified person’ from

the European Union - i.e. they exercise a right to reside as a worker; a self-employed person; a job seeker; a self-sufficient person or a student. Contributory benefits, such as contribution based job-seeker's allowance, are payable to anyone who satisfies the contribution and other conditions for the benefit, regardless of nationality. For income related benefits each claimant must satisfy the habitual residence test before they are eligible to claim means-tested benefits. Economically inactive people, who are neither in work or seeking work, are required to be self-sufficient and have comprehensive medical insurance. Similarly students are required to be self-sufficient. Therefore, under domestic legislation economically inactive EEA nationals and their family members cannot claim income-related benefits." But one would search the right wing press in vain for these facts.

A short statement on immigrants and benefits by Mark Hoban on 20 May ought to please the xenophobic Daily Express and other right wing newspapers. Hoban was asked what steps are being taken to restrict access to benefits of nationals of other EU member states. He told MPs: "We are taking steps to tighten further the rules relating to all migrants, not just new migrants. We are strengthening the habitual residence test; the Home Office is creating a statutory presumption that European economic area jobseekers and workers who are voluntarily unemployed will not have a right to reside here after six months unless they can demonstrate they are actively seeking working and have a genuine chance of finding a job; and we will prevent those with no entitlement to work in the UK from claiming contributory benefits."

On the surface this seems a reasonable attempt to prevent abuse of the benefits system. There is however a serious problem with it, of which Hoban must be aware. It is not difficult to show that one is actively seeking work, but with over 2.5 million people out of work and many of them looking for a job, it is impossible to prove one has a genuine chance of finding one. PNs knows someone who recently applied for a fairly well paid part time job. There were more than 26,000 applications. And the well heeled old Etonian, former Oxford University Bullingdon Club member, and London Mayor Boris

Johnson is aware of this, and yet in an article in the Daily Telegraph on 13 May he described British workers as sloths. This is an unspoken view held by many Tories, but dear old Boris simply blurts it out

And Cameron Will Arm Them!

On 15 May, Home Office Minister Alistair Burt replied on behalf of the Foreign Office to a question about the number of UK citizens fighting against the Assad regime in Syria. His reply ought to have been considered by David Cameron, who at the time was arguing for the EU embargo on arms to Syria to be lifted. (Since Burt spoke the embargo has not been ratified). Cameron, of course, would like the arms to go to the acceptable, moderate, rebels. But as he ought to know, they will find their way sooner or later to the unacceptable, extremist, rebels, represented by the Islamist terrorist group, Jabhat al-Nusra, an offshoot of al-Qaeda. Burt told Tory backbencher, Matthew Offord: "We judge that Syria is now the number one destination for jihadists anywhere in the world today. Violent extremist groups are attracting a large number of foreign fighters of all nationalities, including a substantial number of UK citizens. We are unsure of the precise number involved in fighting against the Assad regime. Our objective in Syria is a diplomatic solution that leads to an end to the violence and a Syrian-led political transition. To help deliver that we are focused on building the credibility and capability of the moderate opposition to boost their appeal and effectiveness relative to extremist groups." It obviously hasn't occurred to Burt (and Cameron) that supplying arms to the rebels in Syria will simply prolong the violence. A political transition may take place, but many more will die before then.

Hague Is Backing The Syrian Rebels

After a long period of silence on the subject, Foreign Secretary William Hague made a statement on Syria to the House of Commons on 20 May and in his opening remarks he made it abundantly clear which side he backs in the current violent struggle for control of the country.

And he insists that most of the violence, including the use of chemical weapons, is carried out by Assad's forces against innocent people and what he seems to believe is a defenceless opposition. His opposite number, Douglas Alexander, advised Hague to think seriously before arming the rebels, referring to earlier efforts in Libya and elsewhere. The following are key extracts from Hague's statement, which opened with an attack on the regime.

"The Syrian regime's military offensive against opposition-held areas around Damascus, Homs, Idlib, Hama and Aleppo is intensifying, with complete disregard for civilian life. The death toll has doubled in the first five months of this year and now stands at an estimated 80,000 people. There have been well-verified reports of massacres around Damascus by regime security forces, and of communities killed in cold blood in villages around Baniyas. Online footage has shown bodies heaped in the streets and children butchered in their homes. Ten thousand people are believed to have fled the area in the panic created by these brutal killings, and last week there were unconfirmed reports of further attacks using chemical weapons."

The above is Hague's account of what he believes to be appalling atrocities carried out by Assad's forces. But from whom did Hague acquire his information? He refers to "well-verified reports", "online footage", and "unconfirmed reports", but we are no wiser as to who provided the reports and the footage. We can only assume it was sources close to the rebels or the rebels themselves. And we are led to believe that chemical weapons are being used by the regime's forces. Yet Carla Del Ponte, a member of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, has reported that "testimony gathered from casualties and medical staff indicated that the nerve gas sarin was used by rebel fighters." Subsequently, the UN Commission distanced itself from her statement saying it had no "conclusive proof" of this. She also said that "the inquiry has yet to see any direct evidence suggesting that government forces have used chemical weapons, but further investigation was required before this possibility could be ruled out." (Report in The Independent, 6 May). But in his statement Hague

makes no reference to her testimony or to the UN Commission's opinion on it.

Hague acknowledges that there is an increasing radicalisation in Syria tending towards extremism, but places the blame for this squarely on the regime. "This suffering has devastating consequences. It is undoubtedly contributing to a radicalisation in Syria. Syrian people are facing a regime that is using warplanes, helicopters, heavy artillery, tanks, cluster munitions and even ballistic missiles against them, often without them having the means to defend themselves and their communities. The conflict is therefore creating opportunities for extremist groups. Syria is now the No. 1 destination for jihadists anywhere in the world today, including approximately 70 to 100 individuals connected with the United Kingdom."

According to Hague, the United Kingdom wants a political settlement and an ensuing peace to reign over Syria for all eternity. But this, he believes, is dependent on support for the rebels. He told MPs: "All efforts of the United Kingdom are devoted to bringing about (such) a political settlement and to saving lives..... The international focus must above all be on ending the crisis. To that end, we are stepping up our efforts to support the opposition and increase pressure on the regime in order to create the conditions for a political transition. On 20 April, I attended the meeting of the core group of the Friends of the Syrian people in Istanbul, where a new compact was agreed with the Syrian National Coalition. The coalition issued a declaration committing itself to a political solution and transition, promising to guarantee the rights of all Syria's communities, and rejecting terrorism and extremist ideology." But so did the new government in Iraq, and we know what has happened there. And how do they square their desire to arm the rebels, many of whom are terrorists, with the promise in the Queen's speech that, "My Government will work to prevent conflict and reduce terrorism." It adds that "It will support countries in transition in the middle east and north Africa...", but support simply means arming the opposition to the Government.

Hague and other world leaders are calling for a new international conference in Geneva, bringing together representa-

tives of the regime and opposition. The regime and the opposition are being urged to attend and to take full advantage of the opportunity to negotiate. But Hague gave a word of warning to Assad's regime: "We have to be open to every way of strengthening moderates and saving lives, rather than the current trajectory of extremism and murder.....but..... We must make it clear that if the regime does not negotiate seriously at the Geneva conference, no option is off the table." Given that threat, why should Assad take any negotiations seriously? Hague acknowledged this when he added: "There remains a serious risk that the Assad regime will not negotiate seriously. That is the lesson of the last two years, in which the regime has shown that it is prepared to countenance any level of loss of life in Syria for as long as it hopes it can win militarily." But according to a report in *The Guardian* of 18 May, it is the rebels who refuse to talk to Assad, so there's little chance of a negotiated settlement.

In his closing comments Hague made further reference to the use of chemical weapons by the regime, while saying he has no evidence of use by the opposition: "There is a growing body of limited but persuasive information showing that the regime used---and continues to use--- chemical weapons. We have physiological samples from inside Syria that have shown the use of sarin, although they do not indicate the scale of that use. Our assessment is that the use of chemical weapons in Syria is very likely to have been by the regime. We have no evidence to date of opposition use. We welcome the UN investigation, which in our view must cover all credible allegations and have access to all relevant sites in Syria. We continue to assist the investigation team and to work with our allies to get more and better information about these allegations." So Hague wants more and better information about allegations of the use of chemical weapons and yet on the basis of unsubstantiated information he accuses the regime of using chemical weapons, while saying nothing about the opinion of a UN observer that the rebels may have used such weapons.

Intervention By Stages

It's abundantly clear from an answer

to a question by Lord Foulkes on 22 May that the Government are hell bent on full scale military intervention in the Syrian conflict. There has been quasi military intervention on the side of the rebels seeking to overthrow Assad since the conflict began, and now that the EU arms embargo has not been ratified full scale intervention is a real possibility although, in their customary way, Ministers have said that no decision has been taken to arm the 'moderate' rebels. Lord (George) Foulkes, (former Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnor and Doon Valley), asked what circumstances they (the Government) consider would justify an escalation of action by external Governments in Syria. Baroness Warsi's reply dodged the question but revealed the extent to which the Government have been involved to date: "My Lords, we have continually escalated our involvement in Syria in response to the deteriorating situation. The conflict has now reached catastrophic proportions: 80,000 people have been killed, and millions have fled their homes. In response, we have committed an additional £30 million for humanitarian assistance and doubled our support to the moderate opposition to £20 million. We strongly support the US-Russia plan to convene an international conference with both the opposition and the Syrian regime."

Warsi agreed with Foulkes that a political solution is desirable, but suggested that we bear in mind the change in circumstances: "As the noble Lord is aware, we have at stages changed the way that the arms embargo has been applied. We started by providing very basic equipment such as cameras and satellite phones, and training, with a view to making sure that the abuses that were committed in Syria were documented. We then stepped that up: we supplied generators, water purification tablets and other items of humanitarian support. However, after January this year, when the arms embargo was amended, we stepped up support again and this time provided protective gear and protective armoured vehicles. We are seeking further amendment to increase the pressure on the Assad regime to say that, at this stage, no options are off the table." This is the commonly used language of a Government moving from so-called humanitarian intervention to all out military aggression. It was used prior to the overthrow of Gadaffi in Libya,

Looming Civil War

Sectarian violence between Shias and Sunnis escalates as rebel outfits at the forefront of the conflict in Syria get active in the country.

The months of April and May witnessed a dramatic spurt of killings in Iraq. There have been reports almost every day of dozens of civilians and officials being targeted in sectarian attacks. In April, 700 people were killed, making it the deadliest month in Iraq in the past five years. If the current spate of killings

continued from 22

page where it was said, initially, that that was not the Government's aim. And here we have Warsi saying that they wish to put further pressure on Assad, ostensibly to persuade him to negotiate with the rebels, while they share the aim of the rebels to oust him from Syria. Warsi said that the Government provided the rebels with cameras and other equipment, to make sure that the abuses committed in Syria were documented, suggesting that all abuses were and are being committed by the Assad regime. Is it any wonder that Assad has said he will fight to the bitter end?

Are You Being Served?

A letter in the (Belfast) Newsletter of 24 May from Walter Millar of Traditional Unionist Voice included a wonderfully anodyne description of the role of the British Army. His letter concerned the horrific attack on Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich. Millar wrote: "While Muslim leadership and the majority of Muslims living in the UK will rightly condemn this attack there must be direct action by the British Government against any Muslim clerics who freely spread their message of hatred towards the British way of life and the British Army serving in Muslim countries." "Serving in Muslim countries" has an innocent ring to it, as if the Army's role is to spread largesse. "More tea, Imam?" It legitimises its role and takes the sting out of the real purpose of its presence.

By John Cherian

continues, May could be even deadlier as Shia militant groups and the Iraqi army have started to retaliate. On May 13 and 14, successive terror attacks killed more than 50 people. The attacks took place in Shia areas such as Sadr City and had all the hallmarks of an Al Qaeda operation. In retaliation to such targeting of Shia neighbourhoods and mosques, Sunni residential areas and mosques came under attack in the first two weeks of May in different parts of the country.

Terrorist organisations such as Al Nusra that have been in the forefront of the fighting in neighbouring Syria are keen to extend the sectarian war to Iraq. Many of the Al Nusra fighters were originally with Al Qaeda in Iraq and had gone across the border to pursue their dream of establishing an Islamic emirate. They have declared a jihad against Shias and other minorities, whom they consider apostates. Another Sunni militant organisation that has also raised the banner of revolt against the government is the "Sahwa" (Awakening). The outfit was originally set up under the tutelage of the American occupation forces as part of their efforts to quell the Sunni insurgency in central Iraq that erupted after 2003. Now, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and its former enemies have joined hands to fight the government in Baghdad. The Sahwa reportedly has a fighting strength of 100,000. There are reports that fighters owing allegiance to Saddam Hussein's Baath Party have also joined hands with their former adversaries to fight the central government in Baghdad.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in a television broadcast in the last week of April, warned Iraqis about the consequences of sectarianism. "Sectarianism is evil, and the wind of sectarianism does not need a licence to cross from one country to another, because if it begins in one place it moves to another place," he said. The escalation in the cycle of violence started after the Iraqi

security forces used strong-arm methods in the city of Hawija, situated north of the capital, Baghdad. Around 26 people were killed when the army and the police intervened to end violent protests there after demands that the demonstrators give up a man accused of killing an Iraqi soldier were rejected. Hawija has long been a centre of Sunni extremism.

A sizable section of the minority Sunni population is yet to reconcile to a government dominated by the majority Shia. Iraqi Vice-President Tareq al-Hashmi, who has been accused of organising death squads while in office, fled to Turkey last year after an arrest warrant was served on him. The country's Finance Minister, Rafe al-Issawi, was also served with an arrest warrant in December last year for harbouring terrorists. Both these Sunni leaders were accommodated in the Cabinet after a power-sharing formula was accepted by al-Maliki to break the political impasse after the general elections held two years ago. One of the senior-most Sunni leaders in the country, parliament Speaker Osama Nujaifi, has called for the resignation of al-Maliki following the Hawija incident.

Neighbouring countries have been encouraging the Sunnis to rise in revolt against the government in Baghdad, which is viewed as being close to the Iranian government. They want to enmesh Iraq in the kind of quagmire that Syria now finds itself in. These moves seem to have the tacit support of the American, Turkish and Saudi Arabian governments.

After the Hawija incident, al-Maliki warned about the dangers of the country sliding into sectarian warfare. "If sectarian war erupts, there will be no winners or losers. All will lose, whether in southern or western or eastern or northern Iraq," he said. The United Nations envoy in Baghdad, Martin Kobler, said in the third week of May that it was the responsibility of all Iraqi leaders to stop the bloodshed. "Small children are burned alive in their cars. Worshippers are cut down outside their own mosques. This is

unacceptable,” he said.

Al-Maliki has been trying to reach out and assuage the restive tribes in central Iraq. He admitted that the Sunnis had some genuine grievances. A parliamentary committee is investigating the Hawija raid, and several prominent Shia lawmakers have criticised the use of force to deal with the demonstrators. But the militant groups have spurned the olive branch. In the last week of April, the tribal leaders of Anbar, a Sunni-dominated area, announced the formation of a tribal army to protect Sunni protest movements. Iraqi government officials say that the protest movements are heavily infiltrated by terrorist groups. All the insurgent groups, including Al Qaeda, have vowed to protect the demonstrators. More than a hundred of those killed in recent weeks were Iraqi soldiers and policemen. Ten soldiers were kidnapped and executed on May 19.

Many Iraqi commentators say that a civil war has already erupted and that it is going to be worse than what Syria is currently witnessing. Fearing the worst, residents of Baghdad have started hoarding essential commodities. The latest surge in violence has further complicated the acute refugee problem the country has been facing since the American invasion in 2003. More than a million Iraqis fled the country during the American occupation to escape the deadly violence that plagued many Iraqi cities and towns. Many of them found refuge in Syria. With the situation deteriorating there, they would like to return to their country. There are around 450,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The orgy of bloodshed that Iraq is witnessing these days is not a happy augury for them as well. In fact, more Iraqis are now thinking of leaving their homes to find a refuge elsewhere.

Most observers of Iraq agree that the current strife in Iraq is a spillover from the bloodshed in Syria. Insurgent groups waging war against the government in Damascus now control a huge swathe of the border between the two countries. This makes it easy for fighters and arms to move between the two countries with comparative ease. The 10-year-long American military occupation of the country has exacerbated the sectarian divide. The Christian community in

Iraq, which was around 5 per cent of the population before the American invasion, has now been almost decimated. Most of them have fled the country after they were selectively targeted by Al Qaeda-linked extremist groups. After the overthrow of the secular Baath government in 2003, the United States purged the entire civil service and the army, hoping to install a pliant government in its place.

Things, however, did not go according to its plan. Iraq was virtually partitioned into two, with the Kurds in the north running a virtually independent state. One of the stated aims of the neo-conservatives who dominated the George Bush administration was to redraw the map of West Asia. Many believe that the Barack Obama administration too is not averse to this goal. The splitting up of Iraq and Syria along sectarian and ethnic lines could be a long-term game plan of the U.S. Obama administration officials, after having evidently lost hope of effecting a regime change in Syria, are now suggesting that the country is heading for a three-way split, with the Kurds and the Sunnis carving out their own mini states.

Shia-Sunni divide

In Iraq, the U.S. patronised “death squads” and militias to do its dirty work during the 10 years of occupation. The U.S. military consciously tried to foster a Shia-Sunni divide and expressed alarm when there were signs of growing unity between the two groups. In all the elections that were held since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Shia-dominated parties have emerged on top, reflecting the will of the majority. The government led by al-Maliki has refused to be subservient to Washington. Iraq witnessed relatively calm provincial elections on April 20. Al-Maliki’s “State of Law” party won most of the seats. The Sunni-led “Iraqiya Bloc” fared poorly in the elections. Elections were not held in the Sunni-dominated Anbar province because of the security situation. Banners have appeared in Sunni-dominated cities such as Fallujah accusing the U.S. of having surrendered the country to the Shias and Iran. “America: You gave Iraq to Iran and then just left,” many of the banners put up in Fallujah proclaim.

Many Sunni insurgents have told the media that they hope a change in the government in Damascus will help their cause. The insurgent groups, however, are still weighing their options—whether to wage a war of secession or return to the situation that existed before the U.S. occupation of the country when the Sunnis monopolised power. Since the overthrow of the Sunni monarchy in the 1950s, though the leadership of the country was under Sunni heads of state, they implemented a mainly secular agenda. The ideology of Pan-Arabism transcended the sectarian divide. Israel was the enemy and Palestine was a sacred cause. Now the U.S., aided by its conservative allies in the region, has succeeded in fostering a sectarian divide. The main enemy for many conservative Arab states today is Shia Iran and its allies—Syria and the Lebanese Hizbollah movement. The Palestine issue has faded into the background. Israel is, in fact, helping the Sunni groups fighting the Syrian government and Hizbollah. There are reports, too, that the U.S. is on the verge of brokering a new defence agreement between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to protect their strategic interests in the region.

Do You Smell Gas?

Is England suffering from war psychosis, celebrating every atrocity from WW2 with pomposity.

The Dambuster’s March revived. Feroocious, every sewing circle, bake-off, khaki.

The old, without remorse, in weak voices, remember well the slaughter and rejoice, boast of their rank in the war-hierarchy.

Germany can only squeak like a mouse. (Maybe its citizens deserved to die?)

It is time for them to re-read their Faust, the barbs of peace gives them no alibi.

Britain feeds off Germany as a louse, its media grunts, squeals, from the pigsty.

Wilson John Haire.