

Labour Affairs

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Paper TIGers

The eight Labour MPs* who resigned from the party last month, and formed themselves into The Independent Group, clearly believe that their action will wreck Labour's chances of winning the next general election. Their primary aim, whatever their views on Brexit and antisemitism, is to stop Jeremy Corbyn entering Downing Street as Prime Minister. They want to prevent anything being done about the unfair accumulation of wealth and the squeezing of the needy.

It is also the aim of the three Tory backbenchers who resigned and joined the former Labour eight to form an alliance to fight Brexit. Although they were welcomed by the group of eight they have little in common with pre-Blair Labour. The Tory defectors are no friends of Labour. They are not even traditional pre-Thatcher Tories. They voted for austerity, the slashing of public services and the cruel cuts in benefits for the disabled. And they will continue to support the government on all matters unrelated to Brexit.

The Independent Group, (TIG), collectively and individually, plotted and schemed against Corbyn from the time he was first elected in 2015. They were among the 172 Labour backbenchers who supported a motion of No-confidence in Corbyn in June 2016, shortly after he had been elected party leader for the second time, with a larger share of the vote than he received in 2015. Margaret Hodge and Ann Coffey, one of the eight who resigned the Labour whip, moved the motion of No-confidence. In the May 2017 general election the eight MPs stood on a Labour manifesto, which they now disown. And all of them greatly increased their majority under a leader they consistently attacked.

They claim that their decision to leave the party was because Labour had changed. Almost as one, they said that they no longer recognise the party they first joined and for which they later became members

of parliament. It would appear from a reading of the statement, published shortly after their resignations, that their economic and social aims are closer to those of the now defunct Social Democrat Party (SDP), which were set out in the Limehouse Declaration. In some media quarters the resignations have been compared with those of the original 'Gang of Four' who left Labour in 1981. The split in Labour led to Thatcher's resounding victory in 1983.

Whatever one thought about them at the time, and history has judged them since, Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams were political giants with a wealth of government experience. In comparison, the Labour eight are political pygmies with no experience to speak of, other than a few, short-lived shadow minister posts.

In 1979 Labour had suffered a huge defeat to the Tories and the 'Gang of Four' believed that policy changes were needed if Labour were ever to regain power. Roll forward to the 2017 general election. A re-energised Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn won 40% of the votes cast, an increase of 9.6% over the 2015 election. This was the largest share of the vote since the Attlee victory in 1945, and it wiped out the Tory majority. So just when the Labour party, with a radical left programme, has a real prospect of electoral victory, the eight desert Labour knowing full well that their action could scuttle Labour's chances.

The eight have been praised for their courage and for standing up for what they believe, as if they were unique among MPs. If they had an ounce of confidence in their beliefs and values they would stand down and put themselves to the test in by-elections. But they have refused to do so knowing that they would almost certainly lose their seats. They want a People's Vote, hoping to reverse the 2016 referendum result, but they refuse to offer their constituents a people's vote by way of a by-election. So much for their courage

and confidence in their beliefs and values. It's clear they intend to stay and make life for Jeremy Corbyn as difficult as possible.

Their opposition to Brexit is the issue that unites them above others. But they voted for the referendum bill which triggered Article 50 and sent the Brexit ball in motion. In any language this is called hypocrisy. They are also as one in their belief that Labour is an institutionally antisemitic and racist party. And they have assiduously used the media to promote this and attack Corbyn.

Joan Ryan, former chair of Labour Friends of Israel who faced deselection before her resignation, accused Corbyn of presiding over antisemitism and racism in Labour. In Ryan's eyes, Corbyn, like Philip 2nd in 16th century Spain, controls all around him, an autocrat at the centre of an undemocratic, unresponsive, party. This is the image of Corbyn that Ryan and her group have cultivated and promoted.

As far as we are aware Jeremy Corbyn has never expressed an antisemitic or racist comment or opinion in his political life. Yet he is condemned by the Independent eight, by his opponents in the parliamentary Labour party, and by the right-wing media, as an antisemite and racist. But this is not the basic issue at stake here. Even a mild form of social democracy is anathema to these Blairite liberals and they will do anything to kill off the chances of such a programme being put into effect. It is also Corbyn's support for the rights of the Palestinians and his vocal condemnations of their treatment by Israel that concern his opponents. If he became Prime Minister it is likely that Britain's policy towards Israel would change. Therefore everything possible must be done to prevent this happening. We wonder if the hand of the state of Israel is behind this?

It seems that free speech is no longer tolerated within Labour, or at least only allowed when it fits the pro-Israel narrative of Labour Friends of Israel. Labour's Chris Williamson is the latest victim of this. He is suspended from the party because of comments he made at a meeting in Sheffield which were

deemed to be antisemitic. Nowhere in his reported speech did he attack Jews or criticise Israel. His 'crime' was simply to question how Labour had so far dealt with allegations of antisemitism.

Williamson is a vocal supporter of Jeremy Corbyn. He has stood firm against Corbyn's opponents, making coherent arguments to support his socialist beliefs. He is a force to be reckoned with, not buckling under pressure from a hostile media. Labour has lost touch with its working class base, embracing instead the destructive and self-indulgent identity politics which began with Blair. Williamson understands this and is working to regain the trust of the party's traditional supporters. He should be supported, not demonised alongside Corbyn. His Constituency Labour Party could begin by passing a vote of confidence in their member of parliament.

Williamson can expect no support from The Independent Group which has turned its back on Labour, believing themselves to be the true voice of the 'ordinary' voter. It is rumoured that they may form themselves into a political party in the near future. They are clearly hoping more 'centrist' Labour MPs will join them once Brexit has been decided one way or the other. They currently bask in media overkill with an estimated 10% of public support. Enough to create a dent in Labour's vote, but way short of becoming an influential force. Voters are crying out for radical change that delivers real benefits. They will not find it in the ultra-economic-liberalism of The Independent Group which brought the Labour party to its knees before Corbyn took over. In government, a left of centre Labour party, led by Jeremy Corbyn, will deliver that change.

* Ian Austin was the ninth Labour MP to resign from the party. He has not joined the Independent Group of eight.

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Contents

No. 295 - March 2019 ISSN 2050-6031
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Paper TIGers - Editorial	1
School Performance & Governance by Christopher Winch	8
Fear of Socialism by Gwydion M. Williams	11
Labour & Anti-Semitism	16
The Economy & Brexit Effect by Eamon Dyas	20
1919 (poem) by Wilson John Haire	23

Regular Features

Parliament and World War One by Dick Barry	3
Views from across the Channel by Froggy	6
Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier by Michael Murray	9
Letter from New Zealand. by Fergus O'Raghallaigh	14
Notes on the News by Gwydion M. Williams	17
Parliament Notes by Dick Barry	21
Orecchiette	24

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Published by the Ernest Bevin Society
Editorial Board
Dick Barry Christopher Winch
Jack Lane Gwydion Williams

LabourAffairs@virginmedia.com
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Distribution: Dave Fennell
Editorial Address
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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

Prime Minister's Review.

07 August 1918. Part Two

The PRIME MINISTER

(Mr. Lloyd George) After the 1st of May the Germans turned off to attack the French. There has never been since the 21st of March an offensive conducted by forces of the same magnitude. That was the biggest attack which has been made up to the present in numbers, in forces, and in concentration. After the 1st of May, they attacked the French Army, and here again they won a preliminary success on a considerable scale. What has happened since then? Not merely have they been fought to a standstill, but General Foch—Marshal Foch, if I may, with permission, for the first time call him by his new title, and I am sure that everybody here will join with me in sending a message of congratulation to him on a title which he has won by such skill, by such resource, and by such genius—by his counterstroke, which is one of the most brilliant in the annals of war, has driven the enemy back, and the enemy—who avowed that he was to capture Calais, perhaps Paris, by dates which vary according to the temperament of the prophets from May till August, August being the latest, who was to capture Paris, destroy the British Army, and overwhelm the French—is now retreating. The danger is not over, but he would be a sanguine man on the German General staff who would now predict that General Ludendorff's plan of campaign will succeed in its objectives, and enable Germany to obtain a military decision this year.

I do not wish to go beyond that, but I should like to say one or two words about the elements of success, because they have their bearing upon the future. The first was the rapidity with which all losses were made up. I need not refer to that. The second was the rapidity with which the American troops were brought over. These two are essential parts

of the German miscalculation. The first German calculation was that we could not make up our losses. Their second calculation was that the Americans could not be brought over. They looked at what had been done. In February the Americans brought over about 48,000 men. I think, in January, there were still fewer. The German General Staff, which seems fairly well informed, came to the conclusion that if what was said in the British Press about our having no men was true, if what they knew about troops being brought over in American ships was true, and if what a certain section of the Press said about our having no ships was also true, then the destruction of the Allied Armies was a certainty. That is one of the uses of a good Press. It is a mistake to contradict it, and that is my complaint about questions put here. It is very difficult not to contradict them. That was the German second miscalculation.

Soon after the blow of 21st March, the British Government made a special appeal to President Wilson to send men over, even if they were not formed in Divisions, so that they could be brigaded with British and French formations. President Wilson responded by return. It was prompt, it was decisive, but he stipulated that we should do our part of the carrying. It was true that we had no ships to spare, but we impressed upon the Shipping Controller the enormous importance of getting every American soldier over, and we pulled ships out of trades which were quite essential. Do not let anyone imagine that we had ships to spare. In order to carry over American troops, we have had to sustain a loss of 200,000 tons per month in essential cargoes, which means 2,500,000 tons per annum. But it has been justified by the result. I forget how many

thousands,—800,000 or 900,000, troops—have been brought over since the date of the battle, mostly in British ships. In the month of July 305,000 American troops were brought over, of which 188,000 were carried in British ships.

That was the second element in the restoration of the situation, because everyone knows how valiantly these troops have fought. It is not merely, as I have repeatedly said here, that they have fought with courage—everyone would have expected that of the American Army—but that they have fought with a trained skill which no one had a right to expect. The men are brave, but the officers, who, after all, are not trained officers in the ordinary sense of the term, have shown a skill, a knowledge, and a management of men under trying conditions which you could hardly expect from men who have not had years of training, and who have not had a good deal of experience of war. That is one of the most remarkable facts in the fighting of the American troops at the present time.

What is the other element that has made for success? I am not sure that I would not almost put this first. Unity of command is at last achieved, but after a long struggle. The word "Generalissimo" is a misleading word. There is no Generalissimo in the real full sense of the term. A Generalissimo is a man who has complete command over his army, who appoints generals and dismisses generals, and who controls not merely the fighting in the field, but the troops behind the lines. That is not the position of Marshal Foch. It is not the position to which he aspired. In the ordinary sense of the term that has not been attained, and I am still of the opinion that it is not desirable that it should be attained. No one has claimed it; no one has argued for it.

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This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

What has been established has been unity of strategic command, and that has answered every purpose, as the Germans know too well, and to their cost.

Our first experiment in this direction was last year with General Nivelle. General Nivelle was the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army. It is right when you have two great armies in the field that he who is in command of the greater army, other things being equal, should command the whole; but, apart from that, you were fighting on French territory. General Nivelle was an exceedingly able and experienced officer. He it was who in the main commanded in the great struggle round Verdun, which resulted in a disastrous defeat for the German Army. He had a great strategic plan for a combined attack upon the German Army in April of last year, and he was the first general in this War who devised the plan of an attack upon a wide front, which the Germans have since followed with such success. When that attack took place unity of command was established during the battle. It was to come to an end after the battle was over. That was the experiment. There has been a good deal of controversy about the French part in the battle, and into that I shall certainly not enter, but I have always thought that even there great results were accomplished. Even in that battle, taking the battle as a whole, 50,000 prisoners and from 400 to 500 guns were captured. Large tracts of territory, some of the first strategic importance, were captured. The British were to attack on the left of the Allied Army, and the main attack was to be on the heights of Vimy. The British part of the battle was the biggest success won by the British Army since 1914. Hon. Members will recollect that it ended in sweeping the German troops from the heights of Vimy, from which prolonged attacks by the French Army in 1915 had failed to dislodge them.

If hon. Members want to realise how important that is, they have only to look at the part which the Vimy Ridge has played in this great battle. Look at the map, study what has happened. The Vimy Ridge has been like a great bastion, which the

Germans could neither capture nor turn. Every effort they have made has ended in the most sanguinary repulse, and yet as long as it was in British hands it made it difficult and even impracticable for them to carry out their great operation of severing the British Army, and ultimately destroying it. Think what a difference it would have made had the summit of the Vimy Ridge been in the hands of the Germans on the 21st March. It would have made all the difference in the world.

That was the first experiment in unity of command, and it achieved great results especially for the British Army. Then came the various efforts at Versailles and afterwards. Unfortunately, the controversies which raged round the decision to bring about such unity of command in February of this year were so prolonged that we had no time to reap the benefit of it before the great blow fell—controversies, I am sorry to say, not merely in the House of Commons, but in the Army itself. But the Germans succeeded by their blow in convincing the most obdurate as to the essential need for unity of command, and from the moment that Marshal Foch assumed the strategic command the fortunes of the Allied Armies were restored. There have since been, perhaps, mishaps, like the Chateau-Thierry disaster, but the masterly handling of the reserves—French, Italian, American, as well as British—gradually baffled the German efforts, and ended in this disastrous retreat from the Marne; which has produced such a wave of confidence and enthusiasm in the Allied countries and such depression, throughout the enemy lands.

It is too early to predict that the German effort is exhausted, and it would be a mistake for us to imagine that. It is no use fostering a false optimism. The Germans have still powerful forces in reserve, though not so many as they had. But although it is too early to say that their efforts are over, it is not too early to say that the chances of the 21st March will not come to them again. Those conditions cannot now be reproduced for the German General Staff. The Americans have already a powerful Army—a tried Army, and a

victorious Army in France, equal to the best troops in the field, growing every day and there will be no break in the increase of that Army until America will have an Army not far, if at all, short of the German Army itself. On the other hand, Germany can never maintain the same number of divisions. They have already been reduced since the 21st March. They are now begging for Austrian support—rather a humiliation for the great German Army, when one knows what is their opinion of the Austrian Army! Begging for the support of the Austrian Army—the great army of Germany, which was to destroy the British Army by May!

The German Allies are rather disconsolate over the Piavé failure. Some of them are becoming a burden to Germany rather than a support. They are now beginning to be disillusioned as to German invincibility. Germany promised great things to her Allies this year. We can see the effect. Suddenly there was a withdrawal of all peace tentacles. When you probed, you found they were not there. Why? What had happened? What of the great promise?—"Do not you worry about peace; we can dictate it in a few months. We mean to have a great offensive in the West, which will destroy the Allied Armies." The peace talk suddenly ceased! You could not hear the whispers. The tinkles of the telephone bell stopped. The great promise has failed! Economically, the position of the Central Powers and of their Allies is one of despair. Their harvests are not too good, and they are short of many essentials. They know that they have failed. Russia has been a complete disappointment to them. She has become a tangle to their feet.

I should like to say one word about Russia. It has broken into a number of confused and ill-defined entities. That makes the path of diplomacy exceedingly difficult in relation to that vast country. There is no *de jure* government there. They attempted to set one up by election. No sooner had the election taken place than the Constituent Assembly was dispersed by force. The idea that we are behaving hostilely towards free democratic governments has nothing

in common with the facts of the case. There is no Government in Russia now, whatever its professions, which is not a Government by force. Our only policy was to deal, where we had to have relations, with *de facto* Governments, and that is not so easy. It is impossible to decide or to ascertain who, from day to day, is governing even a single village in the vast territory of Russia. We have not the slightest desire to interfere with the Russian people, and we certainly have no intention of imposing upon them any particular form of government. That is a matter entirely for themselves. But when we see Germany imposing her authority on large tracts, and exploiting them, or attempting to exploit them, to the detriment of the Allies, and against the will of the people themselves, we feel, at any rate, that the Russian people ought to be free to decide for themselves. They more and more resent the usurpation of Germany, and recent events, violent as they are, demonstrate that. They regard the Germans as marauders. Under these conditions the Russian people are more and more seeking Allied assistance, and we should not hesitate to render every help in our power to enable them to emancipate themselves from this cruel oppression wherever we are within reach.

I must also refer to the Czecho-Slovak movement in Russia, a very remarkable movement. The only desire of the Czechoslovaks was to leave Russia, and to go to the West to fight for the Allies. They stipulated that under no condition would they take any part in Russian politics on one side or the other. All they wanted was to get away. They asked us for ships. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and myself, at the Supreme War Council, came to an arrangement to do our best to get the ships to take them away, and when we returned—this is some time ago—we made arrangements to secure ships to bring them away. I want to say this in order to make it quite clear that we are not exploiting the Czecho-Slovak business, in order to interfere with Russian internal affairs. We were prepared to get the ships. We took the ships away from very important

and essential work elsewhere, in order to send them to Vladivostock for that purpose. What happened? Acting undoubtedly under German duress—something like dictation—the Bolshevik Government refused to allow them to get through to Archangel and Vladivostock.

If the Czecho-Slovaks have now become the centre of activities which are hostile to the Bolshevik Government in Russia, the Bolshevik Government have themselves and no one else to blame. The Czecho-Slovaks were anxious to get away. What did they do? First of all, the Bolsheviks tried to disarm them. The Czecho-Slovaks would have been lunatics had they handed over their arms. What has happened since has proved their wisdom in refusing to comply with that demand. The result has been they have only made for themselves that great movement in Russia which centres round the Czecho-Slovaks. You cannot blame the Czecho-Slovaks for getting assistance wherever they could in order to save themselves. Who is attacking them? We are told that Siberia is Bolshevik. If it is, why do not the Siberians support that Government? They could not get a sufficient number of men amounting even to a decent sized Army, and they have had to employ German and Austrian prisoners in order to attack the Czecho-Slovak forces, and prevent them getting through to Vladivostok. It is idle to call that a “free democratic Government,” so far as Siberia is concerned. I wanted to make that perfectly clear, because there has been some criticism of the decision which the President of the United States has taken, in conjunction with the Japanese, to send a force to Vladivostock, in order to rescue the Czecho-Slovaks from the plight in which they were put by the organisation of German and Austrian prisoners of war as a force to intercept them and capture them.

What about peace? The longest war must end in peace. There are people in every country who regard any effort to make peace as in itself dishonourable and a treason to their country. That attitude must be steadfastly discouraged. But is this the moment—I put this to all those who

only want an honourable peace—is this the moment when such a peace could be made? Why did we go to war? Because that instinct which is a compound of experience and conscience taught the British people that something which is fundamental to human happiness and human progress was put in jeopardy by the great military power of Germany. That will remain in jeopardy as long as the caste that made the War is in supreme command. Has there been any change in that respect?

Let us take three recent events. I mention these because they are real tests. The first is the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, when some of the statesmen of Germany went in, I think, with good intentions. I believe they were prepared to negotiate a peace which, according to their lights, would be on fair lines. What happened? As soon as there was any indication that there was to be anything except a most humiliating and drastic peace imposed upon Russia, the German High Command swept on one side Count Hertling, Von Kuehlmann's and Count Czernin, and imposed their own terms. What is the next test? The humiliating and enslaving peace imposed upon Rumania. The third is what happened after Baron von Kuehlmann's speech in the Reichstag. He said things which I should have thought would have been perfectly obvious to anyone who had witnessed the course of the War from the point of view of the Germans. In a few days he was swept away. What did that mean? The people who made the War, for the purpose for which they made it, are still there prosecuting the same sinister purpose. You cannot have peace as long as they are predominant in the councils of our chief enemy.

I believe in a League of Nations, but whether the League of Nations is going to be a success or not will depend upon the conditions under which it is set up. Some of us have been members of representative assemblies for a generation. I hope I shall say nothing which will offend the susceptibilities of my colleagues. But everyone knows that when there

Continued On Page 6

Froggy

News From Across The Channel

Correction: John Lloyd's article about the *Gilets Jaunes* discussed in last month Froggy appeared in the *Irish Independent* not the *Irish Times* as stated mistakenly.

European elections

At the 2014 European elections Marine Le Pen got the most votes. Macron is keen to avoid a repeat of this result, and he is busy whipping up a degree of interest in the elections, enough to get at least some people to turn out. Macron invited her to the Elysée Palace (as well as Mélenchon), ostensibly to work out solutions to the *Gilets Jaunes* situation. Marine Le Pen is invited again on radio and television to give her opinion on this that and the other.

The elections will take place Sunday 26 May. Parties present lists of 79 candidates for the 79 seats France has in the European Parliament, 5 more than in 2014 because France has been given 5 of Britain's seats. There are no constituencies for this election: there are whole France party lists, and the vote is by Proportional Representation.

The lists must contain as many women as men, the names alternating, so that as many women as men are elected, since those at the top of the list will sit in Parliament. The laborious work of reconstituting parties is taking place now after the last presidential election debacle. The Socialists do not have a leader for their list. They are in disarray, their historical seat in Paris has been sold; one of their leading lights, Benoit Hamon, has left and created a rival groupuscule.

The Republicans (Sarkozy's and Fillon's outfit) is also trying to find someone to head their list. The ex FN is in deep trouble financially and struggling to make up a list. They have lost a third of their premises throughout France, and a large proportion of members. Their list is headed by an unknown, Jordan Bardella.

Melenchon's party (FI, la France Insoumise) has got a list, click on <https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/actualites/elections-europeennes/les-candidat.e.s-aux-elections-europeennes/> to see a list as it should

be, one woman, one man and where the spelling is right on, that is, feminine and masculine forms in the same word—not '*candidats*' and '*candidates*', but '*candidat.e.s*'. This makes reading and writing awkward and difficult, but principles come first.

The CP has a new leader, Ian Brossat, at the moment deputy to the Mayor of Paris; they are also financially straitened; they are keeping their historical seat in central Paris thanks to letting out most of it. They are wondering whether to ally with others, in order not to be crippled by costs. Macron's party is still standing, but they are not announcing their head of list until the last minute.

The media are pretending this is interesting, citing polls with enthusiasm: Marine Le Pen is second to Macron in voting intentions! *Le Monde* joins in with a headline to make you believe the European Parliament actually does something relevant: "European Parliament condemns excessive use of force against demonstrators in France". The article contradicts the headline; the EU Parliament, after studying police behaviour during the *Gilets Jaunes* demonstrations, 'recommended that police use force proportionally'.

The *Gilets Jaunes* movement is continuing: they have not missed a Saturday yet since the 17th November. In their effort to stop them, the government is redoubling the deployment of the anti-Semitism smear against them. All interviews with them bring out comments about the cost of living, the difficulty in making ends meet, the lack of public services where they live; opposition to Macron, and TV stations, and a desire for tax justice. That is as far

Continued From Page 5

is any great decision here, what really determines it is not so much what is said in the course of the Debate as the fact that there is some power behind which takes a certain view, and has power to enforce that view. It is the electorate here. In the League of Nations let us take care it is not the sword. The same thing might conceivably happen in your League of Nations, unless you start it under favourable conditions. You might enter it, the Germans saying, not in words, but in their actions, "We invaded your lands. We devastated them. We trampled you under foot. You failed to drive us back. You made no impression upon our Armies. They were absolutely intact when peace was declared. Had it not been for our economic difficulties, you would never have won. We will take good care next time to prepare, and not to be short of rubber, corn, cotton and other essentials." Every time you came to a decision the Prussian sword would clank on the council table. What is the good of entering into a league on such conditions? We all want peace, but it must be a peace which is just and which is durable. We do not want to put this generation again through the horrors of this War. Peace must be durable, it must be just, but it must be more. There must be a power behind that justice, a power which can enforce its decrees. All who enter that Conference must know that, and when we have demonstrated even to the enemy that such a power does exist on earth, peace will then come—but no sooner.



as they will go in general politics. They are a million miles from anti-Semitism; it is not something that is part of their world.

That doesn't stop the government from trying to smear them with that particular insult, using anti-Semitic incidents that occurred 'since the start of the GJ movement' such as graffiti on letter boxes, and the verbal attack on a prominent Jewish philosopher near his house 'on the fringes of a GJ demonstration' by people wearing yellow vests. The *Times* of London in its report on this incident (21.2.19) said that he was called 'a dirty Jew'. The philosopher himself has stated he did not hear that particular insult.

This tactic could cause resentment, because it is totally unfair. The GJ movement is striking on the contrary by its absence of meanness: the targets of their anger are those above, not those below like people on benefit or immigrants. It is also dangerous because it mixes together false accusations and true accusations. False accusations used as weapons to discredit a whole movement will weaken the case against real acts of anti-Semitism.

Some GJ want to take part in the European elections. The GJ Ingrid Levavasseur headed a list for the European elections, called 'Rally of Citizen Initiative' (RIC); the name comes from the GJ demand for a Referendum of Citizen Initiative (RIC). She is a 31 year old care assistant, divorced with two children, from a rural background, earning 1250 euros a month. She has a high media profile. She left the list saying it had been infiltrated and no longer has the same objectives.

Some GJ are against the idea of standing for the European elections; they point out that such a list would take votes away from FI and the ex FN, making life easy for Macron's party. Other campaigners for the RIC list have left and other GJ have created other movements with corresponding lists.

The other consideration is finance for the campaign, leaflets, posters etc. It is estimated that a national campaign costs 700,000 euros. The RIC intended to rely on gifts, since crowd funding, which they had envisaged, is illegal. They would

have to create their own site for collecting gifts, apparently a costly enterprise.

The Agricultural Show

This is the time of year for the *Salon de l'Agriculture*. The concentration of agriculture into larger and larger farms is continuing rapidly. Smaller farmers are being squeezed out, their costs compared to their output do not allow them to carry on. The 2018 national debate on Agriculture and Food brought this out clearly, since one of the aims was to slow down this process by improving small farmers' income. The debate came to nothing in terms of legislation. All this has taken the shine from the Salon.

Factory closures

No wonder parties have lost influence: they, and the government, are helpless when it comes to the vital question of preserving employment in industry. There has been a 'blizzard' a 'cascade' of factory closures this year already, according to *Le Monde*. The minister of Industry and Finance is each time involved in trying, unsuccessfully, to keep sites open.

Most new employment takes place on short term contracts. When unemployment is high and jobs not assured in the long term, owning a house or flat becomes a source of stability. But it is also a source of stress because it won't be near the place of work, and commuting is stressful. On top of that, concentration of schools, hospitals and public administration into bigger units depletes small towns and causes yet more necessity for travel. This is without mentioning the disappearance of small shops, replaced by out of town hypermarkets.

As well as concentration, there is digitalisation of services: everything is done on line. This creates deserts. People becomes isolated. It is this situation that caused the Gilets Jaunes movement. A large part of its success came about because it gave an occasion for socialising. But no wonder they can't formulate a programme! A better distribution of the wealth created by economic concentration, as demanded by the

GJ, would be a start. No one has a programme that would deal with the problems thrown up by the new social and economic organisation of society.

Marianne

The magazine *Marianne* has editorials describing the Gilets Jaunes as 'full of hate' and 'disgustingly vulgar'. But it hosts a variety of opinions. An interesting journalist, Hadrien Mathoux, wrote of the necessity of not using anti-semitism as a means to silence opposition. He points out that when the minister for European Affairs for example associates anti-europeans with Nazis and their treatment of Jews, she is forcing all Jews, by implication, to be on the side of the European Union.

In another article Mathoux explains that radio and television have now excluded from the airwaves points of view critical of the EU, of the neo-liberal economic model, of immigration and of the 'progressist' social questions (identity politics). The views of three quarters of the population are therefore not expressed. The GJ protested before the headquarters of TV and Radio stations, and the media themselves say that 75% of the population do not trust them, without saying why of course.

The GJ were also protesting against the way their movement is portrayed. An example is the tweet by one of the most famous radio journalist, JM Apathie, claiming one the best known GJ, Eric Drouet, 'had voted Marine Le Pen in both rounds of the presidential election. This statement was taken up by the rest of the media and some politicians, before Drouet denied it emphatically. Statements by him in other contexts show that he would not consider such a vote.

Mathoux then makes a list of internet sites with a large following that provide left oriented news programmes, and a list of right wing ones. His opinion is that all this is a source of useful information and debate, and not only a reinforcement of prejudice, as is often said. Froggy will report back on these sites next month.

Letter to Rebecca Long-Bailey MP and Angela Rayner MP

Dear Rebecca and Angela,

I am a Labour Party member and a contributor to the monthly journal 'Labour Affairs'.

The editor, Dick Barry is copied in to this mail.

I'm currently writing a series of articles for 'Labour Affairs' on the subject of Labour's education policies. The subject, as you both know, is very complex and each aspect of education has implications for the other aspects. This is why several articles are needed to do justice to the topic. Education is also profoundly connected to economic and business policy, which is why I am writing to you both.

The articles are framed as an open letter so as to encourage debate about education policy on the left unencumbered by taboos and sacred cows. Otherwise we shall not make progress with these issues. The first article will be published in our March edition. Dick will send you complimentary copies of the magazine while the series lasts.

I hope that you will find the letter and its sequels thought provoking and a stimulus to further thinking by the party, whether you agree with all the contents or not.

Fraternally,

Chris Winch

(This should have appeared last month, along with the first part of the main letter. It was accidentally omitted.)

School Performance, Accountability and Governance.

Christopher Winch

Second Part of Open Letter to Angela Rayner and Rebecca Long-Bailey.

The 1944 Education Act ushered in a 'national system of education, locally administered'. But this phrase concealed the fact that Local Authorities (LAs) had enormous discretionary powers over education, including funding through the Block Grant, control of the curriculum, the appointment of teachers, pedagogical methods and allocation of pupils to schools. While the intention was admirable, the powers vested in Local Authorities were more than they could cope with. There were unacceptable variations in funding due to the discretion that LAs had over how the grant was spent. Rarely, if ever were the curricular powers of the LAs exercised because LAs were incapable of doing so. Furthermore, unacceptable interventions in teaching methods, something LAs are not capable to make judgements about, were often made. The 1944 Act got the balance between national and local authority over education wrong, but it is obvious that localities should have a larger degree of control over their schools and colleges than they do at present. Labour has a chance to get this right.

Conservative governments since the time of Thatcher sought to deprive LAs of their powers, culminating in a move to practically remove all control from them in the aborted 2016 White Paper inappropriately called 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'. The really serious stripping of control from LAs started with the Academy programme instituted by Labour in the early noughties and intensified into a drive to remove and privatise education under Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan. Academies are publicly funded but privately controlled schools, usually grouped into Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). These are controlled by shadowy bodies of trustees nominally accountable to Regional School Commissioners appointed by the government. Weak accountability arrangements mean that the scope for financial abuse is considerable and there have been numerous scandals. The Public Accounts Committee's report into the antics of the Durand Academy and Bright Tribe MATs lifts the rug on the creepy crawly practices of many of these organisations.

MATs are not obliged to report on the finances of individual schools, nor do they have to provide a governing body for each school. They are charitable bodies, set up by members who appoint trustees who run the schools through governing bodies (if they wish to) and headteachers. Elections don't come into it. Members are like shareholders of a private company except that they are not supposed to make a profit. However, lax rules regarding the contracting out of services has the potential to lead to widespread abuse. Excessive salaries and absurd payoffs are not unusual. MATs are not confined to particular geographical areas but can be spread across the country and thus cannot replicate the geographical coherence of LAs. The DfE has the power to assign a school to a MAT of its own choosing if that school is deemed inadequate and parents and the local authority have no say in the matter. As well as having the potential for abuse, there is no evidence that, taken as a whole, MATs do any better than LA schools and many do worse. Thus 7,500 schools are now academies, 72% of secondaries and 27% of primaries, consuming £20 billion of public funding every year. They control their curricula, pedagogic methods, appointment and dismissal of staff and have autonomy over their finances. They are less competent than local authorities and have even more control over the running of their schools than LAs did under the 1944 Act and subsequent amendments.

A National Education Service should ensure that there is equitable funding for schools, based on need. Schools should have the explicit aim of preparing children to take part in their cultural heritage, become citizens and eventually make an economic contribution to their society. There should be a national curriculum which all schools should follow which is designed to fulfil these aims. While literacy and numeracy are the foundation of future success, they cannot be allowed to become obsessions which crowd out the practical, sporting and aesthetic elements of the curriculum. Within limits

teachers should be able to choose their own teaching methods based on available evidence for what is likely to be effective. These methods should not be based on fads imposed by misguided enthusiasts. Teaching methods should only be prescribed by the government when it is evident that schools are unable to teach parts of the curriculum and the government should avoid this happening by making sure that competent teachers are appointed, that they stay in teaching and become experts and leaders in their own right. This means having a coherent teacher education policy, which the current government palpably does not have.

The Academy policy is incompatible with these aims and Labour should take steps to place schools under the direction of local authorities, whose responsibility it should be to ensure that sufficient resources are provided to fulfil educational aims, to manage the teaching force in their jurisdiction and to allocate children to appropriate schools and colleges. Thus Academies and MATS should have their charitable status terminated and their members relieved of their rights. They should return to the democratic control of local authorities under a better balance between the national and the local run by governing bodies which represent employees, the LA, parents and the broader community including trade unions. The national inspectorate Ofsted should have its remit changed to ensure that all schools observe minimum standards of progress in learning, spend public money responsibly in pursuit of educational aims, follow the national curriculum and ensure that children are properly taught. They should not be making fine-grained judgements about what teaching methods a school should employ.

It is understandable that the public and parents should be concerned about the performance of their local schools. However, no method has yet been devised that can give meaningful comparisons between schools that are stable for more than a year, once pupil characteristics have been taken into account. Trying to devise methods that reliably do this has proved to be a wild goose

chase over the last 40 years and should now be abandoned. It would be advisable to re-introduce an institution created by the Wilson government of 1974-6 called the Assessment of Performance Unit, which carried out light sampling of the performance within the system and produced digests of the standards of work that could be expected from pupils. These could, in their turn, be used as materials for the professional development of teachers. Its main aims were to “promote the development of methods of assessing and monitoring the achievement of children at school, and to seek to identify the incidents of underachievement” The APU was killed off when the accountability approach introduced in the Education Reform Act of 1988 came in. However, since that approach has had mixed results the time is right to revisit a smaller scale and less intrusive way of monitoring the performance of the education system as a whole.

One of the main problems with English education is the close association of educational progress with social class. This is not the whole story as there is plenty of evidence that the children of recent migrant communities often manage to do very well within the system as it exists. However, the evidence that a good social class mix in schools is beneficial to overall progress is very strong. There is also evidence from the United States that careful political work resulting in school zoning decisions that ensure such a mix in school intakes can boost performance overall and not lead to middle class resentment. The preliminary work here must come from local Labour politicians, but the national party has an important role to play in promoting such initiatives.

Then there is the vexed question about qualifications and what is appropriate in a situation where all young people have to continue in education until the age of 18. You probably won't recall that David Miliband and others advocated a broader exit qualification at 18+ than the current A levels as long ago as 1991, but this and the subsequent

Tomlinson recommendations were firmly squashed by both Labour and Tory governments afraid to disturb the A level ‘gold standard’. As you are probably aware, Robert Halfon (Tory Chair of the Commons Select Committee on Education) launched a proposal on Monday the 11th February to reform 18+ qualifications, proposing a broad exit qualification that preserves breadth of study and integrates aesthetic and vocational subjects. This is a bold post-Brexit move, partly designed to address shortages of skilled labour that are likely arise when we leave the EU as well as to provide a really good offer for young people who do not wish to go to university. I didn't see either of you at this event nor did the Labour Party appear to make any impression in the ensuing discussion. This is not surprising when there doesn't seem to be much evidence of thinking about these issues in the highest policymaking circles of the party. Do we really want to allow the Tories to be doing the constructive thinking that needs to be done, particularly on a topic of such interest to working people and their families? I was worried by the lack of engagement by you and the rest of the party policy elite.

One final point about a national education service. The existence of independent schools will always undermine the aim of securing a first class national system of education. In any case the complete abolition (as opposed to the regulation) of private schools is probably too intrusive a step against the right of parents to educate their children according to their wishes. There is, however, no need to subsidise the practice of buying advantages in life for some children at the expense of the prospects of the rest. Labour should make this clear and remove charitable status for independent schools except for some very special cases where it can be shown that buying privilege is not even a secondary aim of the schooling provided. It is offensive that an organisation can enjoy the privileges of a charity and, at the same time, be a way of entrenching the power of an already privileged group within the society.

Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier

by Michael Murray

Dictionary definition of “foot soldier”: “...a dedicated low level follower...”

Michael Murray: murraymicha@gmail.com; **Facebook:** **Michael Murray London**

It seems ironic that Chris Williamson has been witch-hunted into suspension from the Labour Party for his efforts to have a film called “*WitchHunt*” more widely known and discussed in the Party. I’m sure that, after this, there will be some who see the forthcoming production in East London’s Yard Theatre of Arthur Miller’s classic play, “*The Crucible*,” as more than coincidental. Miller’s play is about another witch-hunt, ostensibly set back in a Puritan-dominated English colony in the Americas, but as everyone now knows, hitting at, the then, infamously vicious contemporary McCarthyite Cold War witch-hunts in the US. Does The Yard Theatre see a contemporary British relevance? I’m looking forward to finding out.

A very serious question arising from all this: is it anti-Semitic to deny the accusations that the British Labour Party is “institutionally” anti-Semitic? Should a Corbyn foot soldier, like myself - a denier of widespread institutional Labour anti-semitism - be worried? It certainly has felt like that over the last three years - coincidentally, the years in which Corbyn has been party leader. Or, is it anti-Semitic, or conspiratorial thinking, even to make that connection? Things have come to that.

The film *WitchHunt* is due for online release after a nationwide tour, and a trip over to Derry, before its 17th March release. It has been widely denounced by those who haven’t yet seen it and lauded by those who have, including two of Britain’s best known Jewish film makers, Mike Leigh (recent credits: *Peterloo*, *Mr Turner*) and Peter Kominsky (*Wolf Hall*, *The Promise*).

I was privileged to see it at its first showing and can say without reservation it has to be seen for the eye-opener it is on the whole issue of Labour and anti-Semitism. But it has more than that going for it. It is a well-executed insight into the social history of migration, and resultant enriching intellectual and cultural cross-fertilisation. As the story of ordinary individuals impacting on, and impacted by, political change it has great human depth. A lot happens in this 62 minute film. As its own press release says: “*It combines extensive archive material with authoritative new interviews, featuring experts in media, Jewish, black and labour history, racism and the politics of the Middle East. The film raises urgent questions about racism, democracy and the responsibilities of the media.*”

Leigh called the film “an impeccably-executed film.” Kominsky: “*It tells a story we just aren’t hearing at the moment.*” Ken Loach refers to the centrality of the Jackie Walker disciplinary case within the narrative and urges people to “*see the film and make up your own mind.*”

Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, Oxford University, has weighed in also. “*Anyone who speaks or writes in the public domain about anti-semitism and the current state of the Labour Party has a duty to see this film and address the issues it raises.*”

International Law Professor Gordon, of Queen Mary University, who was due to speak in an after-showing discussion, described the banning of the Westminster showing of the film as “*outrageous.*”

(2) *Lies, damn lies and Statistics*

In its journal, *The Jewish Voice for Labour*, which, by the way sponsored the cancelled film showing, released these statistics on the prevalence of anti-semitism in the Labour Party, based on the Party’s own data for the last 10 months.

It noted:

The Labour Party has a membership of over 500,000.

Of this:

- 1,106 referrals of anti-Semitism allegations
- 433 had nothing to do with the party

Of the remaining 673, 220 were dismissed for lack of evidence.

This left 453

96 of these resulted in Suspensions

There were 12 expulsions

The JVL article surmises: “*This isn’t a wave of anti-Semitism. It’s not even a ripple. In nautical terms it’s almost a dead flat calm.*” But the smears and accusations continue, including from within the party, and from amongst its recent defectors.

“*If the facts are at such odds with the accounts of leading politicians and mainstream media, there can be only one explanation - these accounts are driven by ulterior political agendas.*”

Other forms of racism, for which manifestations in the UK are 70 times more prevalent than those for antisemitism, barely get a mention.”

The persistent attacks on Labour for its stance on anti-semitism are debilitating as well as being disproportionate, as we’ve just seen. Elsewhere, the JVL suggests that all the available research puts anti-Semitism across Britain as lying in a range of 2 to 5%. In any likely future General Election the anti-Semitic accusations thrown at the Labour Party, its Leader - and his most loyal supporters, like Chris Williamson - could seriously dent its chances in a, likely, close-run election. And, in the meantime, they serve a very useful purpose of keeping Corbyn and his supporters on the back foot. That’s what all this threatens, and the purpose it serves. And it’s working.

A recent motion to affiliate our Labour Party Branch to JVL failed. So, I exercised my individual right to apply for “Supporter” status membership - not being Jewish.

Aaaah! That last statement brought back a memorable line in Wolfe Mankowicz’s lovely play “*The Irish-Hebrew Lesson*,” set in Tan-War 1920s Cork City.

IRA MAN: Our schoolmaster said we Irish were one of the lost tribes of Israel.

JEWISH PEDDLER: (LONG PAUSE) They couldn’t have got that lost....

Fear of Socialism

The Real Issue for the 'Vainglorious Seven'

by Gwydion M. Williams

The Labour Party from its 1900 creation saw public ownership and trade union power as fine ideas.

Tony Blair thought otherwise. Removed Clause Four, the aspiration for '*common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange*'.

Yet he gave victory, and had some left-wing policies. He raised taxes, got some new employment rights and a National Minimum Wage. He spent more on the NHS.

Follies like the Iraq War are part of Labour tradition. Most of the party supported World War One. The 1945 Labour government helped suppress popular Communist movements in Greece and Malaya. Oversaw the Amethyst Incident, when the Chinese Communists won an artillery duel with several medium-sized Royal Navy ships. Would not allow foreign warships on a river in the middle of China, which the Chinese 'nationalists' were too timid to oppose. Which the British Empire under Labour was hanging onto.

The Iraq War was a blatant blunder. But many in Labour like the notion of meddling in lands once dominated by European Imperialism. More might still happen.

Labour started the drive to give Britain independent nuclear weapons. Keeping them is still Labour Party policy, despite Corbyn's personal objections.

A Labour government under Corbyn might not be much different from Labour governments before the 1980s. But it would certainly throw out Thatcherism and the New Labour capitulation to its values. And that is the main issue.

Almost as important is ordinary Labour members asserting their own views. Not meekly accepting what MPs see as the limits to the possible.

Fabian Socialism, important in creating the Labour Party, was nice upper-middle-class people telling 'the masses' how to live their lives. With the best of intentions, of course, and actually doing a lot of good. But there was always a tension between this and Trade Unionism, which was about power for ordinary people.

Power for ordinary people includes a duty to respect the group decision, based on voting majorities. This awkward detail was foolishly attacked by 1960s radicals. Then much more cleverly attacked by the New Right, who said that

the rights of The Individual must come first.

Asserting the rights of The Individual on social matters was a broad liberation, though with some negatives.

Asserting the rights of The Individual on economic matters gave the richest and most aggressive individuals a wholly unfair share of the social wealth.

If anyone can undermine agreed majority policy, the main gainers will be the rich. People are slow to recognise this. But it is the visible outcome of nearly four decades of upholding an asocial vision of The Individual.

Law, the ultimate Closed Shop for lawyers, is a comfortable niche for Independent Professionals. Chuka Umunna began as a lawyer, as did Tony Blair and his wife. Likewise Barak Obama and both Clintons in the USA. This encourages fantasies about units of The Individual making a perfect world.

English law retains 18th century slowness, inefficiency, unfairness, and expense. Back then, the local lawyer, school teacher and doctor were social equals, with the local clergyman superior. Teaching and health are modernised and industrialised: the church is marginalised. Lawyers get enormous salaries if they are at all successful.

Blair could have stayed within Labour Right traditions. But he swallowed the Thatcherite notion that common ownership was undesirable. That a profit motive was needed to avoid waste and inefficiency. Having promised to remove Thatcher's 'internal market' for the NHS, in his second term he chose instead to extend it.

Labour lost popularity, despite Tory weakness under a series of balding and unpleasant leaders. Lost to Mr Cameron, with his excellent impersonation of a nice and very competent fellow.

Ed Miliband wanted something like Labour as it had been, but lacked the guts to push this. Lost the 2015 election. So members who had stuck with Labour all through the Blair years elected Corbyn, who clearly meant what he said.

The Establishment, including most Labour MPs, were horrified at democracy operating against their wishes. Thought Corbyn must be horribly unpopular with the voters. But Labour in 2017 got 12.87 million votes. Much the best result since Blair in 1997, when it was not yet clear he wanted nothing to do with socialism.

Reversing Thatcherism

The Vainglorious Seven, briefly the Hateful Eight, made a show of being Real Labour fleeing Corbynite extremism. But were then joined by Tory ladies, who joked they must be the Three Amigos.

Amigos or not, a party that pro-Austerity Tories can happily join is blatantly not Real Labour. *Nicely Mindless Moderates?* Or if Chuka Umunna emerges as leader, *Uncle Tom's Centrists?* He must know that only Labour is ever serious about attacking racism. That Centrists and the Centre-Right will do as little as possible. They excluded non-elite women and non-whites, until they came under left-wing pressure.

The modern elite vaguely wish for their women to get an equal slice of the privileges of the privileged. Are callously indifferent to the plight of ordinary needy women with no hope of joining that elite.

For the modern elite, those without hope of joining the elite barely count as human. They should get no more than is needful to avoid embarrassment for their betters. If a lot of them die – as they do under the infamous Tory system of 'Universal Care' – this is something the elite are comfortable with.

The media have ignored the issue, with the odd exception of a lead article in London's *Evening Standard*. A paper owned by an exiled Russian oligarch with a legal but unearned chunk of the wealth of the Russian people:

"Corbyn's political project is first to reverse Thatcherism and then to erect a new economic model in its place: to have a counter-revolution in his first term in office and a revolution in his second.

"To do that, he will need to replace at least some sitting Labour MPs and be able to hold the threat of replacement over the rest in order to pass his reforms."¹

But could Corbyn do more than reverse Thatcherism, which is growing ever less popular? That remains open. Yet many MPs nurtured by New Labour fear a world where the dogmas of the 1980s are rejected.

The Vainglorious Seven are embodied legally as *Gemini A Ltd*, a private company started by one of them. This apparently let them lawfully hide the

¹ <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/stephen-bush-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go-labour-mps-wrestle-with-a-clash-of-values-a4071666.html>

names of their major financial backers. I've no doubt it includes some Jews: but I suspect that the non-Jewish names would be vastly more interesting.

They defend the excessive slice of wealth that a rich 'Overclass' have gained since the 1980s. Chris Leslie, a former shadow chancellor, said that Labour were '*hostile to business large and small,*' and '*make impossible promises that everyone knows, in their hearts, couldn't be kept without putting the economy at risk. And they constantly pit one part of society against another*'.

Corbyn is one of many who want to reverse the shameful flow of wealth to a more-than-millionaire elite. This is worst in the USA, where 90% of the society have the same slice of wealth and income they had in the 1970s. Not as bad in Continental Europe. And middling in Britain.

Thatcher's Imaginary Capitalism

Capitalism as described by Adam Smith did not exist when he wrote. It still does not exist. Right-wing pundit Ayn Rand even wrote *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, though she failed to explain why it could be so good for us without really existing. Transubstantiation seems quite straightforward by comparison, and does not claim to be other than supernatural.

Despite a highly successful Mixed Economy following Roosevelt's semi-socialist *New Deal*, a wave of protestors wrote hymns to Imaginary Capitalism, claiming it the source of all things good and nothing bad. They devised fancy maths, but it is unconnected to how real economies work. Maths is a set of languages that allow exact and testable descriptions of weird events, particularly for subatomic particles and for the universe as a whole. But you can write gibberish in those same languages, like any other.

To speak of '*the snowy vistas of the mountains of East Anglia*' is valid English, but unreal. Or you could imagine men in bowler hats, black leather jackets and tartan kilts doing a clog-dance at the centre of Lords Cricket Ground, while the London Symphony Orchestra plays *Pop Goes the Weasel*. But this won't actually occur.

Britain's Industrial Revolution was overseen by a ruling class based on inherited ownership of land worked by tenant farmers. They decided to do nothing about a vast growth of industry outside of conventional controls in Birmingham and North Britain. Guilds for particular trades had raised Britain to a high level of wealth, while protecting small property. But the ruling class,

which did not need them, let them be destroyed in many small local struggles. Likewise small farmers, shopkeepers and comfortable local businesses.

The ruling class also stopped protecting the wages of workers left powerless by gigantic new industries that could easily replace a disobedient workforce. But the results were so bad that a Tory government allowed Trade Unions from 1824. Imposed some very basic Factory Acts in the 1840s.

Britain in its heyday astonished the world, but did this with annual growth of less than 2%. In the run-up to the 1914-18 War, the British Empire was being overtaken by both the USA and United Germany. That war left the British Empire much weakened. Outside of the Soviet Union, the world struggled to get 'back to normal'. And it failed.

The world before 1914 was the nearest we ever got to Imaginary Capitalism. Between the wars, several countries turned away from it and opted for Corporatism – treat the society as an organic whole. Don't try abolishing private property and keep a role for capitalism – but insist that the state must regulate and subsidise for the people's welfare.

The first experiments were mostly fascist, but Roosevelt with the New Deal showed that the same thing could work in a multi-party democracy. Though it was only allowed in the face of massive unemployment, and with the support of racist Southern Democrats. Black people got only half a loaf – but that was well worth having.

Fascism was quite successful as a peacetime system, though brutal and inefficient when it went to war. Hitler got as far as he did, because he inherited the high skills of the Kaiser's army. He bungled his task of large-scale management.² With his defeat, the world as a whole moved leftwards.

I've detailed elsewhere how progressive ideas pioneered in the Soviet Union became the new normal in the West.³ How it was a huge economic success, overtaking the USA. How the Soviet leaders then bungled reforms that might have been just as successful as China's post-Mao reforms.⁴ But left-wing thinking back then was dominated by two failed versions of Leninism:

² See for instance <https://gwydionwiliams.com/44-fascism-and-world-war-2/how-hitler-might-have-had-a-victorious-peace/>

³ <https://gwydionwiliams.com/history-and-philosophy/the-left-redefined-the-normal/>

⁴ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/the-mixed-economy-won-the-cold-war/>

Trotskyism and Khrushchevism / Brezhnevism. When in the 1970s there was the real prospect of a left-wing advance within the existing system, they were bitterly against it.

The ideas of Tony Benn, which Corbyn has inherited, were much closer to what might have been. Including Workers Control, which is almost forgotten about.

Feed-the-Rich Corporatism

In the 1970s, the Corporatist system that the West had run successfully in the 1950s and 1960s was under strain. It had depended on mild subordination: depended on women, the working class and the wider non-European world 'knowing their place'. Also on a feeling of the nation as 'one family', strong in World War Two and fading for the Baby Boomers.

'Togetherness' was not helped by massive non-white immigration into societies where casual racism was normal.

The left fumbled. Trade unions brought down Labour governments that were doing their best for them. The way was open for a revival of the 19th-century Liberal dream of Imaginary Capitalism.

This happened within the Tory Party, of course. Part of the failed Liberal Party collapsed into Toryism. And with Thatcher, it emerged as something else. Rather like the parasitic worm bursting from the body of John Hurt in the horror-film *Alien*. Someone should make a cartoon of it: since both are dead, England's vicious Libel Laws do not apply.

The residual Liberal Party, only superficially changed by the ex-Labour Social Democrats, would sometimes sound different. But they, like New Labour, accepted Imaginary Capitalism as a grim reality that progressives had to live with. (And could also gain nice jobs and book contracts, and join an elite that was doing nicely out of inequality.)

But none of it was real.

Even before the 2008 crisis, both Britain and the USA had grown slightly more slowly than they had in the 1950s and 1960s, when hideous state power was supposedly stifling the wonderful creativity of the business class. Western Europe, where the idea of a Mixed Economy with much state power had been taken further, suffered a much sharper decline from the 1980s. Likewise Japan.

China, with much harsher curbs on the business class than anyone would contemplate in Europe, continues to have record fast economic growth. So too does India, with very different values

but also rejecting Imaginary Capitalism.

Winners and Losers

Radicals like to talk about the 1% and the 99%. But it is not so simple, and people add themselves to the 1% who do not belong there. One US survey found as many as one in five believed this.

I prefer to talk of a more-than-millionaire class. Whether measured in dollars, euros or pounds, millionaires are clearly rare and privileged. And overpaid:

“The top 1 percent have doubled their income share... The ultra-wealthy control more of the income ‘pie.’ In 1980 they received 10.7 percent of pre-tax national income. In 2014, it was 20.2 percent. The bottom 50 percent of earners have seen their share of the pie shrink – they took home 19.9 percent of pre-tax income in 1980, but only 12.5 percent in 2014.”⁵

Most people can’t aspire to join them, short of winning the lottery. Yet the 1% are so privileged and rich that a genuine millionaire might still belong in the grade below.

The grade below I call the Next Nine, or the Comfortable Classes. £70,000 would put you in the middle of it; in the top 5% of wage-earners.⁶ It is also below the basic salary for a British MP, leaving aside all the extras they can legally earn.

The Comfortable Classes haven’t gained or lost a lot from Thatcherite changes. But a lot of them – and especially MPs – can aspire to rise into the Overclass.

The remaining 90% of us should be called the Cheated Classes. This includes the classic working class, obviously. Also most of the middle class, whether you use the British definition or the much broader US understanding, which includes lorry drivers. Regardless, these people are the true source of the undeserved wealth of the Overclass.

The people who elected Jeremy Corbyn, though some of his ideas are too left-wing for them.

Labour Anti-Semites?

Intolerance is encouraged by social stress. Jews are one target, but not the only target.

The standard demand is to treat hostility to Jews as much more important than hostility to anyone other minority. This had vague justification after the mass killings by the Nazis. But that was part of a philosophy of Race War, which the British Empire had applied outside of Europe, though with Jews generally accepted as part of a Superior White Race.⁷

There are also Conspiracy Theories, which are foolish and diverting. And made worse by the obvious fact of a social malaise.

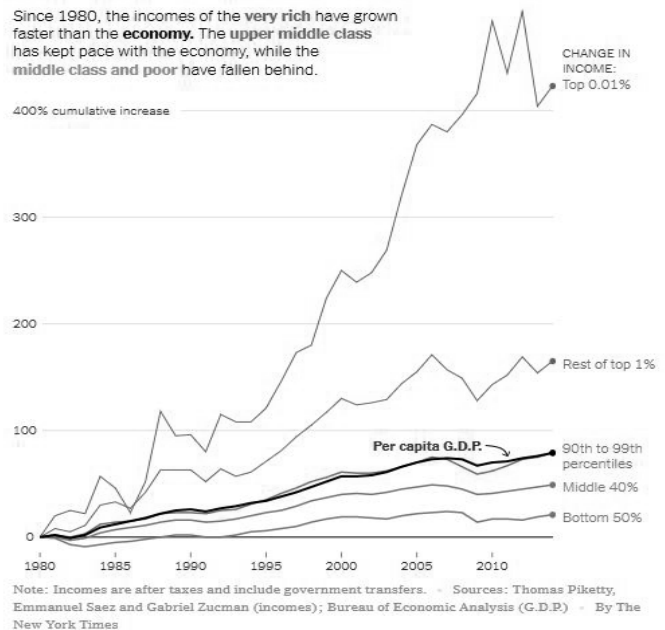
For a long time, many people felt that if there was some sort of conspiracy running the Western world, it was doing quite a good job. And could probably be persuaded that the truth was more like H. G. Wells’s Open Conspiracy: like-minded people who work individually and have no central authority telling them what to do.

The malaise from the 1980s was not caused by any conspiracy. It comes from an unwillingness to control the business elite. They are by nature an irresponsible Overclass, and have gained power as traditional ruling classes decay.

⁵ <https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/my-money/articles/2017-08-10/12-staggering-statistics-about-financial-inequality-in-the-us>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/70000-john-mcdonnell-salary-hmrc-rich-top-5-percent-denial-a7697561.html>

⁷ <https://gwydionwilliams.com/048-anti-semitism-and-zionism/jews-suffering-in-the-fall-of-the-british-empire/>



And Jews do often get blamed.

My guess would be that a considerable majority of British Jews would be in the Cheated Classes. But that rather more than 9% of them would be in the Comfortable Class, and rather more than 1% in the Overclass. So if people think in terms of rival communities rather than rival classes, Jews are likely to be blamed.

But current aggressive and right-wing policies by Israel make things worse. And also leads to false accusations against Corbyn and others who have fought hard against racism of all sorts. Who are consistent in putting equal value on the lives of the two main Semitic peoples, the Jews and the Arabs.

Israel’s policy from the 1990s suggest a wish to exclude all non-Jews from the Palestinian Mandate that the British Empire carved out of what had been the Ottoman Empire province of Greater Syria.

You are supposed to praise Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. It is a democracy for Jews, indeed. Non-Jews who hung on when Israel was created can vote, but are marginal in actual politics. Millions more Arabs in occupied territories have no meaningful vote, but the sensible idea of letting them form a real Palestinian state has been blocked. They remain Occupied Territories, and there is no prospect of them becoming more.

Though the Balfour Declaration spoke about preserving the rights of the existing Muslim and Christian inhabitants, this was clearly just a cover for eventual Jewish domination. Had Greater Syria been maintained, a Jewish majority would never have been feasible. And in a similar spirit, Lebanon was created to make a regional majority for the Maronite Christians: remnants of the Crusaders whom France favoured.

Maronite Christians got an advantage in the country where they already lived. Designating the newly-created British Mandate of Palestine as a home for Jews was more complex. Some Jews rightly feared that Europe’s rising nationalist movements would say that Jews belonged there and nowhere else. They opposed Zionism for just this reason. When the Balfour Declaration was made, Edwin Montagu as the only Jew in the British cabinet was against it.

In 1948, when Israel was created, Europe and its US offshoot

Continued On Page 14

A Letter From Our New Zealand Correspondent

Feergus O'Raghallaigh

A 'Light on the Hill'?

"I try to think of the Labor movement, not as putting an extra sixpence into somebody's pocket, or making somebody Prime Minister or Premier, but as a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective - the light on the hill - which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand. If it were not for that, the Labor movement would not be worth fighting for."

Ben Chifley, Labor Party leader and Prime Minister of Australia, Speech to NSW Labor Party, 1949

Is Ardern in the Chifley mold? Is she tracing the steps of his Kiwi counterpart Michael Joseph Savage? Both, by the way, were ethnic Irish. Going by some of her pronouncements she is hitting some Chifley notes, with her talk of alternatives to growth and GDP

measures of performance and a new living standards/wellbeing framework for assessing government policy performance.

Last month I dealt with the travails endured by one union in trying to negotiate with one employer in one business sector in one New Zealand town. It was a story representative of what every union faces in respect of every employer and place of employment in New Zealand – whether private sector or public. In essence in this country collective negotiation on pay and conditions is overridden by principles of commercial contract law through employer imposition of individual contracts prevailing over collective agreements.

Another result – and it is related – is that New Zealand today is a low wage economy. It is also not simply a low-wage regime but one, systemically, of impoverishment of those at the very end of economic and business chains and their families.

It is at its worst one of hunger, of intergenerational family and community disintegration, of crime and physical decay. There is a strong racial dimension to it all with Maori most damaged by the regime. Yet all of this has a coherent purpose. It is that described by Michel Foucault. Impoverishment and all that goes with it has purpose: to construct in effect, society as a controlling Benthamite panopticon.

[The panopticon was a building in which a single watchman without the inmates being able to tell whether or not they are being watched. Bentham thought it equally applicable to hospitals, schools, sanatoriums, and asylums, but he devoted most of his efforts to developing a design for a Panopticon prison. In a letter, he described the Panopticon prison as "a mill for grinding rogues honest".¹]

The disruptive impact extends into the business of business and the delivery of public services: again purposefully chaotic and degenerative. It is based on businesses unrestrained by unions and collective action, racing each other to the bottom on wages and conditions. In such chaos, rot and decay, accumulation thrives – even if within it, its own winners and losers thrive, flourish, decay and rot: but that is the law of capital, of the jungle.

Pundit assessment is that Labour was shocked to find itself in government post the 2017 general election, leading a coalition with the Greens and New Zealand First, and with a very appealing and popular prime minister, Jacinda Ardern. But it had on this view, no policies, nor governmental agenda, none.

The fundamental problem (apart from having no policies) was and is for the Labour leadership, Labour: Labour is Labour and what it represents in modern politics it must for the leadership also hove to the 'voices of business', be 'realistic', 'business-friendly' etc. It is impossible to square this. So Labour

Continued From Page 13

dominated most of the world. Zionist wishes might have been met by designating some portion of the vast territories taken for European settlement as being for those Jews who wished to be keep a separate identity. But none of those European settlements liked the idea: only in the Soviet Union was a peculiar Jewish republic set up in the Far East, and it was never popular.

The solution favoured at the time was to give a chunk of Arab territory to displaced Jews, who were not wanted in European countries or the USA. Not wanted because of a widespread feeling that existing Jews were quite enough already, and more than most countries wanted. Those Jewish minorities had made enormous contributions, and further Jews allowed to settle would have done more, but actual prejudice back then was far higher. As was a view that Arabs and others outside of the White Race did not matter and could be safely shoved about.

Though the Tory party includes some people who hate Jews, and many more who hold the grossest prejudices about them, they are comfortable with whatever Israel chooses to do to Arabs. The two attitudes can live happily together: they might hope that some Jews and all of the strongly-self-assertive Jews will abandon England and go and live in Israel instead. And some Zionists have said similar things, for Britain and other countries, suggesting only that in Israel can Jews find safety.

Except it probably won't work, in the long run. The foolish intervention in Iraq undermined the Arab Nationalism, which was the main alternative to Islamic extremism.

Saudi Arabia has been a global promotor of Wahhabism, an extremist Islamic sect. Almost all of the Islamic terrorists have come out of Wahhabism.

The real policy of Saudi Arabian governments has been to keep Israel safe, while making a big show of being hostile. And from the 1991 Gulf War onwards, it has waged war on other Muslims in alliance with the USA. How long will ordinary Arabians tolerate this?

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon>

has pitched it all down the road: there are lots and lots of bowls bouncing down bendy byways, a bit like Cork road bowls – committees, groups, commissions and so on to consider and report.

One reported a few weeks ago, the Fair Pay Agreement Working Group. The idea of Fair Pay Agreements (FPAs) was floated by Labour's Iain Lees-Galloway in opposition. He now finds himself in government, the Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety. A first move was to install a working group headed by Jim Bolger, a former leader of National and PM and a good old-fashioned Irish Catholic country boy Christian Democrat.

Love is not an aspect of relations between James Brendan Bolger and his old party. For one thing an extreme pro-market and anti-union faction first, forced him against his beliefs into extreme anti-trade union legislation and shortly after, in 1997 rolled him as PM (when he was at a Commonwealth Conference). Jim has neither forgotten or forgiven – and now he's pronounced in a sense on (the worst) part of his own governmental legacy. His proposition is: 'bin it all'.

The working group report makes a number of points. For example New Zealanders work longer hours and produce less per hour than in most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Productivity growth over recent decades has been poor with economic growth largely been driven by increased labour force participation and immigration, rather than by labour productivity. It is a low-skills, low pay and low productivity economy.

Wages have grown but much more slowly for workers on lower incomes than those on higher earnings. Productivity growth has outstripped wage increases generally. Inequalities in the distribution of incomes and wealth have widened and deepened. New Zealand has over the decades slipped well down the OECD living standard rankings. All of this is significantly attributable to weakened unionisation but also to an economy highly dependent on commodity production (farming,

lumber etc).

There are two prescriptive aspects to 'Bolger'. First, there is the government vision: that the employment relations framework should create a level playing field where good employers are not disadvantaged by paying reasonable, industry-standard wages. The regime should also encourage a highly skilled and innovative economy with well-paid, decent jobs.

Second, to all of this end, there is a proposed return of collective bargaining based on FPAs in the workplace world.

An FPA bargaining process should be initiated by only workers and their union representatives.

There should be two circumstances where a FPA collective bargaining process may be initiated:

Representativeness trigger: in any sector or occupation, workers should be able to initiate a FPA bargaining process if they can meet a minimum threshold of 1000 or 10 percent of workers in the nominated sector or occupation, whichever is lower. The representativeness threshold should cover both union and non-union workers

Public interest trigger: where the representativeness threshold is not met, a FPA may still be initiated where there are harmful labour market conditions in the nominated sector or occupation. The conditions to be met under the public interest trigger should be set in legislation

It is important for agreements to cover all workers – not just employees – to avoid perverse incentives to define work outside of employment regulation; and, a testing proposition politically, "Most of the Group agreed that to achieve the Government's objectives, all employers in the sector or occupation should be covered by a Fair Pay Agreement (FPA)."²

Overview

There is no doubt but that 'Bolger' unfettered would radically change the New Zealand workplace in both

2 There is lots more. Go here for a good summary/links page: <https://www.interest.co.nz/business/97869/jim-bolger-chaired-group-details-proposed-fair-pay-agreements-system-report-workplace>

the private and public sectors. In both however I see severe employer resistance.

For example in municipal transport, local authorities are the ultimate providers – but rates-funded and secured by periodic public procurement competitions that operate on a lowest tender basis. Wellington has in the last year re-procured supply of its urban rail services (awarded to Transdev) and bus services (mostly awarded to NZ Bus). Both winners concentrated on union-wrecking and slashing pay and conditions in their winning tenders. The awarding authority (Greater Wellington Regional Council) went along with this. Wellington is not alone, it is much the same in Auckland and other cities. In Wellington bus drivers are literally walking off the job – it isn't worth it. Services are being cancelled and routes suspended off-peak.

In road haulage and in courier companies workers have been forced into 'self-employment' – and also having to finance their trucks, trailers, vans and related equipment, insurance and so on. Self-employment and sub-contracting also prevail in construction. It is also seeping into the public health system with District Health Boards forced by law to behave as private, for-profit companies.

Everywhere working hours are long, conditions such as holiday and sick pay no longer operate. A six-day week is widespread as is the 12-hour day. In sectors such as horticulture and viticulture much work is seasonal – and undertaken on a subcontract regime by temporary migrant workers imported from Pasifika.

The employer trope will be (is) competitiveness, efficiency, productivity. The problem is that's the problem with New Zealand's current condition. The trope has not delivered on any indicator one chooses. Labour's *de rigueur* trope of listening to the 'voices of business', being 'realistic', 'business-friendly' and so on will have to be abandoned. I am not holding my breath. Ardern is no new Chifley.

Jewish Comments on Zionism & Socialism

Over 200 Jewish members and supporters of the Labour party sign a letter urging that anyone seeking an end to bigotry and racism should back Labour and Corbyn

You report (19 February) that a number of implacably anti-Corbyn MPs have left the Labour party alleging a failed “approach to dealing with antisemitism”, with Luciana Berger criticising Labour for becoming “sickeningly institutionally racist”.

We are Jewish members and supporters of the Labour party concerned about the current rise of reactionary ideologies, including antisemitism, in Britain and elsewhere across Europe.

We note the worrying growth of populist rightwing parties, encouraging racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism. In Britain the far right is whipping up these prejudices, a threat that requires a resolute and energetic response. But instead we have seen a disproportionate focus on antisemitism on the left, which is abhorrent but relatively rare

We believe that the Labour party under the progressive leadership of Jeremy Corbyn is a crucial ally in the fight against bigotry and reaction. His lifetime record of campaigning for equality and human rights, including consistent support for initiatives against antisemitism, is formidable. His involvement strengthens this struggle.

Labour governments introduced both the anti-racist and human rights legislation of the 20th century and the 2010 Equalities Act. A Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn will be a powerful force to fight against racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism.

It is in this context that we welcome the Labour party’s endorsement of freedom of expression on Israel and on the rights of Palestinians. Labour is correct to recognise that while prejudice against Jewish people is deplorable, criticism of Israel’s government and policies can and must be made.

We urge all who wish to see an end to bigotry and racism, and who seek a more just society, to give their support to the Labour party.¹

David Rosenberg, posting on the Facebook page of the Jewish Socialists’ Group, said the following:

“I would not be exaggerating in the least if I were to say that, observing Zionist politics in recent years, one frequently gets the impression that these people have simply gone out of their minds...”

“The leaders of the Zionist movement have, in fact, openly began to play the antisemitic card. The incredible thought is stumbling around in their heads today of helping to form a bloc of countries with antisemitic regimes as allies of Zionism...”

“Zionism has all along been a Siamese twin of antisemitism and every kind of nationalist chauvinism. Zionism has always regarded the law of force, of nationalist reaction, as the normal law of history, and on this law it has built its interpretations of Jewish life.”

When was this said? And by whom?

It was actually Henryk Erlich, one of the leaders of the Bund (Jewish socialist movement) in Poland in 1938, in an exchange he was having with the Jewish historian/sociologist professor Simon Dubnow in 1938 about whether Zionism was a liberating and democratic movement.

I couldn’t help thinking of it as I read what should have been the unbelievable words spoken in the Knesset a few days ago by Anat Berko, one of Netanyahu’s Likud Party MKs. Only they are, now, all too believable.

She was defending a summit that Netanyahu was holding with leaders of central European nations all of whom with form for antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Roma, and anti-migrant/refugee prejudice. Netanyahu had chosen Holocaust Memorial Day, 27th January (the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz) on which to extend the invitations to these leaders.

Berko said: “They might be antisemites, but they are on our side”. Just let that sink in.

Morning Star On-Line had the following

Labour suspended Chris Williamson today pending an investigation after he had said that the party had been “too apologetic” over claims of anti-semitism...

The row blew up after video footage emerged of the MP addressing a Momentum meeting in Sheffield in the wake of last week’s resignation of eight Labour MPs to join the Independent Group.

It shows him receiving an applause as he said that the party had “given too much ground” to its critics who had “demonised [it] as a racist, bigoted party.”

Condemning the suspension, Jewish Voice for Labour representative Mike Cushman said: “This is madness, he’s suspended for saying the party is doing much to combat anti-semitism and should stop apologising, and it’s the parties that have done nothing that have something to answer for.”

Mr Williamson said in his apology: “I reject racism ethically and morally. It has no place in the Labour Party or in our country.

“It pains me greatly, therefore, that anyone should believe that it is my intention to minimise the cancerous and pernicious nature of anti-semitism.

“I deeply regret, and apologise for, my recent choice of words when speaking about how the Labour Party has responded to the ongoing fight against anti-semitism inside of our party. I was trying to stress how much the party has done to tackle anti-semitism.”

Morning Star editor Ben Chacko denounced the suspension. “The left needs to understand that unless we hang together we will hang separately.

“Chris Williamson is an outstanding Labour MP. The party and movement will be the poorer if MPs who couldn’t care less whether their party is elected succeed in turfing him out.”

Since the footage came to light, a screening of a documentary film called *Witchhunt*, which makers say explores the background to accusations of anti-semitism in Labour Party, has been cancelled.

The film by Jon Pullman, which has been praised by leading Jewish film-makers Mike Leigh and Peter Kosminsky, was due to be screened in the Commons on Monday with Mr Williamson’s assistance.²

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/feb/20/jeremy-corbyn-labour-party-crucial-ally-in-fight-against-antisemitism>

² <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/labour-suspension-of-chris-williamson-branded-madness>

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Vote for Cheese, Get Chalk

“Imagine for a moment that a [US] presidential candidate made this speech:

“My fellow Americans, I’m here today to tell you about my economic plan. Each year, I will require every middle-class family across this great country to write a check. We will then pool the money and distribute it to the richest Americans among us — the top 1 percent of earners, who, because of their talent, virtue and success, deserve even more money.

“The exact size of the checks will depend on a family’s income, but a typical middle-class household will hand over \$15,000 each year. This plan, I promise all of you, will create the greatest version of America that has ever existed.

“You would consider that proposal pretty radical, wouldn’t you? Politically crazy. Destructive, even. Well, I’ve just described the actual changes in the American economy since the 1970s.”¹

That’s from an Opinion piece in the *New York Times*. It points out that the ‘radical’ notion of a wealth tax from the US Democrats is simply a return to what was normal before Reagan and Thatcher and the upsurge of New Right ideas. Part of a wider movement, some of it socialist and some not. Many people have realised that the current system is hurting US values.

Some people, of course, learn nothing and forget nothing. Britain’s *Economist* magazine remains true to its 1840s origins, when it insisted that Free Trade was vastly more important than millions of Irish starving to death. Their Official History endorsed this view.² It is beyond them to notice that millions

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/03/opinion/democrats-wealth-tax.html>

2 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/50-new-right-ideas/430-2/>, *Economical With The Irish*

of angry Irish Catholic survivors played a big role in bringing down the British Empire. The USA, though long prejudiced against them, did in the end incorporate them. And was enormously stronger because of this. But now it is the US that inflicts misery to uphold a right-wing ideology.

Moves to revive tax-and-spend are being denounced as socialist and extremist, and even as communist. Standard right-wing tactics – you’ll be surprised to learn that singer Frank Sinatra was denounced as a communist in his earlier and more radical years.³ The FBI investigated this, along with gangster links that were real enough. Sinatra and his politically-active mother were in their day mild progressives within the US Democrats, but as he aged he switched to supporting Reagan. I’d suppose that he was one of many who got offended when their progressive ideas became the norm and other much more radical ideas pushed towards normality. One of many who chose just the wrong answer, helping break up the pattern of secure well-paid jobs which had been the actual basis for functional US conservatism.

What we have now is dysfunctional US conservatism. Capitalism without powerful cultural and state-imposed limits is nihilistic, just as Marx and Engels said. The Western system has survived as long as it has, because there used to be a Ruling Class that was nicely distanced from commerce and thought about long-term survival. That has now faded.

It’s a Silly Overclass

Modern business people mostly know very little about the world outside of their own business. When they have to think about it, they look

3 See for instance <https://indianapublicmedia.org/afterglow/great-american-songbook-blacklist/>

to experts. But which experts?

Business people – overwhelmingly business *men* in those days – were strongly against the 1930s New Deal. They’d not have done anything about Japan’s brutal conquest of China, if Japan’s brave but foolish rulers had not been goaded by Roosevelt into attacking the USA. And they’d have done nothing about Nazism if Hitler had not shown lousy judgement and declared war on them, when there was a sporting chance it might have remained a separate US-Japan war. The Soviet Union and Japan remained at peace till almost the end, which helped them both at the expense of both the West and Nazism.

The World War created a boom in the US economy – state spending for warfare was and is acceptable to most business people. The Military-Industrial Complex that Eisenhower denounced was the best available system in a society where ordinary people still had fantasies of independent small production as the norm. No one anywhere has come up with a political-economic package that truly preserves independent small production as the norm: many attempts to do so have flopped completely. Reagan and his heirs sounded as if this was his aim, and possibly it was: but the actuality of markets free from state control has always favoured Big Business.

The continuation of the wartime boom through to the mid-1970s is generally recognised as unusual.⁴ Ayn Rand in her famous 1957 book *Atlas Shrugged* pretended it wasn’t happening and that the USA under intensive state interventionism was falling into decay. Surprisingly, she got a large following based on this rubbish: ideology can easily override a small thing like facts. And when the system ran into trouble, the New Right tried pretending it had never

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post%E2%80%93World_War_II_economic_expansion

actually happened. Tried to deny that the Soviet economy had been a huge success from the 1930s to 1960s.

The Cold War is the probable reason that the boom lasted as long as it did. Business people feared to lose everything, so they tolerated Trade Union power and social radicalism as lesser evils. But that lasted only for as long as the Soviet Union was there as a credible rival.

Opposition did ensure that social radicalism from the 1960s never translated into a solid new system of Social Morality that upheld fairness and honesty and was relaxed about sex. Instead, you could be relaxed about sex because the world was full of corruption, and it all got along nicely regardless. I was recently reminded of this by a cop-comedy film called *Freebie and the Bean*, which is very relaxed about sex, crime and corruption. What stuck in my memory was a film-prop sex cinema with a film entitled '**Sex is Revolting**'.⁵ Good jokes work because they are close to reality, and that was indeed typical of the new balance. The world is sleazy but it works and we live with it. An attitude that has since darkened into much gloomier visions, but without people learning the right lessons.

This was not what the elite wanted. But the decline of the traditional ruling class meant that a short-termist business elite dominated. Would-be right-wing pundits had to conform to their values, if they wanted to succeed. Give meaningless reassurance on most issues, including Climate Change, when the system was actually self-destructing.

David Cameron was exactly that. The elite wanted 'marriage equality' for its gay members, so he assured them that it was a *conservative* measure. I ridiculed this at the time, not being against gay marriage but predicting it would be part of a much more massive restructuring of sex, reproduction and relationships. And asking why we were not also legalising polygamy and polyandry, which have much stronger historic justification. I'd expect such a demand to surface eventually, but for now the main dispute is over transsexuals and whether women are obliged to accept them as women.

Cameron also messed up by agreeing to a referendum on leaving the European Union. It eased his problems with his own party, but an authentic conservative would have paid the price and avoided a move that is massively self-destructive.

He also missed the chance to kill it by demanding that 'Leave' get at least

⁵ <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/freebie-and-the-bean/>

40% of the Registered Voters. That prevented a Scottish Assembly in the 1979 vote, where 'Yes' got a majority but only 32.9% of the registered electorate. There were complaints ahead of the vote that registered voters who had died would count as having voted 'No'. But the result showed this would have made no difference, unless one thought there were about 270,000 deceased 'Yes' voters as well as 1,230,937 living ones. This could anyway have been easily answered, by getting some neutral experts to make an estimate of the number of dead to get the correct threshold.

The Scottish Assembly happened anyway, but mostly because Scots saw government remain in the hands of parties who valued the prosperous south-east ahead of them. And because it was more favoured by the young. Brexit is based on the old feeling nostalgic for a lost world of Britain as a global power. Imposing this fantasy on the young, who don't remember it and will pay the price for Brexit.

I admit I never thought of a 40% threshold ahead of the vote, which I expected to end with a 'Remain' victory. But it was not my job. It is astonishing that none of the ruling elite thought of a 40% threshold, which was reached only in England and not for the UK as a whole.

But these are shallow people. They think in sound-bites. Majority victory is seen as unbreakable, even though they also try to trick people out of using it effectively.

Europe Flourishing Without Britain

Assuming Brexit happens, it will be terrible for England. And is likely to detach Scotland from the United Kingdom. Possibly Northern Ireland also, and a loose confederation linking it with both Scotland and the Irish Republic might be a halfway house. But for Continental Europe, it has strengthened feelings of unity

Other 'Exiteers' must be put off by the fact that not even Britain can get the rules bent very much. A major reason for the strong stand – weakness might have caused a wave of further secessions.

As things are, the merits of unity are being remembered.

"You see, we don't talk often enough—or at all, really, in the Anglo world—about the European miracle. But what Europe accomplished was nothing short of a modern miracle. In 1950, it was utterly ruined, destroyed, a smoking wreck. By 1970, it was rebuilt.

By 1990, it had raced ahead of America and Britain—its middle class healthier, happier, longer-lived. By 2000, it had achieved the highest living standards of all—by a very long way. Think about that. Just fifty years.

"Would anyone have predicted that in the shadow of the great war? They didn't. Mostly, Europe was written off as a failure, a has-been, laughed at, scorned. And yet it rose from the ashes to become history's most successful society, ever, period. Again—that's not my subjective judgment. Europeans are richer, happier, healthier, etcetera, on average, than anyone else. Sure, of course there are poor parts of Europe—Europe is not some kind of magical fantasyland. We don't live in one, and we never will. But focusing only on its downsides—as our foolish Anglo thinkers want us to do—we fail to see the truth of the miracle."⁶

Nazism rose to power, because of the greed and foolishness that the New Right partly revived in the 1980s. One German explained it thus:

"Until his death in the early 1990s, my grandad was a committed Nazi. Most of his elder brothers died in one night ... in the first world war. In a bitterly traumatised interwar Germany, defined by hatred against foreigners, Jews and democracy as well as delusions of national grandeur, he was unemployed for most of the 1920s. He joined the Nazi party early, and volunteered to fight in 1940...

"We believe he took part in the September 1941 Babi Yar massacre, in which more than 33,000 Jewish inhabitants of Kiev were shot. Until his death he would rant about Jews, the French and the perfidious Albion. He never left the country again and he'd be in a near panic when coming close to a border.

"My maternal grandfather, meanwhile, was a teacher from Duisburg. When he went to war he left his wife, two children, his camera, his library and all hope of survival behind. He survived three years on the eastern front but never played music again, never took up photography again. He was a broken man. While he was away, my grandmother remained in Duisburg. She was 'bombed out' three times, meaning that her flat or house got a direct hit. Until her death, the sound of sirens would send her into a panic."⁷

⁶ <https://eand.co/what-anglos-dont-understand-about-the-european-miracle-753394e5e6a4>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/20/grandfather-nazi-cu-world-war-two-germans-peace>

The European Union has successfully kept peace for itself. Tragically caused wars in both Former Yugoslavia and Ukraine, by selfishly backing the forces they most liked. But both those outbreaks of war happened after a long period of peace between the rival communities. Showed that existing peace is no protection against fresh war. Peace lasts, only if it has the correct political structures.

Forgetting Yugoslavia

UK foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt was rightly mocked for supposing that Slovenia had been a 'Soviet vassal state'. But the wider lesson was lost.

For more than four decades, the Yugoslav Communists kept the peace between a bunch of similar but distinct South Slav nations that had been at war in the past. Serbs claiming Bosnia started World War One by assassinating the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne. Suspicions of official sponsorship were very reasonable, given that the boss of the Serb security services had organised the murder of a previous Serb monarch, along with his wife, to replace them with a rival dynasty more hostile to Austria-Hungary. A demand for a proper investigation was the key demand that Serbia rejected. Russia and France and the British Empire went to war on the claim that it was their right to have refused it. Books mostly gloss over the issue.

In World War Two, Croatia was a very willing ally of Nazi Germany. Whereas most Nazi allies either handed over their Jews for supposed resettlement or else protected them, Croats were happy to kill them. And also killed vast numbers of Serbs, their main target.

Tito, with a Croat father and a Slovene mother, tried to revive the dream of Yugoslavia, which between the wars had been functionally a Serb dominion. He included majority-Serb areas within a newly defined Croatia. And also unwisely copied the Soviet Union in giving these states a right of secession, without any provision for minorities.

The European Union was naïve and greedy, when it came to absorbing this volatile mix while it was losing confidence in Yugoslavia's anti-Soviet socialism. Free elections produced nationalists and secessionist ruling parties. Not a big problem in Slovenia, rich and with only tiny ethnic minorities. But Croatia elected a party identifying with the pro-Nazi Croat state, similar to what later happened in Ukraine. Worse, its leader was Franjo Tudjman, who had been listed as a denialist of the mass

killing of Jews by Deborah Lipstadt. She also listed David Irving, who unwisely sued her and lost. Tudjman ignored her, and also very conveniently died in 1999, before it might have become a big issue.

It should have been expected that the rival nationalities might fight again, if left without outside controls. The European Union could have imposed these, since all of them wanted membership. Instead it was left to find its own balance, and that balance was a series of appalling wars.

And top Tories know nothing of this. Nor, indeed, do most leftists.

Snippets

Weather

"So far 2019 has set 35 records for heat and 2 for cold..."

"Mathematical models predict that in a stable climate, the number of hot and cold records should be equal, and new records occur less frequently over time.

"In 2018, 430 stations worldwide saw all-time high temperatures and 40 saw all-time lows."⁸

As of late February, a gyrating Jet Stream brought unusual cold weather to North America, and now also for the Balkans and beyond, with snow in Libya.⁹ The up-loop of this Jet Stream had brought unusually mild air to Britain, though just for now.

Feed the Rich

"Only a small, sad nation robs its people of arts and culture..."

"Museums, libraries and arts festivals increasingly hollowed out by cash-strapped councils. The maths is simple: as years of austerity have left local authorities struggling to cover even their legal duties, such as social care and child protection, a growing number of so-called nonessential services such as art and culture are cut."¹⁰

The 'centrist' defectors from Labour want more of the same, and do not dare refuse the greedy demands of the very rich. Likewise the three Tories who have joined them.

8 <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2192369-so-far-2019-has-set-35-records-for-heat-and-2-for-cold/>

9 <https://www.libyaherald.com/2019/02/24/cold-snap-hits-western-region/>, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10215785719253879&set=pcb.10215785726414058&type=3&theater>

10 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/07/arts-culture-services-austerity>

Kill Off the Old

"More than 50,000 people have died waiting for care while ministers dither over long-awaited plans to overhaul the funding of social care, a charity has claimed.

"Age UK estimated that, in England, 54,000 people – or 77 a day – have died while waiting for a care package in the 700 days since the government first said in March 2017 it would publish its social care green paper, which has since been delayed several times."

Uncontrolled Social Media

"Let them hate me, so long as they make money for me".

I've not heard any of the Social Media billionaires say this. Unlike Roman Emperor Tiberias, who was content to be hated so long as he was also feared, they do need to worry about public opinion. And no longer so scared of socialism, which has been the only force that ever really curbed such people. But given the ineffective controls we have seen so far, they might well be thinking it.

Hungary Values Itself

I recently saw a long moan in *The Guardian* about the European Union failing to curb a Hungarian government committed to Illiberal Democracy.¹¹

At the last election, the ruling party got 49% of the votes. The main opposition with 19% is Jobbik, much further to the right and more racist.¹²

It is a very consistent left-liberal view. People *must* have elections with multi-party choices. But if they make the 'wrong' choice, they must be thwarted.

In a similar spirit, there is left-liberal outrage at a plan to give tax advantages to mothers with four or more children. A woman has a right to do what she likes with her own body, but not if liberal opinion disapproves of it.

Websites

Previous *Newsnotes* at the Labour Affairs website, <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/>. Also <https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/newsnotes-historic/>. I blog every month or so or so at <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>, and tweet at @GwydionMW.

11 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/06/viktor-orban-crossed-red-lines-hungary-eu>

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Hungarian_parliamentary_election

The Economy And The Brexit Effect

By Eamon Dyas

Some weeks ago at the start of the most recent Westminster “meaningful vote” circus Evan Davis had two people on his Five PM radio programme. The chap who was arguing against Brexit had all his economic ducks lined up to back his arguments and convincing they were too. I can’t recall the name of the woman who was making the Brexit argument but her point was that the main mistake of the pro-EU side was that they only viewed the issue as one of economics. Her argument was that the vote for Brexit had nothing to do with economics but was one of fear. The British have had a congenital fear of losing control of their “green and pleasant land” for many years now and they viewed the influence of the EU on their culture and institutions as increasingly toxic.

I wouldn’t necessarily agree with economics being an absent element in the pro-Brexit vote. Or, indeed that fear does not have an economic component. It all depends on what economics is being referred to. The small business and sole trader trying to make a living and being undercut by immigrant labour, in many cases living in shared hovels and prepared to tolerate wages and living conditions far below what the indigenous population expects, no doubt poses an economic threat to this element of the indigenous population and that threat undoubtedly generates a feeling of fear.

Traditionally the part of the indigenous population that has been directly impacted by cheap immigrant labour have been the sole-traders and very small operations around things like plastering, plumbing, gardening, double-glazing installers, roofers etc. The extent to which these small operations and sole-traders exist in the economy has grown in direct proportion to the shedding of labour by the big operators and the perspectives of these “shedded” people is determined by their experience in trying to make a living. But there has also been a recent expression of the fetish to facilitate the financial sector which has had the effect of broadening the sentiment

previously shared by the sole and small trader. The real issue for the British economy is the way in which the property sector has dominated investment for decades. This has not only diverted investment away from manufacturing but it has had a positively destructive effect on small businesses.

The small spray-painting workshops, glaziers, furniture-makers, welding workshops etc. have all suffered significantly as successive government policies continued to underpin the financial/property bandwagon. I saw it in direct operation about ten years ago when a local garage in New Cross owned by an aging mechanic named Arthur ended up being demolished and is now a block of flats. We knew Arthur for decades. What he didn’t know about cars wasn’t worth knowing and represented the best of those Englishmen who retained a sense of fair play and duty to the extent that it was to Arthur that the women in the area went to when they had problems with their cars.

Arthur had three men working for him and an apprentice but he was getting too old for the work and his dodgy knee was getting worse. He finally decided to call it a day but he wanted to make sure that his “lads” were ok after he retired. He owned the free-hold to the site on which his garage stood and he offered the business to his staff at a knock-down rate. He even helped them formulate a business plan for them to present to the banks. But the banks didn’t want anything to do with it. They blackballed the garage hands and their efforts to finance Arthur’s buyout. They did this in the full knowledge that Arthur’s garage was on a prime piece of real estate. The financial strangulation of any use of the site for a garage made absolute sense in the world of the financiers. Without his ability to sell the site to the garage hands Arthur was compelled to put it on open sale and of course as everyone knew would happen, it was quickly snapped up by a property developer. The property developer then went to the bank for a

much larger loan than was originally asked by the garage hands in order to cover the development costs and the banks were only too willing to facilitate this.

Within the past year the highly remunerative railway arches owned by Network Rail and which housed thousands of small business in London have been sold to a hedge fund manager and the first thing they plan to do is to “improve the workspaces” with a view to upping the rent. The plight of small business and sole-traders in London is dire. Because of the extortionate rents they cannot afford the conventional commercial spaces and the railway arches offered a cheap and accessible option. It’s not as if Network Rail were not already making a significant profit from the renting of their arches - they made millions each year - but the government wanted the quick burst of cash that their sale provided and so the plight of the small business became secondary.

Only in the last six months there has been another local event that shows the way in which corporate interests are facilitated in a way that over-rides the small man. Within a couple of hundred yards there is a Wicks DIY store and the carpark has always had a tea-hut which offered tea/coffee/sandwiches to the Wicks’ customers (mostly small-scale workmen) who were using the store. Seeing how popular the tea-hut was, the management of Wicks decided to cash in and offered the site to Costa Coffee who promptly built a “drive-through” facility in the car park and the chap who ran the tea-hut for decades was turfed out.

There is a myriad of such instances happening every day affecting many, many, people but it does not command the attention of the media and a local garage forced to close is not exactly headline news. There are economic arguments and then there are economic arguments and there are arguments about fear but there is a hidden reality out there that nobody seems to notice but which had its day in the referendum of 2016.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Leaving the European Union
26 February 2019

On 26 February Theresa May presented a statement to the House of Commons on the progress made in negotiations with EU leaders. Jeremy Corbyn responded to her speech.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) I would like to start by thanking the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement. I have lost count of the number of times the Prime Minister has come to this House to explain a further delay. They say history repeats itself—the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce—but by the umpteenth time it can only be described as grotesquely reckless. This is not dithering; it is a deliberate strategy to run down the clock. The Prime Minister is promising to achieve something she knows is not achievable and is stringing people along, so will she be straight with people? The withdrawal agreement is not being reopened. There is no attempt to get a unilateral exit on the backstop or a time limit.

In Sharm el-Sheikh, the Prime Minister said that “a delay in this process, doesn’t deliver a decision in parliament, it doesn’t deliver a deal”.

I can only assume she was being self-critical. She has so far promised a vote on her deal in December, January, February and now March, and she only managed to put a vote once—in January, when it was comprehensively defeated. The Prime Minister continues to say that it is her deal or no deal, but this House has decisively rejected her deal and

has clearly rejected no deal. It is the Prime Minister’s obstinacy that is blocking a resolution, so if the House confirms that opposition, then what is the Prime Minister’s plan B?

I pay tribute to others across the House who are working on such solutions—whether that is the proposal that is commonly known as Norway-plus or other options. Labour, I would like to inform the House, will back the Costa amendment if tabled tomorrow, and I also confirm that we will back the amendment drafted by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on securing citizens’ rights for EU citizens here and for UK citizens in Europe, some of whom I met in Spain last week.

The Prime Minister has become quite the expert at kicking the can down the road, but the problem is that the road is running out. The consequences of running down the clock are evident and very real for industry and for people’s jobs. For now, the Prime Minister states that the can be kicked until 12 March, but the EU cannot now ratify any deal until its leaders’ summit on 21 March. After all, section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act states that the final agreement will be laid before this House before it can be voted on, so can the Prime Minister confirm how there can be a vote in this House if the EU has not yet agreed any final exit, or is the Prime Minister now saying that there will be no change to either the withdrawal agreement or to the political declaration, so we will be voting again on the same

documents?

Every delay and every bit of badly made fudge just intensifies the uncertainty for industry, with business investment being held back, jobs being lost and yet more jobs being putting at risk. The real life consequences of the Prime Minister’s cynical tactics are being felt across the country, with factories relocating abroad, jobs being lost and investment being cancelled. Thousands of workers at sites across Britain’s towns and cities are hearing rumours and fearing the worst. The responsibility for this lies exclusively with the Prime Minister and her Government’s shambolic handling of Brexit. Even now, with just one month to go before our legally enshrined exit date, the Prime Minister is not clear what she wants in renegotiations that have now dragged on since it became clear in December that her deal was not even backed by much of her own party, let alone Parliament or the country at large.

Labour has a credible plan—[Interruption.] Labour has a credible plan that could bring the country together, provide certainty for people, and safeguard jobs and industry. It is based around a new customs union with the EU to protect our manufacturing industry, close alignment with the single market to protect all of our trading sectors and keeping pace with the best practice on workers’ rights, environmental protections and consumer safeguards. The people of this country deserve nothing less. The Prime Minister talks about giving commitments

on future developments, but that is way short of a commitment to dynamic alignments on rights and standards when we know many on her Front Bench see Brexit as an opportunity to rip up those vital protections.

In recent weeks, I have been speaking to businesses, industry organisations and trade unions. Last week, along with our shadow Brexit Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) and Baroness Chakrabarti, I travelled to Europe to meet EU officials and leaders to discuss the crisis and explain Labour's proposals. We left with no doubt whatsoever that our proposals are workable and could be negotiated, so tomorrow we will—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker Order. I indicated to the House that the Prime Minister should be fairly and courteously heard, and the same goes for the Leader of the Opposition. If the usual suspects could just calm down, it would be in their interests and, more importantly, those of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn Thank you, Mr Speaker. Tomorrow, we will ask Parliament to vote on these proposals—they are workable and negotiable—which back the demands of working people all across this country and industry all across this country. I urge Members across this House to back that amendment to respect the result of the 2016 referendum and to safeguard jobs, investment and industry in this country. Labour accepts the result of the 2016 referendum, but we believe in getting the terms of our exit right, and that is why we believe in our alternative plan.

The Prime Minister's botched deal provides no certainty or guarantees for the future, and was comprehensively rejected by

this House. We cannot risk our country's industry and people's livelihoods, so if it somehow passes in some form at a later stage, we believe there must be a confirmatory public vote to see if people feel that that is what they voted for. A no-deal outcome would be disastrous, and that is why we committed to backing the amendment, in the names of my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), to rule out that reckless cliff-edge Brexit.

The Prime Minister appears to be belatedly listening to the House. Any extension is necessary only because of the Prime Minister's shambolic negotiations and her decision to run down the clock, but until the Prime Minister is clear about what alternative she would put forward in those circumstances, then she is simply continuing to run down the clock. She promises a short extension, but for what? If the Government want a genuine renegotiation, they should do so on the terms that can win a majority in this House and on the terms, backed by businesses and unions, that are contained within Labour's amendment, which I urge the whole House to back tomorrow.

The Prime Minister I will first respond to a couple of the right hon. Gentleman's questions. He asked about the meaningful vote and whether new documents would be brought before the House. Of course, we are in discussions with the EU about changes—changes that this House said it wanted—to the Northern Ireland backstop. We are discussing those with the European Union. Any changes that are agreed with the European Union would be put before this House before the meaningful vote.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of citizens' rights. As I

covered in my statement, the EU does not have the legal authority to do a separate deal on citizens' rights without a new mandate. This is a matter, unless it is part of the withdrawal agreement—obviously, we have negotiated something within the withdrawal agreement; good rights for citizens within the withdrawal agreement—for individual member states. We have taken up the issue with individual member states. A number of them have already given good guarantees to UK citizens and we are encouraging those that have not to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to workers' rights. I think it is important. [Interruption.] I am answering the points that he has made, but he does not seem to be too interested in listening to the answers that I am giving. He advocated dynamic alignment on workers' rights. I have to say that we on the Government side of the House think that those decisions should be taken in the UK, and in this House. One of the reasons for taking those decisions on workers' rights in this House, as I have said, is that Governments in this country, of different colours, have consistently given greater rights to workers than the European Union has negotiated.

The right hon. Gentleman referenced the Labour party's approach to a deal. Of course, its approach is that it wants a customs union, to be in the single market and to have a say on trade deals, in a way that says, "Well, please, if you're very nice to us, can we sit around the table and maybe some time we might be able to put an opinion on the trade deals?" If he wants the benefits of a customs union—no tariffs, no fees and no charges—they are there within the political declaration, in the deal that has been negotiated by

Continued On Page 23

Continued From Page 22

this Government. In that political declaration, we also have the right for us, as an independent country, to strike our own trade deals again, and not to have to rely on those struck in Brussels.

The right hon. Gentleman then spoke about the time running down to 29 March. My sole focus throughout all of this has been on getting a deal that enables us to leave the European Union on 29 March with a deal. It is the right hon. Gentleman who has kept no deal on the table, by refusing to agree to a deal. He talks about uncertainty on jobs, but he could have voted to end uncertainty on jobs by backing the deal the Government brought back from the European Union.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman says that he and the Labour party accept the result of the referendum, yet we also know that they back a second referendum. By backing a second referendum, he is breaking his promise to respect the result of the 2016 referendum. He will be ignoring the biggest vote in our history and betraying the trust of the British people.

1919

You're forbidden to put it into words
so you put it into guns.
When a democracy killed a million of its own
it didn't seem absurd
to kill another's democracy
by splitting its tongue.
Who attacked first in defence of that democracy
becomes a mere intellectual exercise
when the thief is already in the house.
He brought bloody footsteps from the trenches
and the fires he set are still to be doused.
But he still thinks he's right on all accounts
with a confidence that wrenches.

Wilson John Haire. 10th February, 2019

Nixon seems to equate criticism with subversion
and being hard on Republicans to being soft on
communism. Adlai Stevenson on Richard Nixon

Ninety percent of the politicians give the other ten
percent a bad name. Henry Kissinger

Neville has a retail mind in a wholesale business
David Lloyd George On Neville Chamberlain

Nature goes on her way, and all that to us seems an
exception is really according to order.
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Continued From Page 24

Salvini, the Five Stars damn themselves", by seeming to interfere politically in judicial matters. *M5S's* founder Beppe Grillo agreed, stating in *La Repubblica* that the *Movement* should not be sorting out Salvini's personal difficulties.

Travaglio, as an early supporter of *M5S*, is clear that the *Movement* has begun to lose the principles that it originally espoused. He questions the reasons behind this and places the blame on Di Maio's relationship with Salvini. He is frightened of him. He gives in to him and his demands "...without (Salvini) giving back even a pinch of loyalty". He considers that the *Movement* is becoming increasingly like the corrupt parties that they endeavoured to replace.

Matteo Salvini took the *Lega Nord*, organising solely in the Italian right-wing nationalistic north, and reconstructed it into *Lega Salvini* - a right-wing pan-national party. Although his candidate won in Sardinia his personal share of the vote was only 12%. In contrast, the *Pd's* candidate, Massimo Zedda, Mayor of Caligari, had a larger 13.1%. The centre-right and centre-left's votes combined to produce the centre-right's win. Although it was quite a triumph for Salvini's relatively new party to top the centre-right poll, it was, in the words of *Huffpost*, not "*a transformation into gold*". It also wasn't the "*League wins 6-0 over the Pd*" as Salvini described it in *Corriere della Sera*. But Salvini plays to win.

Now Di Maio has said that *M5S* must re-examine their rules in order to develop. One interesting change might be to reconsider the pledge that elected members (in any forum) can be mandated for two terms only. This would impact on many MP's, Senators and Councillors, including Luigi Di Maio himself. *La Repubblica* (28 February) referred to this rule and later went on to report that Di Maio was "*really fed up with losing*".

Matteo Salvini seems to be constantly on the lookout for new opportunities and a *Huffpost* blog from *Fi* parliamentarian Mara Carfagna pointed out a direction. At the end of February there was a developing argument between Berlusconi, his *Fi* party members and Salvini. Carfagna used the metaphor of the folly of governing with *two ovens*, to pinpoint the developing view of the right that the *M5S* plus *Lega's* two ovens policies were an error responsible for propelling Italy into recession. She is not alone in wanting to capitalise on the faltering position of *M5S*.

Salvini has repeatedly rejected appeals from Berlusconi to actively revive cooperation with the other centre-right parties. He avoids working with Berlusconi. So far he has resisted this, but pressure is growing on him. They need him. Does he need them? In the run up to the Sardinian election Berlusconi said: "*If we win in Sardinia, I'll just say that I'll call Matteo Salvini on Monday.*"

"*On Monday I'll take my phone off the hook*", was Salvini's reported response.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

MASS SLAUGHTER IN SARDINIA

The centre-right coalition predictably won the Sardinian Presidential elections on 24th February with Christian Solinas from *The Lega Salvini* as the main candidate. The first opinion polls in November put The Five Star *M5S* and the centre-left group almost level in second place. But a massive 32% of *M5S*'s March 2018 general election votes transferred themselves mostly to the centre-right, so that their candidate slumped to 11.2%. The centre-left took second place with 33.3%, and lost their previous Governorship.

Is it interesting? Well, it might be a small election in European terms but it was a significant one for Italy and a possible preview of the outcome of May's EU election. It marked not only a further decline for the populist Movement started by Beppe Grillo in 2009, but also a triumph for the right-wing, expansionist *Lega*'s Matteo Salvini. *Huffington Post* vividly described it as a *M5S* mass-slaughter and ran a photo of Luigi Di Maio with his head in his hands. A blog from journalist Roberto Arditti blamed a (figurative) blow from the *pattada*, a long, murderous Sardinian knife.

As background, Sardinia is one of the five autonomous regions in Italy. These were established in the Constitution to preserve the cultural and linguistic differences of the three border regions and the two islands of Sardinia and Sicily. Four of the regions retain 60% of the taxes raised while Sardinia keeps 100%.

In order to have a parliamentary majority Luigi Di Maio, the victor in the general election, agreed to govern in coalition with Matteo Salvini. It was immediately obvious that Salvini had the upper hand, because he was forceful, charismatic and, significantly, extremely politically astute.

Two recent events question Di Maio's sense of judgement and his ability to effectively share government with his coalition partner, Salvini.

Straying into my colleague *Froggy*'s domain, Di Maio decided to travel to Paris to meet Christof Chalençon of the Yellow Vest protestors: *gilet gialli* in Italian. Speculation was that he considered it would enhance his image in time for May's EU elections. *Huffpost.it* reported Di Maio as saying that *M5S* and the *gilets gialli* had "*shared values that focus on the battles of citizens, social rights, direct democracy and the environment*". Other *gilet gialli* supporters, referred to as *principal leaders*, had said that Di Maio had made no contact with them. Indeed one said that they wouldn't have lifted the phone if he had rung.

The visit caused a serious diplomatic row. *Huffpost.it* reported that Chalençon had threatened President Macron with the guillotine. *Il Fatto Quotidiano* said that Chalençon wanted "*to organise a mobilisation on the Franco-Italian border...as a transnational common*

struggle". Di Maio apparently approved of this idea. *Il Fatto* was amazed, wondering why "*Di Maio doesn't seem to remember that he is the Vice-President of the Government*" (that he wants to overthrow).

The proverbial penny eventually dropped and Di Maio, realising his mistake, said that he could never support violence. Too late - the French Ambassador was recalled. Matters were taken out of Di Maio's hands and President Mattarella travelled to Paris to smooth relations.

Another angle on this incident is that the losing *M5S* candidate in Sardinia did not have any physical support from his leader Luigi Di Maio, who was visiting Paris and Strasbourg instead. The candidate, Francesco Desogus, had asked, but was left on his own. Gabriella Cerami, interviewing him, asked whether he felt abandoned. Her questions probed for critical comment but his responses repeatedly hedged. He did say that he was impressed by the energy and commitment of Salvini who had visited and supported farmers angry about EU milk subsidies. "*He knows how to operate...he is always on the crest of a wave, he is a political animal.*"

The second incident involves Salvini's refusal to accept any more seaborne migrants by preventing their rescuers' boats docking in Italy. Matteo Renzi's *Pd*'s (*Partito Democratico*) government had long pressured ineffectively for other European countries to share the influx taken by Italy. Salvini's brutal methods worked instantly and migrants were dispersed to be shared with other countries. In August 2018 Salvini refused to allow the *Diciotto* coastguard ship with over 100 migrants to off-load in Catania. He threatened that he would return them to Libya if other countries didn't take their share. The incident was protracted and the Sicilian Regional authorities eventually charged him with kidnap.

At first Salvini was bullish and dismissive but then decided that he did not want to go to court. *M5S* were then pressured, according to Travaglio, by a blackmailing strategy that threatened to "*overthrow the government*", in reality to curtail their coalition. *M5S* are extremely anxious to avoid an election because currently heavy losses are predicted for them. Marco Travaglio previous Editor of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and writer of their editorials dedicated two of them (16 and 19 February) to this incident.

M5S had used their on-line voting website "*Rousseau*" to ask members their opinion on whether the case against Salvini should proceed. Travaglio puts it like this, "*when 'the people' are asked to pronounce not on matters of principle, but on criminal cases of which they know nothing, the answer that usually comes is wrong. And thatis not only wrong, but suicidal.*" "*To save*

Continued On Page 23