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Foot and Mouth

Michael Foot saved the Labour Party in the potentially disastrous leadership conflict following the resignation of James Callaghan. He did not save it by his policies, by his administrative drive, or by the force of his personality. He saved it just by being there and agreeing to be Leader when the policy choice lay between Denis Healey and Anthony Wedgwood Benn. The fact that he lost the General Election of 1983 with a Manifesto which was "*the largest suicide note in history*" was a small matter. It was only the Election that was lost, not the Party. And the Party was what was at stake.

If Benn had got the leadership, it seemed likely that defections from the Right of the Party would have led to the Social Democratic Party becoming the second party in the two-party system which is, by design, heavily biased against the third party. If that had happened, the Labour Party would probably have become a Socialist Party, somewhat like the Independent Labour Party of long ago. And, while that might have been a good thing, and there is undoubtedly a function for a strong Socialist Party which is not likely ever to win an Election, that was not what was sought.

A Socialist Party strong enough to be a threat to the established order would keep the established order honest. It would keep the two major parties polarised on issues of some relevance. What we got as a consequence of Foot saving the Labour Party was Tweedledum and Tweedledee politics. When Foot lost the election so spectacularly, the moment had gone out of the SDLP movement. Kinnock was brought in as a leader from the Left with the blessing of Foot, without any great protest from the Right.

Kinnock was no Foot. He was from the upwardly mobile left, whereas Foot came from the top drawer of society. Members of the Foot family were, by family inheritance, in the busi-

ness of running the world. Foot was not on the make. Kinnock was.

Kinnock set about the task of remaking the Labour Party so that it would be functional in the Thatcherite framework.

Thatcherism was not the Toryism with which Labour had established an understanding about the parameters of political conflict. The catastrophe brought about by Scargill, without noticeable opposition by Kinnock, established Thatcherism in total dominance for a political generation. Kinnock undertook to adapt Labour to Thatcherism, and he was allowed to lose an election in the course of doing so. When he lost a second election, the loss was attributed to his personal style and he had to go. John Smith threatened briefly to reverse the Kinnock Thatcherising. When he died suddenly, Gordon Brown handed the leadership to Blair, who was Kinnock's gifted heir. Foot would not—could not—have done to the Party what Kinnock did. It would have been beneath him.

Yet Blair, who took Kinnock's Thatcherism further, was endorsed as a Parliamentary candidate by Foot in the early 1980s. And he refrained, out of loyalty to the Party, from any public criticism during the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. He also offered his support when Blair waged war on the former Yugoslavia.

The obituaries dwell on Foot's quality as an Orator. It never seemed to us that he was anything like an Orator. Oratory is the driving home of an argument with rhetorical style. Foot shouted out fragments of sentences, but he had neither argument nor style. But that is not said to disparage him. Kinnock was the Orator of recent British politics. On the eve of one Election (Thatcher's second, possibly), he delivered a remarkable oration in the form of a Litany about what would befall people if they voted for Thatcher. It was memorable. But it wasn't believed.

Kinnock was apparently sincere when he warned that Thatcher was committed to grinding the faces of the poor. But it wasn't so. Thatcher's aim was not to make us poor but to make us all competitive egoists.

The poor are always with us—so the book which inspired generations of British socialists tells us. What Thatcher did to the poor was make life easier for them by making Reg Prentice Secretary of State for Labour and Social Welfare. Prentice was an East London socialist who was de-selected by Trotskyists in his Constituency. Thatcher made a bid for him. He responded. And he repealed the Poor Law rules that still controlled the social welfare system two generations after the establishment of the welfare state. If it's all about the poor, it has to be said that the poor had a better time under Thatcher than before or since.

If it's about establishing a socialist economy and burdening the workers with the cares of management, business strategy, and Budgets—well, Thatcher said frankly that that was what she did not want to do. She was for capitalism. And, under capitalism, management manages for the shareholders and the workers work and consume.

Others may have said something different, but for sixty years has anyone done anything different—except Barbara Castle and Harold Wilson, who at least made serious gestures towards something different?

The welfare state system, which seems to be indestructible, was established during the War by Ernest Bevin as Minister for Labour, and by the 1945 Government which grew out of the wartime regime. Bevin had effective control of home government during the War, while Churchill concentrated on foreign policy. The post-War reform was a continuation of what had begun during the War, and there is little doubt that it was the ability and determination shown by Attlee and Bevin in running the country during the War that led to the 1945 victory.

Aneurin Bevan—an Orator—was a Parliamentary Socialist. Bevin was a working class organiser. When World War launched by Chamberlain went awry in May 1940, and Churchill formed a Coalition with Labour, Bevin got in the Cabinet before he got a seat in Parliament. Bevan spent the War bitching about Bevin's un-Parliamentary and un-Socialist measures and methods. When

Attlee and Bevin won the 1945 Election, Bevan was given the job of setting up the National Health Service, and he did it well. Then in 1950 he resigned from the Government when a charge was put on prescriptions for teeth and spectacles.

Bevin died in 1951. The Labour Party lost its majority in the Election of that year while increasing its vote. Churchill made no attempt to break up the welfare state. The MPs who resigned from the Government over teeth and spectacles then became the effective Labour Party, under Bevan's leadership with Gaitskell as official leader. Bevan showed no awareness of the politics that had brought the party to power, and given him a useful job of administration for a few years. Bevin was marked down as a Right Wing Social Democrat whose influence was to be wiped out.

Foot had begun in public life as a favourite of Lord Beaverbrook, the Press Lord. He broke with the Liberal tradition of his family by joining Labour. He entered Parliament in 1945 and his orientation was "Keep Left". He was an ardent Bevanite, and remained so even when Bevan shocked his admirers by questioning unilateral nuclear disarmament in the hope of winning an election—which was not won, however.

In the mid 1940s Foot joined with Richard Crossman in the campaign for a Jewish State in Palestine. Crossman condemned previous British Governments for failing to use Imperial power to cleanse Palestine of Arabs in preparation for a Jewish State. But he was still in favour of setting up a Jewish State even though it clearly meant the large scale ethnic cleansing of Arabs by Jewish nationalism.

When Bevin rejected this course of action, he was branded an Anti-Semite. The setting up of the Jewish State, and all that it involved, went ahead anyway through a collaboration between the USA and Russia, and under the authority of a General Assembly Resolution at the UN—which was the only General Assembly, as distinct from Security Council, Resolution that was ever considered binding.

It seemed that Foot would forever

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remain frozen in a stance of incoherent protest. But then, in the 1970s, something inspired him to accept a position in the Wilson and Callaghan Governments. He legislated busily in the interests of the workers, but we do not recall that he showed any interest in the major structural reform proposed by the Bullock Commission: Workers' Control. Kinnock opposed Workers' Control, as did Callaghan.

Since it was clear that something had to be done about Trade Union power, and since the Unions and the Left insisted that the organised workers should not be implicated in responsibility for running the economy, Thatcher won the 1979 Election on a policy of curbing the Unions in order to restore the authority of shareholder management. Foot's reforms were then swept aside easily. Nevertheless, he could still bring himself to support Thatcher's war against Argentina in the early 1980s.

In spite of a decent record on domestic reforms—with the crucial issue of Bullock excepted—it seems that the consistent nuclear unilateralist Foot was the inconsistent conventional warmonger. One is left to puzzle why he gave public vocal support to Thatcher and Blair over Argentina and Yugoslavia, while staying mute over Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet it was known he had private reservations about the latter and his support would have reinforced opposition to these wars from a number of Labour MPs and millions of the British public. Did his judgement finally desert him, or did a misplaced sense of loyalty get the better of him? We shall never know.

China's Blue Republic

Gwydion M. Williams

It is a continuous Western demand that today's Chinese People's Republic should drop its distinctiveness and copy the Western political system. Those making such demands prefer to ignore what happened the last time it was tried.

Last month I described how the Manchu Dynasty in China made a mess of reform, while a somewhat similar system in Japan succeeded brilliantly.^[A] This month I'll look at what happened next. China became the world's third large Republic, after the USA and France. But its politics were a dismal failure.

The 1911 Revolution and the 1912 abdication of the Emperor wiped out the existing framework of loyalty, but put nothing in its place. This sort of empty radicalism was in line with Western Liberalism of the John Stewart Mill variety, people who assumed that social problems arose from the existence of social ties, with detached individuals able to discover their common interests if those oppressive social ties were removed. Of course Western Liberals couldn't actually operate as if there were no social ties – they simply supposed that their own pattern of respectable middle-class life was natural and that no one would wish to break it. They failed to understand why Chinese with the income to live in a Western style would prefer to go on being Chinese. They would have been equally surprised had they been shown how their own West European descendants would be living in 50 or 100 years time.

To work, a Republic needs a public, a human community that has a large stock of fellow-feeling and mutual trust. The British colonies in North America had had that for several generations, having been self-governing under the loose control of the British crown. This enabled them to rule themselves when they won independence. The former Spanish and Portuguese colonies had no such experience, so their politics was utterly unstable. China was very much less prepared: Spain and Portugal had traditions from mediaeval times of legal opposition to your superiors, whereas Chinese political theory believed that there should be a single ruler to whom everyone owed complete loyalty. All Europeans looked back to the Roman Republic and the limited democracy of Athens as part of their heritage: there is no record of anything remotely similar ever existing in China.

China had elections of a sort in 1913. When this delivered victory to the Kuomintang, their talented deputy leader Song Jiaoren was assassinated, almost certainly on the orders of General Yuan Shikai. Yuan Shikai then took absolute command the fledgling republic without much difficulty. A country where a politician can murder a rival and carry on without loss of reputation is hardly a country ready for multi-party rule.

It was also a bad time to be trying it: European democracy was badly damaged by the 1914-18 war. This isn't the picture you get given nowadays: the German Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empires are described as autocracies and their defeat as a victory for democracy. But Germany and Austria-Hungary were Constitutional Monarchies in 1914. There and in all of the other ma-

ajor combatants, the war could not have been started in 1914 without their parliaments voting war credits. The power of the elected representatives was rising everywhere, even in Russia, where there had been a half-constitutional system since 1905.

Where the monarch's traditional legitimacy endorsed a newly-created constitutional system, it was fairly secure. When the various nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Empires lived within a single political structure, they could get along with each other and be tolerant of minorities, including Jews. But when existing states were carved up at Versailles, something very different emerged, a bunch of new states based on nationalities that hadn't been self-governing for centuries and which had competitive claims on each other. The British Empire was weakened by the war. The USA was strengthened, but failed to do anything coherent with its new power. It preferred the selfish enjoyment of the 1920s and allowed financial speculation that blew up in the Wall Street Crash and then the Great Slump.

This was the background to China trying to find a new constitutional system, having broken with the old after the old refused to change.

Yuan Shikai was a product of the weak modernisation of China's Self-Strengthening period. The Yuan clan were part of the network of gentry armies who had suppressed the Taiping and the other rebellions of the 1850s. As an infant, Yuan Shikai was adopted into the most important branch of the Yuan clan, that of General Yuan Chia-san.[B] He sat the traditional Civil Service examination but failed at the first of its three levels and opted for a military career instead. He was sent to Korea, which at that time recognised a loose Chinese overlordship. Japan, having modernised much more successfully, was manoeuvring to take over Korea. Sensibly enough, the majority of Koreans looked to China for support. In 1882, Yuan Shikai was entrusted by the Koreans with training a force of 500 soldiers in modern warfare – or rather modern warfare as China's militarists understood it, but Koreans then would not have known the difference.

Japanese plots and internal Korean politics produced a pro-Japanese coup in 1884. Yuan Shikai led an attack by a mixed Chinese and Korean force on the Japanese soldiers holding the Korean king. The incident ended indecisively, but a treaty the following year saw Japan given equal rights in Korea. This reflected China's defeat in the Sino-French War that happened at the same time and separated Annam (Vietnam) from Chinese hegemony, put it under French control.

Yuan continued to play a part in Korean affairs, but was withdrawn by the Chinese government in 1894, just before the Sino-Japanese War. According to Jerome Ch'en:

"His first serious political lesson was the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 when he saw the ruination of the ageing Li-Hung-chang [Li Hongzhang] in opposition to a strong foreign power. The lesson was so well driven home to him that, throughout the rest of his life, Yuan never fought against a single foreign soldier – not even during the Boxer Uprising nor when (in 1915) the Japanese presented him with the Twenty-one Demands." [C]

This might seem a very odd lesson to learn – a more normal reaction would have been to try to figure out what Japan had got right, and then copy it. But if it *seems* normal now, that is only because the world has changed a great deal, and our ideas of the normal have shifted with it. As I explained last month, Japan had been able to radically reform on the basis of the Emperor's traditional authority and with the gentry firmly in control. Yuan came from a class of Chinese gentry-warlords who had successfully suppressed their own people in the shape of the Taiping Rebellion, and yet remained scared of them. He and the other warlords preferred to be local tyrants pushed around by foreign powers, but with a privileged position over other Chinese.

Yuan and others wanted modernisation in the abstract. But the real price of modernisation was that they should abolish themselves, give up gentry privileges and unite with the common people. Naturally this was too much for

most members of this class. It remained the main blockage until the Chinese Communists came to power and shattered gentry power with a massive land-reform.

The defeat by Japan discredited 'Self-Strengthening' as it had been practiced. One answer was more of the same – a bigger army to serve the same corrupt interests:

"What was left of [Li Hongzhang's] Huai Army after the War ...formed the inadequate defensive force of the Imperial Capital and North China. These troops amounted to no more than 70,000 men, with a measure of bloodthirsty bravery but neither training nor discipline, equipped with Mausers and rifles of various makes and calibres. The dire need for a new arm was obvious...

"Apart from the discredited generals of the Huai Army, Yuan was the only one among his contemporaries who had the required experience and knowledge for the task." [D]

This army – also known as the Beiyang Army – came under Yuan's control and was China's best for a long time. That didn't mean that it was good by world standards, just that it was better than its immediate Chinese rivals:

"He took special steps to prevent his officers and men from smoking opium and embezzling funds. Soldiers were paid individually under his personal supervision instead of the money being issued to the commanding officers in the customary way. Discipline was so stern that there were said to be only two ways of noticing subordinates, either by promoting or beheading them." [E]

Yuan became the most influential military leader, well-placed to help the 100 Days Reform. Though that reform was a desperate measure, had he backed it and failed it would have been an honourable failure. Instead Yuan opted for gross dishonesty and yet still failed in the long run. He quietly accumulated power within a decaying system. The death of the Dowager Empress and the murder of the Reform Emperor in 1908 displaced him, but the new rulers were so ineffective that this did him no harm.

There was a hazy promise of a constitution in 1908: Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 had been seen by the Chinese elite as the triumph of a constitutional monarchic Japan over autocratic Russia.[F] But while the Manchu elite were willing to dump ancient Chinese traditions, they were not willing to drop Manchu privilege. Han Chinese were the vast majority of the population but remained a minority in the governments in the Empire's last days. The 1911 Revolution happened because the mostly-Han gentry were sick and tired of being kept down. But it was all internal – there was no attempt to assert China's rights against foreign powers.

Chinese unity proved fragile. The immediate result of the 1911 Revolution was an attempt by several provinces to go their own way. Most of them were large enough to be decent-sized nations in their own right, and had some distinct identity. China could quite easily have fragmented:

"Three provinces – Shensi, Hunan and Kiangsu – declared independence; and, by the end of the month, this number grew to five. At the end of November, fourteen out of the eighteen provinces in China proper were independent." [H]

There was however a strong desire to preserve unity: these declarations of 'independence' seem to have been more a refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the existing government than a real wish to leave 'Zhongguo', the Middle Realm that had existed for several thousand years in much the same form. A fragile unity was restored, by agreeing to a Republic with Yuan as President. Yuan consolidated his power, mostly by turning over power in the provinces to military commanders. He concentrated on suppressing the Kuomintang, the most dynamic element in China at the time.

As I mentioned earlier, the Kuomintang won an election despite a rather narrow franchise. But they had no army, and when one of their main leaders was assassinated, nothing much followed. It was a Republic without a public, no body of ordinary people who would be outraged by such a breach of democratic norms. Norms for Western Europe politics were not norms in

China, and in fact never became so. The Kuomintang forces controlled several provinces but soon lost a brief civil war.

Yuan's next step was to try to go from being President to Emperor. To achieve this he was willing to concede Japan's notorious Twenty-One Demands, which would have made China a protectorate of Japan. But this lost him the loyalty of many of his subordinates – what was the use of an authoritarian ruler who was not ready to stand up for his own country? The attempted enthronement in 1916 proved a farce: Yuan faced a much more serious rebellion than had resulted from his suppression of the Kuomintang. His claim to be an Emperor was abandoned by him after 83 days.[G] Despite Yuan's unsuitability, I'd interpret this as the selfish interests of warlords winning out. A revived Empire might possibly have been effective, and they preferred weakness in which they could flourish as warlords.

Yuan – still only 56 – died soon after this. Nothing coherent followed. The 'Last Emperor' Puyi was restored in 1917, only to be displaced again very quickly. He was later set up as puppet ruler of Manchukuo, the Manchu homeland that Japan had conquered, even though its population by then was mostly Han Chinese. Japan remained a major threat and the main disruptive force, while almost all of the warlords followed Yuan's example in trying to avoid a fight with external enemies. They preferred to fight other Chinese, battles that the outside powers were willing to let them win.

Contrary to what most historians say, I don't think the idea of a new dynasty was inherently an the error. Something similar did produce a viable structure in Iran, where Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925 overthrew the previous dynasty and became a modernising monarch. That his creation blew up in 1979 under his son may have been due to the 'good advice' of the USA, which has a wretchedly bad record of nation-building among unfamiliar cultures. The idea of a new Chinese dynasty wasn't absurd, and the Chinese government at the time did do some serious thinking and noticed that multi-party systems introduced suddenly led to civil wars and had failed in

Latin America. The big trouble was that Yuan had a long history of betrayal and of failing to stand up for Chinese interests. Autocratic governments only work if they are respected as morally serious by a big chunk of the population. With Yuan, that was out of the question.

The failure of China's Western-style Republic was unsurprising. Chinese reformers had believed Western political theorists who ignored the mess and brutality of Europe's actual modernisation. Western liberals preached the politics of Cloud Cuckoo Land and some Chinese mistook this for Western reality. (A tradition that has carried on down to China's 'Charter 08' in our own era.)

It wasn't so much that those Chinese were mistaken in trying to be like what the West was: Japan had managed that quite nicely. They were doomed because they confused the window-dressing with the reality, because they were trying to be what the West *wasn't*.

After Yuan Shikai's failure, China split into warlord cliques. The best response to this was led by Sun Yat-sen, who was maybe China's best chance of a relatively smooth modernisation. But he died of cancer in 1925. After a period of divided loyalties, Chiang Kai-shek succeeded him, but refused to revolutionise the society or confront Western imperialism.

Chiang Kai-shek was not the man to be China's Ataturk, any more than Yuan Shikai was. He'd gone to Japan to get a military education, but then had nowhere to apply it for many years. Meantime he'd got involved with Shanghai's Green Gang, a vast criminal organisation that was intertwined with the Shanghai police and which never dared challenge foreign interests. No doubt this connection was very useful after he shot dead a major political rival:

"After the takeover of the Republican government by Yuan Shikai and the failed Second Revolution, Chiang, like his Kuomintang comrades, divided his time between exile in Japan and havens in Shanghai's foreign concession areas. In Shanghai, Chiang also cultivated ties with the underworld gangs dominated by the notorious Green Gang and its

leader Du Yuesheng .On 15 February 1912 a few KMT members, including Chiang, killed Tao Chengzhang, the leader of the Restoration Society, in a Shanghai French Concession hospital, thus ridding Sun Yat-sen of his chief rival. (There is no evidence that Sun Yat-sen himself was involved in the affair in any way.)" (Wikipedia, [J])

"Chiang had numerous brushes with the law during this period and the International Concession police records show an arrest warrant for him for armed robbery. On February 15, 1912, Chiang Kai-shek shot and killed Tao Chengzhang, the leader of the Restoration Society, at point-blank range as Tao lay sick in a Shanghai French Concession hospital, thus ridding Chen Qimei of his chief rival. In 1915, Chen Qimei was assassinated by agents of Yuan Shikai and Chiang succeeded him as the leader of the Chinese Revolutionary Party in Shanghai. This was during a low point in Sun Yat-sen's career, with most of his old Revolutionary Alliance comrades refusing to join him in the exiled Chinese Revolutionary Party, and Chen Qimei had been Sun's chief lieutenant in the party." [K]

According to Fenby's much-praised *Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek and the China He Lost*:

"Returning to Shanghai with his first victory under his belt, Chiang was put in command of a revolutionary army brigade funded by local merchants. According to a critical account written in 1930, the men were riff-raff, and their commander soon gave up trying to train them. Chiang followed the example of Chen Qimei [his mentor in Chinese revolutionary nationalism] by forging links with secret societies, and plunged into the flamboyant Shanghai nightlife.. He also got to know Zhang Jinqiang, a prominent finance whom he added to his list of sworn brothers..."

"After meeting Sun Yat-sen on a boat, Zhang became a devoted follower of the doctor, and contributed large sums to his cause..."

With his dark glasses, Richard-III-like appearance and aura of money and power, he [Zhang] was one of the

city's distinctive figures, his influence increased by the underworld and secret society contacts to whom he introduced Chiang. The young revolutionary clearly struck Zhang as a man with a future. For his part, Chiang referred to his feeling of 'fear and respect' for the businessman.

"Despite such useful associations, Chiang was not the most popular man in revolutionary circles. He had a nasty temper and insisted on having his own way. His fiery side was well illustrated when he wanted to see a rival of Chen Qimei, who was in hospital at the time. As a quarrel developed, Chiang pulled out a pistol and shot the man dead.

"{Footnote} According to the adulterated biography by Sie, Chiang acted in 'legitimate self defence'... but others say he took the initiative.

"After this episode Chiang, now twenty-five, took off for Japan, where he published a military magazine, for which he wrote articles extolling the doctrine of 'blood and iron' and the centralisation of military power. China, he argued, should be ruled by an enlightened despotism, which would combine 'Washington's ideas' with 'Napoleon's methods', and democratic thought with revolutionary spirit." [L]

This is another example of how alien Chinese politics were at the time: no one seemed bothered that Chiang had killed a political rival, or that it might have been deliberate murder. You couldn't imagine British Tory leader David Cameron gunning down Gordon Brown, or Hillary Clinton 'wasting' a few Republican senators in order to secure a legislative majority and enact Universal Health Care. But in China's brief attempt at Westernisation, similar things passed without much comment.

Some military-authoritarian leader might have modernised China in a broadly Western and right-wing manner, as Ataturk did in Turkey. But the two best-place men, Yuan and Chiang, were hopelessly inadequate. Both had dirty pasts that were well-known to everyone they did business with. Both were weak in the face of foreign threats. Both acted as cuckoos in the nest, block-

ing other possible developments.

Look back to the choices that Chiang made. He found himself in command of a unit of riff-raff, so he gave up on them, preferring to make profitable connections with opium gangsters. A more serious man would have turned his troops into something other than riff-raff, or else died trying. A lot of the new recruits to Mao's Red Army came from the warlord armies and would have been riff-raff when they arrived, followers of the ancient Chinese habit of defeated soldiers joining the winning side. They became something very different thanks to the simplistic but highly effective political training that Mao helped develop.

The Kuomintang became much more serious when the Soviet Union remodelled it as a Leninist-type party. Chiang Kai-shek was appointed Commandant of the Whampoa Military Academy, which trained officers for an army that was given elements of Leninist discipline and was the best Chinese army until the Red Army emerged. Chiang did nothing much to build on this heritage: he was always a wastrel. When the Northern Expedition got as far as Shanghai, he and his gangster allies massacred the Chinese Communists and suppressed radicalism within the Kuomintang. They became a new government, but it was largely 'business as usual'.

The British Empire squatted in Shanghai and along the Yangtze Valley as a broadly obstructive force. Britain by the 20th century had already ceased to be anything useful in the Indian Subcontinent: in China the British community were never anything except a gigantic parasite on a society they'd wilfully disrupted to open it up for trade. In Western Tibet, Britain might have overseen a traditionalist modernisation and done some good – but Tibet was not a likely source of large revenues. Shanghai was, with opium sales continuing to the bitter end. British India made a lot of money growing opium, regardless of the limited legal outlets for this crop. China was the main actual outlet and successive British governments chose to keep this corrupt relationship in place. Nor were such links a source

of shame of the sort that Britain nowadays demands from foreign countries. A lot of the opium money would have been deposited with the *Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*, which was founded after the First Opium War. It survived in Hong Kong during Mao's rule, became a major presence in Britain after taking over the Midland Bank and as HSBC is currently the world's biggest privately-owned company.[M]

The British Empire was doing very nicely out of Chinese misery, and was not going to quit without a fight. Developments in China in the 1920s gave the Kuomintang a simple choice between fighting global imperialism or becoming lackeys. Chiang Kai-shek and his Green-Gang pals showed no qualms about becoming lackeys: maybe they planned to become something more later on, but this was never likely.

A successful authoritarian state may make use of criminals, but it cannot be run by them. The Nazi leaders were all from highly law-abiding backgrounds: right-wing criminals within the Nazi Party took orders from them and knew their place. In Republican China it was all much more ambiguous, with no clear lines between warlordism, criminal networks and the Kuomintang. It rotted such genuine political idealism as existed among them.

Meantime a Chinese Communist Party had formed, or rather it had emerged twice, in China itself and among Chinese working in Europe. Global Leninism encouraged the formation of a Chinese Communist party, but then switched to updating the Kuomintang, in line with Comintern policy. But in China in that era, where there was no clear line between politics and warfare, this was not an arrangement that was likely to work. The policy was a bungle. Either they should have ordered the Chinese Communists to wholly dissolve themselves into the Kuomintang, or they should have ignored the Kuomintang and helped the Communists to build their own armies. Attempting to carry through a national revolution with two rival power-centres was bound to lead to disaster. Mao's well-known remark about political power growing out of the barrel of a gun was a simple fact of

life in China after the Imperial Government was overthrown. No politics had much significance unless it was backed by armed force. The only likely cure for China's weakness was a unified army under the control of a leader strong enough to reshape the nation.

Chiang Kaishek tried to become that man and he failed. At no time was Chiang Kaishek ever in full control of China. Most of the warlords found it convenient to recognise him as the national leader, but that was a long way short of accepting him as Top Man in the way Ataturk was in Turkey. He probably kept the capital of China in Nanjing because he dare not try to rule from Beijing, surrounded as it was by the fragments of what had been Yuan Shikai's Beiyang Army. Instead he tried to change the city's name from Beijing – Northern Capital – to Beiping, Northern Peace. This never really caught on outside of the Kuomintang government's official documents, but the USA kept on using it into the 1960s, mostly in the older version 'Peiping'.

The problem with Chiang Kaishek was not that he was a dictator: no other sort of government was likely to work in China as it then was. Sun Yatsen had officially set out that there would be a period of 'tutelage' before eventually moving to a multi-party Western system. But Sun Yatsen had realised that there also had to be radical change and had wanted a serious land reform. Chiang Kaishek preferred to support the existing order, a parasitic landlord class that separated itself from the land as soon as it could. Chiang got a limpet-like grip on power, but part of the deal was that he rejected changes that China urgently needed, particularly land reform. He was also ready to give away chunks of China to Japan, in the hope that outside powers would rescue him in the longer term.

I called Chiang a cuckoo, someone who occupied the spot in which an effective non-Communist leader might have emerged. But it's moot if there was anyone much better. The best candidate I could find was Feng Yuxiang (Feng Yu-hsiang), also known as the Christian General. Unlike Chiang, his conversion to Christianity was sincere. As one British Christian commentator put it:

"The contrast between Cromwell's Ironsides and Charles's Cavaliers is not more striking than that which exists in China today between the godly and well-disciplined troops of General Feng and the normal type of man who in that land goes by the name of soldier... While it is too much to say that there are no good soldiers in China outside of General Feng's army, it is none the less true that the people generally are as fearful of the presence of troops as of brigand bands. The brigands, indeed, are generally unpaid or disbanded troops, being today in the regular army and tomorrow freebooters." [N]

That was the view back in 1923, at a time when British Protestants took their own history seriously and regarded Cromwell as an admirable example. Feng later offended the West by being willing to look to the Soviet Union for support, and being willing to work with the Chinese Communists. Feng built his own traditions from the ground up: Chiang hijacked the reformed Kuomintang when it had been rebuilt with Communist help. Chiang then made an alliance with Feng against other Northern warlords, followed inevitably by a further war between the two of them in which Chiang defeated Feng and became Top Warlord in a country that remained badly divided.

Whether Feng would have done any better is one of history's unknowns. Whoever had been in charge of the Blue Republic would have faced the problem of Japan.

Japan had very successfully imitated the west. But what the Japanese imitated was Europe's late-19th-century pattern of popular militarism and expanding empires. By modern standards, the entire world was heading in the wrong direction from the 1870s. It would be nice to suppose that 'modern standards' would somehow have won out anyhow, but my own strong feeling is that it was a matter of luck, rival right-wing authoritarian systems wrecking each other and giving different politics a chance.

At the time when Japan copied the West, there would have seemed to be no alternative. The 'scramble for Africa' from the 1880s extended European

rule over a continent that had previously been self-governing. Burma was gradually taken over by British India between 1824 and 1886. France was likewise expanding in Indochina, with Thailand left precariously between territories ruled by the French and British. Japan had every reason to apply the same pattern against its neighbours, and every reason to fear that an independent non-European power would not be tolerated for long. Or not unless it rapidly became extremely strong, stronger than it could be on the basis of Japan alone. Japan saw an opportunity for expansion in Korea, and then Manchuria, and then China as a whole. The Chinese Republic was too weak to do much about it.

But Japan messed up politically, ruling mostly by force and not bothering to do much to attract real loyalty to the new state. I'm puzzled that they never tried saying that the Japanese Emperor had become the Chinese Emperor, or maybe that the Crown Prince would take the title. There were plenty of precedents for 'Zhongguo' being ruled by a non-Han dynasty, and plenty of Han who had loyally served such regimes. The Japanese Army got plenty of recruits from Korea, despite treating them as despicable inferiors. But in Manchuria and the rest of China, they preferred to rule through puppet regimes that no one took seriously. This remained the case even when Wang Jingwei joined them: he had been the main alternative to Chiang Kaishek in the Kuomintang and in the 1920s had tried to work with the Chinese Communists, but working for the Japanese he was a nothing.

The West had been happy to leave China as a nominally independent state that gave them access for trade without the need to do more. Japan thought seriously about creating a new China, but alienated most Chinese by the way it went about it. The Japanese army pulled off pieces of China with a pretence of autonomy, and Chiang Kaishek failed to act. He had to be kidnapped by some of his own generals before he'd drop his policy of waging war against the surviving Chinese Communists and agree to unite with them against the Japanese threat. This led on to a full-blown invasion of China by Japan, beginning in 1937 and merging into World War Two.

After a series of defeats – which included much Chinese heroism and a lot of Japanese brutality, notably the 'Rape of Nanking' – Chiang's government found refuge in Sichuan, right next to Tibet. Perhaps because it was right next door and vital to their strategic security, Chiang's government played a large role in getting the present Dalai Lama recognised and enthroned in Lhasa in 1940 – but that's another story.

Few Westerners at that time cared much about Tibet: the war in Europe was the key, but the war in East Asia was also important. Chiang and his elegant wife Meiling managed to present themselves to the USA as heroic allies. Those US citizens who got close enough to look got a very different impression, it was a weak and corrupt government and they set a bad example:

"At the beginning of July, Meiling flew back to Asia with her niece in a converted Liberator bomber... The two women had amassed such a treasure trove of American goods to take home that some had to be brought in on another aircraft. At Assam, one of the crates was dropped and broke open. The US army grapevine had it that inside were ermine brassieres, which was probably not true; but there was certainly a lot of cosmetics, groceries and lingerie, wrote Graham Peck. Angered, the American soldiers dropped other crates, kicked the contents around and then threw them into the Liberator." (Fenby, [P])

This wasn't just ordinary abuse of public resources: the trip from Assam to West China meant flying over the Himalayas and was both difficult and dangerous. Medical supplies and military supplies were both vitally needed, but Chiang's wife preferred to use limited air-freight for her own comfort.

A corrupt government is tolerable if it also modernises – Britain's governments were pretty solidly corrupt when the Industrial Revolution began. But Chiang Kaishek wasn't interested in change, and was foolish enough to document it:

"There was also cause for concern about Chiang's literary activities. As Meiling had begun her tour of the United

States, he had a book published... *China's Destiny* had been largely ghosted for the Generalissimo... The 213-page work became a must-buy for anybody who wanted to be in with the regime. Sales soared through the hundreds of thousands, some said up to a million. The book insisted on the supremacy of traditional Chinese ways and blamed foreigners for all the country's ills...

"China's highly reactionary message could have alienated the public of China's main ally; so an English language version was shelved, and then issued in a version which cut out the objectionable passages... The State Department classified its copy of the Chinese original as 'top secret'. Washington was about to award the Generalissimo the Legion of Merit... it would hardly do for the recipient to be known as an opponent of everything the allies were meant to be fighting for..."

"[Footnote] The full version later appeared in an unauthorised edition critically annotated by an American Communist sympathiser, Phillip Jaffe." (Fenby, [Q])

I've read Chiang's book in the Jaffe version. Fenby is correct to say it would have offended the West – but maybe because Western methods were not going to work in China, regardless. And Chiang has some valid points. He says of the 1911 revolution:

"They had overthrown the absolute monarchy, but they could not eliminate the bad habits of idleness, greed, and aimlessness developed under autocracy nor the tradition of unrealistic learning and discussion without practical results. With such habits and traditions... the operation of the parliamentary system was marked by bribery and the [illegal] revision of the provisional constitution. Even members that joined the revolutionary party were so governed by bad habits that they lacked steadfastness." [R]

Most Western readers would be shocked by his scorn for two-party systems: I myself would say he got that bit right. But he leaves out the need to revolutionise the society, unleash the dangerous power of ordinary peo-

ple. Failed to do what Mao has been condemned by the West for doing, but Mao left China enormously stronger, richer and more respected than when he came to power. Chiang stayed within the boundaries the West set for him and left China as much of an impoverished mess when he departed as it was when he achieved power. (His later success in Taiwan was built on the ruthless but effective modernisation that the Japanese had done.)

Note also that the people that Chiang condemns for “*idleness, greed, and aimlessness*” were much the same people that Mao unleashed popular anger against in his various campaigns. See the connections?

Chiang was inhibited by his fear of radicalism and the popular will. But he knew just why the first attempt had failed. He describes how Sun Yatsen tried:

“To implant the foundation of the Three People’s Principles in the minds and life of the people. There were very few men in the party that understood this idea... They also copied the form of British and American politics, believing that if two major parties existed side by side, the mold of democracy would have been set. However, though two major parties were organised, they did not help the parliament to increase its authority... nor could they prevent a president like Yuan Shih-k’ai from abusing his prerogatives.” [S]

Although Chiang was nominally a Christian, the book shows no real interest in Christian values:

“China’s own philosophy of life, developed by Confucius... automatically became a lofty system, superior to any other philosophy in the world. Yet the Chinese nation also accepted foreign religions...”

“During the past hundred years, Christianity in China exercised a beneficial effect in introducing scientific knowledge and reforming social traditions.” [T]

“Although the Chinese people originally studied Western civilisa-

tion because of their unwillingness to become slaves, the result was that they unconsciously became the slaves of foreign theories because of their studies of Western civilisation.

“After the May 4th [1919] Movement, the ideas of Liberalism [Democracy] and Communism spread throughout the country. But those that advocated these ideas had no real knowledge of the enduring qualities of Chinese culture, they were simply looking for something new...

“[In the revised edition, the foregoing passage was altered to read: ‘After May 4th, two types of thought – individualistic Liberalism and class-war Communism – were suddenly introduced among the educated classes...’] [U]

But what was the alternative? Chiang cites Ataturk’s achievements: “Turkey, after its successful revolution, established a free and independent national government which further stimulated and aroused the peoples of Asia”. [Y] But Ataturk did the two key things that Chiang never tried, he took on the European empires by rejecting the treaty they tried to impose after World War One, and he overturned centuries of Turkish tradition when in power. Ataturk imposed Western dress, a Western alphabet and the Western system of surnames. In China, radical nationalism of that sort had to wait for Mao, who combined it with the class-war Communism that Ataturk did not allow.

Ataturk also decided that western-style liberalism should be the end point, though he maintained an autocratic government while the nation was being modernised. What Chiang would have ended up with if he’d retained power is anyone’s guess. He did say:

“It should be noted that China’s democratic system will certainly not be patterned on the nineteenth-century democratic theories of individualism and class consciousness of Europe and America.” [V]

Chiang tended towards European Fascism, in as far as he had any coherent ideas. Had Hitler chosen to keep the

Chinese links that the German military had made, rather than making an alliance with Japan, history might have gone differently. And it wasn’t just political liberalism that Chiang rejected: he viewed economic liberalism as outdated as well:

“Those who favoured the theories of liberalism approached the problems the problems that faced China as a result of the prolonged oppression of the unequal treaties, without recognising that the trend in world economics after the First World War had been from free competition towards monopoly and centralisation. They regarded themselves as new and modern when they were actually applying the economic theories of the first industrial revolution to a China that was faced with the second industrial revolution in Europe and America.” [W]

This muddles two distinct issues: the state of the world economy and China’s role within it. China’s home-grown industry made no progress until Mao sealed it off from outside competition, exactly as Bismarck sealed off Germany and as the US Republicans from the 1860s sealed off the USA. After 1949 and fearing the spread of Communism, the USA allowed East Asia to build or rebuild its industries behind high tariff barriers while selling freely into US markets. This would have been unlikely without the existence of Communism as a major alternative.

Chiang was never very realistic, not even about war. Of the highly unsuccessful defence of China against Japan, a much smaller nation that from 1941 was also fighting the USA, he says:

“Although the Japanese militarists considered themselves extremely clever, they were really stupid and stubborn. In their war of aggression against our country, they thought that they had the initiative in their hands... What they did not know was that, from the beginning of the war, their policy and military strategy were entirely under out control... and proceeded along the road to inevitable collapse.” [X]

‘What they did not know’ is also something that no one else seems to know, apart from Chiang. A general

loathing of Imperial Japan in the West has not prevented historians from recognising their military efficiency. In as far as they got bogged down, this was due to the massive underground war waged by the Chinese Communists. US military advisors who hoped to help the Chinese against the Japanese soon got a complete contempt for the Kuomintang.

Another point: why on earth does Chiang bother to make a claim that obviously contradicts the reality of Chinese weakness and Japanese success? Before finding this passage, I'd never been quite sure whether Lu Xun's famous novel *The True Story of Ah Q* was exaggerating when he parodied the Chinese habit of dressing up defeat as success. From this passage it seems entirely accurate and to have lived on in Taiwan. I assume most readers won't have read *Ah Q*, so I'll quote an example:

"If the idlers were still not satisfied, but continued to bait him, they would in the end come to blows. Then only after Ah Q had, to all appearances, been defeated, had his brownish pigtail pulled and his head bumped against the wall four or five times, would the idlers walk away, satisfied at having won. Ah Q would stand there for a second, thinking to himself, 'It is as if I were beaten by my son. What is the world coming to nowadays...' Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won." [Z]

The True Story of Ah Q is one of the books you need to read if you want to understand China's 20th century history. Lu Xun was one of many who supported the Communists because there simply wasn't anyone else who could cure China's existing weakness. How he'd have fared in Mao's China is moot: maybe he was personally lucky not to have lived to see it, and some of his disciples fared badly. But it's not impossibly he'd have been large-spirited enough to understand that only someone like Mao could have put together a shattered and demoralised nation.

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March 2010.
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Same Old Tory

Sean McGouran

The Guardian magazine (20.03.10) had an article on 'Cameron's cuties' - though some of them are male - they are named, typically, on the 'Blair's babes' principle. The 'babes' were the women elected in fairly large numbers in 1997. None of them, despite some having distinctly feminist backgrounds, appeared to object to the description. One 'cutie' does - Joanne Cash - who is pictured on the front page of the paper proper, as well as in the 'colour comic'.

She "grew up in Northern Ireland" - the Grauniad does not indicate where she 'grew up'. It does not indicate what foot she digs with. Meaning whether she is Catholic / Nationalist or Protestant / Unionist in background. As the Guardian is strictly anti-Unionist (it may even be part of its precious house style) her background may be the former. Her contribution to the article, Tories 2.0, consists mainly of her rejecting the designation 'cutie'.

The feminist mini-manifesto means her actual politics are not mentioned. She is described as a "media barrister". Other 'media types' are Ester McVey who "used to host GMTV with Eamonn Holmes". Charlotte Leslie (who produced The Weakest Link and The Holiday Show - for the BBC) "never liked authority stamping on what individuals want to do." It's pertinent to wonder where striking workers come into this political outlook. Louise Bagshawe, a writer of "racy" (her own description) books, is a "die-hard Thatcherite". She believes in "optimism, sunshine and

liberty". (This reads as if she spent her authorial apprenticeship writing verses for Mother's Day cards).

Dr Sarah Wollaston "won Britain's first open primary". She feels "passionately about the NHS" — it is doubtful if Ms Bagshawe feels the same way. Cameron, due to the expenses scandal - cooked up by the Daily Telegraph (alias Torygraph) - to take the heart off its friends in The City, may have a majority of first-time MPs in the up-coming parliament. Most of them will be typical Tory MPs - male, pale and public school - but this lot are interesting. Their views are not much more enlightened than former Conservative MPs.

Charlotte Vere believes "that a more effective government is better than a bigger government". In other words the Civil Service should be decimated. Tories, when railing about 'bureaucracy' or 'big government' (an American import) rarely mean that the top tier should be trimmed. Keely Huxtable "always believed in a small state, and giving people power over their own lives".

There is no indication as to what was at the back of her mind when saying this — but buckshee health care is a safe bet — think of all that freed-up tax money. Phillipa Stroud was attracted by "the Conservative poverty-fighting agenda". She is on the executive of the Centre for Social Justice. Ian Duncan Smith set up this Centre after he was purged from the leadership of the party - and discovered Catholic social doctrine. Ms Stroud will probably find that this 'agenda' becomes surplus to requirements quite quickly.

Maria Hutchings, a natural (old) Labour voter seems to have been gulled by Cameron's reaction to the personal

tragedy of his son's death. That's not politics, and certainly not the politics of parliamentary lobby fodder. That is what these people will be for years, should they get elected. Claire Perry thinks "rural Britain has suffered massively under Labour". 'Rural Britain' is swimming in EU cash. Most of it is going to those who have industrialised agriculture. They were backed mightily by Thatcher and her successors Major, Blair and Brown. She probably means that people who actually live - and work - in ruralia have fewer and fewer amenities. Meaning pubs, post offices, grocers or affordable trains and buses to get to where these amenities are still in place.

Claire Perry an "ex-City worker" probably has a trusty 4x4 to get her to any amenities she needs. If she is under the impression that the Conservatives are going to spend money on 'rural Britain' to enhance the lives of native oiks, seasonal working 'crusties', and Portuguese peasant immigrants she will be sorely disillusioned. Helen Grant claims the party is now "a truer and better reflection of modern Britain".

Apart from any other matter this can't be accurate. And good government is not necessarily an outcome of mirroring 'the nation'. Clem Attlee, Ernest Bevin, Nye Bevan, Stafford Cripps and the rest of the 1945-51 administration were not particularly 'representative' of the United Kingdom's population. But it put in place something that Thatcher and her successors have spent three decades trying to uproot, and they haven't succeeded — yet. Helen Grant is of Afro-Caribbean origin and is standing for a rock-solid Tory seat.

Priti Patel really says nothing other than she has experienced "some" bigotry in the party. She is described as the director of a business consultancy. She "supports capital punishment". Her family were "driven out of Kenya by Idi Amin". Idi Amin ruled Uganda. Presumably the blunder is the fault of writer Julian Glover. Paul Uppal, a Sikh, his "family came from Kenya. We had to start from scratch". So do most other migrant families. He contributes a burble about immigration. He is for "a positive contribution" but wants "people" to "have control". At least he is 'political'

in the sense of trying to square a socio-political circle.

The other chaps are a seriously mixed bunch. Nick Boles contributes an Uppal-like burble on his sexuality, speaking about which clearly bores him. Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, the Black Farmer (it is a trade mark rather than his avocation. He buys-in fresh food, to be labelled 'Black Farmer' and is a 'gentleman farmer'). Where he made the money to buy his farm and finance his business is not made clear. He says, "It's only when I started to succeed in life that I became a Conservative." That's refreshingly straightforward, this man is not in the business of frightening the horses (or the blue-rinses). He continues, "We need to create an entrepreneurial culture." Did Magna Carta - sorry - Maggie Thatcher live in vain? To use a suitably conservative locution, the needle seems to have stuck somewhere about 1984.

Dom Raab, son of "a Czech refugee" (period unspecified - whether 1945, escaping from the mess Britain dropped the place in, or the late 1960s when the Soviets could be blamed, is not noted). He feels the party is committed "to defending our freedom as a nation and ending the creeping mission of the European Union." The EU, with four Presidents, is no danger to any nation's freedom. The Conservatives could try to close the whole enterprise down by leaving. Mr Raab must realise that the UK is in the EU as America's agent.

Britain will not leave because it might strengthen the Union. Even Sarkozy has fallen out of love with the 'Anglo-Saxon' model of limitlessly free markets. (It is difficult to work out when these interviews took place. It can't have been prior to the 'credit crunch'. But nobody refers to the single most important problem facing any incoming government anywhere on the planet.) The UK, with the USA's interests at heart, wants a big version of the erstwhile EFTA (European Free Trade Association) which it left to join what became the EU.

The whine that 'we weren't told about a Union' has been put to sleep. The first element in all the treaties since the 1957 Treaty of Rome has been an in-

citement to 'ever closer union'. The European Union is at the end of its tether. It should, probably, be wound up.

Shaun Bailey, was raised by "a Jamaican mother", presumably his own. It's not particularly obvious in the text if they were related. No reason is given for his preference for the Conservatives. Like a number of others here he may be just fed-up with New Labour. Which is Thatcherite, but so are the Cameroons (and the LibDems with Clegg and Cable at the top).

Many of these people will find parliamentary party discipline extremely difficult to tolerate. Shaun Bailey is one and Rory Stewart is another. He was in the Labour Party at university in the early 1990s. But now he is "frustrated with government over foreign policy". Quite why he thinks the Conservatives will be any different from New Labour is difficult to get a grip on. Cameron will be even more anxious than Blair and Brown to do America's bidding.

There are many more first time candidates - the environmentalist billionaire Zac Goldsmith has very little in common with Shaun Bailey, or Dr. Wollaston, or Rory Stewart. Political parties have pulled wildly diverse people together in pursuit of an over-riding objective, or mission. Members of Attlee's Cabinets refused to talk to each other outside of the Cabinet room. Cameron has a much more difficult task than Attlee. His party has no particular mission. It is, in effect, the 'not-New-Labour' Party. That may get them elected to government. But it does not constitute a policy.

We would, in normal circumstances, be inclined to gloat over such matters. (We can't be permanently on our best front-parlour behaviour). The economic crisis, brought about by the bankers who were encouraged by all three major parties, is too grave for levity. None of the parties in contention for state power has any policies to resolve the crisis. Other than the destruction of what might be called the 'social' State. The people who will suffer in the exercise will be the old, the young, the unemployed, the underpaid and immigrant workers — the 'working class' in other words.

Froggy

News from Across The Channel

Antigone 2010

An economics journalist at *Le Monde*, asked by his boss to angle his column to International Women's Day, wrote under the title: "Lehman Sisters" that it was a woman, a Greek employee of Goldman Sachs, with the first name of Antigone, who in 2000 devised the financial instruments that helped Greece hide its deficit and enable it to join the Euro.

Erin Callan was financial director of Lehman Brothers when the firm was careering off the rails. As for the victims of the financial crisis, the journalist pointed out that they are predominantly male since industry is worse affected than the predominantly female service sector. What a cheeky fellow!

Spend, Germany!

This is what the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, is urging Germany to do, in an interview with the *Financial Times*. Stop saving, borrow and spend! "Relax shop-opening times and promote e-commerce" he is reported as saying. German shops, especially in the South, close Saturday lunchtime and reopen on Monday. What! Have people got more important things to do with their free time than go to the mall and shop online when the mall is closed? They must stop at once. They are not playing the capitalist game properly.

The journalist interviewing Barroso in his Brussels office helpfully tells us that the office is decorated with modern art, and photographs of the man himself with Tony Blair.

Through their industrial policy, the Germans have managed to remain an industrial country. France is bemoaning the fact that its industrial sector has shrunk in comparison with Germany's:

France has lost 500 000 industrial jobs since 2000. "Nicolas Sarkozy counts on the State to revitalise French industry" was the headline in *Le Monde* on 6 March. A series of measures were announced. The State will take a more active role in firms where it is represented (e.g. Renault, Air France, Thales, GDF, Areva, EDF, Total, Heuliez), through twice yearly meetings between ministers of the sector concerned and the firm's bosses. People will be encouraged to invest long term; there will be tax credits for research for small and medium firms.

However, when it comes to it, the State does not intervene in favour of the workers, and in favour of employment. It lets jobs go abroad for the sake of greater profit for shareholders.

Last month we mentioned the case of Renault:

One would have thought that with current unemployment the government would be taking measures to keep jobs in France, but it is not doing anything to save jobs at the Flins car factory near Paris. The Renault Twingo is already built in Slovenia and the Clio is partly built in Turkey. Now there is a threat that the Clio will be totally built in Turkey, where costs would be 10 % lower. For a car sold 14 000 Euros, in France there are extra production costs of 400 Euros, for wages, and 1000 Euros for 'local business tax' and social security costs.

German firms have workers on the board that take important industrial decisions. Clearly workers have decided to limit wages and consumption in order to support employment. And the president of the European Commission wants them to behave like the rest of

Europe: go for short-term financial profit, let jobs go abroad, live on borrowed money. It is in the interest of workers to keep jobs in their own country, but it is not in the interest of the shareholders. In countries where workers have no say in the running of their firms, the interest of shareholders will come first. Nicolas Sarkozy may wish French industry was doing better, but he will not give it the political and administrative framework that would enable it to survive strongly.

Regional elections.

It's business as before: the situation is the same as for the previous regional elections (local government) in 2004. The Regions are headed by coalitions of the Left; the Socialist Party has done very well. Segolene Royal, the presidential hopeful, did well with the Socialist Party list in her region of Poitou-Charentes. Martine Aubry, the Socialist Party leader, did well in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

The National Front caused the ruling UMP Party to do badly by giving right wing electors an alternative to vote for. The elections take place on two successive Sundays, unless there is an overall majority. This only happened in Guadeloupe, where the Left won outright. Weak parties lose their deposit, the rest make alliances as necessary. The National Front was strong enough to go through to the second round in 12 of the 26 regions. (There are 22 metropolitan regions and 4 overseas).

The Socialists and the Left are allowed to use their energy working in local government. When it comes to the legislative and presidential elections things will be different.

Henry's Robeson Comes Alive

BBC Radio3 recently has broadcast some radical plays on Sunday night. Or at least, plays about radicals. One was on Tom Paine, another, (21.02.10) on Paul Robeson. It was called *I'm Still the Same Paul*. That was part of his message to well-wishers ('glitterati' from stage, screen recording studio, opera house. And Senators who would not have been seen dead in his company in his prime), on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday in 1973. The message was delivered by tape. Robeson was too ill, and (in the play), implicitly, too depressed to attend his own 'party'.

We hear most of the details of Robeson's career from the rookie spook sent to tail him, in the post Second World War 'Red Scare' (a more virulent matter than the one following WW1). Robeson spots him immediately, and remarks on the fact that the agent has a (slightly disguised) Italian name. Robeson says that Hoover, boss of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) only allowed WASPS (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) prior to the 'anti-Fascist war'. The agent's name is Michael Vincent, he ages in the course of the action and, in slightly clichéd fashion becomes a bit of an old grump.

His changing feelings are interest-

Sean McGouran

ing. He starts as a man who more or less agrees with the shouted questions from journalists to Robeson as he emerges from an UnAmerican Activities Committee session. 'Why do you hate America, which allowed you to become a rich man?' But Vincent tires of snooping into Robeson's private life. Hoover has a prurient obsession with his (virtually non-existent) sex life. But he gathers files full of information about his rocky relationship with his wife Essie. She is somewhat jealous of his relationship with Helen Rosen, and feels restricted in her own artistic ambitions (she was a playwright).

The write of this play Annie Caulfield is Hiberno-English with Belfast connections. She has produced many other works for radio and television. The Radio Times write-up on *I'm Still the Same Paul* emphasised the fact that Robeson was a Stalinist. This does not really loom large in Caulfield's script. Except in regard to a trip to the USSR (referred to as "Russia" despite the fact that he spent most of his time in the 'Stans). While there he discovers that "Stalin killed Jews", the phrase is unexplained, implicitly Stalin 'killed Jews' in the same numbers as Hitler. And for the same reason - or because the

whim took him.

The facts of the matter are probably distasteful, (in a mature democracy like the UK — provided you overlook the current treatment of Muslims) but it had to do with Zionism, and not racist attitudes to Jews. At least, probably, not on the part of Stalin. Georgians have not, historically, had the same attitude to Jews as Russians. Karl Dallas, in a letter to the Morning Star pointed out that Robeson did not suffer the moral collapse implied in the play. At a concert in Moscow, he sang as an encore, a Yiddish song identified with the wartime Jewish Anti-Fascist group. It got a standing ovation. One aspect of this section of the play is that we got to hear Robeson's recording of the Soviet national Anthem - in his own translation into English.

Lenny Henry's performance is simply superb, from the relatively young Robeson poking fun at young Vincent, to the ill and elderly man who told his admirers that he was 'still the same Paul'. Though it is heavily implied in the script that he was a broken man. The other performers were strong too, it's just a pity my notes on the cast have been lost. The BBC is fond of repeating material - if you get a chance listen to this play.

Brutus Assumed the Purple. Page 14

[C] Ibid., p 249.

[D] Ibid., p 48-49.

[E] Ibid., p 52

[F] Ibid., p 95

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[U] Ibid, page 98

[V] Ibid, page 169

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[X] Ibid, page 145.

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Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

Bubble Barons

“A century ago, the robber barons at the helm of the U.S. economy were easily identifiable titans of industry: Andrew Carnegie of Carnegie Steel, John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil, financier and steel magnate J.P. Morgan. It was easy to draw the link between the robber barons’ brutal business practices and their immense wealth; it was clear that these businessmen were quite literally, robbing the American people in the course of amassing their fortunes.

“The influence of today’s super-rich is significantly harder to trace. Much of their wealth is managed in opaque Wall Street investment vehicles and byzantine corporate structures. They are less likely to slap their names on their ventures, and their profitable relationships with the most destructive segments of our economy are hidden behind layers of corporate control. In our post-industrial economy, they amass wealth not by producing things with actual value, but rather by riding waves of speculation, such as the housing bubble, to dizzying heights of wealth.

“Today’s super-rich are not robber barons, but bubble barons: they extract their fortunes from intensifying cycles of imaginary wealth creation and destruction, live at a far remove from their businesses, and evade accountability in the public spotlight. The robber barons stood behind their economic crimes; the bubble barons, for the most part, do not.

“Beginning today, AlterNet and LittleSis.org are partnering in an investigation of these bubble barons -- a select group of American multi-billionaires who saw astronomic gains in wealth during the housing bubble, and who so far have evaded all accountability in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.” [F]

That comes from ‘Information Clearing House’, a site with lots of interesting material. And some basic misunderstanding. The ‘Bubble Barons’ thrive on the new economy, but they did not create it, any more than surfers create the giant waves that they ride with varying degrees of skill. There was and still is a tolerance of financial chicanery by millions of people who think that they can be the lucky winners rather than the sad victims. Very few make it, naturally. But in the USA, fully a quarter of the population believe themselves to be part of the richest one per cent

In Britain and even more in the USA, there is a continuing illusion that those people succeed by some sort of mysterious cheating, instead of by the normal operation of what they call a ‘Free Economy’. There is cheating, obviously, but maybe more among small business than in large business, where there is much more to lose and a greater number of ‘outsiders’ who are to some degree involved.

Accountants Without Frontiers

The 1960s saw a general assertion of individual rights. A lot of it was about sex, a lot of it was about women becoming equal, and some of it was about breaking down stuffy habits of ‘respectability’. This could have meant an advance towards socialism, a lot of it was ideas that had once been mostly found on the Left. But most of the Left in the 1970s refused to adapt to the new world, fought bitterly against attempts at reforms that would have made trade unions equal to employers. They were happy to deadlock the society and fantasise that this would lead to revolution. Very surprised when Thatcher and Reagan broke the deadlock in favour of the employers and the rights of capital.

But is capitalism viable without respectability? Can it work without a set of unwritten rules that are stuck to regardless of immediate advantage? It rather looks as if it cannot.

Without the idea of *respectability* to guide business people, the obvious temptation is to allow almost anything in order to give the appearance of a profit. The notorious Enron was an extreme example, but it seems much more widespread. And some amazing stuff is coming out about Lehman Brothers, the giant global financial services firm whose September 2008 bankruptcy almost brought down the global financial system. According to *Private Eye* (which is the place journalists send stories that the regular press will not publish):

“The trick was to get billions of pounds of loans off the balance sheet using a transaction called ‘repo 105’. American regulators were having none of it, so what did Lehman do? It simply transferred its security inventory across the pond and got its operation in regulation-lite London to conduct the transaction.” [G]

Accountants are hired by the people they audit, so it’s not amazing that they will pass any old rubbish. I once saw this sort of trickery compared to a man arranging that his left-hand pocket sells the right-hand pocket a hanky for a million pounds, thus giving it a fantastic balance-sheet. The right-hand pocket then sells it back before its own audit and so it seems to be doing well as well. Broadly, a company’s debt vanishes with a meaningless transaction, one that yields no real money. Yet it’s not clear that it’s illegal, and the punishment goes mostly to those in senior management who refuse to be part of it:

“The dissident Lehman Brothers vice-president Matthew Lee, who was fired after blowing the whistle on dubious accounting, has been unable to find work since leaving the Wall Street bank, partly because of the stigma attached to being a former Lehman audit executive.

“Speaking to the *Guardian*, Lee’s attorney, Erwin Shustak, today shed more light on his client’s attempt to raise red flags over Lehman’s questionable financial management, which

was revealed last week in a 2,200-page bankruptcy court report into the bank's demise...

"Lee wrote a six-point memo outlining his concerns and sent it to senior management. His note listed, among other things, a balance sheet that listed assets \$5bn above reality, a lack of expertise and adequate systems in accounting, unrealistic valuations of inventories and billions of dollars in potentially toxic liabilities.

"Approximately two weeks later, he was called into an office and summarily told he was part of a mass layoff," says Shustak. "There was no other reason given." [H]

The Fate of Those Who Hate the State

No man is an island, though some of us are peninsulas. Humans can live tribally, or they can live in a state. A pre-industrial society where most people live in self-sufficient villages can have a fairly small state, though this generally means leaving power in the hands of the local gentry. An industrial society is much more interconnected, so the state has to expand. Britain's Industrial Revolution is generally dated from 1760 to 1830, and this was a period when the British state grew rather faster than the economy as a whole. This process continued right through to the present day, and to protest about it is futile.

The USA under Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to end its Great Depression and became a superpower because it accepted tax-and-spend as the right policy, along with a considerable growth in state power. Anti-state attitudes from Reagan onwards seem to be ending with its decline from superpower status and another Great Depression. Yet critics like 'Information Clearing House' ignore the methods that actually worked and instead look back to Woodrow Wilson saying:

"Liberty has never come from the government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of government. The history of liberty is the history of resistance. The history of liberty is a history of the limitation of governmental power, not the increase of it." [K]

This is just not true. The growth of governmental power requires some limits on what can be done with it, that is necessary and proper. Those who want to define their own sort of freedom should be thinking about somehow bending the state machine to their wishes, or possibly overthrowing it and starting again, though this only works when most people are profoundly alienated from what exists. Thinking that you should avoid the state and rely on individual struggles is an excellent formula for achieving nothing.

Since the 1960s, women have mostly got the state working for them, as have gays in the West and so has the Green movement, those have been the big successes. The Trade Union movement in Britain backed away from taking a large role in the state in the 1970s, and is still paying the price.

China and Japan

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the USA showed that it hadn't believed a lot of what it said during the Cold War. The US kept together a coalition of states with different values, whereas the Soviet Union lost its biggest ally, China, and alienated Middle-Europe with the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The USA was shrewder, stringing along rulers like Suharto in Indonesia, Mobutu in what was then Zaire, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, as well as states like Former Yugoslavia and parties like the Italian Christian Democrats and Socialists. When the Cold War ended, they became targets. The German Christian Democrats got something of the same treatment but survived it.

Japan with its massive fast-growing economy was being loosely spoken of as the 'next foe' in the early 1990s. Miraculously its well-managed economy stopped growing at about that time, with the 1990s being a 'Lost Decade'. There was a plausible explanation, an

asset bubble that caused a crisis, but the failure to recover from this fairly minor crisis was puzzling.

Or not puzzling at all, if you suppose that Japan saw that it was isolated and at risk. In the 1990s, it looked possible that China would become much more pro-Western or else fall into chaos, maybe both. It's not much mentioned now, but there were serious doubts as to whether it would stay stable after the death of Deng Xiaoping, the last leader with massive personal authority. In this same era, Russia was keen to copy the West. The 'Little Tigers' of East Asia saw the USA as their friend and Japan as maybe a rival.

Things changed after 1997. The 'Little Tigers' were hit by a massive crisis caused mostly by liberalised economics that allowed in speculative money. Russia got disgusted with Western liberalism, which had brought them mostly poverty and suffering. The USA had great difficulties with Former Yugoslavia, whose violent disintegration was a bad advert for their system. China proved entirely stable without a single charismatic leader. Saddam in Iraq resisted the best efforts of the West to get rid of him by sanctions and threats. The USA seemed in a mood for something drastic, though Japan was now being ignored as no longer the rival it had once seemed.

The al-Qaeda attack on the Two Towers focuses US wrath onto Afghanistan, even though the Taliban offered to stop sheltering them if it was proved in the Taliban's own courts that al-Qaeda were guilty. The USA by then was keen to demonstrate its strength, and did just that, but also demonstrated weaknesses that the US governing class had not faced up to. The USA could get into Afghanistan, as early invaders had done, but it was not so easy to get out again on terms the invader wanted. The same was true of Iraq: they could knock down the semi-Western system that Saddam and the Baath had built, but something

much more alien replaced it.

Meantime China was rising, and China was wisely building alliances. China chose to help Russia as Russia began to turn against the West. An aggressive policy might have won them back large territories that the Tsarist Empire took from the Chinese Empire in the 19th century – but it would have cost them far more in the long run.

China has maintained its alliance with Russia, sometimes expanded as 'BRIC' with Brazil and India, or as BASIC with Brazil, South Africa and India but not Russia at the Copenhagen climate summit. China is now taking over from Japan as the second richest state in the world, but doing it as part of a wider system of alliances.

China is also ignoring Western 'good advice' over its economy, of the sort Japan took with disastrous results, and that was also taken by the Asian Tigers up to their 1997 crash. They were going their own way even before the star of the West's current round of economic chaos.

The rise of Asia seems to be happening regardless, and with increasing independence of European values. It was foreseeable and in fact foreseen by a few wise commentators. One man said in 1947:

"Asia for the Asiatics? Power will come to the east, but I think it will be peaceful power – they have suffered too much to play with war again. To imagine that America and Russia are the great colossi is like thinking one move ahead in chess; the greatest colossus of all is the babe with the bloody eyes". [J]

Chinese Equality

If Google do quit China in April, as now looks likely, they will not be much missed. Local entrepreneurs produced a better version of their own, as I detailed in an earlier Newsnotes. And China is in no mood to be told what to do on its own territory. They have recently cut ties with Oxfam's Hong Kong branch:

"China's education ministry has ordered colleges to cut ties with Oxfam and prevent it from recruiting on cam-

puses, accusing its Hong Kong branch of a hidden political agenda..."

"A notice attributed to the education ministry said the Hong Kong branch of Oxfam, which oversees operations on the mainland, was a 'non-governmental organisation seeking to infiltrate' the mainland." [A]

I know nothing about this specific matter, but charities do often get political, despite being supposed not to. I also heard from some Serbs in Former Yugoslavia who reckoned that they had been quietly undermined by organisations posing as non-political.

China sticks to its own system, which was recently described as follows:

"Labels do not help satisfactorily describe the model, which the Chinese say is based on socialism with Chinese characteristics. It can be described as a mixed economy with socialist and capitalist features or, less flatteringly, autocratic capitalism.

"The model has a number of key characteristics. The State controls the strategic direction of the economy and therefore its strategic sectors. The State-owned enterprises still dominate industry. The government can thus set and direct its economic priorities..."

"Historically a model marked by clear goals and ruthless pragmatism usually succeeds because of the determination of political leadership.

"Examples are Charles de Gaulle in France after 1958, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in post-war Japan and, of course, Deng Xiaoping 30 years ago.

"Success generates domestic legitimacy and external challenge, but at the potential cost of both corruption and excessive reliance on exports." [B]

China may be losing interest in being the world's cheap export centre, it has lots of other possibilities. Thus:

"Guangdong, the province that produces about a third of China's exports, on Thursday announced plans to raise

its minimum wage more than 20 per cent, fuelling inflation fears and dealing a blow to manufacturers emerging from the global credit crisis.

"The province, which borders Hong Kong and forms part of the manufacturing powerhouse known as the Pearl River Delta in southern China, was not the first to introduce a mandatory wage rise this year, but the increase was sharply higher than the 13 per cent introduced by Jiangsu province last month.

"The local government said the move was necessary to attract labour to work in local factories and improve the lives of low-income earners. The minimum wage increase of 21.1 per cent will take effect on May 1.

"It added that wages were set to reflect rising inflation and the region's acute labour shortage – a problem that is paralysing plants rushing to complete an unexpected surge in orders after Chinese new year in February.

"One factory owner on Thursday said the move would bring limited benefits to business.

"A lot of our workforce traditionally come from the poorer regions in western China, but factories are moving out there to take advantage of cheaper wages and lower taxes. Those workers who used to come here can now find work close to home. I don't think we will see many of them moving back here," said Au Yiu-chee, a Hong Kong owner of a textile factory in Dongguan." [E]

It seems that the priority is curing existing inequalities, and that the chosen mechanism is state regulation, with no assumption that market forces will do the trick. Standard assumptions before the 1980s, and now returning as the long-run results of deregulation are seen.

Maoist Populism

Most studies of China's economy do not mention that Deng built on top of Mao's success, while Mao largely had to start from scratch. China had been stagnant for centuries. China's 'Blue Republic' that lasted from 1912 to 1949 produced no net economic growth, with

rural decay balancing industrial growth in the coastal cities.

Under Mao the economy tripled, a success matched only by Japan, the Asian Tigers and Western Europe after World War Two. But Mao faced the triple problem of little outside aid, a population with little experience of industry and the constant threat of invasion. West Germany had just one of these, the other 'miracles' none. Mao was resented by most of those who were privileged in the Blue Republic and failed to get out in 1949. Those people tend to know English and be able to express themselves to a Western audience, but they remain untypical. In the population at large, Mao retains immense prestige. There have been cases of politicians managing to tap into this:

"At the National People's Congress during the past few days, one man has dominated the talk among the gathered elite. When he arrived 40 minutes late for a weekend meeting at the Great Hall of the People, onlookers were trampled by the scrum of television crews following in the wake of the tall photogenic figure. Generating all this attention, of the kind usually reserved for film stars, is Bo Xilai, the Communist party boss of Chongqing city in central China.

"For the past six months, Mr Bo has been on a crusade that has won him countless headlines and stirred up a political hornets' nest in Beijing. The Chongqing government has been conducting an all-out campaign against organised crime that has led to more than 3,000 arrests – including that of the leading judicial official – and prompted calls for similar action across the country. Mr Bo has also encouraged a wave of nostalgia for the Mao era, which many perceive as less corrupt. The city's mobile phone users often receive 'red text messages' of the Great Leader's famous phrases.

"Mr Bo's campaign is lifting the lid on the ties between local party officials and the growing gangster culture. But its impact is being felt well beyond the provinces...

"Now 60, Mr Bo has long been a rising political star. The son of revolution-

ary hero Bo Yibo, he grew up in Beijing and has been in party or government jobs all his life. He became well known in the 1990s as mayor of Dalian city, then governor of Liaoning province, both in the north-east, before moving to Beijing as commerce minister in 2004, when he had a number of tense negotiations with Peter Mandelson, then European Union trade commissioner. By aggressively promoting urban modernisation projects in the north-east he has appealed to those who favour economic reform, but his anti-corruption campaigns have also won support among more conservative groups.

"However, at a 2007 party congress, he saw two members of his own generation promoted to the nine-man Standing Committee at the top of the party: Xi Jinping, expected to take over from Mr Hu in 2012-13; and Li Keqiang, expected to become premier. Mr Bo was appointed party secretary of the fast-growing municipality Chongqing – technically a promotion but a sideways step in some eyes.

"He has made sure the city is anything but a political backwater. Last summer, the first arrests were made in a crackdown called an 'anti-Triad tornado'. The public has lapped up details about the city's gangsters. One of the most high-profile arrests was of Xie Caiping, known as the 'godmother of the Chongqing underworld' because of her network of casinos, one of which was based across the road from the supreme court.

"The arrests quickly began to expose the extent of organised crime. Wang Li, a law lecturer at Southwestern University in Chongqing who has written a book about gangsters, says it really expanded after 2000 when its economy began to explode. 'They started entering legitimate businesses like real estate, threatening other bidders at land auctions not to raise their prices,' he says...

"The campaign has been accompanied by a revival of symbols of the Mao era. It is not just the mass texts of Mao quotations. At party meetings in front of television cameras, he likes to lead officials in renditions of revolutionary songs. At the city's new university

campus, a 20-metre statue of the Great Helmsman towers over the classrooms and dormitories that surround it..." [C]

"Today Bo is in charge of running Chongqing, a region of more than 31,000 square miles and 32 million people along the Yangtze River that is the largest of China's four provincial-level municipalities. In the fall of 2008, Bo gained national praise for the way he managed strikes by teachers, police and taxi drivers in the city as China's economy began to contract. While other regional leaders around the country faced with similar problems treated striking workers as criminals, arresting leaders and sending in police, Bo made what was considered a radical move in China: He invited taxi driver representatives to meet with him in a forum broadcast on state television and negotiated terms for ending the strike.

"And in 2009, Bo took another political gamble. He launched what he called a 'Red Culture Campaign' to get people to get together and read, study and even sing about Mao Zedong's work again. While a few scholars ridiculed the efforts, it was a hit with the masses, with hundreds of thousands showing up at the events." [D]

Footnotes

The universal praise for the late Michael Foot is a measure of how little he achieved. We can expect a lot of wrath and scorn as well as praise when Lady Thatcher finally goes. But Foot? As far as I recall, he evaded all of the hard choices. Tony Benn was on the right lines pushing for Workers Control. I don't recall Foot ever doing anything about it.

He came from an old Liberal family, and that was the problem. It was 'Foots, Foots, Foots, Foots, Marching Over Empire'. There was a large element of snobbery in him calling Norman Tebbit 'a semi-house-trained polecat': there are a lot of people like that and the Tories brought them into government, while Labour narrowed its social base and ceased to be connected much with ordinary people.

Characters like Tebbit are better ridiculed for not really helping or defending

people of the sort they came from. The discontent that Thatcher tapped into got taken over by the wide-boy financiers who've enriched themselves and left behind a lot of debt.

The legacy of Thatcherism is that many people in Britain's Working Mainstream see people like themselves as something alien, horrible parasites after their hard-earned money. They aspire to be part of the small elite who end up with millions. This undermined the basis of British society, which was indeed somewhat like a family, George Orwell was quite right on that point. Now it's much more like a broken home.

It was there before Thatcher, the commercial culture we imported from the USA. I suspect that huge long-term damage has been done by advertising, which thrives by an abuse of sympathy and does a lot to degrade a culture. Everyone gets more suspicious after a series of false promises: advertising does that continuously.

Foot had a chance to do something different and failed. I'll not miss him.

And So Say All of Me

Our brains are very peculiar systems. Unlike a computer, specific tasks happen in particular locations. Computers usually have a Central Processor Chip and a few extra microprocessors for special tasks like graphics. The brain has dozens of specialist areas and no obvious centre. Brain damage may knock out one particular function and leave the rest of the brain working fine.

Most politics and philosophy assume that each human is a unitary individual. But we actually seem to function as an ensemble, a mix of differing functions.

"Typically neuroscientists who run imaging experiments are trying to pinpoint the brain region that gives rise to a given perception or behaviour..."

"Neuroscientists had never thought of these regions as a system in the way we think of a visual or motor system – as a set of discrete areas that communicate with one another to get the job done..."

"The symphony orchestra provides an apt metaphor, with its integrated tapestry of sounds arising from multiple instruments playing to the same rhythm..."

"But the brain is more complex than a symphony orchestra. Each specialized brain system ... exhibits its own pattern of SCP [slow cortical potentials]. Chaos is averted because all systems are not created equal. Electrical signaling from some brain areas takes precedence over others. At the top of this hierarchy resides the DMN [default mode network]... the brain is not a free-for-all among independent systems but a federation of interdependent components..."

"The brain continuously wrestles with the need to balance planned responses and the immediate needs of the moment." [L]

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WAR BRIDE

They talk about National Pride
in killing.

Restored in retaking
the Malvinas.

Of Afghanistan, Iraq,
being heinous.

This violence the media
keeps milling:

War is a delight morning,
noon and night.

It is 'Over the Top' with
World War One.

Methinks World War Two
will never be done.

Psyche-up the population:
'Might is Right.'

But was war ever meant
to reach your town.

Terminal youth terminal
streets defeat.

Where no milkman will go
death does the rounds.

Where factories stood,
only cracked concrete.

This National Pride breeds death,
not renown
when the media takes
he bridal suite.

Wilson John Haire.

Parliament Notes

Dick Barry

The Right To Know.

The serious breach of his licence conditions by Jon Venables, one of the killers of two year old James Bulger in 1993, was the subject of a statement by Justice Secretary Jack Straw on 8 March. The statement was made partly in response to alarming speculation by the tabloid press. Straw told MPs, " We have not provided full details about this case, beyond confirming that Venables faces extremely serious allegations. That is because the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions have advised that a premature disclosure of information could undermine the integrity of the criminal justice process, including the continuing investigation and the potential for a prosecution in the future. I fully understand the concern of James Bulger's parents and the wider public about this case, and, indeed, the frustration voiced by James's mother, Mrs Fergus, that insufficient information has been provided to her." Straw went on to say, " Mrs Fergus, in comments made on television this morning, accepted that although she is obviously very anxious to have full information, she does not want that information to arise prematurely in a way that could prejudice any future criminal justice process, and that is exactly the position that I hold."

There are serious questions at stake here. Should the parents of James Bulger, or indeed those of any victim, have a right to know the full extent of any allegations relating to a breach of licence conditions? And how much information should be placed in the public domain? It seems reasonable that James Bulger's parents should be given as much information as is legally permissible, but not until Venables has had a fair trial following the due process of the law. And James's mother, Mrs Fergus, has acknowledged this. Although, initially, she seemed to be demanding to know all the facts in advance. But do the public have a right to know? What purpose would it serve, other than to ensure that any failure on the part of the authorities is brought to light? However, that is not why the tabloids scream

for "the facts" to be revealed. To some extent the tabloids reflect the feelings/opinions of their readers. And these demand, not justice, but revenge. There is a strong public feeling that James Bulger's killers, 10 years old at the time, who served eight years, got off lightly. Perhaps they did, but justice is better served if a judge in a court of law sets the sentence, and not a politician or the court of public opinion.

James Bulger's was a truly horrific murder which understandably shocked the nation. But, thankfully, crimes of this nature, carried out by strangers, and particularly by children, are very rare. More common are the murders of children within the family. And there have been a number of these in recent memory. Of course, this is no consolation to James Bulger's parents. The murder of a child stirs the deepest, darkest feelings in all of us. It asks questions of ourselves and of the society in which we live and which we are reluctant to face. It has been reported that Jon Venables was physically abused as a child. And there are many examples of such children abusing others and growing up to be serial abusers. Jon Venables may be such a case. But let the law deal with him and others who commit horrific crimes, not a public lynch mob.

War As Religion

A Bill, "to provide for the extension of Christmas Day restrictions on the opening of retail premises to Remembrance Sunday; and for connected purposes," was introduced by Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire, Con.), and agreed to by MPs present, on 10 March. Should the Bill become law it will raise to an official status war as a religious symbol. Cormack actually acknowledged this to be the case when he said, "What I am seeking to do with this Bill is to put Remembrance Sunday on the same footing as Easter Sunday and Christmas day" and he added, "Christmas day is a great day of family celebration. Easter day is too and, like Christmas, it is also a great religious festival. However, there are very few families in the land who have not

been touched in one way or another by the conflicts of the last century." So remembrance of every conflict in which Britain has been involved over the last century is to be placed on an equal footing with the celebration of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who preached peace and brotherly love. This is the twisted mind of the British establishment at work. The war propaganda machine in action.

Unusually for a Tory, Cormack called upon the aid of a trade union. He told MPs that "This Bill has the very strong support of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, and I am delighted to be able to introduce it." One is tempted to ask why USDAW backs the Bill. Could it be that they see an opportunity for an extra day's paid leave for their members? Or is that being too cynical? Cormack's Bill however is pretty limited and one wonders what really is the point of it. He said, "The Bill would not affect farm shops, pharmacies, petrol filling stations, shops at airports or railway stations, or shops at exhibitions that are specially staged on a Sunday. Rather, it would mean that large shops - those of 280 metres, or 3,000 square feet, and above - would not be able to open on Remembrance Sunday. It would also mean that the loading restrictions in force for Easter day and Christmas day would apply." This is gesture politics at its most base.

In Quest Of The Truth

The inquest into the death of Dr David Kelly, senior civil servant and UN weapons inspector, was raised (again) by Lib-Dem MP Norman Baker on 5 March. In his book, 'The Strange Death of David Kelly', published in 2007, Baker challenged the official verdict of suicide, arguing that Kelly was unlawfully killed. Since then Baker has been digging further and claims he has unearthed new evidence he believes is pertinent to his case for a further inquest into Kelly's death. Baker told MPs that, "It was subsequently discovered - by me I might say, through a freedom of information request to

Thames Valley police - that there were no fingerprints on the knife, despite the fact that Dr Kelly was not wearing gloves. We are invited to work out how he is supposed to have slit his wrists without leaving prints. Why was it left to me to find that out? Why did Lord Hutton not find out that most basic fact in his inquiry?" He said further, "There is also the fact that Mia Pederson, Dr Kelly's close friend, stated to a national paper, The Mail on Sunday, that she had a meal with Dr Kelly shortly before his death. He had an accident - a painful injury to his right elbow - and as his hands gripped the silver, he struggled to get a knife through a steak he had ordered. How was he supposed to cut his wrists, when he could not even cut through a steak?"

In his response, Minister of State Michael Wills made no reference to the absence of fingerprints on the knife, nor to the Mail on Sunday report of Kelly's injury. Wills told Baker, "After considering all of the evidence, Lord Hutton concluded that Dr Kelly took his own life, and that the principal cause of death was bleeding from wounds to his left wrist which Dr Kelly had inflicted on himself with the knife found beside his body." Baker also referred Wills to a further matter of importance. He said, "The Minister will be aware of the challenge that several leading medical experts have launched, demanding a proper inquest and saying that, in their view, it is clinically impossible for David Kelly to have died in the way that Lord Hutton described. They have asked for information about the death and it has turned out that Lord Hutton recommended - astonishingly - that the information should be kept secret for 70 years. A coroner's inquest is normally a public event, but here is Lord Hutton keeping information a secret for 70 years. What has he got to hide?"

Wills's reply was even more astonishing. He said, "I am aware that a group of doctors is considering making such an application, although I understand that it has not done so to date. This has given rise to some discussion in the media about what was mistakenly reported as Lord Hutton's "decision" to bar for 70 years the release of some documents. Neither Lord Hutton nor anyone else has imposed or ordered that the informa-

tion not be disclosed for 70 years. Lord Hutton made that clear in a statement on Tuesday 26 January. He said that he had "requested" that the post-mortem examination report relating to Dr Kelly not be disclosed for 70 years in view of the "distress" that could be caused to Dr Kelly's wife and daughters." In this context there is a very fine line between "recommended" and "requested". And how was Lord Hutton in a position to decide that release of the report would cause "distress" to Dr Kelly's family? Is it customary in the case of a suicide to request that the post-mortem report be kept secret for 70 years? If not, what makes Dr Kelly's case so special? Wills, predictably, rejected Baker's call for a re-examination of the circumstances surrounding Dr Kelly's death. He did however give an undertaking that "if he comes forward with new evidence we will engage with him in discussing it and in seeing whether there is any reason to re-examine our position." Clearly, he wasn't really listening to Baker.

Leave Off ?

Between 3 and 18 March Robert Syms, Tory MP for Poole, tabled a series of questions relating to trade union activity in government Commissions and Departments. The questions varied slightly but Syms was primarily interested in how many days staff of each Commission/Department spent on trade union activity in the latest year for which figures are available and the cost of this to the public purse. One wonders why a relatively unknown back-bencher like Syms is interested in this issue, when the cost is a tiny fraction of Commission/Departmental budgets and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and the ACAS code of practice provide for such activity. Do the Tories intend to curb it should they form the next government? Whatever the reason the responses make interesting reading. Here they are.

1) Cabinet Office- (2009-10)- 250 days. Plus 188 days for The Charity Commission and 55 days for The Central Office of Information. Annual cost is not held centrally.

3) Children, Schools and Families- Four full-time members of staff engaged in national full-time trade union activity at an estimated cost of £118,000. Moving to three full-time posts in the com-

ing year at an estimated cost of £85,000. Other staff are occasionally engaged in trade union related work, but information not held centrally.

3) Communities and Local Government- Two full time staff at an estimated cost of £92,000. CLG also pays for a number of part time staff. Total cost for 2008-09 was £192,000. Number of days spent on all trade union activities was 1,075.05.

4) Culture, Media and Sport- (no date)- Both DCMS and the Royal Parks provide facility for local trade union officials. Annual cost for DCMS is up to £25,952 and £29,333 for the Royal Parks.

5) Defence- Information on the number of days and its cost is not held centrally.

6) Electoral Commission- (2009)- 11 hours of paid time to attend meetings and seven days paid leave to attend PCS training. Estimated cost was £1,400.

7) Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs- Information is not held centrally.

8) Health- Information is not held centrally.

9) House of Commons Commission- Information is not held centrally.

10) International Development- The Department has one member of full time staff allocated to undertake trade union activities, with a salary in the range from £30,000 to £35,000 a year. In addition, all trade union members are allowed a reasonable amount of time to attend official union meetings. No record of total time spent is held centrally.

11) Justice- Two employees are currently on secondment to the PCS Trade Union and their salaries are reimbursed by the union.

12) Law Officers Department- (2008-09)- including the Treasury Solicitors Department (TSol) and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). TSol spent 354 days at a cost of £37,212 and CPS (including data for HNRCPO) spent 4,068 days at a cost of £535,915.

13) Public Accounts Commission-

(2009). No days were spent on trade union activity.

14) Scotland Office- No staff spend time on trade union activities.

15) Transport- Information is not held centrally.

16) Treasury- HM Treasury has one member of staff who spends 0.60 of time working as a trade union official. In 2008-09, staff of HM Revenue and Customs spent 48,902 days on trade union activity at an estimated cost of £5,918,065. Staff in the Valuation Office Agency spent 4,861 days at an estimated cost of £756,193.

17) Wales Office- (2008-09). 1.5 days on trade union activity at a cost of £150.

18) Work and Pensions- A total resource of 0.2 per cent of the Department's overall time is allowed for trade union activity. Out of a total of 21,134,300 staff days this was 42,460 days for the year commencing 1 June 2009 to 31 May 2010.

Relocation, Relocation, Relocation

Sections 1 to 9 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, relating to control orders for terrorist suspects, were renewed on 1 March. Powers under the Act will continue to operate until 10 March 2011 when, presumably, renewal will be sought for a further year. Unless, in the meantime, a change of government opts for different methods of dealing with terrorist suspects. Opening the debate David Hanson, Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism, told MPs that the control orders were needed "to tackle what I believe is a threat posed to the public by suspected terrorists when we can neither prosecute nor deport.....In recent years , there have been a number of potential threats, significant potential terrorist attacks and attempted attacks on our country, and, indeed, on other countries across the world. These attacks and proposed potential attacks undermine the very fabric of our society and our values, leading potentially to the indiscriminate murder of innocent people." The irony of that last remark was clearly lost on Hanson. Without wishing to understate the potential risk to innocent British lives, we need to remind

ourselves that many thousands of innocent Afghani and Iraqi lives have been lost as a result of British and American military activity.

According to Hanson, there are individuals "who cannot be prosecuted because there is not enough evidence - although we believe them to be a threat - and whom we cannot deport , either because of the human rights record of the countries to which they might be deported or because they are British citizens." So the security services have some evidence but not enough for a prosecution. And we cannot be told what that evidence is. We are simply expected to take the word of the security services and the Minister that these people present a real threat and therefore draconian measures are necessary to control them. Let us not forget that these are the people who told us that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that were a real and immediate threat to Britain. Crispin Blunt (Reigate, Con.) put it neatly when he said, "On this issue, I am sure that most of us would be predisposed to trust our Government, but the unhappy record of the past decade, ranging from the dodgy dossier through to the naked priority of political positioning in the debates on 90 and 42-days' pre-charge detention, has meant that this Government have squandered people's trust on security issues with the same abandon as our principal ally squandered the unimpeachable moral and legal high ground after it was attacked by the forces of mediaeval religious fundamentalism as represented by al-Qaeda."

When control orders were first introduced we were told that there were thousands of potential terrorists in Britain who presented a real threat to British lives and property. And yet Hanson told MPs that only 46 individuals have ever been subject to a control order, with just 11 currently in force. Of the 46 individuals, seven have absconded and are presumably still at large. Which rather suggests that the system is not particularly secure. One aspect of the use of control orders that concerned MPs was relocation. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington, Lab.) asked, "Why has relocation been increasingly used as part of the control order regime?" Hanson accepted that relocation is an important issue that causes difficulties but, he said, "The

key issue, however, is that sometimes an individual is subject to a control order simply because they remain a threat because of their geographical location, the threat they pose diminishes and in due course that helps them to have more positive inputs in their life and, potentially, to return to their native area having been deradicalised." Now let me get this right. Relocation, or internal exile as it has been more accurately described, is an essential tool of the control order regime because when taken out of their native area, dangerous potential terrorists are no longer subject to the influences that radicalised them and can, in fact, be returned to their homes as reformed characters having seen the error of their ways. If that is the case, and it really beggars belief, why not relocate all potential terrorist suspects?

The last word on all this should be given to Labour's Diane Abbott who, in summing up, said, "Control orders, secret evidence, the whole debate about extraordinary rendition-all these add up to the emergence, post-9/11, of a secret state that does not meet the test of the freedoms that this country has taken for granted for so many centuries; that is not effective; and that is undermining some of the good work of our security services by spreading disaffection in the communities thus affected. I would say more than that. If the emergence of a secret state is allowed to happen in this way - by that I mean not just control orders, secret evidence and what happens in and around the process of extraordinary rendition - then it is not just the particular communities that some of us have in mind that are affected: in the end, that abrogation of liberty will affect us all. In recent weeks, the Government have found themselves in the deeply embarrassing position of having fought to keep judicial findings about the extradition of Binyam Mohamed secret and then being forced by the courts to reveal every last paragraph. Yet Ministers still do not see where the post-9/11 atmosphere has led them in terms of going clean contrary to what has, for centuries, been accepted as the due process of law in this country. Control orders were wrong when the Government initially proposed the, they have been proven to be even more inadequate than some of us thought, and they are still wrong now. I will not be supporting the Government on this mat-

ter tonight." Not surprisingly, but unusually, the Minister waved his right of reply to the debate.

No More Nukes?

The fourth report of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, "Global Security: Non-Proliferation.", was the subject of debate on 4 March. Introducing the report, Mike Gapes (Ilford South, Lab/Co-op), Foreign Affairs Committee chair, quoted from paragraph 114. "We conclude," he said, "that the five recognised nuclear weapons states have widely varying records as regards nuclear disarmament and control over the last decade. We welcome the fact that of the five the record of the UK has been the best. However, we also conclude that, owing to the way in which the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty... enshrines a distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons States Parties, the five recognised nuclear powers are often perceived as a group by the non-nuclear weapons states, and that, as such, the group is seen collectively to have failed to live up to the nuclear disarmament commitments made at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences." One is at a loss to understand how the Committee concluded that the record of the UK has been the best over the past decade. The debate that followed certainly did not support that claim.

Gapes told MPs that, "The important point we are making is that the vast majority of the nuclear arsenals in the world are held by the two nuclear superpowers: the United States and Russia. The UK, France and China, the other three nuclear weapons states that are signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, have much smaller arsenals." And, he added, as paragraph 114 concludes, "Without decisive movement by the five recognised nuclear weapons states as a whole on nuclear disarmament measures, there is a risk that the 2010 Review Conference will fail, like its 2005 predecessor - during a critical period for dealing with North Korea and attempting to constrain Iran's nuclear programme." And that, surely, is the crucial point. Why should North Korea and Iran tolerate lectures from Britain and the USA about the acquisition of nuclear weapons when they and other nuclear weapons states continue to hold

them and have no intention of giving them up? India and Pakistan have not signed the NPT, whereas Iran and North Korea have, although it is believed that the latter have now withdrawn.

Israel on the other hand presents a more difficult problem. Although it is widely known to possess nuclear weapons, it has yet to admit it does so and consequently it is not a signatory to the NPT. Gapes referred to Israel and the Middle East in the context of the 2005 Review Conference. He said, "One reason for the conference's failure in 2005 was the perennial difficulties in the middle east, and there has been no progress on the negotiation of a comprehensive settlement of the middle east dispute. As a result, it is highly likely that Israel's nuclear weapons programme will feature in the debates on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Israel's internal politics cannot be easily influenced from outside. Members of our Committee recently visited Israel. There is a clear concentration on security concerns in Israel, as in Iran, and such matters have a relationship." One assumes that five years ago, when Iran was not perceived as a problem, the issue of Israel's nuclear weapons was not raised at the Review Conference, but now that it is believed Iran is seeking to acquire them, Israel's possession will be the subject of debate. In other words, as long as no other Middle East state had, or sought to have, nuclear weapons Britain and the USA turned a blind eye to Israel's possession of nuclear weapons.

Gapes's statement that "Israel's internal politics cannot easily be influenced from the outside", is a statement of fact. No effective external pressure is put on Israel. Verbal admonishments from the USA, Israel's biggest supporter, are of no use. Obama talks tough, but fails to back his words with concrete action. And Britain wags its little finger to no effect. Iran on the other hand is threatened with sanctions and worse, if it does not comply with the West's demands. This is what Foreign Office Minister of State Ivan Lewis said about Iran: "Iran's developing nuclear weapons has to be non-negotiable in terms of the stability of the international community and the middle east, but, paradoxically, also because of the arms race that would be triggered as a

consequence of its developing nuclear weapons. Other middle eastern countries would feel they had no alternative. Therefore, having made diplomatic and political overtures to Tehran, and having had a negative response and a complete lack of co-operation with the UN body charged with policing such matters, we have no choice but to say to Iran that we are serious. If Iran still refuses to come to the table, the next step in demonstrating our seriousness would be to introduce tough economic sanctions that particularly focused on the people in the Iranian regime who make decisions."

Contrast Lewis's tough talk on Iran with his weasel words on Israel. Labour's Jeremy Corbyn asked him, "What discussion is taking place with Israel concerning its nuclear weapons capacity? What hopes are there for its involvement in some form of disarmament discussions in the future to create what we all want, which is a nuclear-free middle east?" Lewis replied, "On the representations that are made, the British position is clear. In every UN resolution on Iran's nuclear weapons programme that we have supported, we have ensured that we equally calling for a nuclear-free middle east. In our bilateral engagement with the state of Israel, we constantly ask it to indicate at least a willingness to consider being part of the NPT. I shall answer my hon. Friend directly: the reality is that Israel's willingness to engage is linked to a paradigm that involves a satisfactory resolution of the two-state issue, so that we have the creation of a viable contiguous Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel."

The position is as clear as crystal. Israel will not even consider being part of the NPT until there is a resolution of the two-state solution which, by its actions, it is doing its best to prevent. But Britain is unwilling to do anything to force Israel's hand, on the expansion of settlements and so on, so it's stalemate. And in the meantime, Iran will continue to work to acquire nuclear weapons and Lewis and the Government will threaten it with sanctions and, say, in all seriousness, "We must not allow any differences to undermine the consensus that has underpinned the success of the NPT for the past 40 years."

Lobotomise Yourself?

The Teach Yourself series (now an imprint of the US-based McGraw-Hill publishing house) has taken to producing historical material. One is The First World War, the author is David Evans, who takes an undeviatingly 'British-standard' line on the whole matter. The cover has a Flanders poppy (in colour, on a grey background), — the 'fronts' other than the Western are given somewhat short shrift.

There is a good description of the confrontation between Italy and Austria-Hungary. The disaster at Caporetto (1917) is noted, as is the fact that the Italians were reinforced from France, and threw the enemy back to near the current border. The Austrians (as Evans puts it p. 175) were reinforced by Germany. He does not mention what the Hungarians were doing. The latter stayed at their posts in Italy, but were not happy at being pinned down there. Other (comparatively) minor players are noted. On page 23, Evans claims "Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and South Africa came to the assistance of their 'Mother Country'". The latter two certainly did not regard "Britain" as their Motherland, in India's case it was India, in the latter case at least in part, the Netherlands. There was an Uprising when Smuts declared war in cahoots with England.

Pages 71 / 72 consist of the trench lingo of British soldiers. One word is 'Doughboy' for American soldiers, which seems unlikely, 'Yank' is listed. Another phrase is 'pork and beans' for Portuguese soldiers. The only other mention they get is their collapse in the face of Ludendorff's April 1918 blitzkrieg offensive. The Portuguese lost 6,000, out of an overall 7,000, dead in this offensive. They were a genuinely 'forgotten army' sustained by Portugal's War Ministry bureaucrats. The country is described as having had declared war on it by Germany in 1916. But the British had cajoled the Portuguese to impound German vessels held up in their ports at the outbreak of war.

Sean McGouran

Apparently war simply 'broke out' between Britain and Germany. There is a distinct impression left here is that the rest of the war was something of a side-show, even Russia's and America's contributions. There is a bilious potted history of Germany prior to 1914. Evans has the British standard inability to understand that Germany genuinely thought that the world order needed strong Muslim states. Its interventions in Morocco and support of the Ottoman empire can only have been motivated by imperialist greed and envy (of Britain).

There is an acknowledgement that Turkey was not the pushover it was assumed to be prior to 1914. Turkey is blamed, in effect, for defending itself too vigorously. The Armenian genocide gets a lengthy outing (pages 158 / 159). It is described as "planned" (it can be argued that it was a 'genocide', but there appears to have been no central plan to exterminate Armenians. The community in what is now Lebanon was untouched). Enver Pasha in particular, and the Young Turks in general, are the guilty parties. The issue of the betrayal of the Arabs is avoided by engaging in hagiography of Lawrence 'of Arabia'.

In dealing with 'propaganda' Evans mentions that "in August 1914, HMS Telconia destroyed the transatlantic cable links between Hamburg and New York...". This meant Britain had a monopoly in the USA on information about the War. He does not admit is that this was an act of international piracy. Four hours after the (midnight) declaration of war against Germany, the Telconia entered Dutch - yes, Dutch - waters and tore up the cable. Did the City of London cast greedy eyes on the Dutch Indies (Indonesia) empire? They effectively owned Portugal's. The 'Belgian' Congo was run from the City. This operation must have been planned well in advance — unlike the Armenian 'genocide'.

Ireland enters into Evans's story (p. 142), apparently "[t]he works of Irish MP and lawyer T. M. Kettle were considered by some to be second only to

[Wilfred] Owen...". 'The Easter Rebellion of 1916' looms quite large (ps 124 & 125), the first paragraph is a bland summary of politics in Ireland pre-1914. No mention is made of the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) or of the super-charged anti-Home Rule campaign in the UK and in the 'Dominions'. Here is (a slightly edited) reprint of Evans's description:

"Amongst a group known as the Irish Volunteers were men who regarded the coming of war as an opportunity... 'England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity'... Patrick Pearse, Sean McDermott and James Connolly [planned]... rebellion against continued British rule. The British... considering... conscription... Volunteers paraded openly, [collecting] money to buy weapons from Germany... recruit[ed] men for a Citizens' Army..."

Billy O'Neill (my history teacher at Barnageeha (pron. 'barney geeky')) would have run out of ink in his red Biro if even his dimmest pupil had produced such tripe. It speaks volumes that a British historian can write such nonsense about the history of the nearest 'geographical expression' to Great Britain. A geographical expression in which Great Britain has much unfinished - political - business.

Evans acknowledges that central Dublin was flattened by the Royal Navy, though in the next paragraph he off-loads the blame onto the insurgents. Casement's alleged sexual proclivities are given a good airing. Their relevance to the actual Rising is not made at all clear. "The bulk of the Irish people had not supported the rebellion and they were angry that their lives had been put at risk and their homes destroyed because of it." This is really a free-floating 'riff' on David Evans's part. The Dublin Castle authorities made do with a generalised assertion that Dubliners were hostile to the defeated 'reels'.

Save yourself nine quid - or the equivalent - and buy Athol Books / Aubeane Historical Society material on the Great War. Dr. Pat Walsh's Imperial Ireland and Ireland's Great War on Turkey, and a number of shorter items would do as starters.

Cameron: the rise of the new Conservative:

This seems to be the only full-length book on the leader of the Tories, which is surprising since he has been there for over four years, and has been presented as the Conservative Party's saviour from its longest-ever period out of office and out of public favour, following its worst electoral defeat since 1906.

However that becomes less of a surprise when on reading it one becomes aware that there is so little about the man worth writing. He comes across as utterly characterless: none of the human defects of the "psychologically-flawed bully" Gordon Brown, no messianic gleam in his eye like Thatcher or Blair. In fact he seems merely a generic specimen of the classes of his origins: the stockbrokers and landed gentry of south-east England (apparently Samantha is even posher, but I know nothing of the social gradations of the bourgeoisie).

He is immensely comfortable with that background, and his education at Eton and Oxford: obviously intelligent, achieving an Oxford First with some ease, but no intellectual: his cultural tastes are described here as "unashamedly middle-brow", which seems an insult to middle-brows: his favourite films are Lawrence of Arabia and Where Eagles Dare, his authors Ian Fleming and Rider Haggard. One aberration is Graham Greene, but one suspects the Greene of Stamboul Train rather than The Power and the Glory.

His ideological history is peculiarly indistinct: he is described as being a "Thatcherite" at Oxford, but showed a "distaste for serious political discourse": "as an implicit, deeply tribal Tory, [he] felt little need to prove he was a Conservative".

No great ideological arguments are

In Review

Book Review:

Cameron: the rise of the new Conservative:

Francis Elliott & James Hanning, 2009

Reviewed By
Tom Doherty

recorded at any stage in his career: at the Conservative Research Department he fitted in with a "hyper right-wing Zeitgeist", with Norman Lamont at the Treasury he is a Euro-sceptic, he "melds into the surroundings" in the Home Office under Michael Howard's "Prison Works" policies. But perhaps that is the job of a spin-doctor, which is all he was.

It is only in his Home Office period that a bit of politics creeps in. Being privileged with a meeting with Enoch Powell, he clearly misjudged the man, extolling the virtues of prison privatisation: Powell's response, which would surprise no-one who knew his history, was that "it was the moral duty of the state to take charge of the penal system, and privatising any part of it would be a dereliction of duty to the public".

Cameron comes across as a spin doctor of a particularly shallow kind: the archetype of spin-doctors, Alastair Campbell is, in contrast, known for his fervent, sometimes over-emotional, ideological commitment to New Labour. On Iraq, he seems to have ducked the issue: when Howard, as Tory leader was inclined to make it a central feature of the 2005 election campaign, "Cameron insisted [it] would be a 'distraction'...

and ought as far as possible to be ignored".

There is an interesting remark about his style of argument, quoted from a close friend: "It's extremely stimulating, but you never win. I know every trick of his. He'll change the subject. He'll overwhelm you with statistics. If that doesn't work he'll make a joke or play to the gallery. If he's losing he'll never let it remain as one on one, he'll get other people to giggle on the sidelines". A close colleague, Michael Gove says: "He's not rabidly ideological. He is the kind of poker player who waits and reads the other players and bets when he knows the alignment is in his favour".

The shallowness of his approach has led to some blunders: his commitment to take the Tories out of the European People's Party originated as a sop to Liam Fox's Eurosceptic supporters in the 2005 Tory leadership race, but has proved a serious embarrassment. Likewise, his enthusiastic support for Georgia in its 2008 conflict with Russia, including a call for its accession to NATO to be accelerated must have bemused the Tories' former sister parties in Europe.

It will be interesting to see, if he wins the election, how he will handle a crisis: the wobbles in economic policy earlier this year portend badly. His experience of Black Wednesday with Norman Lamont seems to have taught him nothing.

Perhaps the last work should go to his fellow Etonian and Bullingdon Club member, Boris Johnson: "Boris despises David. He doesn't respect his intelligence, thinks he's conventional and safe and unimaginative, and he can't understand how he's got the top job".