

# Labour Affairs

Incorporating the Labour and Trade Union Review

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## A Dishonourable Start

It does not augur well for the future of the Labour Party that its new leader, Sir Keir Starmer, in his first address, as leader, to a Party conference has begun with a false account of the previous 5 years of the Party under Jeremy Corbyn. Starmer says it's time to get serious about winning. The implication is that Corbyn was not serious about winning and that's why Labour lost the general elections in 2017 and 2019. However in 2017 the swing to Labour was 9.6% and it increased its vote by some 37% from 9,347,273 in the 2015 general election under Ed Miliband to 12,878,460 in 2017 under Corbyn. Its parliamentary seats increased from 232 to 262. It achieved that vote on the basis of a radical socialist manifesto and a commitment to implementing the Brexit referendum result and leaving the EU. In 2019 it went to the country with a similar radical socialist manifesto but had dropped its commitment to implement the referendum result and leave the EU. The Tory manifesto in the 2019 was 'Get Brexit Done'. The Labour policy on Brexit was effectively 'Let's Stop Brexit' via a second referendum. And so Labour lost 56 seats in constituencies that had voted Leave in the Brexit referendum but had, previously, invariably voted Labour in general elections – the so-called 'Red Wall' seats.

And who was the architect of this 'Let's Stop Brexit' policy? None other than Sir Keir Starmer. He had hijacked the 2019 Labour Party conference to insist that there should be a 2<sup>nd</sup> referendum on leaving the EU which he hoped would overturn the result of the 1<sup>st</sup> referendum. The electorate comprehensively rejected Sir Keir's 'Let's Stop Brexit' policy and the Tories ended up with an 80 seat majority in Parliament. Starmer was the main architect of Labour's defeat in 2019. Yet on this we heard nothing in his speech to conference. A loud mea culpa would have been very appropriate. It would have been doubly appropriate since Corbyn's instinct was always to accept the Brexit referendum result. Starmer had to subvert Corbyn's leadership to have his 'Let's Stop Brexit' policy adopted. Starmer was not alone here. Several of Corbyn's key supporters like John McDonnell,

Emily Thornberry and Dianne Abbot were also keen supporters of a second vote. Corbyn found himself isolated and failed to show the required leadership. He should have made clear that he would only remain leader of the party if conference reiterated its commitment to implementing the referendum result.

Starmer's gratuitous refusal to accept his role in damaging Labour's election chances was the central defining aspect of his speech. It was something he simply didn't have to do. After all he was in a position where he could have done what he's been claiming he wants to do since he became leader - unite the party - by accepting the fact that the second referendum issue damaged the party below the water line.

Having failed to give a fair account of why Labour lost the 2019 General Election Starmer feels constrained to give some sort of explanation for that loss. In doing so his inability to face reality plumbs new depths when he says: *"It's time to get serious about winning. That means we have to change, and that's what we're doing. This is a party under new leadership. As I promised on my first day as leader we will root out the antisemitism that has infected our party. We're making progress – and we will root it out, once and for all. We're becoming a competent, credible Opposition"*

The clear implication of this sequence of half-truths is that the Labour Party was under the leadership of an anti-Semitic Jeremy Corbyn and that anti-Semitism was what stopped Labour becoming a credible Opposition. Such a smear of one of the most anti-racist leaders of the Labour Party is truly reprehensible. Starmer's choice of Ruth Smeeth to introduce him to the party conference was a very calculated insult to Corbyn. In 2019 Smeeth was parliamentary chair of the Jewish Labour Movement which passed a motion at its annual general meeting in April unanimously adopting a policy that declared Corbyn to be "unfit to be prime minister". The anti-Semitic card was played against Corbyn because if he had won there would have been a significant change in Britain's attitude to the war of conquest and colonization being perpetrated by Israel against

the Palestinian people. If Starmer does not grasp this elementary fact then his lack of understanding of power politics would be truly alarming. But we suspect he knows only too well that the anti-Semitic charge is and was false.

He has branded Corbyn as an anti-Semite by conceding the legal action on political grounds. He has disposed of the Corbyn era, in which he was fully implicated, by giving up the defence of the legal action which the Party under Corbyn had embarked upon on legal advice, and by refusing to give a straight answer as to whether he did so on the basis of legal advice. Corbyn has said that the action was settled on political, not legal, grounds and Starmer has failed to contradict this by saying that he settled on legal grounds.

Starmer has also sat on the Report on alleged Labour anti-Semitism, presumably on the grounds that it does not support the allegation of significant anti-Semitism in the Party. However, the same false charge will be employed at any time in the future if it is felt to be useful in preventing a Labour government that might be sympathetic to the Palestinian people.

One of Starmer's first acts when he won the leadership of the Labour Party was to appoint Claire Ainsley as his director of policy. Ainsley has written a book **'The New Working Class. How to win hearts, minds and votes.'** In her book Ainsley argues that politicians have to win the votes of this new working class if they are ever to achieve a parliamentary majority. She argues that understanding people's values, social identities, moral foundations and attitudes is just as important as policy formulation. The values of the new working class are identified as 'family', 'fairness', 'hard work' and 'decency', followed by 'equality' and 'freedom'. Starmer has clearly taken Ainsley's message to heart when he says: *"And my vision for Britain is simple: I want this to be the best country to grow up in and the best country to*

*grow old in. A country in which we put family first. A country that embodies the values I hold dear. Decency, fairness, opportunity, compassion and security. Security for our nation, our families and for all of our communities."*

Ainsley and Starmer appear to think that if Labour identifies what working class people want through focus groups then that is what they should get. The idea of taking a lead and persuading people that a policy is in their interest seems beyond them. This is the kind of politics that Labour adopted under Blair and Brown.

Starmer's lack of ability to understand the challenge in winning back 'Red Wall' seats is also made clear in his lack of interest in issues to do with providing good jobs in those seats. This is going to involve investment, not only in plant and machinery but in skills and research. This implies investing in colleges and apprenticeships and being serious about vocational education as a meaningful alternative to university education that all too often leads to huge levels of debt and jobs that do not require a university education to be done competently. Here again he reflects a metropolitan attitude to education and a lack of interest in what many working people think is important, despite his supposed identification with working class values. As this journal has pointed out, the Tories are much more aware of the importance of this issue than Labour and Labour will pay the price.

Starmer's entire speech is light on policy and heavy on rhetoric about values. For someone who proclaims his values are decency and fairness he is quite wrong to think that party members and the electorate generally will not see through his indecent and unfair portrayal of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party. An accurate and fair portrayal of Labour's last 5 years and Starmer's disastrous contribution to it would have served him much better.

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## 2nd Editorial - **Brexit: Deal Or No Deal?**

The Conservative party's victory at the 2019 general election was won largely on the back of the oft repeated slogan, "get Brexit done!" Voters prefer a simple message, particularly one they are told is achievable; an "oven-ready" deal that contrasted sharply with Labour's confusion and indecision. However, it now seems that the withdrawal agreement, effectively Johnson's "oven-ready" deal, and adopted by parliament last December, will be over-ridden in parts.

The government admitted that renegeing on parts of the agreement breaks international law, albeit, in the words of the Northern Ireland Secretary, in a "very specific and limited way." This caused widespread moral outrage across the political parties and in the media at large. And it was condemned by the European Union. The EU claimed that by tabling the Internal Market Bill the UK had breached the withdrawal agreement. The government on the other hand argued that it is designed to protect the UK's internal market.

The EU believes that the bill tears up the key elements in the withdrawal agreement relating to the Northern Ireland protocol, threatening a hard border between NI and the Republic, involving customs checks on cross border trade. It should be noted however that only two clauses in the bill apply directly to Northern Ireland. These clauses to which the EU objects remain in place following the passing of the bill's Third Reading on 29 September. Consequently on 30 September the EU began its legal action against the government in the form of a letter of intent.

During the debate on the bill's second reading on 14 September Johnson struck a nationalist tone, standing up for the UK against the EU which he described as a foreign power intent on breaking up the nation. And he included Labour in this. By voting against the bill Labour was accused of taking the side of the EU against the British people. It was, Johnson said, a vote against the national interest. A deliberate obfuscation he knew would appeal

to the EU prejudices of many voters. But if he wishes to have Ireland as a friend and ally, he seemed to forget that it is a member state of the foreign power he maligned.

It appears to us however that Johnson may be playing a game in which rules can be broken if the end result is to the UK's benefit. The end justifying the means. And so far everything he has said points in that direction: that it is a negotiating tactic to force the EU to agree a deal he can claim as favourable to the UK. And if his tactic produces a deal which backbench Tories feel they can support, Johnson can announce it as a great achievement to wide acclaim in the Conservative supporting press and among leave voters. To prove that his cheeky chutzpah has won through in the end.

But he is playing a dangerous game of political brinkmanship. A deal with the EU has to be finalised by 15 October. Failure to do so will mean that the UK leaves the EU without a deal, and will be subject to World Trade Organisation rules from 1 January 2021. It's generally accepted, although not by Brexiters, that this would lead to disruptions at borders, higher prices and possibly shortages. Labour will of course oppose the outcome, but if it had voted for Theresa May's withdrawal agreement a no-deal Brexit may have been avoided. Instead, it prevaricated, voted against, and the opportunity was lost.

A sticking point in the negotiations with the EU is the issue of state

aid. The EU has strict rules on this. It argues that state aid distorts competition and trade within the EU. The single market, the jewel in the EU's economic crown, enables companies across the EU to trade on equal terms. In the EU's rules book state aid gives a competitive advantage to companies, contrary to the letter and spirit of the laws of the single market.

Johnson is keen to use the state to provide a stimulus to growth, particularly in the red wall seats across the midlands and the north. However, Brussels insists that its rules on state aid must continue to apply to the UK even after it has left the EU. In the eyes of the EU a level playing field – agreed standards on environmental protection, workers' rights, taxation and state aid - is essential to prevent distortions of trade, giving an unfair advantage to the UK's access to the EU's market. In the process, undercutting EU firms. But who knows what will happen when Johnson's irresistible force meets the EU's immovable object?

Historically the Conservative party has tended to oppose direct financial assistance to companies, believing that governments are bad at picking winners. Enoch Powell, the talisman of many Conservatives, argued that failing companies should be allowed to die, not resuscitated by the taxpayer. It was socialists, he

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# The Internal Market Bill

*The move by Boris Johnson's government to legislate for an Internal Market Bill would nullify the withdrawal agreement the Prime Minister has reached with the European Union, override the Northern Ireland protocol, and institute a hard border on the island of Ireland.*

*Mark Langhammer considers the wide, varied and likely implications and the potential political fall-out.*

Brandon Lewis, the Northern Ireland secretary confirmed in the House of Commons that the new Internal Market Bill would unilaterally alter the withdrawal agreement, thereby breaking international law in 'a very limited and specific way'. Environment secretary, George Eustice, described the move as just 'tying up loose ends'. Jonathan Jones, the Treasury solicitor (the Government's most senior legal civil servant), resigned soon afterwards – newspaper reports suggesting he had clashed with Suella Braverman, the Attorney General.

Public criticism of the Prime Minister ensued from four of his predecessors, Theresa May, John Major, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. Tony Blair and Sir John Major teamed up to accuse Boris Johnson of "shaming" the UK by proposing legislation which undermines his own Brexit deal. In the Lords, another former Tory leader, the Brexit-supporting Michael Howard, excoriated Johnson's administration:

*'How can we reproach Russia, or China, or Iran when their conduct falls below internationally accepted standards when we are showing such scant regard for our treaty obligations?'*

The Bill passed its first reading by 340 to 263 on Tuesday 20 October with 30 Tory MPs abstaining. Whilst some resistance from the Lords is expected, the bill is to be fast-tracked and, if passed, would effectively end any EU influence over the UK, including Northern Ireland, in direct contravention of last October's deal. A no-deal exit now seems likely.

Within the EU, Britain's treaty abrogation is taken as clear evidence that Johnson has little interest in a Brexit deal. The EU, in response, is reported to be studying the possibility of legal action against the UK and the possibility of triggering the dispute settlement mechanism, with potential financial sanctions.

Johnson risks reopening some old wounds within his own party, though the European Research Group has

been reinvigorated. The Johnson Government's 'cover' that the bill was a tidying exercise and that the October agreement was inadequately scrutinised, the real issue at play is facilitative of UK State aid, on two counts. The state aid issue is not characterised as rescuing "lame duck" companies as in the past, like British Leyland or Rolls Royce, but appears central to Johnson's sovereignty argument. Dominic Cummings is reportedly driven by the prospect of building a trillion pound British 'Google' in the UK, boosted by targeted state-aid.<sup>1</sup>

Economist Mariana Mazzucato, amongst others, has detailed the chance and circumstance involved in building trillion dollar tech-businesses and the 'hit and miss' nature of state investment in them. The internet was an accident that grew out of 1960s US military decision to build a distributed array of computing power that could  
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/dominic-cummings-brexit-tech-giant-critics-2020-9?r=US&IR=T>

## Continued From Page 3

believed, who used the state to prop up business, with limited success. The late Tony Benn, guru of the Labour left in the 1980s, was a strong advocate of state aid. The Labour left's Alternative Economic Strategy, to which Benn was a signatory, had state aid at its core.

In Powell's world, and that of leading conservatives such as former party leader William Hague, Johnson is behaving like a socialist. Insisting that the UK should be free to use whatever state aid is necessary to protect jobs at a time of economic crisis, as Chancellor Sunak's furlough scheme has done. And in particular to support the newly developing hi-tech companies in today's digital age. The UK as a "trillion dollar technology champion", which hopefully will become less dependent on the United States and China.

Creating new high-tech jobs is essential for the future success of the UK outside of the EU. But Johnson and Sunak will have their work cut out plugging the huge unemployment gap effected by Covid-19. And it is these lost jobs, in entertainment, the hospitality sector and services in general, that are of immediate concern to many voters. To address the additional damage to the economy in recent months the furlough scheme will be replaced at the end of October by a Job Support Scheme and other measures. Time will tell whether these satisfy the genuine concerns of the owners of businesses most badly affected. General opinion so far suggests they will fall short of what is needed.

Benn and the Labour left were clear about their economic objectives. But where does today's Labour party stand on these matters, particularly the question of state aid and public spending in general? At Labour's recent conference Shadow Chancellor Annaliese Dodds accused the government of misuse of public money, spending too much with little focus and lack of thought about its effect on borrowing. It reminded listeners of Conservative attacks on Labour governments in general and of George Osborne's criticism of Gordon Brown during the 2008 financial crisis when Brown's quantitative easing bailed out the banks. Is Labour simply reacting to opinion polls which show that voters still don't trust the party with the economy? Or is it a cautious, conservative economic policy we can expect from the kind of Labour party Keir Starmer described in his conference speech? It's time we were told.

withstand a nuclear attack. All Silicon Valley's tech giants have idiosyncratic 'chance' histories in which luck and serendipity plays a big part. Bill Gates' purchase of MS-DOS in 1981. Apple's move into consumer products away from computers. Amazon's growth from online book-seller to a cloud-computing giant. But there's also Nokia, AOL, Alta Vista or Netscape? The notion that Dominic Cummings or the UK government can pick and grow winning companies flies in the face of a long history of British failure when it has tried to do exactly that.

In any event, restaging a Brexit show is hardly unhelpful to Boris Johnson - not least to divert from the UK's dire Covid-19 performance.

Political calculation may be another dimension to all of this. The Bill faces the process of Second Readings, House of Lords, and Committee stages before it's "oven ready". That process overlaps with the negotiating space for a deal with the EU. The Bill may have been introduced with half an eye on 'playing out' those negotiations.

Given that the state aid issue has been central to Johnson's sovereignty argument, this Bill enables him to continue the appearance of representing the UK sovereignty/integrity position in a situation where the prospect of abandoning State Aid of itself would blow his credibility with the "Brexit means Brexit" brigade. The parliamentary appearance of this Bill in the weeks ahead will continue to supply the British back-drop during the business end of the negotiations with the EU and during that time it will enable Boris to continue to be seen as the champion of British sovereignty.

Politically, the Cummings-Johnson administration, modelled in part on the Bannon-Trump experiment in the US, came to power on the strength of a single issue - Brexit - and a willingness to flout convention, tell lies, break laws, tear down institutions and beggar the neighbours. Politically, Dominic Cummings' pseudo-anarchist philosophy and appetite to "break things" (a la Zuckerberg's Facebook motto "Move Fast and

Break Things"), is more akin to what is usually found in students' unions debating halls.

The Labour Party view on all of this remains opaque, with a Labour Party leader who won't outline a position to use State Aid to reconfigure the economy. A straight-forward policy would be to construct a rational argument which advocates a trade agreement while acknowledging that it requires significant compromise on the issue of state aid.

UK diplomatic reactions included a contribution for Kim Darroch, the former U.S. ambassador, whose career ended abruptly when his frank views on President Donald Trump were leaked. Having spent 40 years as a diplomat, he says he's never before seen a British government saying it plans to break international law. *"It's all-round extraordinary.... It's one of the things that we thought was a basic principle of Britain's face to the world: that we stuck by international law and agreements."*

The two former prime ministers, Blair and Major, were amongst many who claim the PM's UK Internal Market Bill will damage the Irish peace process and trade talks. So how does the Bill affect Northern Ireland, and the island as a whole?

### **The Institute for Government on the effect in Ireland**

The Institute for Government have published an article on the UK Internal Market Bill which examines the Bill clause by clause<sup>2</sup>. In respect of clauses 40 to 45, these clauses that seek to override the protocol are 42 (which is about documentation for goods moving from Great Britain (GB) to Northern Ireland (NI) and 43 and 44 (which are about state aid law). The following is the Institute for Government's summary of what these clauses say, and mean:

What clause 42 says: This clause gives UK ministers the power to disapply or modify exit summary declarations (and any other exit procedures) for goods moving from NI-GB and, in doing so, to disregard domestic laws or international obligations, including any under the

<sup>2</sup> See at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/internal-market-bill>

Northern Ireland protocol.

What clause 42 means: The UK government is currently seeking an exemption from exit summary declarations, as required by EU's customs rules which apply under the protocol, for goods moving NI-GB. In the event that no agreement is reached, this will allow the UK to remove the requirement unilaterally.

What clause 43 & 44 says: Clause 43 gives ministers the powers to make regulations to determine how the state aid law is applied, including in a way that modifies the protocol itself or is incompatible with international law. Clause 44 states that only UK ministers may notify the European Commission of state aid requiring approval under the protocol.

What clause 43 & 44 means: Under the Northern Ireland protocol, EU state aid law will apply to any UK act affecting trade between NI and the EU, but the government is concerned that this may have implications for state aid in other parts of the UK. These clauses would allow UK ministers to apply state aid law according to the UK rather than the EU's interpretation. When the Bill was published, the Financial Times said: *"Legal experts said the legislation was even broader than suggested by the government, and did not make the new powers contingent on a "no deal" outcome in the EU-UK trade negotiations, as had been widely anticipated."*<sup>3</sup>

It seems certain that a "no-deal" outcome is inevitable while the government is threatening not to implement bits of Northern Ireland protocol in the last deal. More likely, the EU will insist that these clauses in the Internal Market Bill will have to be repealed prior to or as part of another deal - otherwise there won't be another deal<sup>4</sup>.

### **The political effect.**

How then, will the Internal Market Bill affect Ireland, politically? Simon Carswell in the Irish Times of 14th

<sup>3</sup> See at <https://www.ft.com/content/a150b01f-dde0-4376-9d6b-bac213a98a84>

<sup>4</sup> The Institute of Government publishes a useful "Myth Busting" blog at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/busting-myths-northern-ireland-protocol>



September explains through a series of questions and answers:

*"The UK has introduced the Internal Market Bill which covers trade within England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It seeks to change key elements of the withdrawal agreement approved earlier this year by the EU and the UK. How would this violate the Brexit agreement? The two main areas where the draft legislation would breach the treaty concern state aid and export declarations, though there are other areas.*

*The withdrawal agreement effectively puts the North in two economic camps – the EU and the UK – to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. The proposed law would breach rules designed to prevent businesses in Northern Ireland having a competitive advantage with UK government subsidies, and ensure checks on goods entering the North.*

*How does the new law do that? It gives the UK government power to tear up parts of the withdrawal agreement and specifically the Northern Ireland Protocol within it.*

*Section 42 of the Bill permits the UK to "disapply" or modify the protocol so Northern Ireland businesses do not have to fill out export declarations or meet other exit procedures to avoid checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea. This was part of the promise by Brexiteers to Northern Ireland that it would have "unfettered access" to the UK's internal market.*

*Section 43 of the Bill permits the Northern Secretary to "disapply" or modify article 10 of the protocol that aims to prevent Northern Ireland businesses benefiting from state aid, a key objective of Brexiteers to protect UK sovereignty.*

*The Bill also protects the UK from legal challenges by saying EU case law or legislation will not apply, blocking any European Court of Justice cases over illegal state aid. The EU says the Bill would be in violation of the treaty's good faith obligation.*

*Didn't the UK government agree to, vote for and sign the withdrawal treaty into law? Yes. Johnson*

*described the deal as "oven-ready" ahead of December's UK election, and in January hailed the signing of the divorce deal as a "fantastic moment" in British history.*

*So why are we here now? Talks between the EU and UK have floundered this year as the two sides seek to reach a trade agreement that would come into effect when the standstill Brexit transition period ends in December. The divide between the sides remains over state aid and Irish Sea checks. Trust between the EU and the UK has plummeted to a new low. The admission by Northern Secretary Brandon Lewis that the Bill would breach the EU withdrawal treaty and international law "in a specific and limited way" makes negotiating a trade deal before the end of the year very difficult.*

*What would happen on January 1st? It would mean a hard Brexit with World Trade Organisation rules applying on goods traded between the EU and the UK. This would result in heavy tariffs and quotas being applied in both directions, potentially causing severe disruption to trade and economic damage.*

*Is there any hope of relations improving? Not if the rhetoric of recent days is anything to go by. Johnson wrote in Saturday's Daily Telegraph that the Bill was necessary to stop the EU installing a "blockade" on food from Britain to the North and that the UK "cannot leave the theoretical power to carve up our country – to divide it – in the hands of an international organisation".*

*Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney has said there is "no blockade proposed" and this "inflammatory language" was "spin and not the truth". Checks would be required to prevent goods moving from Britain to the Republic via the North tariff-free if there was no trade deal.*

*What does it mean for Ireland? Once again, how to keep the Border on the island of Ireland open while the UK fully exits the EU remains the dilemma, as it has been since the UK voted out in 2016.*

**Nansi Pelosi intervenes: "Absolutely no chance..."**

On 9 September, Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, issued a stark warning to the UK that there will be "absolutely no chance of a US-UK trade agreement passing the Congress" if the UK government does anything to undermine the Good Friday Agreement, the 1998 Northern Irish peace settlement.

Four senior congressmen—three Democrats and one Republican—have since echoed her warning on the part of the Congress "Ways and Means" committee, without whose support a US-UK trade deal cannot pass. In a letter to Boris Johnson, they reiterated that "the United States Congress will not support any free trade agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom if the United Kingdom fails to preserve the gains of the Good Friday Agreement and broader peace process". They added that "it would be difficult to see how these conditions could be met" if the government were to proceed with the Internal Market Bill in its current form, and urged Johnson "to abandon any and all legally questionable and unfair efforts to flout the Northern Ireland protocol".

UK Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab was presaged to visit Washington a week later to allay concerns about the Internal Market Bill and, just as he was landing on the tarmac, a large group of prominent Irish-American politicians and business leaders flexed their muscles, urging the British government to reconsider its plans. The UK government saw at first hand quite how deep a stake the US has in the Irish peace process, with the Pelosi 'line' repeated just as bluntly. The Johnson Government now finds itself in a pincer movement between the EU and the United States, an unenviable position.

### **Irish concerns**

In Ireland, the damage to diplomatic relations is obvious, with Taoiseach Micheál Martin noting 'Trust has been eroded.'. The Irish Road Hauliers Association was quick to point out Irish concerns

(from Simon Carswell, Irish Times): *The Irish Road Haulage Association has urged the Government to help set up a fast, direct daily ferry service with continental Europe for lorries to avoid post-Brexit disruption on the UK transit route.*

*Eugene Drennan, the president of the industry group, has called for Government intervention to secure supply routes with Europe by establishing a fast, daily ferry service for lorries, preferably into the French port of Le Havre, supported initially with subsidies.*

*The association has requested financial support for hauliers using a direct ferry service to cover any higher costs from using the longer, more expensive route and to designate new, faster ferry services as public service obligation routes for at least a year.*

*Mr Drennan said political and logistical challenges thrown up in recent weeks show Ireland's "extreme vulnerability" to maintaining dependence on the so-called land bridge through the UK to gain access to EU markets.*

*Mr Drennan said Irish hauliers suffered serious delays from migrant and security checks at Dover port in the past week, resulting in drivers taking more than three hours to travel less than two kilometres and causing knock-on nine-hour delays due to driving limits. "Any interference with the passage of Irish drivers through the UK land bridge, whether by political manoeuvrings or administrative zeal, will have cataclysmic impacts on Irish trade and our people," he said. "The Government needs to recognise this now and plan accordingly."*

*"Some 150,000 Irish lorries use the land bridge every year. About 40 per cent of Irish exports and 13 per cent of imports, in value and volume terms, pass over the key transit route every year. More than 80 per cent of one million "roll-on, roll-off" lorries using Irish ports every year go through UK ports, with the remainder going on direct routes to continental Europe. The value of trade crossing the land bridge was €18 billion in exports and €3 billion in imports in 2016, according to a 2018 report on the route by the Irish Maritime Development Office. Journey times*

*on direct ferry services between Ireland and continental Europe can up to 40 hours, compared with less than 20 hours for lorries using the land bridge. Mr Drennan said lorry drivers could be between six and 12 hours behind schedule by using direct ferry service to Europe instead of the land bridge".*

At the very least, the Irish Republic needs to fast-track its efforts to boost port and air infrastructure to enable direct access to the European continent, and to drive a hard financial bargain with the EU to facilitate independent access and infrastructure without delay.

More widely, Brexit has forced the Irish state off the 'revisionist' or Anglicisation supplicancy which took root in 1969-70 after the *volte-face* effected in the face of British pressure at the time of the Arms Crisis. The only route open to Ireland,

notwithstanding whether it desires otherwise, is in the soft embrace of Germany, France and the EU. And no bad thing.

Within Northern Ireland, the Internal Market Bill has caused division within the Democratic Unionist Party. Arlene Foster, previous reconciled to ameliorating the border down the Irish Sea, has been countered by her more Brexit-friendly MPs, such as Sammy Wilson and forced to harden the DUP line. DUP Minister, Edwin Poots (from the former Paisleyite wing of the party) has issued instructions to civil-servants to cease work on seaport customs infrastructure.

No polls on the Border issue have been undertaken since the introduction of the Internal Market Bill, but it is reasonable to suppose that support for a Border poll has strengthened and pro-united Ireland sentiment increased.

#### WAKE UP AT THE BACK THERE IT'S STILL 2020

The Woke Generation is rife  
so, I gave up meat to save the planet.  
Then I thought of plant-life,  
though I can't eat granite.  
Don't they deserve a life,  
aren't they male and female.  
Don't they have a husband or a wife.  
They could also be LGBT,  
isn't In-Vitro-Fertilisation  
carried out by bees.  
Had to lie down on hunger strike  
though I have not yet registered my cause.  
Got on my e-bike  
to a rally at Trafalgar Square.  
Seems there are too many people on this earth  
but not enough at this meeting to compare.  
They say what is needed is counter-birth,  
they take over animal-space  
but then some animals eat meat and others  
those poor plants  
and the rest is cant.  
All I can do now is leave in haste.  
That will leave six billion and ninety-nine million  
and ninety-nine.  
But before I go I'll have a large steak with mushrooms  
and a bottle of your finest wine.  
One has to keep one's station in life,  
I presume.

Wilson John Haire. 27th September, 2020

# Froggy

## News From Across The Channel



### Covid in France

The situation is much the same in both France and England: governments react to the situation as it evolves, using a mix of science and crowd manipulation techniques resulting in frequent changes and general confusion, e.g. mask wearing not necessary in April, obligatory now in some places.

The same wave of warm appreciation washed over health staff and the low paid who carried on working, saved people and kept the country going. The French clapped every day, the English only on Thursdays. Both countries saw a furlough system and home working. The possible second wave is accompanied in France as in England by a greater take-up of testing, and people complaining it takes too long to get results or the testing centre is too far from one's home.

On the French government website, the instructions are fairly confusing: you can be tested without a doctor's prescription, but on the other hand, people with a prescription are prioritised. It's free to have a test, except that sometimes it isn't. If it isn't, you will be reimbursed. So when you go for your test, take money with you and don't forget your Social Security card, called 'Carte Vitale', without which you can't access health services.

### Role of local authorities

France is divided in 14 'regions'.

Government health policy in general is implemented by the 14 regions' Health Agencies. For example, to implement government track and trace policy the Grand Est health authority (ARS Agence Régionale de Santé) have set up a network of places where you can be tested, for free and without a

prescription; you go to their website to get addresses.

They give the example of their work. Two family gatherings of over 50 people took place Friday and Saturday 7/8 August, in which one person was (mildly) infected. Realising later he/she was ill, the person contacted members of the family and 25 people were tested, 13 positive. The local authorities then stepped in.

The ARS organized, with a laboratory, the MSA and the village authorities, the implementation of an emergency screening so that these contacts could be tested on August 17. 4 private sector nurses were mobilized. 90 people were thus given a Covid-19 test on August 17, 19 of whom tested positive.

The MSA is Mutualité Sociale Agricole, the Social Security body for everyone connected with agriculture. The Agricultural social mutual organization (MSA) operates with joint oversight from the ministry in charge of agriculture, the ministry of public action and accounts, and the ministry of health.

MSA provides social coverage (health, family, pension, industrial accident, and occupational illness benefits) for all individuals with ties to agriculture and their beneficiaries: farmers, salaried workers (of farms, farming businesses, cooperatives, and professional agricultural organizations).

### Role of the Mayor

At the end of August president Macron was optimistic, talking about keeping the economy going and 'learning to live with the virus'. The government Covid strategy, promoted in particular by the new prime minister, Jean Castex, was to be a collaboration with the mayors

(local) and préfets (government agents).

Then at the end of September, without consultation, the health minister ordered pubs and restaurants in the Marseille-Aix hub to close altogether, creating a storm of protest, with several marches in the middle of town. The deputy-mayor of Marseille called the ruling 'an affront'. The Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and the Mayor of Marseille Michèle Rubirola called for the measure to be postponed. The regional authorities are going to court to have the measure rescinded. The government gave a day's grace. In 11 other cities bars and restaurants will have to close at 10 pm after 28 September.

The government will compensate for the loss of turnover that cafes and restaurants will suffer during this period. Restaurants that are administratively closed will benefit from an exemption from social security contributions and a solidarity fund of 10,000 euros per month, compared to 1,500 euros currently. The total reimbursement of partial unemployment will also be extended beyond November 1 if necessary.

### The role of the 'Opposition'

In England BBC news programmes quote the Labour Opposition's criticism of the government's management of the Covid crisis, as if dutifully propping up the two-party system. Boris Johnson dismisses the criticism in Parliament as mere carping. It is mere carping; we haven't heard Keith Starmer complaining about giant multinationals with no involvement in health being handed large contracts for Track and Trace, instead of local authorities who have experience of public health.

In France there are 'oppositions', a



multitude of parties and movements. They do not need to be quoted on national radio. (As an aside, in the 2020 local elections, severely disrupted by the pandemic, a number of Greens took some large cities. The new mayor of Lyon, who had to host the passage of the Tour de France in his town as it had been scheduled by the previous Mayor, announced the Tour was an old-fashioned, macho event. 'The Tour is not environmentally friendly and does not respect men/women equality.' Then after all, he attended the arrival of the cyclists and tried to ingratiate himself, having done the damage.)

### Financing of health services

Social security finances health services, but the great majority of people have complementary health insurance. Teachers and other civil servants contribute to a particular insurance scheme. This calculates contributions according to income, and in the same way calculates refunds for medicines according to income: if you have a low income you get more of your expenses refunded. You can belong to it now even if not a civil servant. And even if a civil servant you can opt for a cheaper package, not calculated as a proportion of your income.

Some pharmacies do not ask you to pay first and be reimbursed later: instead of payment they swipe your 'Carte Vitale'. If you have had a serious health condition, medicines to do with the condition are fully refunded. Otherwise, for everyone, some medicines are fully refunded and others not, depending on government ruling, to do with efficacy of the drug in question.

People are involved in a mixture of private and public provision, much more than in England where only the well-off 'go private'. Otherwise, the English do not necessarily see the private sector involvement in the health service, where everything, even Serco's 'Track and Trace,' appears under the blue and white NHS logo.

### Hydroxychloroquine

The French have a celebrity in this field.

This anti-malarial drug is studied as a possible treatment for Covid-19; it is promoted by Dr Raoult, head of the Infectious disease department at a large Marseille hospital. His scientific studies on the subject are disputed. He is very politicised, supported by the right wing in France, as well as some libertarians on the left, and by Trump. Raoult accused the Lancet, who published a later retracted article discounting the drug as a possible treatment, of being motivated by a hatred of Trump. Raoult was seen marching at the front of protesters in Marseille on 26 September against the closing of bars and restaurants.

Raoult quotes Chinese studies of the molecule, but these studies are all in vitro and not on patients. Seemingly sensible doctors and scientists, who can't really be accused of being in the pay of vaccine developers, point out that in the Raoult studies patients who died under treatment with the molecule are not counted in the final results, as only those who complete the three-day treatment are counted. Also, people with heart conditions are excluded from trials. The world-wide strategy seems to be to concentrate

on a vaccine rather than a treatment, since the virus seems to be like colds and flu, for which treatment hasn't been found.

### Is the word 'Covid' feminine or masculine?

Now for the important questions.

As a new word, Covid had to be either a feminine or masculine. A lot of people opt to say 'le Covid' because it is 'le virus', but on the radio you hear commentators speak about 'la Covid'. This is because the D in Covid stands for Disease (COrona VIRus Disease) and disease is 'la maladie'. Académie Française, the body that rules on the national language, says that la Covid is preferable. It deplores however that the English word 'disease' was chosen to describe the illness internationally, when the first two words, corona and virus, are Latin; they suggest the Latin word for illness 'morbus' should have been chosen. How right they are.

But public life and public space are invaded by English, or, as the French call it, 'Globish'. A group defending the French language against the invasion of English has remarked that you see more English on posters and public spaces in Paris today than you saw German signs and posters round Paris during the Occupation.

The French as a whole will continue to be resistant to learning English, except those who very much want to get on.

### NOVEMBER 2020.

In the US if you want votes try sanctions.

Please those veterans of the Bay of Pigs  
now on pensions.

Cripple their birthplace  
where tourism helps the economy.

But there is a dichotomy:  
Where there is tourism  
there is whoreism.

Women in the shadows of Havana  
eat men like piranhas  
for the US dollar.

That educates children into scholar  
and helps a free health service.

So, when you think of socialism  
don't be nervous,  
capitalism hasn't died.  
Just keep lying on that Cuban beach,  
totally fried.

Wilson John Haire. 27th Sept., 2020

# Artificial Intelligence and Labour Policy

By Mark Cowling.

Following its disastrous performance at the last election, the Labour Party is having a re-think of its policies. This brief article gives a taste of a much more substantial piece which appears in *Problems of Communism and Capitalism* (Problems 43, October 2020). Artificial intelligence is becoming more and more effective and is having an increasingly pervasive influence on people's lives. It is therefore really important for socialists to develop an appreciation both of the potential for human liberation and of the damaging effects of artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence is the use of computer systems to undertake tasks which would normally require human intelligence, such as voice recognition, making translations, visual perception, decision-making and manufacturing. Enormous amounts of data is collected on individuals by the tech firms. Initially collected for advertising purposes, data can also be used by law enforcement agencies. This can be for purposes most people would accept, such as preventing terrorism or catching paedophiles, but can also be unjustifiably intrusive and can constrain legitimate debate and protest, violating legitimate expectations of non-interference in our lives.

The rapidly developing capacities of artificial intelligence can perform amazing tasks, outperforming radiologists and doctors in the interpretation of x-rays, facilitating keyhole surgery, or allowing precise and minimising crop spraying. But it also facilitates inhumane farming practices, particularly in the USA, or the use of bots, which may well have allowed Trump to win the last presidential election, given that Hillary Clinton got more votes, and also played a role in boosting the Leave side of the UK referendum. This was achieved by manipulating people's emotions, and supplying them with carefully selected news. Some of this manipulation was carried out by Russian sources. Such manipulation is a very serious threat to democracy. The tech firms claim that they are getting better at eliminating such practices, but it is very important to monitor what is going on.

## Artificial Intelligence and Employment

Artificial intelligence arguably represents a new development of capitalism, accelerating the possibilities

for variety inherent in post-Fordism. Just to take one example, the development of 3D printing allows the rapid production of individualised components. Factories are already highly automated. For example, everything that Heinz produces in the UK, including 3 million tins of baked beans every week, with a 24-hour, seven days a week operation, is achieved by a workforce of about 1500. Although the UK fluctuates between being the sixth and eighth largest manufacturing country in the world, manufacturing now employs relatively few people. Since the early 1980s the workforce has shrunk by about 3 million, falling from 21% of the UK workforce down to about 8%.

This shrinkage is likely to accelerate in the future as robots get more sophisticated and automation goes further. Indeed, whole swathes of employment are liable to disappear. Drivers will be replaced by self-driving vehicles; artificial intelligence can do better than paralegals; low-level programmers will not be needed; as voice recognition gets better, call centres will need fewer staff; insurance underwriting will be done by algorithms; checkout operators will not be required; Jeff Bezos needs more money, so Amazon warehouses will be staffed by robots instead of computer-monitored people, with parcels loaded onto self-driving lorries or drones; much of the checking of social media for unacceptable content will be done by algorithms instead of people; telemarketing, credit checking and baking will be performed by robots and artificial intelligence.

Already the effects on employment are bad. Employment in the gig economy is insecure self-employment, not enjoying the rights to sick pay, holidays, pensions etc. of full-time employees. Moreover, the accumulation of wealth at the top end of the tech firms is matched by stagnating earnings at the bottom end, accelerating the tendencies already started by neoliberalism.

## Crime and Policing.

Already the Internet facilitates recruitment to ISIS. It doubtless inspired the horrific attacks on Muslims in New Zealand, which were also publicised online. But this is a mere foretaste of things to come! There is the potential for terrorists to release hostages instead of beheading them, but then to control their behaviour and turn them into suicide bombers.

Artificial intelligence is playing an increasing role in policing. It can identify hotspots, and alert police officers to gang activity via their smartphones. However, this identification is largely built up from police reports of criminal activity. Concretely this is liable to mean that black areas of cities get undue police attention; behave like members of the notorious Oxford Bullingdon Club in black areas and you will get a criminal record instead of joining the Cabinet! Particularly controversial is the role of facial recognition technology. It has typically been developed concentrating on white males, and is therefore less reliable on black people and women. Already black men suffer much higher rates of stop and search and imprisonment than is warranted by their conduct; artificial intelligence may make this process worse. It thus can make bad policing more efficiently bad! This facilitates the oppressive policing of black people which has led in turn to the Black Lives Matter protests. Repression of such protests is also facilitated by artificial intelligence. It can, in any case, be argued that pervasive use of facial recognition is an undue trespass on people's freedom.

## The Future.

Policies to narrow the gap between the extreme wealth of the people at the top of the tech companies and those forced into insecure self-employment are needed, possibly involving a universal basic income. Tax avoidance and evasion by tech companies urgently needs to be dealt with. Given the right policies, in the long term there is the potential for a flowering of human creativity, with people relieved of the necessity to engage in arduous labour under the cosh of necessity. Back in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century about half the British population were employed on the land; now much greater agricultural production is achieved by about 2% of the population; a similar process will apply eventually to much of today's economy. Artificial intelligence enables the monitoring of climate change and deforestation, and can facilitate measures to protect biodiversity and slow or reverse global warming. An increasingly luxurious and egalitarian future is possible given the right policies!

# Diary of a Starmer foot soldier

by Michael Murray

*Dictionary definition of "foot soldier": "...a dedicated low level follower..."*

*Contents: The "Vision" thing ....., Gauging Starmer's direction of travel .....,  
Follow the money ....., A Starmer foot soldier, really?*

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## 1. The "Vision" thing

Oseni Joseph wrote: "A man without vision is a man without purpose because purpose is what will tell you why you need the vision..." Very pro-deep as a Dublin Corpo worker of my acquaintance would say. I don't know who Oseni Joseph is, or was, even after a google search. It could turn out he was a raving antisemitic, or, with that surname, "the wrong kind of Jew." I could find myself in receipt of THAT LETTER that tells me I'm suspended from the Labour Party for quoting from an antisemitic source and, should I be traumatised by the possibility of being suspended from Labour membership, I could contact the Samaritans. Having now seen copies of such letters from comrades around the country, asking me - though they were expressly, and wrongly, told not to contact other comrades for advice or support. Support is the very least I could offer: "An injury to one is the concern of all." And a person is innocent, pending investigation. As for advice? As an ex-union activist and official I know the difference between advice and opinion. Let's say, I know what I would do in that situation. What the letters I've seen have in common is the mention of the Samaritans. It's a recognition by the Labour Party that real psychological damage is being done by the procedures they have chosen, and needs to be mitigated. For me as a Catholic atheist, with the parable of "The Good Samaritan" imprinted on his brain, there is a huge irony in Labour referring members suspended under its Kafkaesque disciplinary rules to the Samaritans for help with the hurt arising from accusations of antisemitism, but let

that pass. Where there is no vision there is no sense of history either.

Keir Starmer was elected with a clear majority to the leadership of the Labour Party, with the pro-Corbyn candidates left trailing some distance behind. Following this, Sophie Ridge, Sky TV, interviewed him. "You've told us you want to unite the party, be an effective opposition and win the next general election. That's obvious, isn't it? But what is your big idea? What are you actually going to change?" His answer made no mention of the "10 Pledges" he stood on in the leadership election. The Pledges, an impressively compressed, coherent vision of a future Labour leader and Party was not referred to by Keir and seem to have been set aside as having served their purpose of getting him elected. As he, uncharacteristically, mumbled and stumbled to answer the "vision" question, this is what, eventually, he articulated: "The first thing I did was to be absolutely clear about things .. like antisemitism ... and that's why I issued an apology in my acceptance speech the first opportunity that I had to our Jewish community and that's why I've already had meetings with Jewish leaders in the past week, so absolutely demonstrating change." (Sophie Ridge on Sunday, Sky TV) Another signalling of "change" in labour leadership was the choice of Ruth Smeeth to introduce Keir Starmer's Keynote Speech to September's Labour Party online conference; a choice ill-advised on so many levels - not least her vigorous role in opposing former leader Jeremy Corbyn from her base in the divisive Jewish Labour Movement. The anti-Corbyn Jewish Chronicle noted Starmer's acknowledgement that Smeeth

"exemplifies the values" of the Labour Party. (Jewish Chronicle 22/09/20).

Forgotten now, because it went unreported in the British mainstream media, was US Secretary of State Pompeo's intervention in the last General Election, when he said, on a visit to Britain, that the fight against Corbyn should not await the outcome of the election. Jerusalem based Haaretz, in an Opinion piece, commented: "When Pompeo committed to 'pushing back' against Corbyn it wasn't just another Trump administration stumble. The US cannot be indifferent to an Anti-Semite coming to power - and nor should any other Western state." (Haaretz 12/06/2019). As recent polls, favourable to Starmer's performance as Labour leader, seem to suggest: in the land of the blind the man with even the haziest vision is king - for the moment. There is only so long Keir will get away with promoting himself as "A New Management," and "Not Jeremy Corbyn." Polls are a snapshot of the moment mostly reflecting mainstream media headlines, real and fake. Allowing for margin of error, plus the historic capacity of the Tories to swiftly jettison a leader no longer fulfilling their party purpose and throwing up someone more formidable than the "incompetent" Johnson as an opponent, a poll lead would need to be more buoyant than a few percentage points. Also, it has to be borne in mind that when it comes to actual elections the first-past-the-post election system is about the distribution of votes not vote share. Then there is the small matter of the Tory 80 seat majority in the House of Commons.



## 2. Gauging Starmer's direction of travel .....

There are other ways of gauging the current direction of the Labour Party under Keir Starmer. The most obvious one is his Shadow Front Bench appointments. Where are the obvious champions amongst them of the domestic and foreign affairs agenda enshrined in Starmer's "10 Pledges"? Aaron Bastani, of Novara Media, has pointed out that most of Starmer's Front Bench is comprised of those who voted in favour of the illegal 2018 bombing of Syria, on the pretext of alleged, since disproven, Syrian government use of chemical bombs against a civilian population in Douma. At a certain level in British "real-politick" there is no separation between the foreign and the domestic in policy formulation. With regard to domestic social policy, from Starmer down, the line seems to be, for the moment, in the words of a well-known Irish song: "Whatever you say, say nothing." The 10 Pledges have been shelved. Instead its concentration is on exposing Government "incompetence," steering away from any critique of the Tory ideological neo-liberal direction: criticise the "incompetence" of providing PPE, or organising "Test and Trace" rather than point to the outsourcing to the private sector - and incidental continued privatisation of the NHS - as a major part of the problem. Dealing with outsourcing was one of the pledges, of course. Other pledges on human rights were abandoned when confronted with the refugee issue and the initial response to issues raised by Black Lives Matter.

The "Overseas Operations Bill" which also led to 3 junior minister being sacked was a further betrayal of the pledge on human rights, and, co-incidentally foreign policy. Dan Jarvis, Labour MP, an ex- British Army Major, asked the obvious questions: What does it say about our Armed Forces if we give them effective legal immunity for no other reason than them being members of our Armed Forces? What does it say when torture and rendition are tolerated and those involved immune from sanction? He goes on to say things that Keir cannot bring himself to say in his endeavour not to appear

"unpatriotic" - like Corbyn: "The UK has a dark recent past when it comes to torture," says Jarvis. "Our involvement during the war on terror has been slowly pierced together over the past two decades. In their 2018 report, Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee identified hundreds of cases in which we are complicit in mistreatment overseas. It is now more important than ever that we uphold our values and standards, not undermine them."

In the first round of voting on the Bill Starmer called for Labour MPs to "abstain." The only reason offered in defence of that whip was the "tactical" one that Labour could table amendments to make the monstrous Tory Bill "better." In a House of Commons with a Tory 80 seat majority? 18 Labour MPs decided this was not a matter for dubious "tactics," but a matter of conscience. Led by Jeremy Corbyn, they voted against, thus, as they later explained, laying down a marker for what Labour policy ought to be. Major Jarvis, it turned out, was "excused boots" on the day and didn't vote. ("The House," H of C magazine, 23/09/20: "The Overseas Operations Bill is damaging to our troops and our international standing")

The rowing back on the pledge on taxes is the most disappointing. Despite a clear pledge for Labour to call for a tax on the top 5% of earners, corporation tax increases, and measures against tax evasion and avoidance, Front Bencher Lisa Nandy, when asked about Labour and wealth taxes in the light of the present Covid-19 crisis, answered that Labour had no intention of increasing tax "on workers" a contrived "straw man" for her to knock down instead taking the opportunity to offer a radical proposal in line with existing Labour policy - and Keir's pledge. The same dissembling is used when questions of Labour's broader macroeconomic policies are raised. The reason given is that it will be time enough in four years to address these policy issues faced with a General Election and Labour should keep its cards close to its chest. By then, it is being said, the party will have put enough distance between Corbyn and Starmer Labour

to have regained sufficient public trust for a radical programme to have a fair chance of getting a fair hearing.

## 3. Follow the money....

Another indication of where Labour is going is contained in an exclusive in "The Times," where Political Reporter, Eleni Courea, wrote about Starmer's "charm offensive" to attract back the Labour Party donors who withdrew their support in Jeremy's time. It is an attempt, she says, to reduce its reliance on membership and trade union funding. Pragmatists might say taking money from the rich need not compromise socialists values but the text of the circular to potential donors suggests otherwise. "If the fundraising drive is successful, it could return Labour to the Blair era in which it competed with the Conservatives in raising millions from the rich and famous. The Times reports that one of those former Blair supporters, who donated more than £650,000 to the cause was Newcastle property developer, David Abrahams. He is reported as saying that Sir Keir "got off to a good start. His price, as reported in The Times, is to see more expulsions of Labour members who made antisemitic comments. (The Times, 26/09/20) Expulsions, mind. Not investigation, or re-education: expulsions. The man that puts up the money calls the shots. And not only concerning antisemitism. You can be sure, as a property developer in the midst of a COVID-19-aggravated property market crisis, he'll have one or two other quid-pro-quos to add to that.

Who remembers "Donorgate," or, Peter Watt? He was Labour Party General Secretary in 2007 when the afore-mentioned property developer, David Abrahams, slipped the five figure sum into the Labour coffers, using 'fronts' (named by BBC News) to bypass Electoral Commission regulations. Still familiar names featured in this story, Dromey, Harman - and then newly elected leader Gordon Browne, who kept his head down, despite Tory pressure in Parliament. It was Watt who became the fall guy. Independent MP, Martin Bell (the renowned journalist), called for a better way to fund British politics

than the “pork barrel” practice of open and secretive donors. Chair Circle membership includes invites to lunches and brunches - including a brunch ahead of the Leader’s Speech to Annual Conference - and ‘invite only strategy updates’ to hear how your support is making a difference to our electoral efforts.” Imagine the optics of all that? The lack of transparency? “I hated selling myself to the membership,” Keir said about his leadership election campaign. But he seems to have no problem selling himself to former donors who deserted in the Corbyn years. The one who pays the piper calls the tune. And in politics that’s a two-way thing. Receiving is just as much a political act as giving. That is why such donations have to be disclosed to the members - and the public. Keir refused to disclose all his own donors prior to the leadership voting period ending, hiding behind the Party’s procedure which doesn’t stipulate that it be done before the Election Day. Here, “Labour Business,” founded by Harold Wilson in 1972, and still going, should be mentioned as an example of transparent, non-cliquish, clearly defined special status membership. Set up to involve business in the party, for mutual benefit, it is arranged into a number of policy groups around innovation, economic policy, business and industrial policy, corporate governance, self-employment and women in business. The bottom line is endorsement of labour societal values, not WIFM (“what’s in it for me”). How it works in practice, I don’t know; but, I acknowledge the value of its affiliation. As a Britain-based democratic socialist the concept of a mixed economy is not an occasion of sin for me. (more on this in LabourList, 1/10/20)

The Labour Campaign for Clean Money @Lab4CleanMoney, commenting on Starmer’s donor initiative wrote: “A Labour Party funded by ordinary people whether as members of the Labour Party, or through union affiliation is a democratic necessity.” (Twitter: 26/09/20) The proof of that is glaringly obvious in the United States, in the rise of a dysfunctional political society culminating in the

emergence as President of someone of the character of Donald Trump and the paucity of the first Presidential Election debate between Trump and Biden - two politicians big into donor-based politics.

Another straw in the wind, and probable the most pernicious is the recent instruction from the new Labour Party General Secretary to Constituency and Labour Party branches: Coming on top of the “health warning” contained in disciplinary letters not to discuss your case with other members is this. Members are forbidden to discuss such issues as the decision to apologise for Corbyn’s Labour criticisms of the appalling Panorama programme on the party’s “institutional antisemitism”; the EHRC report on the same issue - and the IHRA definition which the Labour signed up to in 2018. Local party officers, many of them elected in the Corbynite period have remained paralysed by this audacious diktat, presumably endorsed by Keir Starmer. Criticising it, long-standing party member, David Ecclestone, reminds us of Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” (Jewish Voice for Labour, 20/08/20). But what’s another “human rights” piety when pragmatism determines the tactics?

#### 4. A Starmer foot soldier, really?

In a thoughtful article in the Guardian recently, the question is asked: “Is there such a thing as Starmarism?” “Politics,” it says, is all about telling a story of how we got here and where we could go. So far, the leader has only hinted at such a vision.” (Guardian, 09/09/20) So, as an ex-Corbyn foot soldier I ask myself, if there is no such thing at the moment as “Starmarism,” albeit for “tactical” reasons, can I describe myself as a Starmer foot soldier? I didn’t vote for him either. I voted Burgon and Long Bailey, the Left “Continuity Corbyn” candidates

more in hope than expectation - and a soupçon of “faute de mieux,” if truth be told. But, I’m staying in the Labour Party - if a little bit less emotionally invested than previously.

I would ask those comrades thinking of leaving to take a longer term view. This is challenging but realistic - not least because we now belong to the largest Labour left wing - albeit fragmented - membership than has existed for a long time, which developed within the process of making Labour the largest democratic socialist party in Europe. All due to Corbyn. Note, also: Left candidates in the elections for Labour’s NEC have just secured the strongest show of support from local parties, with all left slate candidates for member representative posts receiving at least 240 nominations each.” (LabourList, 29/09/20) However, changes in the voting system for the NEC means that the “strong showing” will not be reflected in final seats won. The Labour Party is NOT institutionally antisemitic, as Smeeth and Starmer were implying the other day. It’s not institutionally right wing either. It’s more to the right now because we on the left haven’t got our act together. And there are external factors. The Labour Party exists in a post-imperialist (“The Empire on which the sun never set”), post-industrial (former “Workshop of the World”), with all the cultural baggage that entails. A society which has a great future behind it and, before it, the existential challenge of redefining itself and its place in the world. The achievement of socialism was never easy - even the small, incremental achievements took generations of struggle. Going forward, it’s not going to get any easier. But, as Tony Benn said to us, after an earlier setback for the left wing membership: “we have to bloody toughen up!” Well, that is what I am saying to myself, as the exhilarating highs and lows of the Corbyn period, recede from the memory.

# "The wrong sort of Jew"

## How Labour pursued complaints against elderly Jewish opponents of Israel

By Richard Sanders, Middle East Eye, 24 September 2020

Labour's investigations into antisemitism raise questions about the nature and definition of what the party is attempting to root out. In July 2019, the BBC broadcast the Panorama programme *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?*, about the allegations made against the party. It included reporting about the Labour Party's own inquiry into the Liverpool Riverside constituency during the autumn of 2016.

Panorama spoke to party member Ben Westerman, the only Jewish official on the complaints team, who it reported "was confronted with the very antisemitism he'd been sent to investigate". Westerman told Panorama that, after one interview had finished, he was asked by one of those present: "Where are you from... Are you from Israel?"

Westerman is clearly upset as he recalls what happened. "What can you say to that?" he tells Panorama. "You're assumed to be in cahoots with the Israeli government." But is his story accurate?

The interviewee Westerman spoke to that day appears to have been a woman called Helen Marks. As part of Labour Party procedure, she was allowed a "silent witness" who could observe, but not participate in, the interview, for which she chose her friend Rica Bird. With Westerman's permission, they recorded the conversation. The programme omitted to mention that Marks and Bird, both 74, are Jewish. Neither, they said, knew that Westerman was Jewish.

At the end there is an exchange that closely matches the one described in Panorama – except that there is no mention of Israel. Bird, conversationally, asks Westerman which Labour Party branch he belongs to. "I was just making chit-chat really," she told Middle East Eye. (MEE).

In response to a complaint from Marks, the BBC suggested in November 2019 that the "she" Westerman referred to may have been a different interviewee. But transcripts and recordings from the interviews involving the other four women Westerman spoke to contain no such conversation. All four women are adamant that it did not take place after the recorder had been switched off.

Marks and Bird are upset and angry. "My father lost family in the Holocaust," says Marks. "It was like my own Jewishness simply didn't count – I was the wrong sort of Jew."

The BBC told MEE: "We stand by our journalism." Neither Ben Westerman nor his lawyers responded to a request for comment at the time of publication. No mainstream media have reported this version of events. Westerman was among the contributors to the Panorama programme who in July received an apology and a payoff from the Labour Party, which had initially described them as being "disaffected former employees" with "political axes to grind". The party says it now accepts this description was "defamatory and false".

### Labour, complaints and investigations

The incident involving Marks and Bird is an example of one little-reported aspect of the Labour antisemitism story – the frequency with which Jewish party members find themselves the centre of investigations, often on what they regard as the flimsiest and most tendentious of grounds.

It is a trend that appears to have gathered pace since Keir Starmer took over as Labour Party leader in April 2020. It raises profound questions about the nature and definition of the "antisemitism" that the party is attempting to root out.

Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL) is an organisation established in 2017 "to protect the right of Labour Party members, mainly supporters of Jeremy Corbyn, to speak freely about Israel and Palestine," as described by Jenny Manson, its co-chair. Manson, like all other officers and committee members in JVL, is Jewish.

Manson says that, besides Marks, at least 24 other Jewish members of the party have come under formal investigation at one time or another, many of them more than once. JVL committee member Mike Cushman, who has himself been investigated in the past, says: "For a Jewish person, to be accused of antisemitism is as devastating as to be confronted with antisemitism. It's even worse when the accusation comes from someone who isn't Jewish themselves."

MEE understands that one Jewish Labour Party member has taken an overdose following expulsion from the party. "Notices of Investigation" sent to party members include a telephone number for the Samaritans.

Reporting on this issue is complicated

by the fact that the Labour Party demands members under investigation do not discuss details of their case. But a number of Jewish party members have received Notices of Investigation during the last few months while under lockdown. A feature of the radical Jewish left in the Labour Party is that many are elderly, often living alone.

Contacted about the concerns raised in this article, the Labour Party responded: "The Labour Party takes all complaints of antisemitism extremely seriously and they are fully investigated in line with our rules and procedures, and any appropriate disciplinary action is taken."

Diana Neslen, 80, is a disabled Jewish widow who lives in Ilford, Essex. A fervent Zionist during her youth, she became disillusioned after witnessing the treatment of Palestinians during a trip to Israel at the end of the 1950s. Born in South Africa, she is a lifelong anti-racist campaigner and a member of the Labour Party.

In September 2018, Neslen received a formal warning about her conduct, accompanied by a list of her social media posts. These included the statement that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was "making shameless political capital out of the Holocaust".

"On Holocaust Memorial Day let us remember that not only a people but their culture was destroyed," she wrote. "In my view Jewish people need to disinter that culture and turn our backs on the nationalism that has superseded it." She was told in the letter from the Labour Party: "These comments have caused offence."

Neslen ran into trouble again in January this year as the proposer of a motion at her local party branch calling on the Labour leadership to reject the "10 pledges" that the Jewish Board of Deputies had demanded the party sign up to following the December 2019 general election.

These include a pledge that any party member supporting a member who has been suspended or expelled should themselves be suspended. Neslen's motion passed but local members said that antisemitic "tropes" had been used at the meeting. She fiercely denies this and says that, besides herself, there were just two Jewish people present, one of whom spoke in support of her motion.

Neslen is furious. "At the end of the



day, it's a bunch of non-Jews piling on to a Jew," she says. "These people know nothing about antisemitism and Jewishness. They have no sense that Jewish people have different views." In 1991, a member of the BNP was jailed for beating up Neslen's son. "I know what real antisemitism looks like," she says.

George Wilmers is a retired academic from Manchester who is Jewish and a Labour Party member. In July 2019 he received a Notice of Investigation following an allegation that he had stated at a meeting that the "JLM [Jewish Labour Movement] were a front for Israel".

Wilmers queries whether he would have used precisely these words. But he defends his criticism of the Jewish Labour Movement, which was anti-Corbyn and generally treated by the media as the principal representative of Jews in the Labour Party. Unlike JVL, it lists a commitment to "Socialist Zionism" as one of its guiding principles.

"They are affiliated to the Israeli Labor Party, which I regard as an openly racist party," says Wilmers. He believes that the JLM's activities seem to indicate that its main purpose is to "demonise supporters of Palestinian rights, and in particular Jewish supporters, by publicly labelling them as antisemitic".

Like Neslen, Wilmers regards his treatment as antisemitic. He wrote to the Labour Party: "It appears to me that that accusation was made against me because I have been targeted as a Jew by fanatical persons who hold that political support for the ethnocratic nature of the actually existing state of Israel is an essential characteristic of being Jewish."

The party eventually ruled that Wilmers' "behaviour on this occasion did not amount to a breach of the Party's Rules". But he was sent a "Reminder of Labour's Values" and urged to "read them carefully and bear them in mind" - advice that Wilmers told MEE was an "insulting homily".

### Antisemitism: The dividing line

Stephen Solley is a retired QC and former chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee. He is Jewish, a Labour Party member and a critic of Israel. On 28 January he received a campaign email from Miriam Mirwitch, chair of Young Labour, the party's youth section, and a candidate for the London Assembly. "I know what it's like to face antisemitism every day," Mirwitch wrote, identifying herself as a national committee member of the Jewish Labour Movement. "I've had to fight antisemitism both inside and

outside the Labour Party," she said.

Solley recalls: "I got this just a week after Holocaust Remembrance Day. I thought this was the most offensive thing. She lives in modern north-west London. It's absurd. Of course she doesn't face antisemitism every day. It's just whipping up anxiety. I was really upset by it." He replied to Mirwitch with a short, simple email. "The Jewish Labour Movement is, in my opinion, a force for ill and something of a con in that it is destructive of socialism. It is a pro-Israel, anti-Palestine group. It becomes imperative to vote against you."

Twenty-three minutes later, Mirwitch wrote to Solley's former chambers, accusing him of antisemitism. She also wrote to the Bar Standards Board. Both rejected her accusations. But three days after sending the email, Solley received notification from the Labour Party that he was under investigation for antisemitism, an investigation that appears to be ongoing.

Solley is aware that by speaking out he may have contravened the party's demand that he "keep all information and correspondence relating to this investigation private." His response? "I don't give a damn. If they really want to expel the Jewish former chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee, so be it."

Almost all the Jewish Labour Party members who find themselves under investigation have either made comments about Israel or Zionism or have questioned the logic of Labour disciplinary procedures. Many are supporters of Jewish Voice for Labour, which has been described by Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland as representing "a tiny fringe of British Jewish opinion".

JVL says it has well over 1,000 members, around a third of whom are Jewish. The rival Jewish Labour Movement has 3,000 members - Jewish and non-Jewish - but, unlike JVL, allows people to join who are not in the Labour Party.

Both JVL and JLM contain a range of views. But a key dividing line is their attitude to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, adopted by the Labour Party following pressure from JLM and others in September 2018.

The definition is opposed by JVL. "The IHRA definition is hopelessly vague, muddled and open-ended," says Avi Shlaim, an Israeli JVL member and Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford. "It deliberately conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism in order to deter

legitimate criticisms of Israel. It has 11 'illustrative examples' of antisemitism. Seven of them relate to Israel. That's the giveaway. Antisemitism is hatred of Jews as Jews. That's all we need."

Criticism of the IHRA definition focuses in particular on example number seven: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour."

Miriam Margolyes, 79, a Jewish actor and Labour Party member, says that the clause serves to stifle debate about the origins and nature of the Israeli state. "When I was young, we were taught the Arabs ran away," she says. "They didn't. They were driven out." She believes Israel to be a state rooted in the domination of one ethnicity over another. "I don't want a Jewish state. I want a shared state."

Jewish comedian Alexei Sayle, 68, who is not a Labour Party member but a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, agrees. "This is real through the looking glass stuff," he says. "The people being accused of antisemitism are almost all defenders of the oppressed and lifelong fighters against racism. Many of the people who are accusing them are very much not that. The media's coverage has been breath-taking in its laziness and one-sidedness."

Not all opponents of the IHRA definition necessarily believe Israel to be an inherently racist state. "Zionism began as a national liberation struggle of the Jewish people - an anti-racist movement in fact," says Shlaim. He believes it became a "colonial enterprise" following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.

But all are united in the view that example seven represents a fundamental denial of free speech, above all because the vast majority of Palestinians firmly believe Zionism to have been, inevitably and unavoidably, a "racist endeavour".

### A Palestinian viewpoint

Ghada Karmi is a London-based Palestinian author whose widely acclaimed memoir, *In Search of Fatima*, describes her own experience of being driven from West Jerusalem as a child in 1948 at the time of the creation of the state of Israel.

"My family left following the massacre at *Deir Yassin*, just a few miles away from our home, a massacre carried out by Jewish militias," she says. "We left because we were terrified that we would be next. We thought we'd be away just a few weeks, but we were never allowed to return. This happened to us because

we were Palestinian. Am I not allowed to call this ethnic cleansing?

“Zionism – as put in practice – was always a racist, colonial enterprise rooted in dispossession. How could it be anything else in a land full of people of a different ethnicity? If someone wants to disagree with that analysis or understanding – fine. If they want to debate – that’s fine. But do they really have the right to outlaw it?” she says.

In August 2018, 24 Palestinian civil society groups published a statement pleading with the Labour Party not to adopt the IHRA definition. The definition “attempts to erase Palestinian history, demonise solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality, suppress freedom of expression, and shield Israel’s far-right regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid,” the statement said. It was ignored by the Labour Party and was barely reported.

Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, says that the IHRA definition and the furore over antisemitism in the Labour Party have had a “chilling effect” on advocacy work for Palestinians.

During 2018, at the height of the row, 290 Palestinians, including 55 minors, were killed by Israeli forces. This number included 190 deaths related to the Great March of Return in Gaza, when Palestinians demanded their right to go back to ancestral homes from which they were driven in 1948. Most of those killed in Gaza were shot by Israeli snipers crouching behind sand berms several hundred metres away, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Jamal says that in the past a significant minority of Labour MPs supported demonstrations in defence of Palestinian human rights – but that year “it became incredibly difficult to get any MPs to come along”.

On 14 May 2018, more than 60 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in a single day (some dying later from their injuries). Only then, Jamal says, did more than 20 MPs from various parties attend a rally.

“I remember commenting at the time,” Jamal says, “at least now we know how many Palestinians have to be killed before people regain their moral compass.”

Both Jamal and Karmi say that anti-Zionism does not mean a desire for the destruction of Israel any more than opposition to apartheid during the 1980s meant a desire for the destruction of South Africa. “I don’t want to drive

anyone into the sea,” Karmi says. “What I believe is that Israel is under an obligation to grant equal rights to everyone it rules, regardless of religion or ethnicity.”

### **‘Jews are being told they have to be Zionists’**

Palestinian activists and their Jewish supporters regard the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism by the Labour Party as a victory for the concept of “the new antisemitism,” the belief, in the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, that “anti-Zionism is the latest mutation of the world’s longest hate”.

But Cushman says: “For the first time in history, Jews are being told they have to be Zionists. It’s a heresy hunt. The Labour Party has been suborned in a battle between orthodox and heretical Jews. Why does the Labour Party get to decide what Jewish values are?” Cushman says that he and others are part of a long tradition of non- and anti-Zionist Jewish socialism.

Groups such as the JVL believe that the Board of Deputies’ 10 Pledges – which Starmer has agreed to adopt – are a further attempt to exclude non-Zionist Jewish groups from any role in Labour Party policy or decision making.

The pledges include the demand that “Labour must engage with the Jewish community via its main representative groups, and not through fringe organisations and individuals”.

JVL does not dispute antisemitism exists in the Labour Party. “We work hard to challenge and reduce it by education and constructive criticism,” says co-chair Jenny Manson. But it advocates forcefully for those it feels have been wrongly accused and often receives vicious abuse as a result”.

Manson, who is 71, says she has received a number of threats, including one left on her answerphone: “You fucking Nazi bitch,” it said. “You should burn in the gas oven. You dirty fucking bitch.... Stinking, stinking swine... You deserve ... to burn in acid.” Police were able to track down the caller, a middle-aged Jewish man. He was formally cautioned for the offence of malicious communications in May 2019.

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, 67, one of JVL’s founders, is a widow whose late husband was Moroccan. She says she has also received threats by telephone. “We know where you are, we are outside your door, we are going to put you in a wheelchair” – that sort of thing.”

She has also been the subject of criticism by the prominent antisemitism campaigner David Collier. “She can

marry whomever she pleases and hold whatever ideological stance she finds attractive,” Collier wrote. “Naomi Wimborne was free to marry a Muslim, and become Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi... But, given her life choices, is Naomi really in a position to talk publicly as if she is representative of British Jewish identity?”

Wimborne-Idrissi stresses the psychological impact on those Labour Party members who have received Notices of Investigation. “It’s Kafkaesque,” she says. “You are not told who is accusing you. And you are not allowed to discuss it with anyone. So you receive this devastating letter – and are immediately isolated.”

For legal reasons JVL is reluctant to discuss details but says a significant proportion of its committee is now under investigation by the party.

“The new Labour leadership is desperate to appear tough on antisemitism,” says Manson. “But there are really profound, deeply held differences of opinion here – inside the Jewish community as much as anywhere else,” she says. “You can’t just bludgeon people into silence.”

Margolyes agrees and finds the division within the Jewish community deeply distressing. Like many others involved in this debate she describes herself as “firmly, inescapably Jewish. There is never a day goes by I don’t think about the Holocaust. I never get in the shower without thinking about the showers in the gas chambers. I never get on a train without thinking about the trains to the camps.”

She says that she is only too aware of the traumas that created in many Jewish people a deep, deep desire for their own homeland. “But I can’t blind myself to what this meant for the Palestinian people,” she says. “I have visited the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. I have seen the overcrowding, the filth, heard the nastiness of the Israeli guards. I know that this is wicked, unnecessary and cruel.

“For me, it’s not a political choice – it’s a moral imperative. I cannot allow things to be done in my name as a Jew which I know to be evil. And I must be allowed to say so without being branded as a ‘self-hating Jew’.”

*Richard Sanders is an award-winning TV producer specialising in history and news and current affairs. He has made more than 50 films, mostly for Channel 4. He has written for a number of publications including The Daily Telegraph and the Boston Globe and is also the author of two history books.*

# Middle East Eye interview Jeremy Corbyn

## Third and final part.

**David Hearst:** You're a lifelong anti-racist campaigner. And yet you never shrug off the repeated claims that you tolerated antisemitism in the Labour Party, that antisemitism was a problem in the Labour Party and you apologised. Did you, do you regret not fighting that smear more stringently? And do you accept that you were targeted, principally, not because of an inherent problem in the Labour Party or that you consorted in any way with antisemites, but because you were a lifelong supporter of the Palestinian cause?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Look, let's unpick that. Antisemitism is an evil and is wrong. Jewish people have suffered antisemitism from the 13th century or before. You look at the books, the legend of the Wandering Jew, the way in which Jewish people were expelled from Britain in the 13th century and came back under [Oliver] Cromwell, but nevertheless were still discriminated against. Antisemitism is rife and has been historically in Europe and indeed around the world.

It is evil. It is wrong. The Nazis exploited antisemitism for their advantage, decided that all the problems of the Weimar Republic were nothing to do with the chaos of the Weimar Republic, or the results of the conference at the end of the First World War, the Versailles Conference, but instead, all the problems, all the fault of the Jews. They started by opposing Jewish people, they then moved on to beating up Jewish businesses, they moved on to killing people, and that ended up with the extermination camps at Dachau and Bergen-Belsen and all the others. It is an absolutely appalling history of where racism and antisemitism lead to. I grew up in a family that were obviously opposed to racism in any form. My mum was there at Cable Street in 1936. That's the sort of background I come from.

When I became leader of the Labour Party, I discovered that there were a small number of cases where people had been accused of antisemitic work, remarks within the party and there should be a process

for dealing with them. I asked for what the process was, and I was not very satisfied. I didn't feel we had a very strong or robust process for dealing with this, and then allegations were made about people making antisemitic remarks at meetings and trolling people and being abusive to Jewish Labour MPs. Absolutely, totally unacceptable in any form. The numbers involved were actually very small.

So, I asked Shami Chakrabarti to do an investigation into this and produce a proposal, which she did, which was to have a stronger governance unit, have it independent of the party leadership, and that cases should be referred to them for process. I had a very strong view in my office that I was not to be the judge, jury and decision-maker on each case. Any case that was brought to my attention - and some were, people wrote in and things like that - I didn't deal with it, I passed it straight on to the governance and legal unit. That process needs to be examined very closely, how efficiently they dealt with those or didn't deal with those, and the party policy has to be one that we don't tolerate antisemitism in any form.

It also has to be clear that we do not tolerate any form of racism within our party, any more than any other party should. So, the allegations of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party also deserve to be investigated. And unless we, as a society, recognise the cancer that racism in any form is, then we're weakened as a society because that leads to wasted opportunities, it leads to damaged lives, it leads to violence against individuals on our street.

**DH:** But why did this happen under your leadership as opposed to [predecessor] Ed Miliband's? Objective evidence says there were actually more incidents of antisemitism under a Jewish leader than it was under you, before all this started.

**JC:** Well, it came up very heavily against me and I believed -

**DH:** Why you?

**JC:** They attacked me all the time on this. I think it is wrong, because I think I'm the one that actually introduced a process for dealing with it. There has to be an examination of the way in which that process operated. I then realised there was a logjam building up in the party on individual cases. And so I proposed the expansion of the National Constitutional Committee, which was duly done in order to deal with cases more quickly. I also introduced a system where egregious cases could be dealt with very quickly, but still within the ambit of rules of natural justice. And so I feel that the attacks on me have been extremely unfair on this.

**PO:** [The BBC investigative programme] Panorama says, or contains, very serious claims that you actually impeded antisemitism investigations by the Labour Party.

**JC:** That is absolutely not the case, I was the one that introduced a system to ensure they were properly dealt with. What I inherited was a system that was not effective, that wasn't clear, that wasn't definitive. And that's why I asked Shami Chakrabarti to do her report and she also recommended in that there should be a process of education as well, as to what antisemitism is or what any form of racism is and the use of language and behaviour. And historically in Britain, the tolerance of antisemitism is huge. When you think of Churchill's antisemitic remarks all through his life... And the degrees of acceptance of antisemitism throughout our history is huge. And I think there has to be a challenge to that or any form of racism. And that is what I tried to do within the party as party leader and it's what I spend my life doing.

**DH:** But do you accept that as a result of this whole storm, that never really died away and is continuing as we speak, with the future publication of the report by the Equalities Commission -

**JC:** Remember the Equalities Commission is now an arm of government. Remember that. It's not



a –

**PO:** Why do you say that?

**JC:** Because I think it's quite significant that the Conservative government has underfunded the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, indeed I went on demonstrations outside its office to demand better funding of it and took place. And for some reason, which I don't fully understand, they decided to take it away from its independent status and make it part of [the] government machine. And I think it's quite important, and had we won the election, I would have reinstated the principle of its complete independence, but also of a wider Equalities and Human Rights Commission, so it dealt with, maybe in separate arms of it, age discrimination, gender discrimination and so on, within our society. Because I do think, the Equalities Act of 2010 was an important step forward in the direction we should go as a society.

**DH:** Are you suggesting that that could colour their decision on the Labour Party?

**JC:** Let's see what happens.

**DH:** Do you accept that as a result of you having lost this battle to clean up the Labour Party, or the label that there is an antisemitism problem specifically in the Labour Party, stuck under your leadership, that it has now become much more difficult to campaign for the Palestinian cause? All sorts of people, including a very distinguished Middle East Eye columnist, are now being accused of antisemitism simply and solely because they're sticking up for the Palestinian cause.

**JC:** Shami made it very clear in her report that antisemitism was completely unacceptable and that in any discussion of the issues of Palestine, of Israel-Palestine relations, or of the future of Palestinian people, it is perfectly possible to have those discussions without indulging in any form of antisemitism. And it is. And I indeed have been, as you know, a member of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and I've been at Palestine Solidarity Campaign meetings where somebody has made antisemitic remarks and they've been removed from the meeting as a result. PSC did

that. They're very clear about that and they're right to be, of course.

And so, I have always supported the need for recognition of the state of Palestine. And I propose that, and it was in both of our manifestos and I hope that will remain their full recognition. I've also made very clear my opposition to the Trump plan, because I think if the Trump plan goes ahead, then the chances of a two-state solution just disappear with it because, in fact, there would be no contiguous Palestinian area at all. It would be a series of islands of what would be called Palestine, which would be Ramallah and Jericho, and one or two other places. I mean, it is a proposal which essentially is [Israeli prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's dream of taking over virtually the whole of the West Bank.

**PO:** Can I ask you, do you think that the British government, the foreign secretary and the Middle East minister have protested enough about this plan?

**JC:** No, I don't think they protested enough about this at all. And it's quite interesting that a cross-party group of MPs have written on this, and I support that letter, saying that there has to be the strongest possible protests. My worry is that the Trump plan is so extreme that it will be rejected. But, and I say this sadly, in reality, the Trump plan is actually a continuation of the demands of the Right in Israel politics for a very long time. The danger is there would be some slightly less aversion of the Trump plan proposed where there's not quite as much expansion, not quite as many settlements, and this will be somehow seen as a victory. The whole process has been that Israel has continuously put in more and more settlements, denied Palestinian people access to land, built a wall through farms that have made it impossible to run a sustainable farm and put the people of Gaza under siege.

I've been in Gaza, I've been in the West Bank, I've been in Israel, I've spoken to people of all sorts of views there. And it's very hard to put yourself in the place of somebody else. But I remember the first time I went to Gaza, this was in the 90s, I met this lady who was, it turned

out, exactly the same age as my late mother, exactly the same age within a month or so. I don't know how the conversation got onto that.

**PO:** We bring our mothers with us wherever we go.

**JC:** Indeed, we do. This is true. And so, I sort of reflected on the rich and varied life that my mother led. And then I said to this lady: "What's your life been like then?" And she described the village that she came from in 1948, which is now where Israel is. And she said since then she's been living in Gaza, and she's grateful to the UN Relief and Works Agency for educating her children, and providing food and water supplies, and so on. But she says: "We've been living under siege ever since." And I said: "What about your sons?" None of them lived with her. None of them lived nowhere near. They were away somewhere; one was in prison, one was abroad and so on, and so on. And you just reflect on her life and then look at the lives of, of young people in Gaza.

Gaza is the most educated place in the world. The highest level of a population with degrees is Gaza. The highest level of people with PhDs is Gaza. They can educate themselves, there's great universities and colleges and so on, but they can't travel anywhere. And so that sense of isolation. I remember going to a primary school, the top end, the northern part of the Gaza Strip, you can go to the top floor of this primary school. You can look one way and you can see the fence with Israel beyond it. You can look the other way and you can see the sea. Out in the sea, you can see the Israeli boats that are preventing the Gaza fisher people going further out. On the other side of the fence, in Israel, you can see cars, you can see life, you can see irrigated land and so on. And these kids, being brought up in this school, with a very good school but underfunded and so on.

And last year, and the year before, I was in Jordan visiting a school in a refugee camp there, and I asked the head teacher: "How much money do you have to run the school?" And he gave me the figures and I sort of did a rapid calculation in my head. And it was quite a good secondary school,

I met the school council, students, as impressive as in Jordan. And I worked out that his capitation funding was much less than half that would be available in a secondary school in Britain. And he said it's going to be halved again, straight away, and it'll be cut more, and the school may have to close in two months' time because the US, at that point, Trump had cut the funding for it, for UNRWA. And so, it's that sense of anger among Palestinian people that I'm not sure people outside fully understand.

But also, there's an underestimate of the feelings of people in Israel against it. Last week, I was on a conference call with people from both Palestine and Israel, people from Meretz Party, people from Gush Shalom, from B'Tselem, different peace groups within Israel who said there was a lot of anger and concern that the Trump plan will actually make their lives more dangerous, will make the situation for people in Israel more dangerous. So, the Trump plan is, I think, an absolute disaster waiting to happen.

**DH:** Do you think that the future will regard you more kindly than the present?

**JC:** Well, it depends who you mean regarding me more kindly.

**DH:** I mean that you would have been genuinely a radical prime minister.

**PO:** Can I put it in a different way? AJP Taylor gave his lectures in 1956 at the University of Oxford about the British radical tradition. It turned into a wonderful book, *The Troublemakers*. And he traces a tradition of Englishmen and Brits from Tom Paine to [William] Cobbett, Keir Hardie. And he says that these, and he goes through these characters, they're outside the governing tradition. They are troublemakers. They're radicals, he calls them. They never win power in their lifetimes, but they win the future. They become, whatever their views, their views, 20 years after that. And they're not always right. Taylor said they were against World War Two as a whole these radicals. They were against World War One, that was right. They were against it. But whatever their view is at any given time becomes the orthodoxy 25 years later. Do you buy into any of that?

**JC:** Yes, I do. The future is getting closer. Yeah. I mean, I, AJP Taylor wonderful guy. I loved the way he always brought in coincidences as well. The worst - if somebody had, if only they delayed a bit longer at the ticket office and not caught that train, they'd have survived, and so and so would have happened and the X, Y, Z would not have taken place in history. Wonderful. And his talks on television, I remember

them as a child. They were absolutely brilliant, I was riveted by these things. The rest of the family: "Well, what you watching that for?" I said: "Oh shut up it's really good." Yeah, you know what it's like with groups, I grew up with three brothers who...

Anyway, I do think that that great radical tradition is a very strong one. And we deny our understanding, our own history at our peril, because there is a very strong radical tradition throughout Britain, which is often denied by the teaching of normal history. My mum and dad wrote a history of the village they lived in before they died. And at one level, a history of a village is about the church, it's about the buildings, it's about the streets, it's about who owned the land and so on, and so on, and so forth. But they decided to write about the machine riots of the 19th century, about the way in which the agricultural workers tried to destroy the machines that were being brought in because they were able, these machines, [to] thrash corn very quickly, could plough fields very quickly and so on, and deny them work. And of course, there was a purpose behind that, to drive them into the cities to work in making those very same machines in the cities. And so, there's that radical history that runs all through our lives.

Now, the people you mentioned, Peter, such as Keir Hardie and Tom Paine and others, Tom Paine is a fascinating figure. And his writing of the *Rights of Man* was obviously enormous, and his role in the supporting the French Revolution, and then going to America, and so on, was absolutely critical. But the interesting one was Mary Wollstonecraft. She lived just down the road from him, just a 15-minute walk from here in Newington Green. And she was really naffed off by Tom Paine. "Hang on what's all this? What about the rights of women?" So, she wrote the treatises on the *Rights of Women* and founded the girls' school in Newington Green. And she is one of my great heroes because of the complicated life that she led, the tragedy of her death at the birth of her daughter Mary [Shelley] and, of William Godwin and all of those, that great radical tradition. And so, I think we have to remember all of them and the contribution they made.

Hardie is to me, an absolutely fascinating figure, a child labourer in the mines, quite religious and strong in the temperance movements, ended up working for the church and the temperance movement. Eventually becomes a miner's agent organiser and eventually becomes the first Labour MP. And he had this amazing internationalist view. Now, where did that come from?

Because this is a man who had grown up with very limited education, taught through the church and, taught himself a great deal, became a member of parliament, and during the time as a member of parliament, he travelled to South Africa, he travelled to India, he travelled the United States. And it wasn't a question of hopping on a plane and getting to Mumbai six hours later. It was a question of two weeks on a ship. And the same for South Africa, same for the USA. And then he built this relationship with people and stood up against the indentured labour system in South Africa, against the caste system in India, and against the exploitation of migrant workers in the United States and brought all that back. He opposed the First World War because he felt, and he'd worked with Jean Juarez and others in opposing the First World War and trying to build this workers unity across Europe. And Adam Hochschild's book about the opponents, the First World War, is a very instructive book. And in doing all of that, he eventually was defeated by the, I don't know, the xenophobia of the time, the nationalism of the time, and he was unable to sustain that and eventually died from a heart attack.

I think it was brought about by his depression at the way in which the basic tenet of international solidarity of the working class in Germany as well as in Britain and France and so on, had been so defeated by the Kitchener campaign. And I think he's somebody that we should think about and remember quite a lot, of standing up against the tide.

**PO:** Yes, he lost his immediate political battles, but he won his long-term political battles.

**JC:** Well, he's the one who's remembered.

**PO:** Can I just ask Jeremy one final thing? Unless it's too late?

**DH:** Go on. One more question.

**PO:** So, you've had a very bruising and must have been exhausting, morally challenging, four, five years. How do you plan to spend your future?

**JC:** Well, as busy as ever. I am the MP for Islington North and very proud to be so and I have never neglected my constituency, and never would, and didn't while I was leader of the party either. This is one of the big arguments in the office. I said: "Fridays is constituency day. I'll be there." They said: "Yeah, but we'd like you to -" I said: "No. I will be there." It may be I'll travel somewhere in the evening or whatever, but I [will]

Continued On Page 20

## Reply to Martin Dolphin on Modern Monetary Theory

Martin Dolphin in his article on MMT (Labour Affairs, July-August) says that if unemployment rises by 20 percentage points the Government should pay the newly unemployed 80% of their former income. This could be done by printing money. He says:

“...it’s a win-win situation. And there are no inflationary pressures...since no more is being consumed than would normally be consumed.”

Before dealing with this I think it is important to make explicit some of the assumptions that are implied.

For simplicity let us assume that the economy was at full employment before the pandemic. This is not completely at odds with the reality of the UK economy which had less than 5% unemployment and Labour shortages in some sectors.

Again, to simplify our model we’ll assume there is no trade with the rest of the world.

We will also assume that the level of productivity of the newly unemployed was (before they were made unemployed) the same as those who retained their jobs.

Martin appears to assume that net savings are zero.

So, what happens when there is a sudden cut in production by 20%? There is a reduction in income. As a consequence there is less money going into the banking system and less money to lend. The reduction in income will result in a corresponding reduction in the money supply. As a result there will be no inflation.

### Continued From Page 19

always be there, and I think it’s important for two reasons. One is because it’s your duty, if you’re elected to represent an area, you have to represent an area and you can’t, there’s no substitute for actually being there and getting involved in the random conversations on the doorstep, on the street and so on, about people’s lives. It keeps you grounded. It keeps you regular. And so, I’ve done that. So, I’m doing plenty of that. I’ve been volunteering at all the food banks in the constituency during the corona crisis, and I’m doing a lot of work on international issues, peace and justice and human rights, and working on environmental issues as well.

So, I’m extremely busy, as I’ve always been, and I have never given up my allotment either, and won’t. And indeed, I’m about to plant out all the maize next weekend. It’s growing nicely in the back garden and it will be taken up to the allotment, growing, we grow two varieties of maize. One is F1 hybrid maize, which is developed in Europe and grows very fast and looks very good and all the rest of it. But we have a far more interesting maize that’s Mexican maize in honour of Laura. And it is multi-coloured and it’s beautiful to eat. But it’s slower growing in this country, but it grows very well in Mexico. We just need a bit more sun here.

**PO:** Well it looks like it will be a hot summer.

**JC:** One hopes.

**DH:** Thank you Mr Corbyn for a very full interview and good answers. You can watch this on [www.middleeasteye.org](http://www.middleeasteye.org) and associated platforms. Thanks also to Peter for joining me.

**JC:** Thank you very much. Really enjoyed it.

But what happens if the Government as Martin suggests transfers money to the unemployed equal to 80% of their former income? Martin says:

“...no more is being consumed than would normally be consumed.”

But in fact 20% less is being consumed because 20% less has been produced (remember we’re assuming no imports and no significant level of unsold goods before the pandemic). The money supply is equal to 96% of what it was before the pandemic but production has been cut to 80%. So the price level is at 96/80 times what it was before, which suggests an inflation rate of 20%.

Why does Martin think there won’t be inflation? He says:

“...the evidence so far suggests they (those still in work - JM) will save it or use it to reduce their debt.”

I’m not sure what evidence he has in mind but he is asking us to believe that those in work will reduce their consumption by 20% (the same percentage as those who are out of work). From saving zero percent of their income they will now save 20% of current income (for some reason Martin thinks this saving is “involuntary”). Why would they do this? Is it not more plausible that they would attempt to maintain their level of consumption by offering higher prices for the reduced volume of goods available? (see note 1 at end).

Martin himself seems to accept that his hopes for the continued abstinence of those in work is a little unrealistic. He concludes by saying:

“To prevent this (inflation - JM) their involuntary savings could be taxed away or some sort of Coronavirus bond could be introduced with a minimal interest rate to make them feel less resentful of their forced, involuntary savings.

“Perhaps, in this situation of a long term lockdown, it might make sense, even from an MMT perspective, to issue bonds. But the bonds would be issued to remove the possibility of inflation and not to raise money for the State.”

So we are back to square one! Taxation or issuing bonds is a way of financing public expenditure without risking inflation. Martin has started with a bang and ended with a whimper!

#### Note 1

If the total money income is 96 units after the cut in production to 80% of the previous level, how will consumption be shared out?

Those in work will have 80/96ths while those out of work will have 16/96ths of the total purchasing power.

So those in work will have  $80/96 \times 80$  units of consumption = 66.67 units. This represents a drop in consumption of 13.33 units or 16.67% on pre pandemic consumption.

Those out of work will have  $16/96 \times 80$  units of consumption = 13.33 units. This represents a drop of 6.67 units or 33% of pre pandemic consumption.

**John Martin**



# Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

[These Newsnotes were written before the news of Trump catching Covid-19.]

## Trump Against the World

“When I was growing up in Ronald Reagan’s America, the small proxy wars that the US fought with the Soviet Union were a regular feature... There would be tragic news out of Afghanistan on the front page one day, El Salvador or Nicaragua the next.

“The US won that contest when the Soviet Union dissolved in the early 1990s and it would be almost 30 years before the political class in Washington decided they had another geopolitical rival of Soviet proportions — President Xi Jinping’s China. But now proxy wars between the two reigning superpowers are fought over companies, not client states, and it is China that has the early lead.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s one way to see it. Maybe the wrong way.

In the Cold War, both sides tried to bend the rest of the world to their way of life. Plus dominance for their own nation. There was some ambiguity under Stalin, but from Khrushchev onwards it was clear Russian hegemony.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the West’s elite *could* have chosen peace and tolerance. They chose to get much tougher about imposing their way of life. And affirmed that the USA was Boss Nation, with Britain as deputy and Western Europe placed next. The UN could either obey or be bypassed.

Japan was briefly considered as the Next Enemy, but then suffered a mysterious stagnation. It was blighted by accepting some of the New Right’s economic ‘wisdom’. But it retains its core values, and is very comfortable.

China in the 1990s was imagined to be going to give up Leninism, as Russia had. This might have worked had the Western elite been honest, generous and far-sighted. But they were none of those things.

The world would be very different had they followed George Soros’s common-sense advice and done a New Marshall Plan to make Russia comfortable after it lost the Cold War. But the ideologues had a fervent certainty that the West won *despite* the Marshall Plan. Just as Adam Smith in the 18th century was

entirely certain that Britain’s economic take-off was *despite* a vast increase in government spending.

The New Right managed to cast fog and darkness on the awkward fact that the USA and Imperial Germany did exactly the same, trusting the economics of Friedrich List.<sup>2</sup> Likewise France, West Germany, Italy and Japan after World War Two. They had spectacular success at a time when Mao’s China was growing faster than the USA and Britain, champions of as much capitalism as possible.

With the rich owning most of the media, and left-liberals hostile to state power, the public and most pundits were successfully sold a false history.<sup>3</sup> One that led to Soros’s sensible ideas being laughed off. And he counted for little until many years later, when he helped wreck Sterling’s wider role and came to be seen as a brilliant thinker.

But facts have an unhappy habit of asserting themselves in the real world, no matter how cleverly you hide the evidence.

The current failure reminds me of the clever-foolish British politics that led to the birth of the USA. Today’s Neo-Cons ‘conquered Washington’ and then failed in the wider world. In the 18th century, a clique grouped around George the Third ‘conquered London’. Restored royal dominance with the support of most MPs in a corrupt and undemocratic Parliament. But then ruined their cause by a needless quarrel with Britain’s diverse colonies in North America.

At a time when British General Elections took several weeks, the initial American demand for ‘*No Taxation Without Representation*’ could have been met. Give two MPs each to the 13 Colonies. This would have encouraged the big gap between New England and Virginia, refugees at various times of rival exiles from Britain’s 17th-century Civil Wars. Instead, they made them feel like a single ‘United States’ by imposing a single intrusive tax system on all of them.

Embarrassingly for fans of Adam Smith, his connections with leading

2 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/48-economics/037-adam-smith-misleading/how-real-economic-growth-was-not-based-on-adam-smiths-ideas/>

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

British politicians include the three main offenders. Charles Townshend, Alexander Wedderburn and Lord North, who gave him a profitable job in the Scottish customs.<sup>4</sup> Only his link to Edmund Burke could be considered ‘respectable’.

A vast number of his letters have been destroyed. Those we have, show him on the side of the British government.

He had also sensibly suggested meeting British North America’s initial request for seats in the House of Commons. But like Soros’s sensible notion for a new Marshall Plan, it was an insight without useful results. The ‘insiders’ had a bloated view of their own power and cleverness.

It can be very useful to *study* history, rather than twisting it to fit your existing ideas.

## Shadow Boxing With China

Right now, Trump is fighting a rearguard action for an older set of US values. Which include White Racism, but also some notion of looking after ordinary people.

I’ve said before that his dispute with China is mostly shadow-boxing. If some of the US Democrats still fantasise about bending China to their will, he and most Republicans know better. Suspect that further efforts would just damage the USA without greatly harming China:

“They may be geopolitical opponents, but Presidents Xi and Trump have done a lot for the other’s approval ratings. For nationalist, authoritarian presidents, having an external enemy is a must. But in forcing the Chinese internet company ByteDance to find an American partner in order to keep its short-video app TikTok alive in the US, Trump has gone further in advancing Xi’s agenda. Unwittingly, he has helped Xi export China’s vision of cyber-governance.

“Since the start of Xi’s rule in 2013, China has tried to convince the world of the legitimacy of its way of governing cyberspace through censoring information and controlling foreign competitors’ access. In 2014, Xi’s newly appointed internet tsar brought together tech executives from around the world at the inaugural Wuzhen World Internet Conference.”<sup>5</sup>

4 <https://allthingsliberty.com/2020/03/an-economists-solution-to-the-war-adam-smith-and-the-rebelling-colonies/>

5 <https://www.ft.com/content/f60bf804-3bf4-44cd-9dbd-ba34d04a26b0>

1 <https://www.ft.com/content/7c76330b-7509-4f16-a046-e32cab3a6271>

I agree with most of this, but I don't think there is anything 'unwitting' about Trump's actions. Ignorant and short-sighted, yes. But he is one of many elected and popular right-wingers who have derailed the 1990s mix of spreading liberal-capitalist values globally. Which was anyway failing, with Iraq a stark warning rather than the beautiful example of Democratic Capitalism that the Globalisers imagined.

By making Joe Biden its candidate, the dominant factions in the US Democrats make it clear that they still think that the concerns of ordinary workers are best ignored.

If liberals are viewed with contempt, they have merited it. They let the welfare of the working mainstream be undermined. They have not controlled the rich and powerful, the class they all now belong to wherever they came from.

Trump will do little better, but at least recognises the problem. Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind. They just aren't learning.

### The World Against Trump

"Most people across the 13 countries surveyed said they have less trust in Trump to 'do the right thing' than they do in Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"Only an average of 16% said they have confidence in Trump as a leader, versus 19% who said the same for Xi and 23% for Putin...

"The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Canada and Australia, gave their lowest favorable views of the US on record since Pew started polling nearly two decades ago.

"In Canada, one in five people expressed confidence in Trump, a drastic drop from 51 percent who held that view a year ago.

"Similarly, Germans gave the US some of 'its worst ratings,' the authors note, with only 10% who said they have confidence in Trump, compared with 13% in 2019 and 86% in 2016 while Barack Obama was president."

Trump makes a mess of Covid-19. He blames the World Health Organisation. Trump makes a mess of a trade-war with China. He blames the World Trade Organisation. California and the whole West Coast burns. He blames Forest Management, not abnormally hot dry weather. Did no one tell him that most of those forests are Federal land? That he could have acted on it?

6 <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-less-trusted-than-russia-china-leaders-poll-us-image-2020-9?r=US&IR=T>

Meantime the USA's Gulf Coast has record rain. Yet he may well get re-elected.

Is electoral politics so wonderful that wars should be fought to impose it where it has never flourished? That was the consensus of the people Trump replaced in the Republican Party, who have mostly shifted to his viewpoint. And still is the view of the Democrat Party.

Dictatorships and politically powerful monarchies can work better. Some of the best-working electoral democracies have had monarchies that gradually dwindled and are now broadly ceremonial. Notably the British Isles, which didn't give the vote to a majority of men till the 1880s, and no women before 1918.<sup>7</sup> And where England alienated Ireland despite similar cultures.

But the mainstream media mislead. Thus when Trump was told off for illegal actions against China, the BBC reported it as "US China tariffs 'inconsistent' with trade rules says WTO".<sup>8</sup> A bit like saying "Dr Crippen's conduct was inconsistent with good marital relationships".

I've blogged about this, giving more details.<sup>9</sup>

And of how the current Secretary-General of the United Nations was almost open in his criticism of the USA and Trump at the recent Zoom gathering for the 75th Anniversary of the UN.<sup>10</sup>

And Trump has undone the shift to diversity:

"President Trump has taken that American face back in time. The people who represent the United States at the highest levels abroad are overwhelmingly white and male...

"A study by the Government Accountability Office published in January found a higher attrition rate for women and people of color in the State Department in 2018 than in the preceding decade. The study also found that racial or ethnic minorities in the State Department's career Civil Service were less likely to be promoted than their white co-workers with similar education, occupation or years of federal service."<sup>11</sup>

7 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-men-us-from-long-revolution-website/40-britain/665-2/>

8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-54168419>

9 <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams/China-Trade-Dispute-WTO-rules-against-the-USA>

10 <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams/UN-Secretary-General-almost-openly-denounces-President-Trump>

11 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/12/us/politics/trump-race-state-department.html>

Less often mentioned is how the same shift happened with astronauts, both real-world and in drama. That's another blog, *Star Wars: the Nordic Generation*.<sup>12</sup>

### Trump Defending a Vanishing USA

US Liberals like to call Trump an aberration. But he is firmly rooted in their actual past. A past that even their idol President Kennedy was tainted by.

I've long insisted that their 1860s Civil War was a war of two racisms.<sup>13</sup> But now I learn fresh facts from an article in the *London Review of Books*:

"When [Andrew] Johnson became president [in 1865], Congress was not in session – in the peculiar political calendar of the 19th century, a Congress did not meet until more than a year after it was elected – and for several months he had a free hand in developing Reconstruction policy. He seized the opportunity to set up new governments in the South controlled entirely by whites. These abolished slavery – they had no choice – but enacted a series of laws called the Black Codes to define the freedom African Americans now enjoyed. They had virtually no civil or political rights, and all adult black men were required to sign a labour contract with a white employer at the beginning of each year or be deemed a vagrant and sold to anyone who would pay the fine. Abandoning his hatred of the slaveocracy, Johnson handed out pardons indiscriminately to wealthy Confederates and ordered that land the federal government had allocated to former slaves be restored to the previous owners...

"Reconstruction ended in 1877, when the last Southern state fell under the control of white supremacist Democrats. As time went on, the impeachment of Andrew Johnson was all but forgotten, or recalled simply as a bizarre episode. In the 1950s it enjoyed a brief resurgence in public consciousness when John F. Kennedy, then the junior senator from Massachusetts, included a chapter on Edmund G. Ross, one of the seven Republicans who voted to acquit Johnson, in his book *Profiles in Courage*. Most of the volume was drafted by Kennedy's speechwriter Theodore Sorensen and edited by the historian Allan Nevins. This did not stop Kennedy being awarded the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for biography, doubtless the only author to receive the honour who contributed next to nothing to the actual text.

12 <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams/Star-Wars-the-Nordic-Generation>

13 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/52-usa/both-sides-were-racist-in-the-us-civil-war/>

"The chapter on Ross in *Profiles in Courage* repeated many of the myths about Reconstruction then prevalent in historical scholarship. Among other things, it claimed that no state 'suffered more' during Reconstruction than Mississippi under Adelbert Ames, a Union army general who owed his election as governor to the state's black voters. Kennedy didn't know it but Ames's daughter, Blanche Ames Ames – an artist and women's rights activist who married a man with the same surname – was still alive. She bombarded Kennedy with demands to revise the disparaging treatment of her father."<sup>14</sup>

And he did shift. But perhaps because he saw that there were more votes in it. And a chance to make his mark on history.

### Chinese Options

I never believed the stories about President Xi being a dictator.<sup>15</sup> He is Chief Executive in a system that rewards results. Broader politics occurs. Western sources occasionally show that they know this.

"As China Ages, a Push to Add Elevators Offers a New Kind of Economic Relief..."

"China's premier, Li Keqiang, and his allies in the government want to retrofit as many as three million older, walk-up apartment buildings, projects that usually cost less than \$100,000..."

"While China's top leader, Xi Jinping, has called for greater reliance on domestic demand to stimulate growth and has separately called for addressing poverty and improving housing for the elderly, he has not specifically backed a national elevator agenda.

"His main constituencies — the military, security agencies and very large state-owned enterprises — have little to gain from elevator projects. They have focused on building rail lines and highways that allow China to rush troops to remote hot spots, like the border with India."<sup>16</sup>

Li Keqiang is thought to have been favoured as heir by the previous President. But the factions compromised, and Xi got the top job. And a lot that's positive has been done: maybe more than with competitive electoral politics.

And if China ever had direct Presidential elections, the winner might well be Mao's grandson. All across Asia, many current or former leaders had little more in their favour than family links.

### Snippets

#### Tax-Hating USA Now Downwardly Mobile

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n18/eric-foner/worst-president-in-history>

<sup>15</sup> <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/post-liberalism/chinese-politics-working-well/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/business/china-economy-elevators-aging.html>

"A measure of social progress finds that the quality of life has dropped in America over the last decade, even as it has risen almost everywhere else..."

"The United States ranks No. 1 in the world in quality of universities, but No. 91 in access to quality basic education. The U.S. leads the world in medical technology, yet we are No. 97 in access to quality health care.

"The *Social Progress Index* finds that Americans have health statistics similar to those of people in Chile, Jordan and Albania, while kids in the United States get an education roughly on par with what children get in Uzbekistan and Mongolia. A majority of countries have lower homicide rates, and most other advanced countries have lower traffic fatality rates and better sanitation and internet access."<sup>17</sup>

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### 2020 Worst Climate Year Ever

Live your life as if there were no tomorrow. Most likely there will then be no tomorrow that you or your children could comfortably live in.

This has applied to the virus crisis – long predicted and likely to be the first of many. And there were many more places than China it might have started.

In China, the elite take collective responsibility and keep the capitalists under control. So actions are decisive and have in view the nation's long-term good.

Elsewhere, there is dither and failure.

But there have been exceptional floods in China and Japan. Typhoons hitting Japan and Korea. Abnormal floods in Bangladesh. And many more: so many cases that I've put them in a blog which I hope you'll read.<sup>18</sup>

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### Ineffective Russian Assassins?

The Western narrative is that the Russian government in 2018 use a needlessly complex method to try to kill a minor enemy, Sergei Skripal. But fail to kill him.

Then in 2020, they go after Alexei Navalny in a similar attack. And again fail. Give him useful publicity.

Believable?

The Navalny incident produced calls to scrap the *Nord Stream 2* gas link. A second link that goes to Germany through international waters rather than countries now unfriendly to Russia.

Poland has repeatedly protested. Russia is now guilty if they choose to avoid intruding on Polish sovereignty, and that of Ukraine.

Poisoning, even of Russians, is not

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/opinion/united-states-social-progress.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams/2020-Worst-Climate-Year-Ever>

the Polish way. But a reliable supply of Natural Gas is not good for many in the global energy market. Thousands involved in fracking etc. At least a few dozen might use massive criminality to boost their profits.

But if that was the aim, it failed. Apart from their Green Party, the Germans will not be moved on the issue.<sup>19</sup>

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### Angering God?

"Maine 'superspreader' wedding linked to 170 Covid cases and seven deaths..."

"A rural church wedding and reception on a beautiful day in the shadow of Mount Katahdin was no doubt a happy day. But it has spread misery ever since.

"That single event on 7 August is linked to coronavirus outbreaks in at least two other locations in Maine, with more than 170 people contracting the virus and seven deaths since."<sup>20</sup>

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### "Not Democracy If Electors Choose Wrong"

"Silence reigns on the US-backed coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia..."

"When 84% of the votes were counted in this preliminary tally, Morales had 45.7% of the vote, and was leading the second-placed candidate by 7.9 percentage points. The reporting in this unofficial, non-binding tally was then interrupted for 23 hours, and when it picked up again, Morales' lead had increased to 10.2 points. By the end of the official count, it was 10.5. According to Bolivia's election rules, a candidate with more than 40% of the vote and at least a 10-point lead wins in the first round, without a runoff.

"The opposition claimed that there was fraud and took to the streets..."

"There was no inexplicable change in trend. All that happened was that areas reporting later were more pro-Morales than the ones that reported earlier, for various geographical and demographic reasons. That is why Morales' lead increased when the last 16% of votes came in, just as it had been increasing throughout the preliminary count."<sup>21</sup>

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Old newsnotes at the magazine website. I also write regular blogs - <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/a26cacdf-7238-4417-b0b7-696eeeb239c>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/17/maine-wedding-superspreader-event>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/18/silence-us-backed-coup-evo-morales-bolivia-american-states>



# Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

## ITALIAN ELECTIONS

Regional Elections and a Referendum – small stuff? Not so. Elections for six regional governorships and a referendum to reduce the numbers of parliamentarians were held on 20 and 21 September. There were some surprises but the implications, some of them subtle, are significant for the future of politics in Italy.

The Referendum asked voters whether they approved of a reduction in the number of parliamentarians. 70% agreed and this will cut the number of representatives per elector from 1.6 to 1. Interestingly this contrasts with Germany's 0.9, to France's 1.4 and to the UK's 2.1. Italy's two houses are both elected and will drop from a Senate and Camera (Lower House) with 200 & 400 respectively to 115 and 230. This will take effect for the next election.

There are also 5 Senators in total who are nominated, and stay for life. They are selected, not as in the UK for services to political parties, but for "*outstanding patriotic merit in the social, scientific, artistic or literary field*" and are selected by the President. They include architect Renzo Piano who was already in post when he designed the replacement for the collapsed Morandi Bridge in Genova. Silvio Berlusconi asked to be included but was reminded that there were no vacancies and he had a conviction for fraud.

Achieving consensus on how and where to cut and what method to use for future voting will be difficult. The word "*proportional*" is currently being opposed or promoted as a voting system and the final outcome will not be reached without agony and drama.

The cut in the number of parliamentarians was proposed in the manifesto of the Five Star Movement (*M5S*) and they are currently reminding Italy that this was their initiative. This is

a necessary ploy to boost the credibility that they have lost with the electorate. The six Regional Governorship elections confirmed that their votes are continuing the trend of a slide into an often single figure insignificance.

At their start *M5S* held up inexperienced and clean political hands and stood for reform, participation and a change from established corrupt political practices. It has achieved little of substance in government or in the two flagship mayoralities in Rome and Turin. Vito Crimi, the interim leader, is oddly silent while the voice of Roberto Fico, The President of the Senate, is heard. He says that they must confront these defeats together, changes must be made so that the Movement can move ahead. Few are listening, the Movement has bifurcated and a destructive internal civil war is in progress.

The results from the six Regions showed several things. The Centre Right held onto two seats and gained one, while the Centre Left held three seats, so it appeared to be a triumph for the right and the *Lega* of Salvini. However Liguria and Veneto were held by Giovanni Toti and Luca Zaia, respectively, and both were re-elected by virtue of their own personal successes. Toti was instrumental in organising the rebuilding of the nationally and locally crucial communication bridge at Genova, while Zaia's implementation and control of Covid planning was seen as exemplary.

Their results seem curious as *Lega* stood as a party but the two men also stood under their own names. So for example, in the Veneto Zaia's *Lega Salvini* took 15.9% while *Zaia Presidente*, ie: Zaia for Governor, achieved an enormous 45.8%. The right succeeded in the elections but actually Salvini's *Lega* vote dropped.

Salvini is criticised increasingly for his excesses and intemperate

behaviour, while the electorate clearly favoured an effective player such as Zaia. Would Zaia want to go after the *Lega* leadership? He has said that he is only interested in his local area. A *La Repubblica* article on 25 September discussed the disquiet within the party: "*The Legistas are circling*". The hotly-tipped *Lega* candidate in Tuscany didn't succeed. Then Salvini is under investigation for two legal cases of not allowing migrants to land: "*deprivation of liberty*", plus a \$65m Russian funding of the Euro elections. The article concludes with: "*Is Salvini fit to govern?*"

Francesco Acquaroli, candidate for Georgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi)*, a right-wing, neo-fascist party, took Marche from the Centre Left *Partito Democratico* party (Pd) incumbent. Meloni has moved from being the leader of an insignificant part of the Centre Right to being a credible leader of the whole group. An IPSOS poll of 25 September gave her a 29% approval compared with Salvini's 25%, although a larger 37% were *Don't Knows*. The recently 84 year old Berlusconi had only 9%. Acquaroli was present at a dinner to celebrate Mussolini's March on Rome, the symbolic and actual start to the fascist era.

On 25 September *La Repubblica* wrote that President Sergio Mattarella had been asked to comment on a Boris Johnsonism. Johnson had said that the UK had had a higher rate of Covid contagion because "*the English.. like freedom*". On 31 July Mattarella had congratulated the famously anarchic Italians for "*suffering the wearing of masks so that others don't get ill*". He responded witheringly to Johnson's statement by saying that "*We like freedom but also gravitas and reliability*." Mattarella had hit on the reason that Luca Zaia had his stunning win in the Veneto election with an overall vote share of 75.9%.