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VICTIM MAY, TORY LOSSES AND BREXIT

Theresa May will stand down as Tory party leader on 7 June starting the process for electing a new leader and Prime Minister. Predictably, in her tearful exit date speech on the steps of Downing Street, she blamed MPs on all sides of the Commons for her failure to get her Brexit deal accepted. She played the victim of a long simmering plot to replace her with a right-wing hard Brexiteer who would ensure that the UK reached a better deal with the EU. But just how a new Tory leader and Prime Minister would achieve this given the political composition of the House of Commons is anyone's guess. Leaving the EU on 31 October with no deal looks more likely than ever.

May had entered talks with Labour less than two months before her exit announcement, much too late in the eyes of many, and had failed to reach agreement. Labour said it would vote against her 'new' deal, as would many Tories, including cabinet members, opposed to her sleeping with the enemy. Her days were numbered, and she knew it. Her speech was peppered with a list of Tory government achievements, with the promise of a bright future for a united country under a new leader. It was a desperate attempt at a party political broadcast by a Prime Minister who was already dead.

The belief that a new Tory leader and Prime Minister would heal the divisions in the country, long dormant but brought to the surface by Brexit, is akin to a belief in fairies. In the general election, whenever it comes, the Tories could pay heavily for what many voters may see as harsh treatment of a courageous woman who did her best to deliver the outcome of the 2016 referendum.

Even if the disastrous EU election results for the Tories are only partially reflected at the general election, they will be kicked out of office. A caveat

here: this will depend on what happens to the votes of those Tory and Labour voters who switched to the single issue Brexit party on 23 May. If many of them stick with Farage and his party, both the Tories and Labour will be badly hit.

The Brexit party topped the poll in every English region outside of London, where it was pushed into third place by the Liberal Democrats and Labour. But it triumphed in Wales, where there was a strong leave vote in 2016, and ran second to the SNP in a firmly remain Scotland.

On the surface these results suggest a very bright future for the Brexit party. However, the EU elections were dominated by the single issue of Brexit and the Brexit party, unlike the Tories and Labour, had a clear unambiguous message, and in Nigel Farage a charismatic leader to communicate it to the voters.

It was undoubtedly a remarkable performance by Farage and his supporters. Farage without UKIP was much stronger than UKIP without Farage. But not astonishing, given that Brexit is now the main issue.

In 2014, UKIP won nearly 27% of the votes and 24 seats. This time, the Brexit party with a shrunken UKIP won just under 35% and 29 seats. Hundreds of thousands who had voted UKIP in 2014 switched to the Brexit party. But at both elections it was not going to give them authentic government power.

Brexit voters need to know what kind of party they support. It is not a political party in the traditional sense. Farage has learned from the right-wing populist parties in Europe, particularly the Five Star Movement in Italy. In 'Where Farage learned his digital tricks', an article in The Guardian of 21 May, two days before the EU elections, Farage is quoted saying "I've watched the growth of the Five

Star Movement with absolute fascination. Look at what we're already doing in four weeks-we're doing the same kind of thing"

In the same article Arron Banks, a close associate of Farage and co-founder of the Leave.EU campaign put it into context: "The Brexit party is the virtual carbon copy of the Five Star Movement. What the Five Star did, and what the Brexit party is doing, is having a tightly controlled central structure, almost a dictatorship at the centre. If you have a tightly controlled centre, then the crazies can't take over" Labour should use that quote at the next election and point out that most 'populists' despise the people they lead, thinking themselves superior and do not plan to give ordinary people real power.

The election campaign was between those who want to leave the EU and those who support a second referendum in the hope that the UK remains a member. The result showed that the parties who had a clear message, the Brexit party, Liberal Democrats and Greens, polled well. (ChangeUK, which attracted the support of a number of Labour remain voters, amassed less than 600,000 votes across England and Wales, with a vote share of 3.4%. Its future surely lies in a merger with the Liberal Democrats).

The compromise parties, the Tories and Labour, who want to leave with a deal that doesn't harm the economy, polled badly. In the current febrile state of politics compromise has become a no-go word. Some Westminster politicians continue to insist that there must be compromise if a deal is to win the support of a majority of MPs. Compromise is the bedrock of parliamentary democracy. But Nigel Farage, basking in the glory of victory, believes that the party's newly elected MEPs should participate in any further talks with EU

leaders to break the deadlock over Brexit.

Europe has been the bugbear of the Tories for more than forty years. It has never reconciled itself to being a part of a greater Europe. It was the downfall of Thatcher, Major, Cameron, and now May. So given the divided state of the current Tory party and the internal battles over the future leadership of the party a mauling in the EU elections was inevitable. Even with Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, commonly known as just plain Boris, as leader-he is the political pin up of the grassroots Tories- the party may not be saved from a further mauling.

Labour's lack of a clear message on Europe led to its poor performance overall, but particularly in Wales, its traditional stronghold. (Its share of the vote in England, Scotland and Wales fell from 25.4% in 2014 to 14.1% in 2019, and halved its number of MEPs to 10). With the leadership and the party in parliament divided, mixed signals were conveyed to voters. Labour's policy, which appeared to suggest that the party could have its cake and eat it- voters couldn't decide whether Labour wanted to leave or remain in the EU- caused a desertion of Labour remain voters to the Liberal Democrats and the Green party and an exodus of Labour leave voters to the Brexit party. Unless Labour clarifies its position and exercises strong leadership, not only on the EU but also on bread and butter issues that have a direct effect on people's lives, many of those voters may not return to Labour.

Labour is in a terrible position which invites losses whichever way it turns. However, the Tories are in an even worse one. A new Tory leader won't get a new deal

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

IRELAND

08 August 1918. Part Two

Edward Shortt MP. KC. (10/3/1862-10/11/1935) was elected as a Liberal Party member in January 1910 for Newcastle upon Tyne, and as member for Newcastle upon Tyne West in December 1918. In May 1918 he was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland. He was Home Secretary from January 1919 until Lloyd George's coalition government was defeated in the general election of October 1922. At that point Shortt retired from politics.

The CHIEF SECRETARY for IRELAND (Mr. Shortt) I will deal first with the two points raised by the hon. Member for East Mayo before I come to the general question. I deal first with the question of permits to travel backwards and forwards between their constituencies and Parliament. Those permits are absolutely necessary for the protection of the good

government of Ireland. It is absolutely necessary that there should be some control over those who are able to get in and out of Ireland, and that necessity involves a second necessity, namely, that there should be at Holyhead an officer whose duty it is to see that no person without a permit is allowed to go on board ship. It might be said that there was at Holyhead a Home Office official who did not know the hon. Member, and that the result might be very considerable inconvenience to the hon. Member. In discussing this point, when we first arranged the permits, we came to the conclusion—and I assure the House that we were considering nothing but the convenience of hon. Members—[Laughter]—no doubt they laugh at me, but I am quite certain that they know that we had nothing but the convenience of hon. Members in our minds—and we came to the conclusion that it was better that they should have what was in

real effect an identification card to enable it to be known at once that they were Members of Parliament who could go on board. I hope that that matter is now settled, and that hon. Members will appreciate it.

Mr. DILLON Do I understand that without going to Downing Street we will get that permit?

Mr. SHORTT I can only say that I arranged with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that that was to be done, that Members of Parliament will be entitled as a right to a permit; but for their own convenience and for better security it was resolved to ask them to carry a permit of that sort, and that it will be available for all time as long as permits are necessary, and that they shall not be required to get their photographs taken.

Mr. HAZLETON Why should I have to get one for three months to-day?

Mr. SHORTT If the officials are not carrying out what my right hon. Friend and I agreed to, I will put pressure on them that they should carry it out. I can only tell what was arranged between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and myself. So far as I am concerned, I will see that it is carried out as far as I possibly can. With regard to the prohibition of meetings, I am bound to say that hon. Members below the Gangway have an extraordinarily difficult standard as to what is an insult. A perfectly innocent statement made by me is resented as a grave insult, but about as gross a charge as could possibly be made when made against me is mere courteous persiflage.

Mr. DEVLIN Who started it?

Mr. SHORTT The hon. Member suggested that it is the

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without a general election to alter the balance of opinion in the House of Commons. But such an election would be disastrous for them. We can be fairly confident that the EU will not grant the new Tory leader a new, improved deal. Will the Tories then go for no deal? That is unlikely to get through the Commons, but that may not matter if it is the default option. The Tories would be forever associated with a no deal Brexit forced through without a general election. Labour could at least claim that they had tried to stop it.

It cannot be stressed enough how disastrous Brexit is for the Labour Party's hope of reviving class politics in Britain. There is now a real danger that the poisonous atmosphere created by the Brexit debate will sink Labour's agenda for good. But at least a no deal Brexit would allow Labour to focus on what it hopes to do for the country.

Editorials and older articles at our website,
<http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/>

This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

deliberate policy of the Irish Government to ensure that the constitutional party and the constitutional movement shall be destroyed, and that we should deliberately try to set up in Ireland a rule, a party, which goes for unrest, which goes for rebellion, and which plays absolutely and entirely into the hands of Germany in this War. To accuse me of that is no insult, but to accuse them of not doing all they might do to help the Government is an insult which calls for denunciation, and they have denounced me in every possible way, and have accused me of the most dishonourable conduct of which a Minister can be guilty. All that is perfectly fair and perfectly right, and there is no insult contained in it at all. That shows how true it is that the Hibernian character is sometimes inclined to exaggeration, and it shows how true it is that hon. Members say many things which they do not mean. I do not believe that there is a single Member in this House who believes that either Lord French or myself would be guilty of any such deliberate treason to this country.

What is the position? The most dangerous and seditious propaganda was carried on by Sinn Feiners—who had been captured by the advocates of physical force—at their meetings and publicly preached sedition. We are asked whether we could not have taken other steps, but the very first thing that would have happened, after proclaiming Sinn Fein, would have been that the physical force party would have turned their attention to the Gaelic Society, or to some other equally innocent association. We are bound to close every possible avenue that may be open to the advocates of physical force. The means employed is to stop public meetings at which sedition is preached, and the only possible way is to use a system of permits,

and to ask the assistance of all reasonable people. We know that for ordinary meetings which are known to be innocent, permits are obtained as a mere formality. What happens? If a Member wants to address his constituency where is the great insult in issuing a permit? What is the intolerable inconvenience to which he is submitted? All that it means is that the gentlemen who organise the meeting for the Member have to send a postcard to the police, to say where they are holding the meeting at which the Member is to address his constituents, and a permit will be sent by return of post.

Mr. DILLON The right hon. Gentlemen has misinterpreted what I said. It was not inconvenience that I complained. What I complained of was the fact that this system of permits gave a political advantage to our opponents, and we cannot consent to give them that advantage.

Mr. SHORTT I would ask the hon. Members who are the opponents to whom the advantage would be given?

Mr. DILLON I mean the Sinn Feiners.

Mr. SHORTT I am told that I have favoured the Sinn Feiners, and frequently the papers have attacked me for fostering Ulster opponents. What is the fact? All parties alike get permits. There is no favouritism, no differentiation, and if there be a meeting where it is known perfectly well that sedition is intended that meeting can be stopped. But where we know perfectly well that no sedition is intended, as, of course, is the case in any meetings at which hon. Members desire to address their constituents, and where there would be no sedition talked, there would not be any trouble whatever. But it is essential and necessary to control political meetings where it is known that

there is intention of seditious speech making, and I myself know of no more convenient method of controlling such meetings than that method which has been established. It only involves a little reasonable acquiescence and assistance on the part of hon. Members in this House. If they would only appreciate the amount of sedition that has been talked in Ireland they would be quite ready to acquiesce and see that we are justified in asking loyal Members of this House to appreciate the circumstances in Ireland.

Mr. SWIFT MacNEILL Does the right hon. Gentleman not know—he is a learned and distinguished lawyer—that the right of holding public meetings is a common law right, and why should we hold our meetings under the permission of some policeman?

Mr. SHORTT My hon. and learned Friend is really a little unreasonable. Here we are in the middle of a great war.

Mr. MacNEILL Let the War alone.

Mr. SHORTT It is all very well to ask us to forget the War, but the Government of Ireland are not going to forget the fact that we are in the middle of a great war and we are bound to take steps to prevent sedition in that country, and they are taken under legislation which has been passed for War purposes only. I know what the common law is perfectly well, but we are living under extreme and abnormal circumstances, in which we cannot help these things being done. I have tried to explain to the House, and I hope I have succeeded, that this is a reasonable and absolutely necessary regulation. It asks very little of hon. Members in this House.

Mr. DEVLIN You are always on the side of the rebels!

Mr. SHORTT Is not that

an insult? All we ask of hon. Members is that they should acquiesce in this Regulation, so as to prevent really seditious meetings from taking place. With regard to the question of Ulster arms, I am not going into that, except to this extent: I am taunted, apparently, with having left the control of arms to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Trinity College. I have not, in fact, asked anyone to take control of the arms, and when I say that I mean personal and physical control. I do not acknowledge the right hon. Member for Trinity College or the Member for East Clare, who is now described as the leader of the Sinn Féin party—I do not recognise either Gentlemen as having control over anybody else in Ireland, and I shall only deal with those who have physical control of arms. So long as I am connected with the Administration, I shall acknowledge nobody outside the Government. I have already explained my position in regard to arms, and it is that we mean to get them without trouble if I can, as I am sure everybody in the House would prefer should be done. If we cannot get them without trouble, we will get them.

Let me deal with the general policy of the Government. The policy of the Government is exactly what it was before I joined the Government, namely, the policy which was declared by the Prime Minister in March. It is true that circumstances have to a certain extent altered, but I hope and believe they have not altered to any such extent as will affect that portion of the dual policy which we talk of as Home Rule. What is the position in regard to that? I should like to give what I conceive to be the position in Ireland to-day. Ireland—I think I am justified in saying this—is being restored to a peaceful state in which law and order are being

observed. Remember, I have said peaceful only. Ireland is to-day extremely prosperous. There is no material grievance, no grievance financial, no grievance like that which resulted from famine, none of the grievances which one could call material grievances, which commonly give rise to trouble amongst peoples. But, and I admit this absolutely frankly, while you have a peaceful people in Ireland, while you have a prosperous people in Ireland, you have all over the South, middle, and West of Ireland deep and bitter resentment and discontent. I know that perfectly well, and I know as well as any hon. Member in this House what the reason is, and really the problem of Ireland to-day is how to bring about a set of circumstances in which the ground for that discontent is removed. I know it is sentimental; I know the one thing that will remove it as well as any hon. Member below the Gangway, but there are only two ways in which you can get Home Rule. One is by physical force—that is out of the question—and the other is by passing what is necessary through this House. That is the problem with which we are faced. How is that going to be done, and what steps are necessary? Because, although it is true, as the hon. Member for East Mayo has said, that a Home Rule measure is upon the Statute Book, it is suspended for the period of the War, and I am not at all sure that he is quite right when he says that it comes automatically into operation at the end of the War unless something is done.

Mr. DILLON I am sure!

Mr. SHORTT Then the hon. Member is in conflict—and I regret to say it—with some very distinguished lawyers. I am not at all sure about that, but for the purposes of argument—

An HON. MEMBER Mr. Redmond thought so!

Mr. SHORTT So did I until yesterday, but a great lawyer has put to me a proposition with regard to it which I do not pretend to have considered, but which certainly has a very serious difficulty in it. However, let us take it for the purposes of argument to-day that it will come automatically into force at the end of the War. The Suspensory Act was passed because it was felt by the Government of that day, 1914, that something must be done to meet the Ulster party and the Ulster objections. From that time onward every attempt has been made to bring Irishmen together—the Buckingham Palace Conference, the suggestions that were made by the present Prime Minister, the Convention—every time that Irishmen have come together to consider the point the question has been: What is to be done to meet the difficulty of Ulster? That question faces us to-day, and hon. Members talk as though the Government had abandoned Home Rule, as though Home Rule was a thing dead and gone. It is absolutely nothing of the sort. There is a Committee which has been labouring at various schemes dealing with this Ulster question, and I have arranged myself to come back again in the Recess, instead of giving my whole time in Ireland, in order to meet a Sub-committee to go into certain other points. We are doing our best to get a measure into a form which will ensure it passing through this House, and that is the one thing which is absolutely essential before you can take the necessary steps to remove discontent in Ireland. Now I am justified in saying this, and even at the risk of being called insulting I shall say it. We have been accused of the bankruptcy of British statesmanship. What sign is there of any Irish constructive statesmanship to-day? What help are we getting? We are getting any amount of destructive criticism,

aye, and not only destructive criticism, but there is great denunciation and great abuse of what we are trying to do. What hon. Member has ever made a suggestion, since the Convention failed, of some way in which the labours of the Convention might be brought to fruition and to success? I have been twitted in some of the Irish newspapers, and, indeed, in some of the English newspapers, with being out of touch with feeling in Ireland and out of touch with the Irish people. How can it be otherwise when every single representative of Ireland refuses to see me in public or to be known to have ever come near me, with the exception of, perhaps, half a dozen?

Mr. DILLON That is on account of Conscription. As long as you are going to conscript our people I am afraid that will be the case.

Mr. SHORTT If I am not to get any help, I must do my best to work without it, but is that a reasonable position to take up? Do hon. Members below the Gangway really think they are forwarding the solution of this great question by standing aloof, by refusing to be seen discussing anything with a member of the Government?

Mr. DEVLIN We know how we were treated when we did discuss things with Ministers.

Mr. SHORTT I have not found that the hon. Member has discussed much with me, but perhaps he would rather not. Hon. Members come to me when they have got any trouble with their constituents, like anybody else, and I am sure they will do me the justice of saying that I have invariably done the very best I could to meet that which they desired. I am only too anxious to meet Irish Members, to get Irish opinion. I have done my best, failing the help of Irish Members of Parliament, to get those in

Ireland who will meet me and give me their opinions. When I offer an opinion in this House it is not my own—it is the best which I can gather from the best advisers I can find in Ireland. I have done my best to get it, but if hon. Members who are the mouthpieces of Irish constituencies, who represent, or ought to represent, the feeling of Ireland, do not come and help me, if they will not come and say, “Let us see the draft of your Bill and see if we can help you with it,” I am helpless to meet their wishes and desires. But I can assure them that I am only too anxious for their help, only too anxious for their assistance and their opinions, only too anxious to get what help they can give me. That is the position, so far as I am concerned, with regard to general policy. It remains unchanged.

An HON. MEMBER Are you in favour of Conscription still?

Mr. SHORTT I am not in a position to say anything more about Conscription than has been said by the spokesman of the Government on the subject. I have explained my position as well as I can, and I can say no more on that, but I do ask during this Recess that those who represent Ireland should at least give me some assistance in my attempts to solve this terrible problem.

Mr. DILLON You have never asked us before. This is the first time it ever was asked.

Mr. SHORTT Do I understand from that—I welcome the interruption with the greatest pleasure—that if I do ask, the hon. Member will come and help me?

Mr. DILLON I only said you never asked it before.

Mr. SHORTT Do I understand from that complaint that the hon. Member will come and help me? Because if so, I ask him here and now, before I sit down.

Mr. DILLON I make no pledge of that character at all,

but undoubtedly the right hon. Gentleman left the House under the impression that he had been asking for assistance and advice from Irish Members. He never did to this hour. This is the first time on which he has approached me or made a hint to me that any advice or assistance would be acceptable.

Mr. HERBERT SAMUEL I desire to intervene only for two or three moments, but the speech of the Chief Secretary has contained two statements of very great importance, and it has also been marked by one omission. The omission was to say anything to the House with respect to the intentions of the Government between now and the middle of October with regard to Conscription.

Mr. SHORTT It cannot be enforced before the House reassembles. If the right hon. Gentleman will look at the Act, he will find that an Order in Council cannot be made unless the House is sitting.

Mr. SAMUEL I know it must come before the House to be discussed, but it is the fact that this threat of Conscription while self-government is still denied to the Irishmen—and that is the essential point—has thrown Ireland into a state of turmoil and has created most of the difficulties with which the right hon. Gentleman and his Administration have to cope. And it is that false modesty, as many of us think it, which is responsible for many of the troubles now in Ireland, while at the same time it has not produced, and appears to me unlikely ever to produce, a single additional soldier to help to fight our battles in this War. The two positive statements that my right hon. Friend's speech contained were such as I think all of us in this House were very glad indeed to note. The first relates to the arms which are stored in Ulster. The right hon. Gentleman said definitely and specifically

that, either with trouble or without trouble, the present Irish Administration is determined to secure possession of those arms.

Mr. PRINGLE He did not tell us when he would take trouble.

Mr. SAMUEL That, I think, is a most wise policy, for there will be no real peace in Ireland, there will be no real sanction to the policy of administration, so long as it can be said, and said with truth, that while one party, which is willing to use physical force to secure its ends, is suppressed by all the power of the Executive, and its weapons taken away from it, another party, which is willing to use physical force for other ends, but equally against the law, is allowed to retain full possession of whatever arms it has been able to accumulate. The other statement is that the Government are still engaged in the endeavour to find a legislative solution of the Home Rule problem, and that he himself during the Recess intends to take part in the deliberations of the Government Committee, with a view to framing a legislative measure. What does that mean? I am quite sure my right hon. Friend would not say that to the House unless the Government intended that those efforts should have some substantial result. He would not make a declaration of that character merely in order to mark time, to keep the attention of the Irish people engaged upon those deliberations, to hold the matter in suspense, while at the end he knew very well that nothing would come of it. I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend is not capable of a policy of that kind. If he tells the House of Commons on the eve of the Adjournment that during the Recess he and his colleagues are to be engaged in endeavouring once more to frame an acceptable Home Rule measure which can pass into law, he means that it is the intention of the Government to produce such a measure to Parliament. That is why, I take it, his speech is of great importance. He could not wish us to draw any other conclusion. I welcome both those declarations—the declaration with regard to arms, and the declaration with regard to a Home Rule Bill. While I welcome them, I do ask my right hon. Friend to beware of such a course of policy as once more will only raise hopes to destroy them, which will only give assurances which are afterwards to be broken. If he tells the Irish people that he means on the one hand to secure complete disarmament of the rebel forces in Ireland, of whatever character they may be, and, further, that it is the intention of the Government to proceed effectively to frame a legislative measure to grant self-government to Ireland, we take note of those undertakings, and let him beware he does not lay himself open to the reproach, so many British statesmen in Ireland have had to bear, of raising hopes only to destroy them afterwards.

The third and final part of the debate on Ireland will appear in the next (July/August) issue of Labour Affairs.

ORPHAN

For the BBC she stood up in a punt,
around 1991 cursing Saddam Hussein
as a runt.

On the waters of Shatt-al-Arab,
scurrying arrogantly as the divine beetle
scarab.

This privileged Englishwoman,
to Imperial Britain and her allies summons
all wrath on the head of Iraq,
for the treatment of the Shia after their attack
that was meant to split the nation.

Napalm caused an inhuman creation
no doubt

but in her shout
the barbarous beast
ripped open the flesh of Iraq
with its innards hacked
until a million lay dead,
then as Mesopotamia still bled

there came an orphan
who wasn't an orphan,
but stolen
and his story swollen
through the kindness of strangers
who took him out of their deliberate
danger.

One day, in 2019, physically healed and speaking
Devon,
it was back to mama as an adult,
among the concrete blocks of instant heaven.
But what big cemeteries you have!
Not to worry the cow still
calves.

Wilson John Haire. 15th May, 2019.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



Another industrial loss

General Electrics is in difficulties worldwide

In 2014/5 General Electrics took over the energy branch of the French company Alstom, a sale recommended by Emmanuel Macron then Elysée Deputy general secretary under Francois Hollande, even though GE was already a struggling giant and Alstom was then one of its principal competitors. This is not mentioned today; the *Monde* newspaper mentions Macron's responsibility briefly, immediately presenting the defence that he was only following the wishes of the then CEO of Alstom. The plant, in Belfort (Eastern France) makes gas turbines and turbines for nuclear power stations (including Hinkley Point); its future is in jeopardy with 900 possible job losses out of a total of 1,900.

In 2015 at the time of the acquisition, General Electric had undertaken to create 1,000 jobs in the Alstom energy sector between 2016 and 2018. It will pay a 50 million Euro penalty to the French state for its failure to do so. The present minister for the economy plans to involve local authorities in the spending of this fine. This is a paltry sum compared to the fine Alstom had to pay at the time of the sale, a 772 million dollar fine to the US because

of a corruption charge; at the time of the acquisition, GE had undertaken to pay the fine, which gave it an advantage over another possible firm, Siemens, which didn't volunteer to do so. In the event, GE did not pay, saying it was illegal for a third party to pay a fine, which was clear from the beginning.

On 21st May workers at the Belfort plant lined up outside the gates to send off one of their large turbines, in celebration of their work and skill.

A possible non loss, thanks to the Gilets Jaunes

The Macron government wants to sell French assets, in this case Paris Airports. The public is strongly opposed to this, and may conceivably prevent it happening thanks to a referendum.

This is the 'Referendum by Shared Initiative' (*Referendum d'Initiative Partagée*), 248 MPs, both left and right, got together to propose the referendum (a fifth of MPs must agree); the Constitutional council validated the proposal; the next step is to gather the signatures of 10% of the electoral register, i.e. more than 4.7 million French. If this number is reached, more hurdles need to be overcome, but this means the decision on Airports of Paris will not be reached until autumn 2020.

The period of collection of signatures will last nine months. The Ministry of the Interior must open a dedicated website by 15 June. If this threshold is reached, Parliament can still suspend the process. The Assembly and the Senate will have six months to consider the text of the referendum proposal. If both houses look at it, then there will be no consultation. If at least one does not do so then the President of the Republic will have to call a referendum.

The government is in a panic about this, and is trying to stop it happening again, by forbidding the calling of a referendum on a subject being debated in parliament. At the moment the subject of a referendum cannot be a law that has already been passed less than a year previously.

The magazine *Marianne* thanks the Gilets Jaunes for this referendum, saying:

"Notwithstanding the vagaries of their movement, this is the meaning of the message sent by the "yellow vests". Their aspiration to be listened to, heard and respected is first and foremost a response to the epidemic that is plaguing our institutions, and therefore democracy. Their request for consultation of the people by referendum (the famous RIC, which has nothing to do with the stunted version retained

by Emmanuel Macron) deserves therefore to be heard, because this reform could revive a public life today reduced to a caricature.”

The Gilets Jaunes RIC was *Referendum d'Initiative Citoyenne*.

Macrons' green washing

With the destruction of political parties, Macron is a bit stuck come election time. He is obliged to resurrect Marine Le Pen, who had been invisible during the struggles against the Labour Law and the SNCF strikes and demonstrations, and rebuffed during the Gilets Jaunes marches and sit ins. Macron had to force the list leader of his party to have a televised debate with Jordan Bardella, the young and relatively inexperienced leader of the RN (exFN) instead of with the leader of the *Républicains* (ex-Sarkozy) list.

Polls give the RN winning the largest number of MEPs (as in 2014) which is a bit embarrassing. Conscious of the fact that people vote more green for the European elections, and of the Friday demonstrations of school and university students for the climate, Macron proceeded to make green speeches, although he talked about what Europe should do, rather than what France should do.

The contradictions between what he says and what he does were obvious.

Macron called for an end to the concreting of the land, yet he supports the massive shopping/leisure project near Paris called EuropaCity.

His government wants to make it easier to cut down forests in France; from now on, the National Office of Forests will no longer be consulted before work takes place.

His government wants to make it easier to develop classified

sites by making ministerial authorisation no longer a requirement. Currently, work likely to change the appearance of classified sites (demolitions, work subject to building permits, tree felling, transport infrastructure ...) require special authorization from the Minister of Ecological Transition. Here is a case where the principle of subsidiarity does not apply: in these cases the heaviest political weight is what is required, in order to resist pressure.

Macron calls for an end to the pollution and destruction of the Amazonian forest, yet has not ruled out the 'Gold Mountain' mining project in French Guiana. He opposes deforestation in emerging countries yet he supports the Total bio refinery of palm oil in La Mède in the South of France.

The EU must take decisions: ban glyphosate, instate a carbon tax, make the Paris climate agreement of 2015 binding; stop making petrol cars etc.

Macron knows neither the EU nor the members states are prepared to do any of this. He can make these pronouncements knowing he will not upset any economic and financial giants that govern us.

The green washing of the official campaign is just that, a pretence.

The battles of the past two years

The unsuccessful battles against the new Labour Law (easier dismissal, plant level negotiations rather than branch level etc) and the privatisation of the railways are not forgotten. What stands out is the determination of the government to make no concessions. The Gilets Jaunes movement stands out for the violence of the government response, both extreme physical force and vile propaganda. One

example of this was on 1st May. The minister of the interior was caught in a blatant lie when he said the Gilets Jaunes had invaded the recovery room in a Paris hospital and were putting patients' lives in danger. The media all repeated this, one journalist adding 'I hope for their sake they were drunk, because there is a lot of alcohol involved in these marches, that would be their only excuse'. It turned out that people had taken refuge from gas and bullets in the halls of various buildings, including that of a hospital. When the hospital staff explained they could not open the door to the recovery room to let them in, the demonstrators left peacefully, in the event accompanied by police who re-established calm on this occasion. The media were obliged to tell the truth the next day. (The excuse was that the director of the hospital had told the minister that they were under attack.)

No political party has been able to support and lead them.

European elections results

With a 51.3% national turnout, the most striking thing is how well Macron's party did: almost as well as Marine Le Pen's party (RN): 22.4% against 23.3. In fact you could say his party has established itself as durable. So he still has support and will carry on with his liberal agenda, as promised. The erstwhile government parties (Sarkozy's *Républicains*, and the Socialist Party) scored below 10%.

What we need now is an opposition. The RN is wheeled out at election time, but during working class, public service and popular protests it is nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless it gathers the protest vote, rather than the left.

Ian Brossat's CP scored 2.5%, the recovery will take a long time.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Crouching Huawei, Falling Apple

Samsung of South Korea has long been the top company for Mobile Phones. But recently, the USA's flagship corporation Apple has been losing market share.

Huawei has been rising, even as Apple falls.¹

I said last month that the US decline is helped by a vicious ideological hatred of socialism. That Huawei's main crime was to be a highly visible example of Chinese success. Success based on a more socialist and state-dominated version of the New Deal or Mixed Economy system, which most of the liberal-left also dislike.²

China producing cheap products fitted a vision of Eternal Western Dominance. China displacing the West and its satellites for top-end products causes fear.

This includes the prospect of China putting the first woman on the moon. Western politicians pretend they defend a continuous tradition: yet they excluded women from space till the 1980s. Sadly, the Soviet Union was also losing faith in the radicalism that had made it strong. They sent up one woman in 1963, but then sent no more until the USA changed its mind.³

China is certain to include women in its plans for fresh human landings on the moon,

¹ [Huawei beats Apple to become second-largest smartphone maker, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/aug/01/huawei-beats-apple-smartphone-manufacturer-samsung-iphone>](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/aug/01/huawei-beats-apple-smartphone-manufacturer-samsung-iphone)

² <https://gwydionwilliams.com/99-problems-magazine/the-mixed-economy-worked-quite-well/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_female_spacefarers

for which there is no fixed date. Trump may have thought of this in his sudden drive to get the US back on the moon by 2024. But just now the Democrats will not give NASA the necessary funds to do it both fast and safely.

As for Huawei, it has long been known that the USA insisted that its own IT and communication corporations make life easy for US spies. That's the real complaint: not that Huawei might let China spy, but that might make it hard for the USA to do so.

More important is that Huawei phones are a visible symbol that a completely different approach to life can flourish in the modern world.

South Korea's Samsung and Finland's Nokia might also give this message. Both countries favour state intervention and tax-based equality. South Korea's Ha-Joon Chang has repeatedly said this,⁴ but isn't known to most of the public, and largely ignored by the left in Europe and the USA. Finland is part of Scandinavia's successful Social-Democracy, but somehow this awkward detail gets evaded. But China is too big and too different to be ignored.

'Please Copy the USA's Failure'

"History is never far from China's mind in its trade dispute with America. A few months ago, when negotiations looked on track, staunch nationalists warned of echoes with the 'unequal treaties' that foreign powers had forced upon China in the

⁴ <https://gwydionwilliams.com/48-economics/ha-joon-chang-23-things-they-dont-tell-you-about-capitalism/>

19th century... But the analogy that haunts Chinese economists does not involve China itself. They fear a replay of the Plaza accord of 1985, when Japan, under American pressure, tried to resolve trade tensions by pushing the yen higher. That calmed the tensions but, most Chinese economists think, at an intolerable price: stagnant Japanese growth for two-plus decades."⁵

That's from *The Economist*. And naturally the article argues that it is a *complete coincidence* that Japan floundered when it abandoned Mixed-Economy methods. A certainty that they are right even when the raw facts point otherwise is the same spirit that led them to demand British inaction in the 1840s Irish potato famine.⁶ But they do at least mention facts that most of the Western media never mention, and perhaps don't know.

I was already definite that the USA had blighted Japan, which was also unready to take on the USA when they were briefly seen as a rival following the Soviet collapse. But despite taking a strong interest and trawling many news sources, I had not previously come across specific matter of the Plaza Accord. Not known how it was being seen today.⁷ Chinese sources frequently mention it,⁸ but I had missed that.

Being able now to google for

⁵ <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2019/05/23/as-the-trade-war-heats-up-china-looks-to-japans-past-for-lessons>

⁶ <https://gwydionwilliams.com/50-new-right-ideas/430-2/>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaza_Accord

⁸ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1151391.shtml>

it, I found some interesting US comments from CNN:

“The US won a trade war against Japan. But China is a whole new ball game...”

“In the 1980s, Japan was the big bad. Its economy was booming — the second largest in the world — and many in the United States feared they were about to be overtaken.

“Articles were published warning of the ‘Japaning of America’ or an ‘economic Pearl Harbor,’ as Japanese businesses bought US companies and landmarks. Lawmakers and commentators warned of a growing trade deficit between the two countries, and complained of Japanese firms stealing US intellectual property and taking advantage of unfair trade deals.

“In an interview with the ‘Morton Downey Jr. Show’ in 1989, Trump himself complained that Japan had ‘systematically sucked the blood out of America — sucked the blood out!’

“‘It’s a huge problem, and it’s a problem that’s going to get worse,’ Trump said of the US-Japan trade balance. ‘And they’re laughing at us.’

“By then, however, change was already happening. And far from overtaking the United States, Japan was about to fall far behind...”

“Yet the Plaza Accord wasn’t the end of US action against Japan. In 1987, Washington imposed 100% tariffs on \$300 million worth of Japanese imports, effectively blocking them from the American market.

“Things quickly turned sour for Tokyo. As the yen increased in value, Japanese products became more and more expensive, and countries turned away from the one-time export powerhouse. Efforts by the country’s central bank to keep the yen’s value low sparked a stock price bubble, the

collapse of which helped push the country into recession and a ‘lost decade.’”⁹

Most of the USA’s political class still believe that the USA has a right and a duty to dominate the rest of the world. US liberals worry that it is failing: they seldom say that it was inherently wrong.

Huawei’s cheap connections were helping impoverished rural areas in the USA,¹⁰ but when has the ruling elite ever really cared about those people? They will vote Republican, regardless of how often they get kicked, so why bother giving them anything? That is typical of the competitive politics that the West wants to impose on everyone else.

Xi: Unity is Strength

Most of what Trump is now doing is aimed at winning re-election in 2020. Or at least with avoiding a Republican rout and the possibility of a President who would reverse the errors made from the 1980s.

President Xi does not face re-election till 2022. Until the rules were changed, he would have been obliged to step down then. Would have lost power in the run-up to 2022, with everyone speculating about whether the new leader would have different intentions. Or whether a new leader would have the strength to carry on with the same policies.

I never saw the removal of the two-term limit as being for Xi’s personal benefit.¹¹ In my view, China’s leaders foresaw that they faced a critical period. That it was no longer possible to avoid confronting the USA. So they

chose to raise up one of their number to the greatest personal authority since Mao.

Contrary to most Western views or hopes, the leadership is in very little danger of being overthrown. For one thing, young people are a smaller proportion of the total population than they were in 1989, or than they were in the West in the rebellious 1960s. But anyway popular sentiment is nationalist, and the authorities have so far been trying to cool it.¹² But Xi is also ready to accept short-term pain for long-term gain. He calls on the people to back this:

“Xi Jinping Warns of New ‘Long March’ as Trade War Intensifies...”

“While Mr. Xi did not mention the trade war in his comments, they are the strongest signal yet that Beijing has abandoned hopes of a deal with the United States on the issue in the near term. Prospects of a deal faded earlier this month when talks broke down between negotiators for the two sides and President Trump accused China of breaking terms that had already been settled.”¹³

Sometimes it is better to fight and lose, than not to fight at all. Fight very hard for those things your enemy might concede without disaster. Finland showed that in World War Two: the Soviets twice had to fight hard for limited gains, and so made no fresh demands.¹⁴

Finland also avoided becoming a front-line state in the Cold War, and ‘Finlandization’ became an insult among people a very long way from any Soviet forces. But in the end, Finland got most of what they wanted.

If China gives too much to Trump this year, more demands will follow. Follow even if a left-

⁹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/24/business/us-china-trade-war-japan-intl/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/25/technology/huawei-rural-wireless-service.html>

¹¹ <https://gwydionwilliams.com/99-problems-magazine/post-liberalism/> - print only till late 2019.

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/23/fight-to-end-china-media-ramps-up-rhetoric-us-trade-war>

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-trade.html>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_Finland_during_World_War_II

wing Democrat gets elected in 2020:

“Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, are every bit as hawkish on China as Trump. So they’ve been left with a tricky bit of triangulation: They agree with cracking down on China, they even agree with some of the president’s more aggressive tactics like tariffs, but they don’t think Trump is executing his plan effectively.”¹⁵

And China is in a much stronger position than Japan was in the 1980s. Japan lost World War Two, but was restored by US power and money during the Cold War. From the 1980s, the New Right decided that the Cold War would soon be won, in part by the enormously expensive ‘Star Wars’ program that might have made a nuclear war winnable by whichever power struck first. They started getting much less generous, and not just about Japan.

No doubt the New Right believed their own story about the Western economy being burdened by state controls and about to boom under their superior policies. This never happened: Britain and the USA never recovered the relatively fast growth of the 1950s and 1960s. By some measures, they did worse than even the chaotic 1970s. But from the viewpoint of the rich, things were going OK, because they gained a much bigger slice of a very average ‘cake’. And the USA was pleased to see the non-Anglo West slowed down to Anglo levels of growth.

China’s continuing success threatens to undermine this optimum for the rich. Hence the Trade War: and its outcome is critical for the future of the world.

The End of Britain’s Iron Age?

“When Mr Bessemer died the global annual production of Bessemer steel ran to £11bn in today’s money. Yet inventors who create and build from scratch have become rare. Instead such talent has given way to bankers who make money through financial rather than industrial engineering. The

¹⁵ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/5/21/18628128/trump-tariffs-2020-presidential-election-joe-biden-bernie-sanders>

skill here is not to take the long view; it is about being adept at manipulating financial structures to extract wealth. The private equity firm Greybull Capital that bought British Steel charged £20m a year in fees and interest from the company. Greybull had a record of failure; its anti-Midas touch saw an airline, an electrical chain, convenience stores and a snooker hall business all go bust when it was in charge.”¹⁶

Britain moved from Bronze to Iron in 800 BC, probably due to immigrants from Continental Europe shaking up a stagnant society.

For archaeologists, Britain’s Iron Age ended with the Roman invasion. But in practice, iron and steel remain dominant.

Britain’s Industrial Revolution was iron-based, and gave Britain a global Empire. The first significant iron-and-steam warship was East India Company’s *Nemesis*, launched in 1839 and vital for winning the First Opium War.¹⁷ And an historic embarrassment, a fighter for drugs pushers, so British historians have been happy for it to have been forgotten. Happy to see the credit grabbed by the USA for the unimportant iron warships of their 1860s Civil War.

Britain’s industrial decline came in part because other countries learned the same tricks. But also because most of the ruling class disliked industry and let it wither. Thatcher’s defeat of the Coal Miners confirmed long-term plans to abandon coal-mining completely: it is all now imported. But they are keen to encourage Fracking.

The former British Steel was taken over by Tata Group, which began as successful industrialists in British India. Tata matched Marx’s expectation that Britain building railways in India would change India for ever: but I doubt he’d have imagined native Indians taking over iron and steel in Britain.

Tata later split their British business

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/22/the-guardian-view-on-british-steel-collapse-productive-v-predatory-capitalism>

¹⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemesis_\(1839\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemesis_(1839))

in two. The English half, centred on Scunthorpe, is the ‘British Steel’ that now seems doomed. They keep Port Talbot Steelworks in Wales, though it too may not last.

China Now, India Next?

Does Mr Modi realise that if the USA defeated China, India would be next on the list to be ‘regulated’?

His re-election did not surprise me. The New Right put enormous effort into discrediting the successful semi-socialist globalisation that India’s Congress Party was a part of. And were helped by many leftists who bitched about imperfections of rival socialists and let the positives be forgotten.¹⁸ But given the cultural emptiness of New Right values, what else was likely to happen?

Humans live with a mix of idealism and selfishness. Pure selfishness is no way to live. And the New Right have anyway been mediocre in terms of overall growth.

Mr Modi has so far ridden the tiger of Hindu Extremists with some success. And has served the interests of rich people in India, rather than abasing himself before Global-Anglo values.

“A bit more Thatcherism would serve India well”, says the *New York Times*.¹⁹ Forgetting how badly it served Britain.

Free Only If Faceless?

For most of human history, people lived in villages or tribes. They had neighbours who knew exactly who they were. And sometimes mistreated each other: but more often there was mutual care.

But could be preyed on by raiders or bandits, which is why the state was developed.

Cities released people from both care and concern. Which is why the state expanded.

You could also *seem* anonymous, if you were out of your area and had nothing very distinctive about you.

¹⁸ <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/opinion/why-india-needs-modi.html>

But this was always limited. You could always be found, if someone cared enough. Or found unless powerful and corrupt people protected you, as with top gangsters.

When the victims were poor or powerless, mostly no one did care. And in bad areas, this danger would extend on up to the working mainstream.

Now we have better methods – CCTV and now Face Recognition. Life could be made safer for the poor or powerless, if they had the sense to act in their own interests.

You can also be tracked in remarkable detail through your Mobile Phone. Oddly, no one much worries about this. Most do not bother to put masking tape across the spy-camera included with most laptop computers.

Sadly, dogmatic liberals have made the running. Had an hysteric reaction to Face Recognition, now banned in San Francisco.²⁰

Will they now pass another law saying *“Human beings shall be forbidden from recognising each other in public places, without the prior written permission of the person being recognised”*?

Yes, Face Recognition is imperfect. But I’d assume the police know that. If not, have a simple training session showing how often it can fail. And it probably fails less than the human sort.

Snippets

Populism – ‘Scorn the People’ fails

Looking after minorities is excellent. But far too often, the left forgets about the working mainstream.

They say too little about economic inequality, which has hurt the mainstream.

Labour needs to make clear its concern for the Core English – people not part of any minority, including the rich.

If they felt overlooked, they were right.

We just saw this in Australia. The

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48276660>

right unexpectedly won in Australia, contrary to what polls predicted. But selfish feelings normally do bloom in the privacy of a voting booth.

Left-wing parties need to make it clear to their core populations that they matter. And that the Centre-Right has never in fact looked after their interests.

Come fly with me and die with me?

“Boeing is facing compensation claims from the three biggest airlines in China, which have grounded dozens of 737 Max jetliners since the deadly crash of an Ethiopian Airlines flight in March.”²¹

They are having trouble explaining away the decisions that led to unsafe aircraft being sold.²²

And trouble convincing the authorities to let those aircraft fly again without expensive changes.

What Next Without May?

Labour calling for a quick General Election is excellent, but very unlikely to succeed.

Ideally, one would like the leading Tories to put on sack-cloth and ashes and repent their many sins against the British people. But the one is almost as unlikely as the other.

The Tories and DUP know that either Labour or the Liberal Democrats would gain – probably both. Perhaps also Greens. Maybe also some right-wing alternatives, though Farage is useless at positive politics and party-building.

I’d expect them to hang on to the legal limit: June 2022.

Even if the Tories split, the fragments could share government together. This is normal in most of Europe.

And a No-Deal Brexit now seems the most likely outcome. Terrible for Britain, but likely to be good for the rest of the European Union.

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/business/boeing-737-max-china-air.html>

²² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-48174797>

More Government Needed

“Rising knife crime linked to council cuts, study suggests...”

““Every time I speak to young people they say the same thing: they need more positive activities, safe spaces to spend time with friends and programmes to help them grow and develop.”

“The APPG’s research found the average council cut spending on youth services – such as youth clubs – from 1.9m in 2014/15 to 1.2m in 2017/18. In real terms, this marked a decrease of 40%, it said.”²³

Executive Drug-Pushers

“Executives at a major opioid company, Insys Therapeutics, were found guilty by a federal jury on Thursday for, among other misdeeds, bribing doctors to prescribe their fentanyl-based painkiller — in another sign that the federal government and the public are increasingly ready to hold individuals and companies responsible for their role in the nationwide opioid epidemic.”²⁴

Knowing the USA, I’d be surprised if the conviction stuck. Yet it is a start.

They pushed pain-killers that were more dangerous than heroin. Have often replaced heroin, which some older addicts now have trouble finding.²⁵

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 at <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>, and tweet at @GwydionMW.

²³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48176397>

²⁴ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/5/3/18528123/insys-fentanyl-trial-verdict-john-kapoor-opioid-epidemic>

²⁵ In Cities Where It Once Reigned, Heroin Is Disappearing. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/18/health/heroin-fentanyl-deaths-baltimore.html>

Antisemitism in the Labour Party

A Further Reply to Mark Cowling

by Labour Affairs Editorial Committee

There can be few people in the Labour Party who have done as much to defend the rights (as opposed to the claims) of Jews in the UK as Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn is an idealist and moved by the plight of the people of Gaza due to the oppression that they suffer from the Israeli state. As such, he has made contact with their elected leaders. The current status of the Charter (see Labour Affairs May 2019) to which Mark attaches such importance is ambiguous and the main objective of Hamas is to defend the people they govern and to provide them with as much social and economic security as they possibly can. If Hamas and its electorate do not particularly like their oppressors and tend to associate Jews with the Israeli state and its nefarious works, we should not be surprised. The best way to remedy such a situation would be for Israel to change its policies. The fact that Corbyn supports Hamas's efforts to better the lives of Gazans in no way makes him an anti-Semite, as Mark acknowledges. He is not obliged to support everything that Hamas says or does while supporting their efforts on behalf of their people. One might as well ask 'Friends of Israel' to denounce the vile statements that prominent Israeli politicians make about Palestinians every time they support the state of Israel. They would reply, not unreasonably, that this would detract from their message of support for Israel.

Mark maintains that Israel is a bolthole for Jews threatened with annihilation by Europeans. If Jews wanted nothing more than a bolthole, there would have been plenty available around the world. However, for religious and nationalistic reasons it had to be on Palestinian territory. And, located here, it functions as a base for further expansion at the expense of the indigenous people, thus provoking their enmity. It is militarily safe for the time being, but its vulnerability was demonstrated in the 2006 war with Hezbollah and, in the longer term, it is subject to the vicissitudes of poor morale and internal cohesion. We are both agreed that Israel provokes the enmity of its neighbours in a way that Jews outside Israel do not provoke the hatred of theirs, so it is at best curious to call it

a bolthole and insurance against annihilation. A better description would be an armed base for colonial expansion.

Jeremy Corbyn is deeply concerned that the Labour Party is riddled with anti-Semites. That attitude is of a part of the attitude towards Jews that he has consistently shown over decades. This does not mean, however, that this concern may not be exaggerated. We think, indeed, that it is. We repeat what we have said before. There is unlikely to be much anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, as opposed to much support for the Palestinian cause. Nothing that Mark has said would give anyone prepared to give the Labour Party a fair hearing any reason to suppose that the Labour Party in general and Jeremy Corbyn in particular are anti-Semitic. This is a phony issue designed to distract the Labour Party from an agenda for social reform and some degree of independence from the United States in its foreign policy.

THE HORROR OF TRUTH

When Baghdadi talks of the people of Islam
versus the people of the Cross
we become the damned.

Gone is the gloss.
Those relentless aircraft strikes
didn't turn off the tap
but breached the dyke
and leaked Muslim blood through the gap..
The US offers 19 million pounds for his demise
but can you kill 1.6 billion Muslims
for that neoliberal dream that vies
for an insane and reckless whim.
Though there is one consolation,
their physical harm can only be a fraction
in answer to our causation
that ended their nations in putrefaction,
we still have Parliament, both Houses of Congress,
and Brussels,
but what about peace-of-mind?

Now, that could be a tussle,
or a never-again find.

Wilson John Haire. 1st of May, 2019

The Nakba and British Labour Party divisions

By Mark Cowling.

Introduction

A toxic atmosphere has developed in the Labour Party round the issue of Israel, the Palestinians and anti-Semitism. People horrified at the sufferings of the Palestinians are prone to, for example, compare at least some Israeli actions to those of the Nazis, and therefore to fall foul of the IHRA examples of anti-Semitism. In turn, a counter-claim is made that accusations of anti-Semitism are intended to close down discussion of Israeli actions and to undermine Jeremy Corbyn. Sensible attempts to discuss the issues are drowned in a flood of accusations and counter accusations. In this article and those that follow, my aim is to get a more rounded picture and hopefully better understanding.

An important starting point for critics of Israel is the Nakba, the event in which some 750,000 Palestinians left or were expelled from Israel in 1948, and not permitted to return. In this article I shall look at the background to this event, and argue that some of the more extreme claims about expulsion as ethnic cleansing are not valid.

Historical Background

Ultimate responsibility for the problems of the contemporary Middle East lies with the Romans, who, following their defeat of a spectacular Jewish revolt in A.D. 67, demolished the Second Temple, the main centre of Jewish worship in Judaea, and engaged in genocide and expulsion of the Jews, which led to the dispersal of Jews around the known world. Some Jews remained in what was now designated as Palestine, but the majority became widely-dispersed marginal populations, vulnerable to re-expulsion. Jewish religion and culture retained a strong link with Israel/Palestine, with aspirations to return.

With the development of nationalism in the 19th century, Jews tended to be seen as distinct from the rest of the national population. There were particular problems in Russia, where Jews suffered officially sponsored pogroms, with the result that about a million Jews left for the United States and Western Europe, but also thousands left for Palestine. There is a particularly good description of a pogrom in Trotsky's 1905.¹ Russian Jews in Western Europe were more obviously distinct from the rest of the population than Jews who had been there for generations, thus adding the sort of resentment against immigrants which frequently arises to other sources of anti-Semitism.

One solution to the problems the Jews were experiencing was Zionism, the aspiration for a Jewish homeland, ideally in Palestine/Israel. Although there were other earlier advocates of this, undoubtedly the most important was Theodore Herzl. Herzl was a secular Jew. He concluded that with the rise of nationalism in Europe Jews would be bound to be oppressed, and needed their own state. Although he started as an advocate of Jewish assimilation, he became convinced by the Dreyfus affair in France that Jews would never be properly assimilated. Briefly, Dreyfus was an army officer falsely accused of spying. The affair lasted from 1894 to his eventual exoneration in 1906, but it revealed a massive reservoir of anti-Semitism in France which belied equality, liberty and fraternity. Herzl put forward the idea of a separate Jewish homeland in the *Der Judenstaat* [*The Jewish State*] (1896).

The book is a curious mixture between extremely detailed accounts of arrangements for the immigration of rich and poor Jews

to the new homeland, together with the working day of poor Jews, and assumptions which with hindsight proved disastrously wrong. For example, like many Jews in Germany in the early 1930s, he assumed that attacks on Jews would rebound on the attackers because of the economic role played by Jews.² He also assumed: "But the Jews, once settled in their own State, would probably have no more enemies."³

For the rest of his life Herzl worked tirelessly to achieve his goal, and was an important figure in setting up the World Zionist Organisation. This in turn set up the Jewish National Fund, devoted to purchasing land in Palestine, and increasing numbers of Jews settled in Palestine, particularly encouraged by the Balfour Declaration of November 1917.

Arab Reaction

From the end of the First World War until 1948 Palestine was governed by the British under a League of Nations mandate. Arab resentment of the Jews increased. However, the development of a full Arab national consciousness and of a coherent strategy for dealing with relations with the Jews was hampered by two factors at least. The Palestinian Arabs had not really built up a full national consciousness. Around 1930, the rate of literacy amongst Jews was measured at 88%, whilst that amongst the Palestinians was 22%.⁴ Thus books, pamphlets and

² *ibid.*, Kindle edition, location 1166.

³ *ibid.*, Kindle edition, location 1154.

⁴ Wikipedia: obviously, there are different ways of measuring literacy, but these figures are so drastically different that the overall contrast is dramatic. Added to this, Palestinian men had a much higher rate of literacy than Palestinian women. And a proportion of the Jews were what might be described as hyper-literate. Thus Ben Gurion, who eventually became Israel's first prime minister, spoke some 10 languages, and was notoriously addicted to visiting bookshops.

¹ Trotsky, L., 1905, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 149-152.

newspapers, which could normally be expected to play a central role in the building up of a consciousness of nationhood, commanded a relatively small audience. The other problem was divided leadership. The most effective leader on the Palestinian side was the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who was so strongly motivated by fanatical anti-Semitism that it precluded a rational consideration of Arab interests. Husseini played the principal role in fomenting the riots of 1936-39, which involved attacks on Jews, and which became known as the Arab Revolt, but which was put down by the British.⁵ By 1948 the Arabs were still suffering the after-effects of this defeat.

The Mufti's anti-Semitism was considerable. He was interviewed in 1936 by the Peel Commission, and made it clear that his aspiration was for an Arab/Muslim Palestine, from which 400,000 Jews would be summarily evicted.⁶ He had spent the Second World War in Germany, where he had encouraged Adolf Hitler to pursue the final solution. He toured the death camps and encouraged pro-Nazi leaders in Eastern Europe to send their Jews to Poland, meaning send them for extermination.⁷ During the Second World War he made frequent broadcasts across the Arab world in favour of a Nazi victory.⁸ This contributed to an irrational intransigence on the Arab side.

The founding of the State of Israel

Zionist aspirations were given a massive boost by the Second World War. In the years before the war, other countries were far too reluctant to receive Jewish refugees from Germany. During the war there was clear evidence of the Holocaust from 1942 onwards, but nothing was done to stop it. After the war, when

the full horrors of the Holocaust emerged, there was a growth in international sympathy for Zionist aspirations. Anti-Semitism persisted in Poland,⁹ which again increased Jewish feelings that they needed a safe refuge.

In the tense situation in the years following the end of the Second World War, the Jews were generally keen for the British to leave Palestine, and a minority, including some future leaders of the Israeli state, engaged in terrorism, notably the blowing up of British officers in the King David Hotel. The Palestinians rejected UN proposals for the partition of Palestine. In the light of what happened subsequently, it would have been at least worth seeing what would happen if partition were accepted. The Palestinians would have been able to set up their own state in their part of Palestine, and would have been able to appeal to the United Nations and other international bodies as a nation state. The Jewish leadership under Ben Gurion accepted the Partition plan, but Ben Gurion doubtless had aspirations to extend the Jewish area. Partition with some transfer of population was certainly being used as a solution to conflicting national aspirations in other parts of world, notably in India.

The British essentially decided to give up and go home. At that point the Jews under the leadership of Ben Gurion declared the existence of the state of Israel on May 14 1948. Israel was invaded by the armies of no less than five Arab states, who denied the right of Israel to exist. The assault on the Jews was assisted by at least some of the Palestinians, and more particularly by Arab fighters from outside who based themselves in Palestinian villages. One aspect of this was that some 750,000 displaced down Palestinians left their homes in Israel – as it now was – and ended up as refugees in Gaza, on the West Bank of the Jordan, in the Lebanon and in Syria. There they or their descendants have largely remained as refugees ever since. The above is intended as a relatively neutral introduction to the really controversial matters below.

Pappé and Chomsky

Many people on the left today appear to take as a starting point the views of the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, which are also accepted by Noam Chomsky¹⁰. Pappé sees the expulsion of the Palestinians as the implementation of Plan D, which he presents as a concerted Israeli plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.¹¹ The declaration of the State of Israel was merely one day in a process of cleansing which began five months earlier. To try to halt this the Arab states dispatched a small army compared to their military strength, an invasion which was easily repulsed by the Israelis.¹² For Pappé, the Palestinians left as the result of a mixture of Jewish intimidation and encouragement by the Arab leaders to think that they could soon return to Palestine cleansed of Jews. This process was encouraged by the most serious massacre of the ethnic cleansing, the killing of what was initially believed to be 254 Arabs at the village of Deir Yassin. This horror was repeatedly broadcast by Arab radio channels.

The work of Pappé, along with that of other Israeli revisionist historians such as Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim is an important corrective to previous Israeli accounts in which the Palestinians vaguely disappear. However, Pappé's account creates a seriously misleading impression, and its ready acceptance leads to a distorted view of the origins of the Israeli State, which conflates the 1948 conflict with the current dreadful behaviour of the Israeli government

Here are some of the problems with Pappé's account. To start with, for people with such a detailed plan, the Israelis do not seem to have been very good at ethnic cleansing. Their massacres, while totally unacceptable, were really very small compared to those practised by other people engaged in ethnic cleansing, such as Serbs

5 Morse, C., *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism: Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini*, Washington DC: WND Books, 2010, p. 43.

6 Morse, C. *The Nazi Connection*, p. 44.

7 Morse, C. *The Nazi Connection*, pp. 60-7.

8 Morse, C. *The Nazi Connection*, p. 57.

9 Gilbert, M., *The Holocaust*, p. 819.

10 Pappé, I. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, London: OneWorld, 2011; Pappé, I. and Chomsky, N., *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War against the Palestinians*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010.

11 Pappé, I., *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, locations 202-8.

12 *ibid.* Location 289.

in Bosnia during the wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia, in which over 8000 Bosnian Muslims were killed. The state of Israel currently has a population of about 8.5 million, of whom about 1.7 million are Palestinian Israelis. Ending up with a fifth of your citizens being people who were supposed to have been ethnically cleansed is quite an oversight!

Another immediate point is that although Israel was decisively victorious over the five Arab armies which invaded her territory in 1948, it was by no means an easy victory. Israel lost about 1% of the Jewish population in the course of the war, which lasted a few months. This compares with Britain losing just under 1% of her population over the five years of the Second World War, or Belgium, whose Jews were subject to the Holocaust, losing just over 1%.

Another fact which is not generally very much remarked on is that, although 750,000 Palestinians became refugees, Israel took in 350,000 Jews from Arab countries where they were no longer welcome. There are no strident assertions of a right of return, nor are these Jews still living in refugee camps.

Benny Morris

Returning to the crucial issue of ethnic cleansing, there is a much more detailed and plausible account of why the Palestinians left Israel from another Israeli historian, Benny Morris.¹³ He documents Ben-Gurion, who became the first Prime Minister of Israel, advocating the compulsory transfer of Arabs to relatively empty Arab lands in 1937.¹⁴ By the time we get to the 1948 war, which was initiated by the Arab states, the idea of transfer was certainly in the air on the Zionist side, but the war was not entered into specifically with a view to engaging in transfer.¹⁵ Morris also stresses the role of both the Mufti and the Arab states in encouraging Arab flight. The British were

surprised at the poor quality of Arab leadership.¹⁶ The Israeli leadership were very surprised at how easily the Arabs fled.¹⁷ Rather than a concerted plan of expulsion, Morris traces Israeli actions in some detail, and argues that there were considerable variations in the ways that local commanders behaved; rather than blanket expulsions, expulsions were directed to securing Jewish supply routes, or dealing with particular Arab threats.

In December 1948 the United Nations General Assembly passed one of the landmark resolutions on Israel, General Assembly Resolution 192, stating that the refugees had a right of return or recompense. However, according to Morris, there was a general international recognition that there was no way the resolution could be fully implemented: the Israelis would not permit the bulk of the refugees back; they would be returning to wrecked villages, or villages now occupied by Jewish immigrants; the Israelis had legitimate security concerns about a fifth column.¹⁸ An interesting fact about General Assembly Resolution 192 is that it also calls for the setting up of a commission to establish peace between the Arab states and Israel. All six of the Arab states which were members of the United Nations at that stage, the Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Yemen voted against the resolution. In other words, the resolution was supposed to provide a right of return in the context of assurances of Israel's security. When supporters of the Palestinians assert a right of return, supported by Resolution 192, they generally do not refer to this question of peace treaties. However, for full implementation of the Resolution, there would need to be agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and also peace treaties between Israel and enough Arab states to assure Israeli security – at least, therefore, the Lebanon and Syria, but ideally including Iraq and Saudi Arabia in addition, of course, to those already signed with Egypt and Jordan. As

the biggest success against Israel so far has been that of Hezbollah, negotiations with them and also with Iran, their major supporter, would be appropriate. In other words, full implementation is a very tall order.

Morris concludes that the majority of the refugees left not because of direct Israeli coercion, but because of concern about what would happen as the Israelis conquered their area, and also with the idea that they would be able to return after a few months when the Arab armies had defeated Israel.¹⁹ The Israelis, he reminds readers, suffered one in every hundred of population killed and a further one injured, as a result of an onslaught by Palestinian Arabs and irregulars, followed by an invasion by Arab armies. From this perspective, denying any right of return was a reasonable response, particularly given the danger of the Arabs acting as a fifth column.

Conclusion

What emerges from the above account is that people on the left can easily see Israel as a state founded simply on stolen land, land stolen according to a deliberate plan and with great violence and a totally unreasonable willingness to accommodate with the Palestinian exiles. However, as a result of poor leadership, both by the Mufti and by the Arab states, the Palestinian Arabs failed to obtain their own state, and left their land for exile much more readily than was necessary. The invasion by the Arab states was very badly thought out and coordinated, and thus offered the Palestinian Arabs a false promise that the Jews would be expelled. Resolution 192 does commit the United Nations to supporting a right of return, but only in the context of a general settlement. The only Arab state to accept exiled Palestinians as full citizens is Jordan. The others have simply allowed them to remain in miserable conditions as refugees.

¹³ Morris, B. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge Middle East Studies) Second Edition, Kindle Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁴ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 51.

¹⁶ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, pp. 97-104, 185-190.

¹⁷ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 155-7.

¹⁸ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 540.

¹⁹ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, location 15955.

Extracts from a Financial Times article on private utility monopolies by Jonathan Ford

English water companies have built up £51bn in debt (from zero at privatisation), a staggering sum that customers will have to service and pay off over many years.

Between privatisation in 1989 and last year, English water companies were permitted by the regulator to generate operating cash flows totalling £159bn in 2017-18 money; easily more than the £123bn they spent on fixed assets such as new pipes and infrastructure.

How come? Embedded in the answer is the reason why private monopolies such as water and energy distribution networks have become so controversial, and why the Labour party's attempt to nationalise them cannot be dismissed as a paleo-socialist blast from the past.

The answer is private investment returns. On top of all the money they invested in their businesses, those water companies paid out £56bn in dividends, and debt interest costs on their growing pile of borrowings.

Electricity companies have been no slouches too, with listed transmission owner National Grid delivering total returns of 12 per cent annually since

privatisation. Dividends are usually seen as a return for equity investors bearing the risk, but the risk in these natural monopolies was minimal. Not only do customers have to buy the product; the regulator has a duty not simply to set prices to protect the public but also to ensure the businesses are financeable. That in turn is why they were able to borrow so much.

Now few would argue that private owners should be able to extract such outsize returns from private monopolies. It is what has spurred the interest in renationalisation.

If you do not trust private owners to exercise control, it is hard to see why that business should be in private hands. So it is hard not to share the analysis that more than well-meaning tweaks are needed. There are broadly two ways to solve the problem of private monopoly.

One is the solution the Labour opposition favours, which is to eliminate it by putting the companies into "not for dividend" public hands. Then you can set whatever social objectives you choose. Eliminating dividends certainly dissolves the conflicts of

private ownership.

The Welsh and Scottish water companies both have this model-and the latter has not suffered a notable penalty in efficiency versus the English companies, according to the Regulator.

The other approach is to foster more competition so that if risk returns have to happen, they should at least be more tolerable. In his 2017 Cost of Energy Review, the economist Dieter Helm suggested this could be achieved if the UK adopted a new approach to overseeing utilities, with regulators setting the desired outputs and then opening them up to competitive tender from anyone-private or even state sources.

Water may be a relatively simple business but it is affected by climatic change. Britain's energy systems face a period of upheaval as they are reconfigured to deal with the challenge of decarbonisation. A new approach might achieve this shift more flexibly, and align returns a little better with the real risk taken. Britain's existing model ought to change.

FARAGE and M5S

By Orecchiette

The result of Italy's Euro elections is an almost identical reversal of the March 2018 general election result, with Salvini's *Lega* at 34.3% and Five Star *M5S* at 17.1%. The Centre left Partito Democratico *Pd* also increased their vote share to 22.7%. While *M5S*'s organisational structure, invented and owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio is highly effective it is evident that it must be paired with a similarly effective front person. Casaleggio used the oratorical skills of Beppe Grillo to power *M5S* into an impressive political force, and he was followed with enthusiasm for being just that person. The current ineffective leader Luigi Di Maio obviously inspires a diminishing number of voters. On 27 May he simply, limply, complained that many members had abstained.

Grillo watched Farage operating in Europe and believed that Farage could succeed by setting up a similar system in the UK. Darren Loucaides (who also writes for *Wired* and the *New Internationalist*) wrote about the development and realisation of this in the *Guardian* on 21 May 2019. For him, Arron Banks and Nigel Farage have developed into the Casaleggio and Grillo of the UK. With the difference that both men are

highly accomplished political operators. He discusses the strategies used by *Leave. UK* and *The Brexit Party* to manipulate supporters, using them as some brands do - as "product". Loucaides quoted Paolo Gerbaudo, author of *The Digital Party*: "*What users/members/customers are given is basically a window-dressing of participation*".

Donations to *M5S* go to a private association in the same way that *The Brexit Party*'s claimed 100,000 supporters' £25 donations are deposited into a Paypal account which is impossible to scrutinise. Farage recently said to *The Telegraph*, "*We're running a company, not a political party ... the chairman Richard Tice and I are not afraid to make decisions.*" Loucaides concludes by saying that Farage's language is "*the language of the new brand of digital populism, in which the director of a private company portrays his firm as the vessel for a democratic mass movement.*"

The day after the Euro elections Italy's *Il Fatto Quotidiano* published an article by journalist & commentator Antonello Caporale where he responded to Salvini and *The Lega*'s win with: "*The Italians obsession for a strong man*". Although he writes, surely with sarcasm, that it is "*a genetic defect*" it could equally apply

anywhere in the world and is particularly relevant to Farage, Johnson and Trump.

Caporale discusses the ultimate futility of blindly following a party based around the personality of one charismatic leader. When that person goes the party implodes leaving an "*empty wrapper*". He mentions the way that the *Pd* collapsed as the charisma of Matteo Renzi dimmed. He can see the same thing happening when Salvini and Berlusconi go. In this country *UKIP* didn't outlast Farage's departure and it is inconceivable that the currently named *Brexit* party would outlast him.

But still people follow the apparently strong because they see them as being winners. And to summarise Caporale, they can't resist backing these winners even though they are obviously hypocritical or offend simple accepted moral standards, or have no coherent political message. To vote without asking why, with no concern about the reasons behind things, with no consideration of the consequences is "*pure recklessness*" and "*blessed ignorance*". And "our lives are in their hands". Salvini attended the Euro election count with a crucifix in his hands. "*Amen*" Caporale says in ironic conclusion.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

**Trade Union
(Access to Workplaces)
15 May 2019**

**Motion for leave to bring in a Bill
(Standing Order No. 23)**

**Faisal Rashid (Warrington
South) (Lab)** I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to remove certain restrictions on trade unions conducting business in workplaces; and for connected purposes.

Article 11 of the European convention on human rights states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests”, or her interests.

At present, there are almost 6.5 million trade union members in the UK, making trade unions this country’s largest voluntary and democratic organisations. Trade unions are on the frontline every day, fighting poverty, inequality and injustice, and negotiating a better deal for working people. Their role has never been more critical than it is today, as in-work poverty is on the rise and zero-hours contracts are widespread. British workers face an uncertain and exploitative job market, while it is boom time for large multinational companies.

I have spoken to union officials who have been prohibited by companies like McDonald’s from efforts to unionise their workforce. Employees have been banned from visiting other McDonald’s stores. Union members from the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union have recounted stories like that of Mohamed, a worker from north London, who was excited at the prospect of working alongside his colleagues to improve basic things at work, like getting his shifts 10 days in advance so that he

can plan his life. Because of these efforts, he was informed by the management that he is banned from every McDonald’s store in the area. Union staff visiting McDonald’s across the UK to speak to workers about the benefits of joining a trade union are being routinely thrown out of stores and having their presence reported to senior regional managers.

Workers at Amazon have reported shift patterns being interrupted and randomised simply to prevent staff from talking to union officials on the way into work. In a members’ survey of workers conducted by the GMB, one Amazon worker described employment there as like “living in a prison”. The strict targets that are imposed on staff mean that 70% feel as though they are given disciplinary points unfairly, while 89% believe that they are being exploited. In its recently published report on InterContinental Hotels Group, Unite documented a culture of fear and bullying, with management pressurising low-paid staff into working for eight to 10 days straight. IHG employees and subcontracted employees have been routinely denied the right to freedom of association and have stood little chance of exercising their right to collective bargaining. Union members are vulnerable and live in fear of reprisals from their employer.

Bupa is one of the largest and highest-profile providers of residential social care in the UK and part of an international health group that serves approximately 32 million customers in 190 countries. It consistently refuses to allow Unison officials access to workplaces to speak to staff and members regarding union rights and representation. During 2017 and 2018, Unison North West regional officers were banned from every Bupa work location, despite assurances that visits could be conducted at the employer’s

convenience and with due regard to operational and safeguarding concerns and priorities. In a sector where shift work and long hours are prevalent, and where many care workers also have significant caring responsibilities at home, the workplace is often the only place for the union to engage with workers. Bupa’s denial of access in this case is effectively a refusal by the employer to allow workers to organise a union.

I could go on: I have heard countless stories like these from union officials. As long as these practices are widespread, this country’s commitment to the human right to form and to join a trade union is hollow and meaningless. Why are our democratic trade unions being treated in this way, and why is the human right to join and form trade unions being denied? In part, it is because under current legislation there are no rights of workplace access for trade unions. In the words of one IHG union member:

“In order to exercise our basic human right to freedom of association, workers in the UK need our employers to provide facility time and a space within our workplaces for reps and members to meet and discuss work related issues.”

This is not a far-fetched, unrealisable demand—it is achievable, and I hope that my Bill can achieve it.

In New Zealand, under its Employment Relations Amendment Act 2018, unions have far greater access to workplaces. Workers can speak to union reps visiting the sites. The company provides a space for the union and worker to meet and pays the worker for a reasonable amount of time with their union rep. This, in turn, leads to higher union membership, higher wages, and more just and fair workplaces. Trade unions in the workplace are

normalised, leading to a less adverse attitude to working people's right to represent themselves. Under this legislation, all that is required is that the union provides a short period of notice that they will be visiting the site, allowing management to add the extra staff member required for the duration of the visit. This means that there is no disruption to the business while ensuring that workers' legal and human right to join and form a union is adhered to. New Zealand's Employment Relations Amendment Act has restored protections for workers, especially vulnerable workers, and strengthened the role of collective bargaining in the workplace.

If we are to transition away from a low-wage, precarious economy, increasing the collective bargaining power of workers is critical. It is a myth that strong trade unions drive down profit—I emphasise that point. A happy, well-respected workforce is also a productive workforce. I know this from my own experience as a union rep at NatWest. Being able to represent and support my colleagues gave me a clear sense of the value of strong union representation in the workplace. My colleagues felt valued and supported, and as a result provided an efficient, professional service. That is what trade unions are all about: bringing people together to work towards a common goal. The stories I have heard from union officials paint the opposite picture: too many British workers feel exploited and dispensable. By expanding trade union access to workplaces, we can restore dignity and respect at work, and put an end to the exploitation and misery we see on the rise today. We need strong trade unions and a better deal for working people.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That Faisal Rashid, Laura Pidcock, Ian Lavery, Caroline Lucas, Grahame Morris, Chris Matheson, Ruth Smeeth, Justin Madders, Helen Goodman, Danielle Rowley and Angus Brendan MacNeil present the Bill.

Faisal Rashid accordingly presented the Bill. Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed (Bill 391).

British Steel

22 May 2019

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark)

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about British Steel.

It was announced this morning that the court has granted an application by the directors of British Steel to enter an insolvency process. Control of the company will now pass to the official receiver, an employee of the Insolvency Service, who will run a compulsory liquidation. The official receiver has made it clear that British Steel employees will continue to be paid and employed, and the business will continue to trade and to supply its customers while he considers the company's position. In fact, employees were paid early, with the May payroll being run yesterday through cash being advanced by the company's lenders.

As the House will recall, I made a statement on 1 May setting out details of a bridging facility that the Government agreed to provide to ensure that British Steel was able to meet its obligations under the EU emissions trading scheme, which fell due on 30 April. The Government provided the facility to purchase allowances worth £120 million against the security of 2019 ETS allowances, which are currently suspended pending ratification of the withdrawal agreement.

Without this facility, British Steel would have faced a financial pressure of over £600 million—the ETS liability, plus a £500 million fine. This would not only have placed British Steel in an insolvent financial position, but the charge attached to its operational assets would have been likely to prevent any new owner from acquiring these assets in the future. This transaction demonstrated the Government's continuing willingness to work closely with all parties to secure the long-term success of this important business.

Following this agreement, the Government have worked intensively with the company for many weeks to seek solutions to the broader financial

challenges it has been facing. The Government and individual Ministers can only act within the law and this requires that any financial support to a steel company must be made on a commercial basis. In the case of the ETS facility, this was based on the security of future ETS allowances.

To provide liquidity to the business in the face of its cash-flow difficulties the Government were willing to consider making a cash loan to the company and worked hard to investigate exhaustively the possibilities. However, the absence of adequate security, no reasonable prospect that any loan would have been repaid and the shareholder being unwilling to provide a sufficient cash injection itself meant that this did not meet the required legal tests.

I am placing in the Library the accounting officer's assessment of these proposals, drawing on professional and legal advice, which concludes:

"It would be unlawful to provide a guarantee or loan on the terms of any of the proposals that the company or any other party has made or any others we have considered. You must note that such an offer cannot be made legally and that by making it you would be in breach of the Ministerial Code."

The insolvency removes Greybull from day-to-day control of British Steel. Given the Government's willingness to help secure British Steel's future, demonstrated in the ETS facility, and the discussions that have taken place in recent weeks, the Government will work closely with the official receiver and prospective new owners to achieve the best outcome for these sites.

The Government have provided an indemnity to the official receiver, who is now responsible for the operations. We will take every possible step to ensure that these vital operations can continue, that jobs are secured and that the sites at Scunthorpe and Skinningrove and on Teesside continue to be important centres of excellent steel-working. During the days and weeks ahead, I will work with the official receiver, the special managers and a British Steel support group of trade unions, management, suppliers, customers and the local

communities to pursue remorselessly every possible step to secure the future of these valuable operations.

This is a very worrying time for everyone associated with British Steel. Each one of British Steel's sites has a proud record of steelmaking excellence, and I am determined to see it continue. Britain and the world will continue to need high-quality steel, and British steel is among the best in the world. Today is a very big setback for these operations, but it is far from being the end and we will take every step possible to secure a successful future for these vital assets, both people and plant.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

This is indeed very worrying news for the workers, their families and the communities who rely on British Steel directly in Scunthorpe, Skinningrove and Teesside and all the way through the supply chain. At least 25,000 people will be worried sick this morning, wondering whether they will have a job this time next week.

As the Secretary of State knows, however, the sector is critical to our manufacturing base and is strategically important for Government procurement from rail all the way through to defence. It is therefore imperative, given that the Government now have some control via the official receiver, that this business is stabilised and confidence is given to customers, workers and businesses right across the supply chain. The message from the Government today must be that British Steel is one of the linchpins of our industrial strategy and to that end they will move heaven and earth to ensure business as usual continues.

It is reported that the owner, Greybull Capital, was asking the Government for a loan of £30 million. The shadow Minister for steel, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), asked for more information yesterday, but we were given none. Can the Secretary of State confirm today what the asks of British Steel were in the negotiations? Were they just the reported £30 million or was that part of a wider package of measures to support steel production?

I welcome the publication of the accounting officer's assessment, but can the Secretary of State confirm Greybull Capital's reasoning in asking for a loan, while reportedly being unwilling to put money on the table and simultaneously investing over £40 million in a French

steelworks last week?

The Secretary of State has said in his press statement today that he will "pursue remorselessly every possible step to secure the future of the valuable operations in sites at Scunthorpe, Skinningrove and on Teesside"

and I welcome that. I also welcome the indemnity he has referred to, but can he outline exactly what other possible steps he will be pursuing in the coming days? Do they include bringing British Steel into public ownership as Unite the union and the Labour party have called for? Do they include discussions with other interested stakeholders to examine options for saving the company, including with Network Rail, which procures 95% of its rails from the Scunthorpe site? It is clear that we simply cannot countenance warm words and no real action as was the case with the SSI steelworks almost four years ago.

The truth of the matter is that the cost of British Steel collapsing is far greater than any short-term outlay the Government must make now. The Institute for Public Policy Research has estimated that British Steel's collapse could lead to £2.8 billion in lost wages, £1.1 billion in lost revenue and extra benefit payments and that it could reduce household spending by £1.2 billion over 10 years. This is a significant economic disturbance, if the Secretary of State would like to dust off his state aid handbook.

We know Network Rail sources 95% of its rails from Scunthorpe. Last year, Network Rail signed a £200 million contract with the company. The loss of this supply could have serious consequences for Network Rail's cost base and the quality of the steel used to maintain and upgrade the British rail network. Notwithstanding the great commitment by Network Rail to British Steel, however, we also know the Government's wider public procurement of UK steel has been disappointing, with only 43% of steel used in Government projects traced to firms based in the UK, according to UK Steel analysis. So will the Secretary of State confirm today what steps he is taking to positively procure British steel for more of our key infrastructure projects?

Finally, there is no doubt that the UK steel industry is in a difficult place. Uncertainty about future trade with the EU and the dangling prospect of no deal are having a severe impact. Domestic

issues like uncompetitive electricity prices, business rates and lack of support for steel in the so-called industrial strategy are also undermining the sector's ability to compete, but UK steel has a proud history in the UK and there is no reason why this cannot continue. The ball is in the Government's court: they can take action now to save British Steel and support the wider industry, or they can accept that their legacy will, yet again, be industrial decline. We in the Opposition know which side of history we want to be on, and I hope the Secretary of State wants the same thing.

Greg Clark I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the spirit in which she approached her response to the statement, recognising that there is a total common purpose across both sides of the House to provide the confidence for new investors to be able to take on these assets, and we all, wherever we sit in this Chamber, want this to be a change of ownership rather than something that puts a stop to steel production.

The hon. Lady was right to refer to SSI, and she will recall—as will her colleague the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)—the situation with Corus in 2010. One thing we know about steel assets is that they are not like other kinds of facilities; once they close, it is very difficult for them to come back into life. So it seems to me that we have a special responsibility to make every effort to ensure there is no interruption whatsoever in production. That is my purpose, and I see it reflected in what the hon. Lady said.

I agree with the hon. Lady about the strategic importance of steel. It presents a strategic opportunity as well, because this country and the world will always need steel and British steel is among the best in the world, so we should be looking to supply it. I think my commitment was demonstrated in the move I made to provide £120 million to make sure that the liability under the ETS was addressed. Crucially, if we had not removed that liability, it would have hung over the assets, preventing any new partner from taking them on.

The hon. Lady also asked about the reports of the £30 million facility. The assessment of the accounting officer gives more information on that. In fact, that £30 million was not for a permanent refinancing of British Steel; it was a contribution to an administration only. The assessment was that the contribution from all parties would not be enough to withstand the cost requirements

during that administration. She will see clearly set out the assessment of the proposals that were given. I have been exhaustive in pursuing the possibilities with British Steel over many weeks. If she is in government, she will find that she is obliged to follow the ministerial code, under which we are not allowed to make a decision that would be illegal, immensely frustrating though it is. I would have much preferred to have given the opportunity of this loan rather than go down the route that has been taken, but that is the requirement and there is no possibility of setting that aside.

On the motivation of Greybull in investing its cash in other facilities in France, one of the requirements in the case of any company failure is that the official receiver conducts an investigation into the reasons for the failure and the lessons to be drawn from it. I very much look forward to seeing the official receiver's report. I dare say that the Chair of the Select Committee will also want to inquire closely, on behalf of her colleagues, into this as well.

On the question of new possibilities, I understand that there are buyers who have already made contact. The hon. Lady is right to say that important stakeholders such as Network Rail, which has been very supportive in recent weeks and has pledged to continue to be supportive, will work together. That is why I have invited everyone with an interest in this, including colleagues on both sides of the House, to work together so that we can make a demonstrable and clear case that the cross-party and cross-House of Commons consensus that reflects the importance of the steel sector is available to any new investor.

Finally, I agree with the hon. Lady's assessment, relating to the report she mentioned, that the consequences are important not only for the workforce and those in the supply chain, vital though they are; they are also important for whole communities and indeed for the country. This furthers my resolve, which I know she shares, to do everything we can in the days and weeks ahead to ensure that there is continuity in these operations.

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"I have a right to remain silent". "You never reveal yourself, do you?" she replies. And this is one of Sorrentino's pointers within the film to understanding Berlusconi's personality. He never does reveal his true self to anyone. Lario, or Ricci goes on to say, *"You are one long performance"*.

Throughout the film the Berlusconi character asks others to tell him how he appears to them. Sorrentino has constructed a character with considerable power who is given respect and who provokes fear. But in reality he is personally insecure. He comprehends that Lario/Ricci wants a divorce yet can't understand why she wants to leave him. He needs to see himself as a reflection and asks her why she loved him, what did she see in him that made her love him? He needs reassurance and, as another character says, *"you want everyone to be crazy about you!"*.

In another brilliant piece of scripting Berlusconi goes to seduce a girl who is sitting, dressed, on a bed. His overtures are tender and gentle and she resists with dignity. He becomes slightly more insistent and she points out that the situation is ridiculous. She is 20 and he is 70. Also she says, *"your breath is neither good nor bad, but it reminds me of my grandfather"*. Later Berlusconi soliloquises that he and the grandfather probably use the same product to clean their dentures.

The film's first long sequence tells the factually true story of one of the *"them"*, who is trying to use Berlusconi to advance himself. This was real-life pimp and convicted criminal Gianpaolo Tarantini. Called Sergio in the film, he rents a property opposite Berlusconi's Sardinian mansion. He lays on orgies, drugs and music which are supposed to lure his fun-loving neighbour and the implication is that they did. Berlusconi later rebuffs an attempt by Sergio to capitalise on his contact by asking to be nominated for a Euro Parliamentary seat. However ludicrous this might seem there are several precedents for nominations to be gifted in this way - see above to

Mara Carfagna.

But Sorrentino's orgies, where cocaine is snorted off naked buttocks, ludicrously never remove as much as one G-string. Bikinis may be tiny but they stay on and men cavort in drugged ecstasy with dozens of gyrating women while wearing large striped boxer shorts. So the scenes fail ridiculously as orgies. They didn't work as semi-orgies and should have been more symbolic, not semi-realistic. As it was they sat uncomfortably alongside other obviously serious parts of the cinematography. *Rolling Stone* was very critical of this, the major part of *Loro 1*, *"a porn film without a moral sense"*.

It was particularly inharmonious with the closing scenes where Berlusconi, as Italy's Prime Minister was dealing seriously with the L'Aquila earthquake. Sorrentino shows him performing with gravity and great concern. Sorrentino understands that Berlusconi needs to be seen, as *La Repubblica* says, as *"a man of action"*. He will operate with showy sincerity, but this is a display appropriate to that moment only. It confirms the words that Sorrentino put into Veronica Lario's mouth once again: *"You are one long performance"*.

The film's parades of sexual peccadilloes show how a Berlusconi, or indeed a Trump figure, lack the comforting gravitas to be seen as credible. There is a short scene where a severe older man counsels Berlusconi to restrict his hugs and jokes when on high-level trips abroad. And Berlusconi is shown to not really understand this. Then on another occasion he expresses frustration at his inability to work as Premier in the way that he wants. *"Why don't they let me govern the country the way I ran my companies? Why do the leftist judges torment me? Why do people snoop on my private life?"*

The film doesn't always succeed. Sorrentino's films work on different levels and need to be appreciated for this. The acting however and the script are superb and almost amount to making it into an excellent film.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

FICTION or REALITY?

A recently released Italian film is this month's subject as the results of the Italian European Elections will not become clear until after the copy date for Labour Affairs.

Paolo Sorrentino's film "*Loro*" was released in the UK in April. It deals with the period between 2006, after Berlusconi's government had fallen, and 2010. "*Loro*", literally "*them*", refers to the people around him at that time, his wife, the women, the people he took advantage of, those wanting to take advantage of him and the ordinary Italian people.

Sorrentino is a well-known Italian writer and director. He is known particularly for making *La grande bellezza*, *The Great Beauty*, and *Il Divo*, the latter about the long-serving Italian Politician Giulio Andreotti. He was a controversial man because of alleged mafia connections, but he was also quite a wit. Relevantly his comment, "Power tires only those who do not have it," could describe Berlusconi, whose search for a political come-back is partly the subject of the film. And Sorrentino could have used it as a title to his film.

"*Loro*" was originally released in two parts, and ideally was to be viewed consecutively. It was later re-released as *Loro* in a single shorter version with English subtitles. *Loro 1* was not received well in Italy and was described by one critic as misshapen. *Loro 2* completed and rounded the story and was reviewed with more understanding and enthusiasm, although it failed to make a Box Office profit. Reviews in the UK were mixed.

Only the main characters were given their real names. The more

significant differently-named characters would probably be identifiable to Italians who would know something about contemporary politics and scandals. Most foreigners would lack the knowledge to give the story its full significance and fun. Also some unidentified characters flit incomprehensibly and confusingly through some of the short scenes and suggest that the film could and should have been edited further.

Sorrentino uses the magnificent Tony Servillo as Berlusconi. In one significant scene he is seen plotting with a real-life long-time collaborator and fellow consummate salesman Ennio Doris. In the film the two devise a (successful) plan to bribe, gently and almost imperceptibly, the six senators necessary to tip the political balance in favour of Silvio. Then they decide to return money to some of their creditors; it is of course to their advantage to do this. "*Well*" says Ennio "*altruism is only another kind of self-interest.*" The English subtitles translate this "*egoismo*" or self-interest as selfishness, which gives a different meaning altogether. Amazingly Ennio's part is also played by Servillo. He is unrecognisable from his Berlusconi character, showing his remarkable ability to transform himself into a part.

The aim of the film for Sorrentino started, it seems oddly, as a "*story of love*". Although it was always intended to have "*feelings and sentiment*" at its heart. He and his screen-writer Umberto Contarello found that it later went off in other directions. This concurs with his constant film making theme of using his work to explain human

behaviour. He said later that "*Loro*" would be his last film about a famous person. "*You start in a disadvantaged position because people don't want to know what you think, they want to recognise what they think*".

The love and relationship between Berlusconi and his wife Veronica Lario was one of the film's main themes. Here the difference between fact and fiction illustrate the problems behind writing screenplays about contemporary people with very personal stories. In real life Lario and Berlusconi had three children. He humiliated her with his philandering which included sex with minors and prostitutes. On one public occasion he was almost embarrassingly flattering, to the point of drooling, about a woman. This was "*former showgirl*" as she is termed, Mara Carfagna who went on to be a Deputy (MP) and Minister **under** Berlusconi. The pun is intended.

The film has a highly entertaining and clever script and excellent directing. For example, a short scene was shot from above focussing on Berlusconi's obviously false shiny black hair. One hears him tell Lario that he needed to go to Rome for a couple of days to have his hair done. Her look spoke volumes. You could see her think: "*Another likely story Silvio*",

Italian *Rolling Stone* said that Elena Sofia Ricci was "*extraordinary*" in the role of Lario. Towards the end of the film she tells him that she is going to divorce him. They briefly discuss money and she asks him how he actually made his initial fortune.

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