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Shedding Crocodile Tears over the Strivers

The recent Resolution Foundation report on Living Standards has provoked a minor political stir. It shows that most people can expect their living standards to remain stagnant until 2020. For lower paid workers this will mean stagnation or decline since 1993. Thatcherism and its New Labour successor have failed to show that their version of capitalism benefits the mass of people who work for their living and its weakness is now becoming painfully obvious.

One feature of this trend is that the top 10% of the income distribution has benefited over the last 20 years and that they will continue to benefit. We now have an 'hour glass' economy with a large number of professional and low-skill jobs and little in the way of the intermediate technical positions on which the economic strength of Germany rests.

The decline in effective trade unionism has had a calamitous consequence in allowing wages to stagnate, income distribution to deteriorate and vocational education in England to remain little more than a sick joke. Another factor to bear in mind is the huge scale of tax evasion and avoidance – estimated at £120 billion a year. We need to remember this when we hear of nostrums from One Nation Labour about 'predistribution' or increasing the overall cake. There is a lot of scope still for redistribution before we even get on to the issue of improving people's incomes. 'Predistribution' will however involve addressing shortcomings in the labour market.

This is not a stable situation. The offshoring of jobs has now bitten deep into middle class and graduate employment: law, software engineering, accountancy, banking and general administration are all exporting jobs to developing countries where there is graduate labour available at as low as a fifth of the cost in the UK. The future for employment for 90% of the population is not looking too good. In three years time graduates will be emerging onto the labour market with around £40-50,000 worth of debt and that their chances of enjoying the middle class

life of their parents will, for the great majority, be bleak.

The Tories in the form of David Willetts claim that all is well, as the government is eliminating income tax at lowest end of the earnings spectrum and is pressing ahead with apprenticeships which will reskill the population. We need to look carefully at these claims. They are not in fact all that different from what is promised by One Nation Labour. Abolishing income tax for the first £10,000 or so of earnings unfortunately also benefits the highest earners so can hardly be termed a relief measure for the low waged alone.

Tax credits have made life bearable for many people on low wages, while at the same time making life easier for employers who do not have to bother to pay a decent wage to their employees and that this taxpayer subsidy for employers who do not pay their employees sufficiently cannot continue to increase. In this connection it is worth noting that the absence of controls on private rents is putting increasing pressure on households and that, once again, greedy landlords are being subsidised by the taxpayer through housing benefit.

One issue that has become apparent is that the low wage, low skill economy operated by Britain is contributing to this state of affairs. This journal has written extensively about this issue and we note that all the parties pay lipservice to the 'reskilling' of the economy, particularly

of the skilled worker/technician category of labour. David Willetts claims, like Gordon Brown before him, that the number of apprenticeship is being rapidly increased. Gordon Brown is mainly responsible for calling virtually any kind of training scheme, for young people or adults an 'apprenticeship' and, despite the Conservatives criticising Labour for doing it, they are doing the same. The figures that the government quotes in the media are, therefore highly misleading.

An apprenticeship, properly so called, is a programme of three years or more duration, combining an employment contract, workplace practice, technical knowledge and continuing general education, which results in a level 3 qualification (roughly equivalent to two A level passes). Lower level forms of training and retraining for adults should not be included in these figures as they are either for lower skilled work or they are helping the current workforce to find a new job.

They cannot be counted in the provision that we make for young people to enter the labour market as skilled workers. We need to make this clear so that apprenticeship rates in England are properly compared with those in Germany, for example, which uses a very successful mass apprenticeship system for its young people.

This is what we obtain from government statistics when we look at Advanced (level 3) Apprenticeships for the under 25s. Starts have risen from 32,000 in 2006-7 to 51,600 in 2010-11. This looks like a reasonable rise after years of decline but it is still a drop in the ocean when compared with the million or so young people not in employment, education or training. However, when we look at completion rates for the 2006/7 cohort in 2009-10 we find that there are only 25,400, quite a modest figure representing an attrition rate of nearly 21%, a huge waste. Strangely no-one draws attention to this huge failure in our education system, particularly when we remember that public money is involved since all

Apprenticeships receive a sub-

stantial government subsidy. If the government were serious about completion rates they would make payment of the subsidy conditional on completion of the award. So the way in which successive governments are addressing the needs of the economy and of young people to earn a decent living are not very impressive. It is simply fraudulent to pretend that we are moving to a mass apprenticeship system and to the transformation of our economy.

David Willetts has made the point that he does not think that the poaching of apprentices by firms who do not train is a serious issue. The implication of this is that the government does not need to do anything about obliging firms to train. They can instead, it is claimed, be bribed to do so.

Brown tried this for many years without any success. Now it is true that firms that do not wish to take a high skill route will not be interested in poaching trained employees from other firms but neither will they have any incentive to train their own if what they sell requires little skilled input. Willetts, like Brown and his ministers does not want to tell employers what to do.

They, like Ed Miliband and One Nation Labour, are not going to introduce a levy grant system, whereby a compulsory employer payroll tax is recouped for training purposes, because they are afraid of employer resistance. It therefore won't happen unless the trade union movement exerts some pressure to make it happen.

The brutal fact of the matter is that the strivers will continue to strive in vain as long as Britain is short of good jobs. And those jobs will never arrive so long as employers are not obliged to up their game and develop high specification goods and services. They are only likely to do so if they have to invest in their workforces. The fact that they are not and that neither the government or Labour will oblige them to do so point to continuing economic decline in Britain.

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Hobsbawm as England's Pet Marxist

Gwydion M. Williams

"Don't bring me solutions, I am having too much fun complaining". I've never heard anyone say this, but I can think of dozens of commentators whom it fits. The late Eric Hobsbawm was one of them.

The wave of friendly obituaries showed how little the man mattered in the post-Soviet era. Had he gone on fighting for his one-time cause, it would have been otherwise. Or he could have decided that his understanding had been wrong and just shut up: 'if you keep burning the toast, stay out of the kitchen'. Instead he hung around in the familiar circles of left-wing thought, but used his reputation and considerable gifts to sneer at left-wing achievements.

In the late 1970s, he did matter or might have mattered. And with *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, he chose to be on the wrong side.

In the late 1970s, there was every possibility of another massive socialist advance in Britain, a repeat of what happened with the Labour government of 1945-1949. That first Labour government was part of a world-wide success for Moderate Socialism, the sort of thing that Trotsky called Soft Socialism when describing the Bolshevik / Menshevik split. It's a sort of socialism that is indeed soft or moderate, in the sense that it does not seek to eliminate capitalism all at once. It works within the political system it finds itself within, and does so as an expression of a large part of the working class. Workers who were doing well and improving their lives had a legitimate concern about what might follow if you "smashed the system". Trotsky himself spent the last decade and a half of his life bitterly denouncing what had actually followed in Russia, yet never admitted that he might have made an error.

The entire Trotskyist movement followed him in this, devoting their considerable energies and talents to denouncing the various forms of socialism and communism that had actually achieved any-

thing. Hobsbawm as a pro-Moscow was not so bad, but he does sneer at the entire Chinese Communist achievement in his 'Age of Extremes'. It's quite easy for a European Marxist to view the world outside of European culture as human dross, though capable of being reprocessed with outside help into proper European values. For them, Mao's break with Moscow was unforgivable.

China under Mao tried several ways to get beyond the stagnating Moscow system, the Cultural Revolution being the last and most drastic. It then actually adopted its own version of Moderate Socialism after Mao, a system which currently flourishes. Whereas Gorbachev and Yeltsin believed the ideology of the New Right and sent their nation tumbling well below the sluggish norms of the Late Soviet era, Deng looked at what actually worked. Singapore was an excellent model, with Lee Kuan Yew as a socialist who rose to prominence in alliance with Communists, but was then able to break with them and be an effective moderniser within a Parliamentary framework. I suspect that Lee would have been ready to abolish the parliamentary system if it had got in the way of efficient government, as Indira Gandhi did briefly with her Emergency. But he had risen through multi-party elections and has been able to get a solid majority through them. I've not heard whether he advised Deng about the matter. A study of other countries that tried uprooting and replacing their politics without a solid multi-party past suggest he was very wise to opt for Moderate Socialism with a Leninist political structure.

Having abandoned Stalin's radical confrontation with the West, Moscow should logically have admitted that Lenin had got it wrong about Moderate Socialism. But this never happened, and European Marxists have been notable for trying every conceivable trick except saying

that Lenin should not have split the world socialist movement and treat the Moderate Socialists as enemies and traitors.

The soft can be powerful, plants split concrete and water washes away the hardest rocks. Still, in the 1920s and 1930s it did seem to be floundering and doomed to extinction. Of course it bounced back and has outlasted its rivals. Yet in the post-1945 era, it benefited greatly from the existence of a functional Hard Socialism as an alternative that scared the privileged.

It was also true that the Wilson government had achieved little. It wanted Incomes Policy, wages decided on some rational basis rather than who could grab hardest. The drawback was that this would have locked the trade unions into a technocratic structure, which there were sensible doubts about. But there was also the possibility of giving workers considerable rights within the enterprises that their labour made possible. Workers Control was very much on the agenda, reaching a high point with the Bullock Report of 1977.

The Bullock Report under Labour Party supervision was a possible way forward. By 1977, it should have been overwhelmingly obvious that the Communist Party road wasn't going to happen in Britain. Yet the Communist Party were the main force among those who made sure that a Moderate Socialist alternative didn't happen.

Of course the wider context was remarkably different from what emerged in the 1980s. The USA was floundering from its ignominious defeat in Vietnam in 1975. The Italian Communists hoped to be part of a coalition government and the French Communists actually did form part of a coalition under Mitterrand in the early 1980s. It looked perfectly feasible that the Soviet Union could win the Cold War. As it happened, Brezhnev made a major blunder in Afghanistan by pushing aside home-grown radicals and sending in Soviet troops at the end of 1979. Still, it seemed perfectly possible that the in-

vasion would succeed. Stuff that's been published since suggests they did come quite close to winning, far closer than the USA ever came in Vietnam.

That was the real context of Hobsbawm's *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* If the CP in Britain was not strong enough to win, it could sabotage the Soft Socialist alternative. Or it could have helped it as a step in the right direction, and a major advance for socialism in Britain. Britain turning left rather than right would have made an enormous difference to world events in the 1980s and beyond.

So what did Hobsbawm do? While making the occasional critical remark, he never lost his loyalty to Moscow. It was Lenin, not Stalin, who decided that Moderate Socialists were enemies, not merely mistaken but traitors to the cause. It was Stalin who was more of the compromiser when it suited him, allowing the United Front and Popular Front policies in the face of growing fascism. Lenin himself could be flexible when the situation seemed to justify it, but from 1917 to his death in 1924 he was committed to a Communist conquest of the world, at a time when other roads seemed closed.

Having rejected Stalin but refused any criticism of Lenin, the entire pro-Moscow Communist movement maimed its understanding of the world. Doomed its chances of creating a World State on the lines set out by H G Wells and other pre-1914 socialists. Yet even as it collapsed and failed, this tail-end of Leninism used its gifts and its entrenched positions in left-wing and trade-union movements to stop its Moderate Socialist rivals achieving anything.

Militancy encouraged by the Communist Party led to the "Winter of Discontent" (1978–79) and the discrediting of the old Labour Party of Wilson and Callaghan. That opened the door for a militant re-assertion of capitalist ideology, both in Britain and the USA, and with Britain maybe more influential. This was helped by people on the left who were willing to portray it all as an historic inevitability, rather than the result of wrong choices in the 1970s. *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* definitely paved the way for this.

What does it actually say?

"What I wish to underline is some-

thing which a marxist analysis alone will help us to understand, but which Marx's texts cannot; that the forward march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt in this country about twenty-five to thirty years ago. Both the working class and the labour movement since then have been passing through a period of crisis, or, if you prefer to be mealy-mouthed about it, of adaptation to a new situation."

25 years back from 1978 is 1953. Nothing had been gained since? What rubbish! It indicates a mind that values the working class only as raw material in some abstract schema for a 1917-type uprising.

It was certainly true that the British working class had no intention of overthrowing the system; they saw it as their system. But there had also been huge advances in Trade Union power between 1953 and 1978, despite the Tories being in office most of that time. Joe Gormley won two decisive victories for the coal miners in 1972 and 1974, and also faced down Thatcher in 1981. It took the "genius" of Communist-educated Arthur Scargill to turn this into the massive defeat in 1984–5. And that's not being wise after the event: I was one of a very small number of left-wingers who said during the strike that Scargill was a silly bungler and was creating a disaster.

The quarter century of the "forward march halted" had also seen the erosion of the sharp lines between "workers by hand and brain", what the USA calls Blue Collar and White Collar. Of course almost all real work involves both hand and brain in close coordination. Working-class people were never the people who made the distinction: it was employees who didn't need to get their hands dirty who used to insist on an enormous social gulf and used to identify with the superior persons above them. But that faded in the 1960s, with a considerable merging of the life-style among the young.

When John Lennon sang about being a "working class hero", this apparently caused amusement among those familiar with the various accents of Liverpool, with his being recognisably middle-class.² Still, it was not a "Home Counties" accent, nor BBC English as it stood at the time. That was progress of a sort.

During the years 1953–78, there was also a massive increase in the status of women, and a distinct advance in what was once called Free Love, and is now so routine as not to need a name. These had always been socialist objectives, along with racial equality, and for a long time Moscow was seen as a beacon of hope. This changed in the 1980s, when the West changed while the Soviet Union stayed the same or went backwards. But things were different in 1978.

All of which makes it odd for him to see disaster and defeat in the decline in the number of manual workers, as he does:

"I shall leave aside for the moment the question whether what was understood by 'manual workers' in the 1860s and 1870s is what we would today call a working class or proletariat. However, whatever they were, they got their hands dirty, and for most of the past century the manual workers in this broad definition have not grown but declined. In 1911 they included about 75 per cent of the population, in 1931 about 70 per cent, in 1961 64 per cent and in 1976 a little over half. This does not, of course, mean that the percentage of proletarians in the technical sense has gone down, i.e. of people who earn their living by selling their labour-power for wages, plus their dependents. On the contrary, in this sense proletarianisation has, as Marx predicted, continued to increase. We cannot accurately measure the percentage of 'employers and proprietors' for the 19th century, but in 1911 it included less than 7 per cent of the occupied population and it has since gone down—after staying more or less stable until 1951—to something like 3.5 per cent in the middle 1960s. So we have, over this century, growing proletarianisation combined with the relative decline, within the wage-earning population, of the manual workers in the literal sense of the word.

"This is a very general phenomenon in the industrial countries. However, in Britain the decline is particularly striking for a special historical reason. A hundred years ago the sector of white-collar work in the widest sense employed only a tiny number of wage-earners; probably relatively less than in other countries with a substantial bureaucracy, public and private. For instance, in 1871 'commercial

occupations' as a whole occupied less than 200,000 out of about 12 millions, whereas by 1911 it already included about 900,000. By 1976 about 45 per cent of the occupied population could be classified as non-manual."

He says a lot more, but casts little light on the matter. The reality is very complex – the owner of a pub or garage in a working-class area is quite likely to be classified as working class and often has a lot of family and social ties. A waitress in a transport café is working class: a waitress in a fancy tea-room is mostly seen as part of the lower-middle class, but may occasionally be a downfallen member of some much higher social stratum. Real social identities are made up of social ties as well as economic positions.

At the start of the 20th century, you were only middle-class in Britain if you had at least one servant. You occupied the middle ground between the rulers and the common folk. The whole thing has become increasingly muddled, with lorry-drivers viewing themselves as middle-class in the USA. And very few of the traditional working class are still 'proletarian', in the sense of owning nothing. But both they and the new expanded middle class lack ownership of their own 'means of production', and mostly depend on gigantic remote corporate structures.

There was also an overlap of income. In the late sixties, there was a BBC sitcom called *Beggar My Neighbour*, which follows two sisters living next door to each other, one married to an underpaid junior executive, the other to a well-paid fitter.³ It laughs at the new reality yet seems to accept it.

But that's just incomes and economics: social values also matter. The traditional 'professional classes' – teachers, lawyers, doctors etc. – were nominally wage workers, yet functionally occupied the middle ground between the rulers and the common folk. The new workers lacked definite traditions and often placed themselves much closer to the ruling elite than they actually were. And in addition, Trade Unions were often seen as obstructive or greedy by working mainstream, including a lot of the traditional working class.

Hobsbawm seems reluctant to accept that the better-educated stratum of

non-manual workers were becoming the dominant element of what was still an advancing labour movement in 1978. He says:

"A century ago the working class was deeply stratified, though this did not prevent it from seeing itself as a class. The very people who were the backbone of trade unionism, perhaps with the exception of the miners, were, and were seen as, a labour aristocracy which looked down on the mass of those whom it regarded as unskilled, 'mere labourers'. But industrial change first threatened, and then eroded this superiority from three directions. In the first place the rise of tertiary employment—white-collar and professional employment—produced a new form of labour aristocracy which identified directly with the middle class. It is only since world war two—at least outside the public sector—that the white-collar workers and professional workers have organised as a mass in trade unions, and increasingly within the TUC, i.e. the conscious labour movement. In the second place modern technology increasingly created a stratum of professionals and technicians separately recruited from outside rather than promoted from those with workshop experience. So the gap between the labour aristocracy and the middle strata widened. On the other hand modern technology and industrial organisation threatened the privileged position of the labour aristocrat, by increasingly turning him into, or replacing him by, the less skilled process worker operating specialised machines, or carrying out specialised parts of an increasingly elaborate division of labour. In other words, as Marx had predicted and as the capitalists always intended, skill was increasingly transferred from men to machines or to the design of the flow of production."

Full of muddle. The term "labour aristocracy" was dreamt up by Lenin, to cope with the awkward fact that a lot of the European working class rejected his demand that they discard the social order that they had been progressing within and praise his new system of one-party dictatorship.

If you accept that standard Khrushchevite line that Lenin's system rapidly evolved into a monstrous Stalinist dictatorship, such doubts were sensible enough. But that's not what the pro-Mos-

cow Communists ever said, right down to the bitter end.

How can one seriously believe the claim that Lenin's system was wonderful except that the wrong person was somehow in charge? This sort of muddle and its dishonest defenders has made pro-Moscow Communism of the post-Stalin variety a blight on everything it touched. (If this seems too sweeping, perhaps someone can name anything they didn't blight?)

Between the rival creeds of Soft Socialism and Hard Socialism, you have a sterile domain of Semi-Hard Socialism, people unready to work realistically within existing structures but not remotely tough enough or realistic enough to break those structures and replace them with functional new politics.

A new political system is always highly authoritarian and intolerant: it is a necessity for the survival of a new-born creed in a dangerous world. But if you're working within an existing system, you are accepting a system that is just as intolerant when the need arises. You may be doing this unknowingly, but you are doing it and may collide with reality any time. For a big strong mature system the need does not arise so often, or does not when it has sensible conservative-minded politicians running it, people who know the danger of over-reaction. (The species went extinct in the Anglosphere in the 1980s, and we now have a pack of hysterical little fools who keep getting tough where softness might have served them better. Started needless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.)

Regarding the Soviet Union, a more rational approach would have been for the post-Stalin leadership to say "Stalin saved us when another leader would probably have failed, but there were definitely some injustices. We will open it up for discussion, and we will pardon those who were sincerely mistaken, or who maybe had a point." Which is pretty much what the post-Mao leadership in China have done and get told off for doing. Denounced even though this has succeeded and the Khrushchev line failed and wiped out all of the advantages that Stalin had gained for the Soviet Union and for European socialism.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel

All Saints Day

The first of November is All Saints Day. Families go to the cemetery to tidy up graves and bring fresh flowers. For example in the Northern city of Arras the street that leads to the graveyard is turned into a one way street for the three days around the 1st to cope with the increased circulation.

The Communist Party of Arras takes the opportunity to pay their respects to their war dead, Resistants shot by the occupying forces, who are buried together in one plot. In a speech the story of the three men buried there is told again. (Other Resistants are buried in the Arras citadel.) The oldest victim, Georges Louchet, was a railway worker who lived in the Cité des Cheminots (a large estate housing railway workers) where he sold the communist paper and sang in the estate's church choir. He had been expelled from his job and his flat in 1941 when the SNCF, the railway company, was compelled to dismiss employees who were communists or active trade unionists.

Then the delegation moved to the grave of Marc Lanvin, an 18 year old communist militant who was shot dead by extreme right-wingers in May 1968 as he was putting up posters. His attackers were sentenced to prison and liberated after three years. The family of Marc Lanvin, although not communist, was present and shook hands with the Communist Party delegation.

The Socialist Party of Arras led similar ceremonies to their own graves.

After which half of the members of the delegations went off to tend their family graves.

The new President

The François Hollande government has taken some good measures; it has brought back retirement age to 60 for those who started work very young. It has removed the cap on the amount of tax the rich can pay, the so-called fiscal shield. It has introduced the 75% rate of

tax payable on income earner over and above a million euros. It has abolished the "crime of solidarity" [délit de solidarité] which forbade giving help to illegal immigrants, such as giving food or even allowing them to charge their mobiles in your house. This was brought in when the Sangatte camp of illegal immigrants was established near Calais.

It is working on improving employment. For example, the cost of labour has been lowered for employers, in the form of tax credits: the employers get to pay less tax when they employ someone.

The opposition party the UMP is mounting a campaign against every measure taken. Froggy, being registered with the French Consulate in London, receives email from all the political parties. A supposedly personal email appeared recently, from some "harmless housewife and mother". This virtual person can only have had access to the email address through the lists kept by the Political Parties. This lady was ask-



ing for signatures for a petition to protest against a measure that will increase the cost of employing a nanny or a private tutor.

Black nannies, white mothers

A book about nannies in France has just been published. It reveals that in Paris for example mothers employ nannies far below the minimum wage, paying them less than they pay their cleaners. The relationship between employer and employee is not good; the mothers distrust the nannies and the nannies have little sympathy with the molycoddling of the children and are resentful of the insulting wages and conditions. The nannies have children of their own, who have to be looked after also, it's not explained how, since they cannot be brought to the place of work. The mothers are mostly white and the nannies mostly black, from Africa. The measure taken by the Hollande government can only be a step in the right direction to remedy this situation.

The industrial situation

The drive for competitiveness has had perverse effects. 70% of jobs for new entrants to industry are for a limited period, which means the young worker does not have access to credit or housing. The firms that offer apprenticeships do not guarantee a job at the end of it. Small and medium firms work for larger firms who outsource part of their activity to them, leaving them helplessly dependent. The relationship between enterprise and contractor is short term. A downturn means that the smaller firm has to lay off their workers without a "plan social" the package of retraining measures which is available to workers in large firms. All these measures, taken to minimise costs, end up creating a sector which is not attractive to young people, and which has positions, such as for engineers, which it cannot fill.

Unions are working to find a way of giving employers financial incentives to take on employees on permanent contracts. The Hollande measure of giving tax incentives to take on employees may contribute to improve the situation.

It's A Fact

The total numbers of people prosecuted for and convicted of having an article with a blade or point on school premises by police force area in England and Wales in 2011 were 90 and 83 respectively. Of these 36 and 29 occurred in the Metropolitan police area. Other police force areas include West Midlands where 6 were prosecuted and 6 found guilty; Hampshire where the respective totals were 6 and 5; Greater Manchester 3 and 3; and Northumbria 3 and 2. Parliamentary Written Answer 8/10/12.

The total numbers of EU citizens from other member states enrolled on undergraduate courses at UK Higher Education Institutions for the academic years 2006/07 to 2010/11 were: 2006/07 – 64,165; 2007/08 – 69,865; 2008/09 – 73,375; 2009/10 – 77,465; 2010/11 – 80,320. PWA 15/10/12.

The number of offences of burglary in a dwelling recorded by the police in England and Wales over the last five financial years were: 2007/08 – 280,696; 2008/09 – 284,431; 2009/10 – 268,606; 2010/11 – 258,165; 2011/12 – 245,317. PWA 15/10/12.

The total numbers of lone parents (aged 16 to 64) with dependent children (under 16 and 16 to 18 not married and in full time education) by employment status, January to December 2007-11, in the UK, were: Employed, Year 2007 – 1,029,000; 2008 – 1,068,000; 2009 – 1,093,000; 2010 – 1,086,000; 2011 – 1,079,000. Unemployed, 2007 – 111,000; 2008 – 140,000; 2009 – 172,000; 2010 – 182,000; 2011 – 201,000. PWA 18/10/12.

There were an estimated 2,283,000 Non-UK EU nationals resident in the UK at December 2011. Of these 899,000 had been resident for 10 or more years. Just 64,000 had been resident for less than one year. Other estimates of the length of residency were: 1 year but less than 2 years – 141,000; 2 years but less than 3 – 138,000; 3 years but less than 4 – 151,000; 4 years but less than 5 – 215,000; 5 years but less than 6 – 217,000; 6 years but less than 7 – 229,000; 7 years but less than 8 – 152,000; 8 years but less than 9 – 64,000; 9 years but less than 10 – 52,000. PWA 18/10/12.

The numbers of registered cars, light goods and heavy goods vehicles in Great Britain as at 30 June 2012 were: Cars – 28,710,000; Light goods vehicles – 3,283,000; Heavy goods vehicles – 466,000. PWA 22/10/12.

The provisional number of apprentice programme starts in 2011/12 (August 2011 to July 2012) was 502,500. Of these 159,290 were in Business, Administration and Law; 105,380 were in Retail and Commercial Enterprise; 104,550 were in Health, Public Services and Care; 57,000 were in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies; 22,960 were in Construction, Planning and the Built Environment; 19,490 were in Leisure Travel and Tourism; 18,190 were in Information and Communication Technology; 7,420 were in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care; 6,740 were in Education and Training; 1,150 were in Arts, Media and Publishing; and 360 were in Science and Mathematics. There were none in Language, Literature and Culture. PWA 22/10/12.

The number of fire stations closed in England, as of 31 March, in the years 2009 to 2012 were: 2009 – 1,453; 2010 – 1,438; 2011 – 1,439; 2012 – 1,428. House of Lords Written Answer 22/10/12.

Police recorded crime for selected offences in England and Wales for the years 2008-09 to 2011-12 was: GBH, Year 2008-09 – 40,206; 2009-10 – 39,501; 2010-11 – 34,789; 2011-12 – 32,355. ABH, 2008-09 – 378,176; 2009-10 – 359,483; 2010-11 – 331,448; 2011-12 – 303,909. Rape, 2008-09 – 13,096; 2009-10 – 15,074; 2010-11 – 15,892; 2011-12 – 16,043. Robbery, 2008-09 – 80,130; 2009-10 – 75,105; 2010-11 – 76,189; 2011-12 – 74,689. Theft from a vehicle, 2008-09 – 396,976; 2009-10 – 339,170; 2010-11 – 313,467; 2011-12 – 300,378. PWA 23/10/12.

The number of 16 to 24 year olds and 25 year olds and over in the UK claiming job-seekers allowance for over 52 weeks from May 2010 to May 2012 was: May 2010, 16 to 24 years – 28,200; 25 and over – 237,210. May 2011, 16 to 24 years – 16,690; 25 and over – 200,640. May 2012, 16 to 24 years – 63,780; 25 and over – 330,225. PWA 24/10/12.

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Between 1917 and Stalin's death in 1953, the power of the Soviet Union steadily grew, despite a few setbacks. From 1953 to the disintegration of 1989-91, most of the gains were lost again.

To get back to Hobsbawm, it is also not true that workers as a whole have been de-skilled. Some skilled trades have vanished, but a lot more have appeared. Very few boiler-makers, but a lot of airline pilots. Fewer automobile makers, but a vast and growing number of computer programmers.

(This last has been my own trade for the last 40 years, and quite informative. For most of that period, there have been people predicting that programming itself can be automated and human skill dumped. And the exact opposite has hap-

pened.)

A modern workforce needs to be skilled, and lack of such skills is a specific problem in Britain. British education does produce some very smart and efficient scientists and technicians, but it also churns out hundreds of thousands of young people well qualified to be television presenters or pop stars, but not well prepared for the discipline and frequent tedium of skilled work, or efficient unskilled work. But that's another topic.

To return to the "halted" Forward March, the other thing Hobsbawm overlooks is the massive decline of religious authority in the 20th century. Religious belief has recovered a bit, after people found that "rationalism" was not emotionally satisfying. And after socialists got into the habit of taking up failures on their own side and not mentioning the

successes (most of them attributable to the "wrong people"). But there has been no real revival of religious authority: the creed has softened to win people back. The apparent revival is what Americans call a Dead Cat Bounce, the appearance of life after the real animating force has decisively ended.

(Endnotes)

1 Available at [http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm]. The original has Marxist as marxist, which I have retained for quotations.

2 See [<http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2885>], for instance

3 [http://www.sitcom.co.uk/sitcoms/beggar_neighbour.shtml]

The Swedish

By Martin Dolphin

In the September and October editions of Labour Affairs I reviewed the German and French pension systems and their development over the previous 20 years. The German and French pension systems share the following characteristics:

1. They are aimed at giving a person in retirement a good income – something of the order of 70% of pre-retirement net income.
2. The pensions systems are mandatory. You cannot opt out of the system. You are required by law to make a contribution to the system each year that you work.
3. The systems are pay-go. Broadly this means that pensions paid in any time period are paid out of contributions made by the work force in that same period.

This month I propose to review the Swedish pension system. This system shares the first two characteristics of the German and French systems. It aims to give a good pension in retirement and the system is mandatory. However the system is not a pure pay-go system. It is referred to as a notional funded system or more exactly a Notional Defined Contribution (NDC) system. It is this difference that we shall be mainly concerned with exploring in this article and I shall argue that the difference between a notional funded system and a pay-go system is not significant. This article draws heavily on the work of Edward Palmer and from official Swedish publications which are listed in the references. Interested readers are encouraged to go use these references for a more complete picture.

Beginnings of the Swedish Public Pension System

Sweden introduced a public pension scheme in 1914. The scheme, which consisted of an old-age pension plan was compulsory and applied to the entire population. The pension was small and was payable from the age of 67. Everyone got the same pension.

Before the reform of the basic pension in 1948, old age for many Swedes was synonymous with a life of poverty. The new basic pension of 1948 was a great improvement but retirement still meant a significant fall in a person's standard of living. In the 1960s Sweden set itself the political goal of giving people in retirement a standard of living that was not greatly below that which they had while working.

The 1960 ATP earnings related pension system

In 1960 the universal public earnings-related scheme, ATP (Allmänna tilläggspension which translates as general supplementary pension) was introduced. This meant that from 1960 all residents of Sweden were covered by the flat-rate folkpension (old age pension) and, in addition, if they had earnings from work, by the public ATP scheme, with a full benefit retirement age of 67. A full folkpension required 30 years of residence. A full ATP benefit required 30 years of coverage (contributions) and was based on the participant's best 15 earnings years. In 1976 the full-benefit retirement age was decreased to 65.

The literature is not particularly clear on why the Swedes opted to replace this system in 1994. The system was not yet in financial difficulty. However the ratio of workers to pensioners had declined from 4.9 in 1960 to 3.25 in 1994. This was perhaps an indication of problems in the future. In 1994 the ATP contribution rate was only 13% but it was estimated that a rate of 17% would have had to be levied if all pensions were to be paid out of current contributions. (The 4% difference was met by drawing money from a fund that had been built up through contributions in the earlier years of the ATP system.)

Another main reason the system was replaced may have been because it was seen as unfair. Two quite different sets of contributions could lead to the same pension and young people entering the workforce in 1990 were increasingly unwilling to accept this.

In any case it was decided to review the whole system in the late 80s with the aim of putting it on a fairer and more sustainable basis. The current NDC/FDC state system is the result of that review.

The 1994 Pension Reform - NDC and FDC Pensions

The most recent milestone in Swedish public pension provision began with the 1994 legislation and conversion of the folkpension/ATP system into mandatory Notional Defined Contribution (NDC) and Financial Defined Contribution (FDC) schemes (NDC and FDC will be explained below), with, as a consequence, an accompanying steady shift of the major occupational schemes away from defined benefit to defined contribution.

Pension System.

It is remarkable how quickly these changes in the pension systems were achieved when compared with the endless politics around pension reform in France. The details had effectively been agreed in a mere 4 years from 1990 to 1994 and a further 4 years were allowed for the communication of the new pension system to the public and to its implementation. The result is that the Swedes have a pension system comprised of 2 main pillars. The first pillar is the state/national earnings related system which comprises a notional defined contribution and a financial defined contribution part. The 2nd pillar is the occupational financial defined contribution system covering 90% of the workforce. Between them these two pillars will aim to give a worker an income in retirement of between 60% and 70% of his/her pre-retirement income.

I have been using terms like Notional Defined Contribution (NDC) and Financial Defined Contribution (FDC) let us now go into a little more detail on how they work.

A defined contribution scheme is one in which the contribution is defined but there is no absolute guarantee on what benefit you will get back. In each year that a Swedish person works, an amount equal to 16% of his/her wages is contributed to the NDC fund. 6% comes from his/her wage and 10% is contributed by the employer. This is not so dissimilar to what happens in France and Germany. However what is significantly different is that the contribution is

put into a notional fund for that worker. There are some 5 million workers in Sweden so

the contribution of each of these 5 millions workers is tracked separately. Indeed each year every worker gets a statement (called the orange envelope) showing exactly the sum total of his/her contributions since they began working and the amount he/she might hope to get as a pension.

Now this might not seem so different to the typical British private pension system where each worker has a fund to which he/she contributes. But it is completely different. A British worker would have complete responsibility for how his/her fund grew or decreased in size. The Swedish worker has no such worries. What he/she contributes is guaranteed to grow at exactly the same rate as that of every other worker who contributes which is set at about 2% per annum.

Furthermore the Swedish worker's fund of contributions is to a notional fund. It does not really exist. What he/she contributes each year is actually immediately used to pay the pensions of those in retirement. So there is no real amount in his/her fund. The fund is really just a record of what he/she has contributed to the payment of other pensions throughout his/her working life and therefore what he/she is entitled to receive in pensions in retirement.

The Financial Defined Contribution (FDC) component of the state pension is fairly close in structure to the typical British private pension. In the FDC, which has a contribution rate of 2.5%, each worker can decide into which investment funds the money should be put and has complete responsibility for how its value grows or decreases over the working life.

In Sweden in 2012 average pensionable income is £35,000 so an employee pays £2450 (7%) into the fund and the employer pays £4025 (11.5%) into the fund giving a total of £6475 paid into the fund and credited against his/her name. Now let's imagine an employee has worked for 40 years at this average wage and has finally reached the age of 61 years which is the earliest age at which he/she can take retirement. What sort of pension might they expect? The calculation is remarkably simple. The total value of the persons fund is divided by the number of year that they are expected to live in retirement.

Age	Number of Years in Work	£ Salary	Real Growth Rate	Contribution Rate	Opening Fund £	£ Fund Growth Contribution	£ Fund Growth Interest	£ Fund due to Closing
22	1	£35,000	2%	18.5	0	6,475	0	6475
23	2	£35,700	2%	18.5	6475	6605	130	13,209
24	3	£36,414	2%	18.5	13,209	6,737	264	20,210
62	41	£77,281	2%	18.5	560,669	14,297	11,213	586,179

Let's see how this would work out for a person joining the labour force today at the age of 22 on the average wage of £35,000. What sort of pension could they expect in retirement in 40+ years' time? The calculation is tedious but not particularly difficult:

So at the age of 62 our worker has accumulated £586,179 in the notional fund at which point he/she decides to retire. If there has also been price inflation the amount will be higher since the funds are protected in this situation. However we are ignoring the issue of price inflation since it complicates the calculations without improving our understanding.

At age 62 a Swedish worker is expected to live another 23

years so he/she is given a pension each year equal to £586179 / 23 giving a pension of approximately £25,500 per annum. However the system assumes that the pension fund will grow while the worker is in retirement at a rate of 1.6% per annum. When we factor this into the calculation we discover that the fund can actually give the worker a pension of £35,000 or approximately some 45% of his/her pre-retirement income.

If our worker delays retirement until 67 he/she will have a pension closer to 55% of his/her pre-retirement income. That is a choice the worker has to make. But basically he/she can take a pension any time after the age of 61.

(Now that calculation that I have made above is not quite right in that I have assumed a contribution rate of 18.5% into the Notional Defined Contribution fund (NDC). In actual fact only 16% goes into the NDC fund. The remaining 2.5% goes into the Financial Defined Contribution fund (FDC).

Each worker has responsibility for his/her own FDC. It is a real fund and could be wiped out in a collapse of the stock market unlike the NDC. Two workers might invest the same amount in the FDC but their funds could have completely different values at the point of retirement. In the NDC if two workers contribute the same amount then their NDC funds will have the same value at the point of retirement. However in the interest of simplifying the calculations I've assumed that the FDC has the same 2% growth rate as the NDC and that allows me to add the 16% NDC and 2.5% FDC contribution rate together to arrive at the above estimates of future retirement income.)

It should also be noted that contributions to the NDC are only levied on a salary up to a pensionable salary ceiling which in 2012 was about £42,000. So if someone was on a salary of £60,000 all their working lives they would get the same state pension as someone on a salary of £35,000. It is left to those on salaries above the pensionable salary ceiling to make additional savings if they want to have a higher pension in retirement than those on the average salary. This is largely achieved through the occupa-

Table 2

Employer contributions to members' accounts, 2007-2012 as a percentage of members' earnings

	Earnings under pensionable salary ceiling (<=£41,800)	Earnings over pensionable salary ceiling (>£41,800)
2007	3.5	3.5
2008	3.9	6.0
2009	4.0	12.0

tional pension schemes considered below. (This structure probably gives the society an incentive to have a good average salary.)

The national state pension with its two components, the Notional Defined Contribution and the Financial Defined Contribution, represents the first pillar in the Swedish pension system. The second pillar is provided by the occupational pension schemes.

Occupational Pension Schemes

A very large proportion of wage earners, estimated at around 90 per cent, are covered by some form of occupational pension scheme. The four major collective agreement areas insure around 80 per cent of wage earners. Occupational pension agreements are generally concluded through collective agreements between labour market partners, and bind all parties covered by the agreement.

The legislation does not lay down any particular requirements for the content of the pension agreements. Defined-benefit solutions previously dominated the market, but a clear trend towards defined-contribution occupational pensions is now occurring. The contractual insurance schemes normally signify a supplement to the basic old-age pension for wage earners who receive incomes up to the earnings ceiling in social insurance, while it represents the principal insurance protection for portions of income above the earnings ceiling in the national system. So it is through the occupational pension schemes that workers on incomes above the pensions earning ceiling ensure that they have pensions that match their incomes before retirement.

It should be noted that the law does not permit employees to contribute to employer-sponsored occupational pension plans. All contribution must come

from the employer. The OECD reports these employer contributions as: Table 2

The contributions of employers for those earning more than the pensionable salary ceiling of £41,800 seem startlingly high at 30%. But it is at those levels so that those workers maintain their standard of living in retirement. It seems to me that there must be some fairly conscious choice on the part of higher paid workers in Sweden to trade higher salaries for better pensions through high employer contributions to pension funds. Contributions towards employees' pensions commence at the age of 25 – raised in 2008 from the previous, younger, eligibility age of 21.

From these employer contributions the employee would expect to receive the following benefits in retirement in the form of an annuity: Table 3

(7.5 IBA is a rather odd little calculation and means 7.5 times the income base amount. The income base amount is determined each year and for 2012 was some £5,200. The pension salary ceiling is roughly 7.5 times the income base amount. So a level of earnings of 30IBA is equal to 4 times the pension salary ceiling of £41,800 i.e. some £167,200.)

We have calculated above that a worker on the average salary of £35,000 who worked until he/she was 65 would get a pension of the order of 55% from the state NDC and FDC system. His/her occupational pension would add 10% to that amount making 65% in total.

A worker on twice the average salary would get 55% from the state pension on the first £41,800 and would get 65% on the balance but this would be coming from the occupational scheme rather than the state scheme. But overall his/her pension would be some 65% of his/her pre-retirement income.

In addition to the national pension and occupational pension, it is possible to have private pension savings. Private pension saving, in an insurance scheme or in a pension savings account, differs from other private saving in that there is an entitlement to tax deductibility.

Other Pension Issues

Children

"In Sweden the parent with the lowest earnings in the year(s) in question will be automatically accredited with child-care pension rights, unless the parents choose otherwise. Child-care "earnings" will be imputed according to the most favourable of the following three computations:

- a supplement equal to 75 per cent of average earnings for all covered persons

- a supplement up to the individual's own earnings the year prior to child birth

- a supplement consisting of a fixed amount, indexed in time to the (covered) wage per capita

Each is targeted to a specific type of recipient. The first model covers persons without earnings immediately prior to childbirth. The second replaces own earnings for a person who leaves her(his) job after childbirth and is wholly or pre-

If women continue to bear close to two children and, as is common, give birth to their second child within 2-3 years after giving birth to the first child, one of the above forms of credit will typically be received during 6-7 years. It is estimated that an average Swedish woman can expect to have her benefits enhanced by close to 10 percent from pension credits for child-care years. On average, she will then have about the same number of earnings years as a typical man.

Contributions will be paid from the state budget for child-care years, conscripted military service (based on imputed earnings equivalent to 50 percent of the average covered wage) and years in higher education – the latter provision was enacted in spite of the strong arguments against it. The military and educational credits will be very small, however."

(Edward Palmer, The Swedish Pension Reform Model: Framework and Issues, page 17)

Minimum/Guaranteed Pension

The "guarantee pension" is an income-tested top-up for people with low levels of benefit from notional accounts. For a single person, the full guaranteed benefit in 2008 was ~£8,300 for a single pensioner born after 1938 or about 25% of gross average earnings.

age pension purposes.

The development of the Swedish system has been watched closely by many countries. Latvia and Poland have also now implemented NDC schemes. Italy introduced an NDC approach in 1995. Indeed Russia had elements of the NDC approach in its 2002 pension reform. Wherever pension systems are being reviewed the NDC approach is a strong contender.

The main thing that prevents such a system being implemented in Britain is political will.

References:

A fairly detailed official account of Swedish Welfare is given in:

Sweden's strategy report for social protection and social inclusion 2008–2010

<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/11/42/69/1009c964.pdf>

A short official but somewhat outdated account of the Swedish pension system can be found in: <http://www.glo-balaging.org/pension/world/sweden.pdf>

The following works by Edward Palmer give very detailed descriptions of most aspects of the Swedish pension system:

The Swedish Pension Reform Model: Framework and Issues

[www.oecd.org/finance/financialmar-](http://www.oecd.org/finance/financialmarkets/2638200.pdf)

[kets/2638200.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/finance/financialmarkets/2638200.pdf)

Swedish Pension Reform - National Bureau of Economic Research

www.nber.org/chapters/c10673.pdf

dominantly at home. It also provides a supplement for someone who works less than he/she did prior to childbirth.

Summary

The Swedes put in place a state pension system 1994 with a minimum of political disruption. This system guarantees workers a good standard of living in retirement, is seen as fair and, of particular importance, it is financially very (though not completely) stable. The system is autonomous and is not affected by fluctuations in the government budget. The income and expenditure of the old-age pension system can only be used for old-

The third provides an extra supplement after return to work – thus not discriminating against those women (men) who return shortly (in Sweden usually after 8- 12 months) with earnings equal to or higher than those prior to childbirth. For each child, the parent has the right to four years of imputed earnings according to the most favourable of the three models.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

War Memories

When World War One was decided upon, every single participating power had a parliament that could have objected and in fact approved the war. Calling it a 'war for democracy' is bullshit: parliamentary democracy was developing nicely in Europe and also in Japan and the Ottoman Empire, the main independent powers. In Latin America it was a mess, and it was on the verge of failing in China, with a warlord seeking to become Emperor with Western support. But without the First World War, this growth in parliamentary democracy might have continued without all of the death and suffering that actually happened.

Not all of those parliaments matched modern democratic standards, of course. British historians make a lot about the German Parliament not having the same control over ministers that Westminster had. There was also unequal voting in Prussia, with the rich having votes that counted for more. But everywhere was imperfect. Most of the warring powers controlled huge non-white populations with no intention of ever letting them be equal.

For the British Empire, the Imperial Parliament was elected by about 60% of adult males living in the British Isles. Colonies with large numbers of white settlers had their own parliaments, which opted for the war and which later decided that conscription would not apply to them when it did in Britain. The non-white majority were conscripted as needed and had no say at all. Non-whites treated as raw material, both in the USA and British Empire. Since there weren't many of them in the British Isles they might have a vote, if they were well-off. But there were strict rules that British officers must be "of the white race".

Starting a war in August 1914 was power-politics, the rivalry of gigantic empires that controlled most of the world. You could argue about whose power-politics was worst, but everyone had a sensible hope for winning the war at acceptable cost.

The crime was continuing the war into 1915, when it was clear there would be no easy victory. A crime repeated in 1916, 1917 and 1918, with the starvation of Germany continued into 1919 to force acceptance of the grossly unfair terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

It was a crime committed the rulers of the British Empire, though the USA was happy to step in and save Britain from defeat. Ordinary Britons went along with it, some buying the argument about the menace of Germany as a trade rival, others genuinely believing that Germany might invade Britain if not stopped in France and Belgium. But note that those ordinary Britons were had a vote were intentionally disempowered by a ruling class that was still in control and still viewed as the only people fit to govern.

Pussy Riot and the Boat Race saboteur

A man who swam into the path of the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race gets six months in prison: no one much minds. Pop Group "Pussy Riot" get two years for singing obscene songs in an Orthodox Christian cathedral, and most of the British media call it tyranny.

Both are examples of people who want to wreck the lives of others if they don't get what they want. Russia overwhelmingly close Putin. The boat race protest was against austerity, but a majority of Britons keep on voting for parties that accept austerity.

I also can't help wondering what would be said if a British punk band were to sing an obscenity-laced song in Westminster Abbey as a protest against climate change. Would that be treated gently, or would it be seen as different if it is your own sacred places?

If you've got democratic norms that give you the possibility of changing the society, it is best to stick to them. It's a pretty good rule of history that when anarchic protest does seriously disrupt a society, the outcome is much more authoritarian and ruthless that whatever regime the protestors were originally objecting to.

Who put the 'vile' in Savile?

It's fairly normal for police to protect the powerful. Bad communication may explain how little-known individuals who have left traces in separate police files stay free, the data is never put together. If Joe Soap left low-level traces with several different police forces, none of them had any strong reason to spend scarce resources checking Joe Soap, who might anyway get confused with a different and entirely innocent Joe Soap.

It is a different matter when a police detective is faced with allegations about a famous individual. The obvious next step would be to ask the other regional police forces if they had anything similar about this famous individual. One accuser may be malicious or a crank: three or four who don't know each other but give the same story is enough for a conviction. So why didn't this happen?

"At least three forces – Surrey, Sussex and Jersey – are known to have been aware of allegations against Savile, but the true number is believed to be as high as seven."¹ Very odd. The issue was made public by the media, and only once Savile was dead and it became safe to voice suspicions without solid proof.

British libel laws must take part of the blame. They mean that you can be punished severely for saying something that you can demonstrate to be probably true. To successfully defend

against a libel action, the accusation or innuendo has to be proven to the degree necessary for a criminal conviction. This was why the late camp singer Liberace got substantial damages from the Daily Mirror for an article which did everything it could to imply the man was homosexual without actually saying so. You might say that the Mirror breached an unofficial understanding that people's private lives would be respected so long as they were discrete. That's acceptable nowadays for homosexuality, which was legalised in the 1960s. It was briefly viewed as possible for underage sex, but the society decided massively against this. So why did Savile get away with it?

Pop keeps lots of ordinary people docile and hoping for individual success without much concern for other people like them. Aspiring musicians hope to rise from the crowd, not see the crowd rise as a united whole. This is part of a much wider trend that I'd call the "Coolheart Revolution", a spread of 'cool' attitudes that favoured selfish personal developments and denied that anything could or should be done about wider social evils. "Give me liberty, sex, drugs and lots of money" would be a fitting slogan.

A weakness in the "Coolheart Revolution" is that only the first two can be sensibly met for everyone who wants them. Drugs destroy an alarming percentage of those who dabble in them, a far higher percentage than the number of alcohol users who become alcoholic. (Alcohol use is also more common, so more die of it, but not as many as might die if drugs were ever decriminalised.)

Sexual liberation – what used to be called Free Love – has proved feasible, though it has changed family structures. But it can become destructive when the under-age get drawn into it. The lucky ones may make a lot of money selling sex appeal without actual sex: vastly more than anything else might do at that age. But even they face problems, as a recent account by Kate Moss has revealed.² She started modelling at 14, but was fortunate enough to have retained her attractiveness and career after she'd grown up. That can't be typical

This "Coolheart Revolution" is what

the radicalism of the 1960s was transmuted into, after the failure to create an improved version of socialism in the 1970s. It proved highly compatible with Thatcherism.

It was also much better than losing completely and seeing 1950s values return, which was essentially what happened in the Soviet bloc. But it's still useful to point out the connections.

US Republicans Don't 'Reap the Whirlwind'

Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind. But in a society dominated by populist values, rich people in control of most of the media can stop the public noticing.

Twenty years ago, people were warning that a general trend to a warmer world would cause the polar ice cap to melt, with unguessable consequences. It was also known that a general trend to a warmer world would not be a simple uniform rise in temperature everywhere. Every climate model I've seen predicts that some areas will actually cool, even as others warm up. Rainfall too was expected to vary.

What was not expected was the speed with which arctic ice would start melting. Nor could anyone be sure about the effect this would have on the Jet Stream.

There are actually several Jet Streams, but the one that counts is the Polar Jet Stream. It controls the flow of weather systems in Europe and the USA. Sometimes it gets locked in an unusual pattern and the flow stops. It happened this summer, giving the USA unusual dryness and heat, while the British summer was unusually wet. It can also produce very cold winters, or very mild ones. This pattern of unpredictable extremes is likely to get worse.

Note also that unpredictable extremes may average out to something like the old norm. One year is hideously hot and dry, the next is cold and wet with unprecedented flooding. Lump them together and it might seem "normal". That's the basis for the Daily Mail saying it's not too serious, since "from the beginning of 1997 until August 2012, there was no

discernible rise in aggregate global temperatures".³ Average warming matters much less than wild weather, and wild weather has definitely increased as the polar ice-cap melts.

What the Jet Stream does to hurricanes is uncertain: they are complex and fickle. The south of the USA gets regularly battered by hurricanes: the East Coast mostly escapes. When Climate Change was being discussed 20 and 30 years ago, it was mentioned that bigger hurricanes and different hurricanes were a possibility. It was also possible we'd get lucky and the new climate would suppress them.

We weren't lucky: rather, the USA has been unlucky. There's little doubt the pattern has changed. The South Atlantic never used to have hurricanes – mostly called cyclones in that part of the world. Before weather satellites in the 1970s, there is little reliable information – though where hurricanes / cyclones / typhoons were common, they had been known about for centuries. In the South Atlantic, there was a cyclone classed as Subtropical Cyclone in 1974, another in 1991. And then seven since 2004, including Cyclone Catarina which reached hurricane strength.⁴

After a summer of extraordinary heat and drought, the USA has now had a hurricane hitting hard where they're not expected. It's way outside previous norms, and also damages the USA's weak infrastructure, neglected after decades of tax-cutting and privatisation. So how do the US voters react? Nearly half of them decide it's "just weather" and that a tax-avoiding man who's grown rich by abolishing the jobs of the working mainstream and letting them re-appear in China is the best man to get the USA out of its current crisis. And it seems that Obama, while accepting climate change, prefers to keep it as a minor issue.⁵

There is a huge chunk of US society that listened to Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and hangs onto his message in the face of an accumulation of "off-message facts". This is often true of a declining society, it hangs on to its core beliefs and refuses to see them as a probable cause of the problem. Imperial Spain reacted to each setback with a strengthening of the

rigid Counter-Reformation Catholicism that had weakened them. The British Empire in its weakened condition after the First World War chose to return to the Gold Standard at the pre-war rate, with huge damage to the economy.

Obama promised change without being very specific. He's not in fact managed to be much different from Bush Junior, any more than Clinton was much of a break from Bush Senior. But he has been more attractive to the rest of the world, while Romney has already offended Britain with stupid remarks about troubles in the run-up to the Olympic. A Republican in the White House backed by Tea Party extremists would have helped the whole trend for Europe to move away from the US alliance. But he didn't lose by much, and Republicans still control the House of Representatives, allowing them to carry on stopping legislation they don't like.

Crazy Democracy

Obama has the distinction of being the first visibly non-white individual to be the ruler of a majority-white state. Andrew Jackson had some Native American ancestry, but not much and this was acceptable. Polls indicate that US voters are suspicious of people of East Asian ancestry, suspecting that they might have different cultural values. Although Native Americans are racially very close, they are not seen as culturally distinct, just fellow-citizens with a touch of the exotic.

It is also notable that the entire Afro-American community failed to produce an electable candidate for national office, and not many in constituencies where there is a white majority. Obama with a white hippy mother and a Kenyan father counts as an anomaly.

Note also that Obama is the first globally, not just in the USA. New Zealand has come close to electing Maori or people of part-Maori ancestry, as close as Deputy Prime Minister, but not yet. Peru has a Native-American majority, but it was a breakthrough when Alberto Fujimori was elected in 1990, even though his ancestry was Japanese.

Obama is now back for another four years. He got just over half of the vote and won most of the crucial "swing states" that Romney had to win. He seems to have done well among the old and the white, but that's no longer enough to win.

The election shows the decline of US Protestantism. It featured a Mormon and two Roman Catholics on the two rival 'tickets'. Obama himself converted to Protestantism from a non-religious background. Converted to the Trinity United Church of Christ, a predominantly African-American church which he has now distanced himself from after publicity about some radical statements by its pastor.

Protestantism began as an attempt to return to an older purer Christianity, a Christianity based on the Bible. Only it turned out that the Bible says many different things. Henry 8th took very seriously some verses against marrying your brother's widow, but elsewhere this is commanded as a religious duty. And the whole "Sabbath" tradition began within Catholicism, people taking Jewish rules for Saturday and applying them to the Roman-pagan rest-day of Sunday, originally viewed as the first day of the week. Catholicism allowed a mix of holiday and worship: Puritans tried to purify it without facing up to the original confusion.

With everything shaky, many Protestants fell into the 'Plutophile Heresy', viewing worldly wealth as a sign of Divine Favour. This is flatly against the whole New Testament tradition: the Old Testament is more mixed and a reader not committed to seeing it as the Word of God would conclude that different books say wildly different things. Since this was not open to devout Protestants, they easily yielded to the temptation to praise the rich. 'Blessed are the praise-singers, for they shall receive money', you might say. This applied in particular to the non-established sects, which were dependent on individual donations. A small number of rich individuals could and did have disproportionate influence, and switch congregations or sects if the Minister preached the wrong message.

This was much more true in the USA than Britain, where the Church of Eng-

land was reasonably prosperous and not so dependent. In England and Wales, at least, what was originally a very strong Nonconformist movement faded to insignificance in the course of the 20th century. Meantime the Church of England has become almost infinitely flexible to the demands of secular society, but still preaches a limited social message. Most Christians in Britain are Liberal-Left, while the intense religiousness of Protestants in the USA has almost entirely yielded to the 'Plutophile Heresy' and delivers poor and middle-income voters to a Republican Party that serves the rich.

The rich in the USA are also able to have a vast influence through campaign funds, which are gigantic and can shepherd large numbers of rather thoughtless voters towards whichever candidate spends the most money. You can't actually buy an election, some rich candidates have spent a lot and failed. But you can buy a lot of bias. Obama has commented on this but has done nothing about it. He might have taken a bold stand, abandoning any hope of re-election but possibly changing politics in the same way as Barry Goldwater changed politics despite losing decisively to Johnson. As things are, he has made little difference in his first term and is unlikely to any better now.

An oddity of the US election is that the Presidential vote chooses an Electoral College. It was assumed by the Founding Fathers that ordinary voters could not sensibly choose an official as remote as the President of a diversity of separate States. But this was quickly subverted by candidates pledged to a particular individual. This could have produced a deadlock, two candidates with exactly the same number of pledged electors. This would be broken by the House of Representatives (Republican) choosing the President from the first three candidates, while the Senate (Democrat) chooses the Vice-President. It might have meant Romney being elected with Obama's Vice-President, creating a vast incentive for assassins to get one or the other. (Vice Presidents have no more power than the President allows them, but are also automatic successors if the President dies in office.)

Obama won by a narrow margin de-

spite keeping the USA viable during a massive crisis caused by speculation. He should have hammered on that Clinton fixed the deficit and Bush Junior re-created it. But Democrats also favour a basic "Feed the Rich" policy, so it would have been seen as too radical to make that a big issue.

Yet for Republicans, social liberalism that is still behind the European norm is wickedness. The milder version of "Feed the Rich" favoured by the Democrats is wickedness. This view lets them feel moral in obstructing the government wherever possible, rather than making a compromise in a way that was once normal. An article appearing in *The Guardian* just before voting began said:

"One of Clinton's national security advisers, Richard Feinberg, observed: 'If a society fundamentally disagrees on fundamental issues – the nature of property and what constitutes a legitimate political system – democracy can't handle it.' At the time, his words were a lecture to Latin American nations. Now they sound like a reproach to his own countrymen."8

Which is true enough, assuming you go along with the modern habit of saying "democracy" when you actually mean "multi-party parliamentary democracy". And it would apply even more strongly to countries where there is no strong tradition of accepting the result of an election as final. Countries that take it for granted that the Opposition opposes within sensible limits and may be the next government. Trying to impose this in Black Africa or on places like Iraq was never likely to work.

Star Wars: a New Look at Luke

I'm not delighted with the Disney Corporation buying up Lucasfilm, but at least now we may get some more live-action movies. (There have been cartoons, but one look convinced me not to bother.)

Star Wars is the main asset. I doubt that Indiana Jones would work without Harrison Ford: the series about his younger days with different actors had some interesting bits of history but

wasn't that great. Both the world of Willow and that of Labyrinth have possibilities. I sincerely hope we've seen the last of Howard the Duck.

What's promised is the final three episodes of the main Star Wars story, which George Lucas variously talked about, saying contradictory things.9 There are a whole swarm of authorised novels that take the story further, with Luke Skywalker becoming a mature Jedi Master. Timothy Zhan's "Thrawn" trilogy would make a decent set of films, but would need new actors, since Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford are much too old for the time of those books. There has also been talk of a new story in which their film-ages match their real ages, but Mark Hamill hasn't aged well and would be unconvincing.

Or they could ignore all of the books: treat it as an 'Alternate Universe' and re-boot the plot with new actors, as was done very successfully for *Star Trek: Enterprise*. Do something drastic and original, like Vader / Anakin appear to Luke as a force ghost and say "Luke, you are not my only son". So you could have more family dramas amidst the background of an Empire that isn't likely to collapse all at once.

Of course they'll probably do something quite different. They usually do.

Red Flag, Red Sorghum

Is Europe getting reconciled to China becoming the world's Number Two without changing much? The award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to author Mo Yan may mean that. He makes criticism of current problems, but within the limits laid down by the party leadership.

No one knows why any of the prizes get awarded, the process is secret. But Mo Yan has a good international reputation. The film version of his novel *Red Sorghum* won first prize in the Golden Bear Awards at the Berlin Film Festival in 1988. His novels have been translated into several languages and been popular in many countries, which is a criterion for this global prize. A judge might validly vote for him while believing there were other Chinese writers who were better, if

it were the case that those writers were little known outside of China.

The Chinese Dissident movement protested, of course. It has turned out to be a remarkably ineffective dissident movement, having little substance apart from Western support. That support continues for now, at least in Britain. The BBC keeps on mentioning income inequality in China, much more often than other countries. It also fails to mention that in terms of wealth, China is much less unequal than the norm. Most of the new wealth has been made in fast-moving businesses, generally businesses producing something useful.

The dissidents objected to the award to a fellow-countryman: they have to go on playing the West's game or become wholly marginal. Thus:

"Dissident artist Ai Weiwei spoke out against him [Mo Yan], calling him someone who 'will always stand on the side of power'."10 Which is true enough: he chooses to take a moderate line with the powerful Communist Party that has raised China from the chaos, weakness and poverty it was suffering in 1949. Ai Weiwei chooses to stand with another sort of power, the vast, unfriendly and bungling power of the USA, still closely supported by the UK and more loosely by the rest of Europe. No doubt he believes that those powers mean well for his people, mean better than home-grown leaders. I doubt he has looked closely at the mess in Iraq.

A continuation of the current peaceful rise of India and China will in due course make China the Number One power, with India Number Two and the USA reduced to Number Three. If you think that the USA would be happy to allow it so long as human rights and democracy are respected, then you are a complete fool when it comes to politics.

China Expects Another Successful Decade

If a country aligned with the West had quadrupled its economy since 2002 and extended basic welfare to a majority of the population, I'm sure the British media would be saying "how wonderful"

and be keen that this winning formula be continued. No one demands that a football manager be fired when his team wins nine games in a row. But since it's an achievement by China, the main threat to the global Anglo hegemony, excuses are found to bitch and to tell the Chinese they urgently need to abandon their system and copy the West more closely.

The Economist – heirs to the people who successfully urged the British ruling class to let the Irish starve during the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s – are the moderate voice of globalisation. Like many British institutions, they switched to the rising USA when the British Empire was clearly ruined. And this particular smooth-talking well-informed and frequently witty magazine can sound very plausible. Plausible until you notice that the rise to influence of their magazine and a broader class it represented coincides quite nicely with the start of the British Empire's long decline as the dominant world power.

The 1840s was the peak of Britain's role as 'Workshop of the World'. If you see the Industrial Revolution as the spreading by capitalist methods of new technologies based on science, then you'd not expect British dominance to last long. Other European nations were just as familiar with capitalist methods, had often invented basic ideas which the British later picked up. Modern science emerged first as a network of individuals communicating mostly in Latin, with Italians and Germans playing the biggest role. Italian science was silenced by the Counter-Reformation, but French and German science were at least as strong, maybe stronger, and there was well-developed science of many of the smaller nations of Europe. As this was translated into modern industry, following Britain's example, Britain's advantage was under threat. How was it to be preserved?

The answer given by The Economist and many others was Free Trade. Since this failed in fact to save the British Empire, already weakening before the drastic losses and nominal victory of the First World War, it might seem rational to say that it was the wrong answer. That the rival idea of a protectionist Empire co-existing with other equally protectionist world blocks would have better served

the interests of Imperial Britain. But that's not the view that by The Economist takes. It stands proudly on its record, including the neglect of the Irish, as was set out in its official history.¹¹

Letting millions of Irish starve or emigrate during the 1840s wasn't just immoral, it was foolish. It almost certainly shortened the lifetime of the Empire, since the upsurge of Irish Republicanism during and after World War One was a major setback. Being mean-minded in the 1840s was a short-term saving that greatly reduced the chances of integrating the Irish as loyal servants on the second tier of the vast hierarchy of the British Empire. Enough of them were willing to accept such a role even after the famine, willing to be unofficially inferior to English, Welsh and Scots so long as they were confirmed as superior to other Europeans and a vast non-white mass who were the bulk of the Empire. But the famine was never forgotten. It was often identified as "the starvation", because it was only potatoes that had failed. Lots of other crops were grown, but the government followed Free Trade rules and would not interfere with existing commercial contracts.

To judge the usefulness of what The Economist advises now, consider the long results of past advice. Looking at the prospects for another 10-year hand-over of power in China – still not officially announced as I write¹², they say:

"A recurring theme of commentary by both the 'left' (meaning, in China, those who yearn for more old-style communism) and the 'right' (as economic and political reformers are often termed) is that dangers are growing at an alarming rate. Leftists worry that the party will implode, like its counterparts in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe, because it has embraced capitalism too wholeheartedly and forgotten its professed mission to serve the people. Rightists worry that China's economic reforms have not gone nearly far enough and that political liberalisation is needed to prevent an explosion of public resentment. Both sides agree there is a lot of this, over issues ranging from corruption to a huge and conspicuous gap between rich and poor."¹³

Of course it wasn't just the Soviet Communist Party who suffered when first Gorbachev and then Yeltsin 'embraced capitalism too wholeheartedly'. The economy shrank, the death rate shot up and a lot of the wealth of the nation passed to people who were hybrids of speculator and gangster. Russia was relatively lucky in that Yeltsin eventually realised his error and put in Putin, who stopped the rot. But Russia has slid well down the world rankings, having been clear Number Two from 1945 to 1989. Almost a dream come true for the Anglosphere, except that they proved massively incompetent when it came to using this new-found hegemony. The West made no solid gains apart from Eastern Europe (which would be better called Middle-Europe). Of course it takes no particular political skills to persuade Poles to hate Russians, and most of the other liberated nations had been resentful of that power for decades. But if there's a split between Continental Europe and the Anglosphere, or a split between the USA and Europe that leaved the UK stranded in the middle, the countries of the former Soviet Block are likely to stick with Europe. The brief dream of a New Europe embracing US values perished when US values became poisonous with the current economic crisis.

The Chinese seem well aware of this and determined to stick to methods that have worked:

"The social unrest caused by Russia's 'shock therapy,' Latin America's 'radical reform,' or certain African countries' copying of the U.S. political system proves that slavish imitation of Western democracy will lead to turmoil. Democracy takes various forms according to different national condition, and good democracy should first suit a country's national conditions. China has attached great importance to the people's livelihood and incremental reform, and pursued suitable democracy through gradual innovation in a pragmatic manner."¹⁴

China after Mao opted for a more moderate version of socialism, a system that Mao himself was willing to allow at times, until he found that the USA was going to be implacably hostile and determines to restore the Kuomintang whatever he might do. People tend to

forget that the USA kept China out of the United Nations and insisted that the rump Kuomintang regime was the real government of China until the early 1970s. Or that Chiang Kaishek repeatedly promised to take back the mainland, which was a joke if based on his own forces but would have become deadly serious if the USA had been able to win its war in South Vietnam and look for new targets.

Mao had reason to take a hard line and treat anyone with Western connections as a potential traitor until the US normalised relationships. By that time Mao had created a very high level of collectivism and wanted to keep it. After his death his heirs decided to allow elements of capitalism and private enterprise to spring up again, but always under strict control.

"China long ago dumped the core of the communist economic system, replacing rigid central planning with commercially minded state enterprises that coexist with a vigorous private sector. Yet for all their liberalization of the economy, Chinese leaders have been careful to keep control of the commanding heights of politics through the party's grip on the 'three Ps': personnel, propaganda, and the People's Liberation Army.

"The PLA is the party's military, not the country's. Unlike in the West, where controversies often arise about the potential politicization of the military, in China the party is on constant guard for the opposite phenomenon, the depoliticization of the military...

"Perhaps most importantly, the party dictates all senior personnel appointments in ministries and companies, universities and the media, through a shadowy and little-known body called the Organization Department. Through the department, the party oversees just about every significant position in every field in the country. Clearly, the Chinese remember Stalin's dictate that the cadres decide everything...

"Under the reforms kick-started by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, the party has gradually removed itself from the private lives of all but the most recalcitrant of dissidents. The waning in the 1980s and 1990s of the old cradle-to-

grave system of state workplaces, health care, and other social services also dismantled an intricate system of controls centered on neighborhood committees, which among other purposes were used for snooping on ordinary citizens.

"The party has benefited hugely from this shift, even if many young people these days have little knowledge of what the party does and consider it irrelevant to their lives. That suits party leaders perfectly. Ordinary people are not encouraged to take an interest in the party's internal operations, anyway."¹⁵

This comes from a blog, but a blog at an official site called Global Times, so perhaps it puts the 'insider' view in blunter language than could be done officially.

On the matter of welfare, there was a gap between workplace-based welfare and a more Western-style system that was worrying but has now been largely filled:

"A decade ago, 147 million urban employees and 55 million rural residents had pension coverage. Now 229 million urban employees are covered, and 449 million rural and urban residents; 124 million are already receiving payments. A few years ago, barely 20% of rural dwellers had medical insurance; now 96% of the population are covered.

"While inequality has soared over the past decade – the gap between town and country has expanded, with rural dwellers enjoying less than a third of average urban incomes on official measures and perhaps as little as a fifth according to experts – research by Tony Saich of Harvard University found that satisfaction with the government had actually gone up between 2003 and 2011.

"Strikingly, significant increases were seen among the poorest and the wealthiest. 'When we started, those in the poorest categories were least satisfied with the local government,' Saich said. 'That's where I think things like the dibao [a subsidy for the poorest] and some kind of medical insurance have improved their view.'¹⁶

The same article says

"There are obvious funding problems. The pensions of current retirees are being paid by new workers ... and the demographics are working against the system. China is ageing rapidly and its workforce is shrinking. In 2000, there were six workers for every person over 60. By 2030, there will be barely two."¹⁷

This would logically imply that the young should shoot the surplus elderly, both in China and the West, which will have the same problem rather sooner. Of course it's not saying that: the argument relies on the New Right dogma that old people living off welfare paid for by taxes are a burden, but old people living off private wealth are an asset. This has been accepted as an unwelcome truth by many on the left, but in fact there is no logic to it.

People fail to realise that money is just an agreed set of social relationships – that private wealth is just an agreed entitlement, not different in kind from a right to a portion of taxes, with both dependent on real wealth created by work and knowledge. It ignores the basic truth that a richer society can afford to support large numbers of old people from the wealth that most of them would have created during their time as workers.

Goodbye, Han Suyin

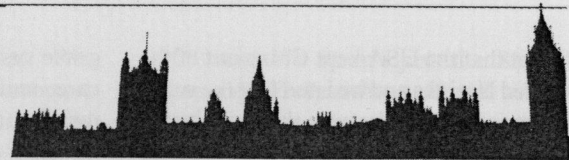
Elizabeth Comber, born Rosalie Matilda Kuanghu Chow and best known by her pen-name Han Suyin (China's Little Writer) has just died. She became famous for *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing*, a romantic novel based on a real romance she had had. When published in 1952, it was controversial for a love that crossed the race barrier: her parents were a Chinese engineer who studied in Europe and a Flemish mother with aristocratic connections.

It was controversial but popular, society was already beginning to change.

Much less well received was *And the Rain My Drink*, which gave an accurate picture of the suppression of Communism by the British in Malaya, at a time when the official British line was that it was just a bunch of bandits.

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Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Trident: Yes Or No?

On 17 October Tory backbencher Dr Julian Lewis asked David Cameron, "Whether he remains committed to the continuation of the UK's Trident nuclear deterrent after the Vanguard submarines are withdrawn from service." Recent questions of a similar nature have received an ambiguous reply, but on this occasion Cameron was absolutely clear. "My hon. Friend will be delighted to know that the answer is yes, we are committed to retaining an independent nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile system. That is why we have continued with the programme to replace the vanguard class submarines, including placing initial design contracts with BAE systems." But last June (see PNs in Labour Affairs No 229 July/August 2012) Defence Secretary Philip Hammond told MPs that "The government's policy is that the Vanguard class will be replaced at the end of its life in the late 2020s by a successor strategic missile submarine carrying the Trident missile, subject to a main gate investment approval for the project in 2016." (my emphasis).

Cameron's commitment to retain an independent nuclear deterrent (to what extent is it independent?) is subject to approval being given in 2016, when Labour may be in power. And as on many other issues its position on Trident is unclear. But there is a further complication. If Scotland votes to become independent, what happens to the nuclear bases on its west coast? There is massive opposition to Trident in Scotland. Whichever political party is in power in an independent Scotland – and at the moment it's looking like the SNP – negotiations will have to be held between Edinburgh and London. Can a government at Westminster continue to base Trident in Scotland against the wishes of the Scottish Parliament and the majority of the Scottish people?

A Fair Exchange?

The Tory proposal – the Lib Dems are sceptical about it – that employees in small businesses trade-in some of their employment rights in return for shares in the company is critical to their objective of cutting business "red tape", i.e. getting rid of regulations that make it difficult for employers to hire and fire. But as, in the words of a former Prime Minister, we have the most flexible labour market in Europe, it seems that offering shares in return for giving up certain employment rights is more like an attempt to weaken trade unions were they exist, by integrating employees into the company. But what happens when employees leave the company? Will they be allowed to hold on to their shares or will they be expected to sell them back?

Undaunted by the potential difficulties of the proposal, Jo Swinson, Under Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, announced the launch of a consultation on 18 October on how the Government will establish what she referred to as "their new employment status." She told MPs that, "Under the new employment status, employee owners will have a different set of employment rights and they will be given shares in the company of between £2,000 and £50,000. Any increase in the value of these shares will not be subject to capital gains tax." Just how the value of shares offered will be determined is an interesting question. Will it depend on how far an employee is prepared to go in giving up their employment rights? Will an offer of £50,000 in shares mean having to give up all employment rights? And will this guarantee permanent employment for those employees? Hardly likely.

Iraq: Bring Out The Bodies

On 16 October Foreign Secretary William Hague told MPs that the Government are publishing a new Iraq strategy. "Iraq is changing," he said. "After years of conflict and uncertainty, it has a democratically elected Government and is gradually becoming more stable, although a serious threat from terrorism remains. Our Government are committed to a broad and enduring relationship with Iraq. We want to support a stable, prosperous and democratic Iraq that is a positive and influential regional actor in a region that is vital to UK security and prosperity. We wish to strengthen our commercial ties with a regional economy of growing importance. To that end we have taken several steps to strengthen the UK's partnership with Iraq."

"Over the past 18 months, there have been 15 ministerial visits between the UK and Iraq, covering our foreign policy, security and commercial interests, including a visit I made in September. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has supported visits to the United Kingdom by the Iraqi Parliament's committees for security and defence, human rights, finance, and foreign affairs. This has helped to develop links between the United Kingdom and Iraqi Parliaments and to support Iraqi democracy. We have taken steps to increase our economic relationship with Iraq. Our embassy in Baghdad has supported numerous delegations of British businesses seeking to re-enter the Iraqi market. We will shortly open a new visa application centre in Baghdad, meaning that Iraqis will no longer need to travel outside of the country to obtain a UK visa, which will make it easier for British businesses to do business with Iraq. During my recent visit to Baghdad, I also agreed to establish a ministerial trade council of British and Iraqi Ministers and business leaders to increase trade and investment links between the two countries."

One can't help but notice the emphasis on business and trade in Hague's statement. It's as if the invasion of Iraq had had an economic purpose. Perish the thought. But what does one make of Hague's claim that Iraq is becoming more stable, although a serious threat from terrorism remains? It's certainly true that there has been a noticeable decline in the number of daily deaths in Iraq. At its height in 2006 the number reached 75 a day. And this has fallen to 12 a day in 2012. If 12 people a day were killed in the UK as a result of terrorism, the Government would declare the country to be in a state of war, and severe restrictions would be placed on people's movements. But such was the horror brought about by the invasion of Iraq that Hague announces that it is becoming more stable, on the grounds that over the last four years the average daily death rate has been 12.

Blair once claimed that Saddam Hussein had killed more than a million of his own people, and he used this to justify his support for the invasion of Iraq. This figure was never challenged. A more reliable estimate puts the figure at 900,000, but this includes 600,000 killed during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s, when the West armed and supported Saddam Hussein, and a further 100,000 during the

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It also offended the Communists, showing real weaknesses rather than the untouchable heroic ideal that was necessary for the success of the movement, where it succeeded. But Zhou Enlai decided she was useful as a friendly external voice, when she came back to China and thought she could be part of the big modernisation. Given her privileged background and the fact that she had married a Kuomintang officer who became a general, it was lucky for her that she followed Zhou's advice and became a detached admirer. She wrote a series of interesting autobiographical works, beginning with *The Crippled Tree*. As well as telling her own tale, she gives an excellent account of the weakness, corruption and neuroticism of pre-Communist China.

Interestingly, Han Suyin fits a set of Chinese ladies who've blossomed with Western husbands or lovers. None of

first Gulf War in the early 1990s. Estimates of the number of those who disappeared into the hands of Saddam's secret police never to be heard from again suggest it could be 200,000, or 23 per day over Saddam's 24 year reign. A conservative estimate of the numbers killed since the 2003 invasion is 110,000. So, in less than ten years the invasion has resulted in 110,000 deaths, or 29 a day and still counting, while during the 24 years of Saddam's brutal reign, 200,000, or 23 a day, died. (Numbers from Iraq Body Count, but for a detailed assessment of the deaths and a critical account of the invasion of Iraq, go to www.david-morrison.org.uk).

Syria: UK Supports The "Opposition."

On 18 October William Hague informed MPs of the latest developments in Syria. Once again Hague laid the blame for the violence and deaths on the Assad regime. He said that the UK is supporting the Syrian people and political opposition without any indication of who they are. He also said that Assad must step aside in the interests of the Syrian people, as if

them connected to the others yet following a similar pattern. One of the unexplained patterns one finds in human affairs.

Her old friend Prince Sihanouk also died recently. I'd not have bothered mentioning him, except that the obituary in *The Economist* includes a useful admission of why he failed:

"He was indifferent to the poverty of the countryside, the corruption of his officials and the spread of communist cells; his peasants he saw as disobedient children who needed to be put in their place. After one revolt, the heads of villagers were displayed in the capital on spikes.

"Meanwhile, his diplomatic neutrality was cracking too. As Vietcong in their thousands sought sanctuary from American firepower in the jungles of eastern Cambodia, he let them stay—and in 1970

he had no support among the people. It is difficult to imagine that he could remain in power without broad support in Syria, not just from Alawites, a Shia sect, who make up a mere 10 per cent of the population, but also from other religious groups, including Sunni who account for 65 per cent of the population. But by urging Assad to step aside he is guaranteeing that the violence will continue. No political leader would willingly step aside when his position is threatened and the country he leads is under siege.

This is what Hague, darling of the Tory grass roots, told MPs. "The situation in Syria remains dire. More than 25,000 have died since March 2011. The UN estimates there are over 2.5 million people inside Syria in need of humanitarian help and over 340,000 Syrian refugees who have fled from the brutality of the regime to neighbouring countries. The British objective is a peaceful end to the violence and a political transition to a more democratic Syria. We believe that Assad must step aside in the interests of the Syrian people if a sustainable transition is to occur.....We continue to believe that there is a need for a chapter VII resolution putting the full weight of the Security Council behind a peaceful settlement and will continue our efforts to that end. However, in the absence of

his generals, with American backing, organised a putsch against him. Outraged at this treachery, he threw his support behind Cambodia's communists ('Khmers Rouges', in his dismissive phrase), giving them legitimacy at a stroke. In 1975 they seized power."18

Cambodian society was a mess in 1970, but might possibly have muddled through without too much damage, had it been left alone. The Vietnamese used it as a base but otherwise left it alone. It was the USA that destroyed Cambodia, as part of a half-arsed scheme to win the Vietnam War. Having been following the war closely at the time, I remember the brief run of a story about "COSVN", a Vietcong command centre in Cambodia that the USA was going to find and destroy. At the time, many people said that the "command centre" was likely to be 4 men under a tree.

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Russian and Chinese agreement to such a resolution we are intensifying our work in four areas: supporting the Syrian people and political opposition; increasing pressure on the Syrian regime; preparing for a political transition; and helping mitigate the humanitarian and regional effects of the crisis."

"First, in our work to support the Syrian opposition, we have expanded our assistance to those in parts of Syria where the regime is no longer in control. With the £5 million non-lethal assistance that I announced in August we have trained citizen journalists and other activists in media skills; and in the coming weeks we will train civil society groups to document human rights violations; train doctors to gather evidence on sexual and gender-based violence; and train a network of 'active citizens' in peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills. We are also providing generators, communication equipment and water purification kits to unarmed opposition groups and civil society organisations in some of the worst areas affected by the violence."

"We are at the forefront of international community activity to support the international and external opposition to become a viable political alternative to the Assad regime. On 18 September the UK's special representative to the Syrian opposition chaired a meeting of countries to agree a strategy to encourage the opposition to unify and present a common vision for Syria. We are working with Qatar to support an inclusive opposition conference in Doha at the start of next month. We have made clear the importance of the opposition reaching out to all elements of Syrian society to reassure them of their place in Syria of the future."

"Secondly, the UK is leading efforts to increase pressure on the Assad regime and to deny it sources of finance with which to buy more weapons. We helped to secure the latest round of EU sanctions agreed on 15 October which targets senior members of the Assad Government we believe share responsibility for the regime's violent repression of the Syrian people. We also remain at the forefront of the international community in calling

for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court to ensure that the perpetrators of the most serious international crimes will be held to account. With our strong support, the Human Rights Council in Geneva adopted a resolution on 28 September which condemned the continuing violence in Syria and extended the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry to enable it to continue its invaluable work in documenting human rights violations and abuses."

It won't have escaped the notice of the reader that this is an entirely one sided account of what is happening in Syria. Nor that it reads as if Assad is being unreasonable by not stepping aside and is killing people for the pure pleasure of it. In Hague's world the opposition have an unanswerable case for taking over the reins of power, even though the USA is more sceptical knowing that the opposition includes a group linked to Al-Qaeda. It also won't have escaped the notice of readers that the UK is working with Qatar in support of the opposition. Hague makes much of the UK not supplying the opposition with lethal weapons, but is working with Qatar, a country that is. And Labour seems to agree with Hague. On 17 October The Independent carried a piece by Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander. In it he said, "This is no longer simply the brutal repression of a popular uprising, or even a Syrian Civil War – it is assuming the characteristics of a regional conflict.....A regional diplomatic response involving the Saudis, Iranians, Turks and Egyptians has come to nothing. Efforts should now focus on uniting the divided Syrian opposition – the only basis for establishing a credible transition plan involving all components of Syrian society, including the Alawites." And of course the UK knows all about uniting a divided opposition doesn't it? Just look at Libya.

Hillsborough: Justice In Sight?

The Hillsborough families quest for justice received a huge boost on 16 October when Attorney-General Dominic Grieve announced to the House of Commons that he intended to apply to the High Court for an order quashing the original inquests on those who died on 15

April 1989. Grieve told MPs, "Following the publication of the Hillsborough panel report I have been considering whether to apply to the High Court for an order quashing the original inquests and ordering new inquests to be held. The High Court will have the power to grant such an order if I place before it evidence that persuades the Court that new inquests are necessary or desirable in the interests of justice. My consideration of the evidence is far from complete but, given the anxiety further delay may cause the families affected by the Hillsborough disaster, I have decided to take an exceptional course and state at this stage that, on the basis of what I have already seen, I have determined that I must make an application to the court."

"In doing so I should make it clear that further work will need to be done before any application can be made. In particular, there was not one inquest but 96. My current view is that I will apply to have every one of those 96 inquests quashed. I believe that these deaths, arising as they do from a common chain of events, should all be considered afresh. However, before reaching any final view on the scope of the application, I want to give the families affected the opportunity to make any representations in respect of the family members or members they lost. I will therefore be in contact with each family seeking views."

"The application is not simply a matter of putting the Hillsborough panel report before the Court. The application will need to be fully prepared and the evidence that underpins the report's findings will need to be carefully considered. I want the application that is made to be as persuasive as it can be. While I make this statement at this stage to reassure the families that an application will be made, it must be understood that there are legal as well as evidential issues to be considered. Although this work is being given a high priority, further time will be needed to prepare the application."

The Attorney-General's decision to apply for an order quashing the original inquests is based on evidence given to the Hillsborough panel and from which the panel concluded in its report, "In the Coroner's summing up he accepted that had resuscitation been administered cor-

rectly, and before the onset of 'irretrievable brain damage', some of those who died might have survived. Taken literally, this comment raises concerns about the sufficiency of inquiry into the period of rescue and resuscitation." (Hillsborough. The Report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel. Report Summary. Page 22, Para. 123.) "In the well-documented case of Kevin Williams and successive submissions by his family to the Attorney-General, the initial pathologist's opinion appeared definitive, but further authoritative opinions raised significant doubts about the accuracy of that initial opinion." (Report Summary. Page 22, Para. 124.). "The documents disclosed show that, considered alongside the restrictions placed by the Coroner on the examination of the evidence presented to the mini-inquests and the presentation of the pathologists' medical opinion as incontrovertible, the imposition of the 3.15pm cut-off severely limited examination of the rescue, evacuation and treatment of those who died. This raised profound concerns regarding sufficiency of inquiry and examination of evidence." (Report Summary. Page 22, Para.125.).

Six days later, on 22 October, MPs met to consider the report of the Hillsborough panel. In opening the debate Home Secretary Teresa May said, "The whole House will want to join me in thanking the Bishop of Liverpool and all members of the panel for their thorough and revealing report. The panel's report was shocking and disturbing, and the families of the victims must have found its contents harrowing. But although it is painful and will make many people angry, the report brings the full truth of Hillsborough into the light of day. The truth that some have long known or suspected is now clear for all to see and to respect. I believe my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke for all of us in the House when he apologised to the families of the 96 for what he called the 'double injustice' that they have suffered: first, the injustice of the appalling events and the indefensible wait to get to the truth; and secondly, the injustice of what he called 'the denigration of the deceased' – the suggestion that those who died were somehow responsible for their own deaths and for those of their friends and fellow fans."

Then May came to the question of accountability for what happened at Hillsborough. She said, "But after truth comes justice; and after the apology, accountability. So let me set out for the House what is happening now. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has announced an investigation into the panel's findings. The investigation will cover potential criminality and misconduct in respect of police officers, both serving and retired. It will be thorough and wide-ranging. As I have previously said, I remain committed to ensuring that the IPCC has all the powers and resources it needs to carry out its investigations thoroughly, transparently and exhaustively. The Government are already looking at what additional powers the IPCC will need, which includes proposals to require current and ex-police officers who may be witness to a crime to attend an interview, and whether this might require fast-track legislation. I therefore welcome what the Shadow Home Secretary set out at the weekend about the opportunity for us to sit down and discuss the proposals, and to see whether fast-track legislation is the right way forward – I think my office has already been in touch with hers to try to get a suitable date in mind."

These are fine words, but fine words butter no parsnips. What confidence can the Hillsborough families have that the IPCC will carry out its investigations "thoroughly, transparently and exhaustively," when there is no record of it having done so in the past? Tell that to the family of Ian Tomlinson or Mark Dugan. And it is truly astounding that currently the IPCC does not have the powers to force a police officer to appear before it. If fast-track legislation is required to rectify this, then let's have it. But as May admitted, it is not only the police who need to be called to account. She told MPs, "In addition to the question about the IPCC's powers in the investigation, it is also important to recognise that, in the case of Hillsborough, a number of individuals and organisations other than the police or ex-police officers will be investigated.....As I have already mentioned, there were issues around the operation of the ambulance service, for example. Further public sector bodies might be involved. Those who are looking at the report are determining which bodies need

to be investigated, and the list is currently being compiled. I can, however, commit that we will provide a list for the House at an appropriate point in due course, so that everyone is able to see all the bodies that are involved."

It is right that other individuals and organisations should be called to account, but the prime responsibility, as the Hillsborough panel report and the Taylor report before it, recognises, lies with the police, and particularly with individual senior police officers. In her contribution to the debate, Labour's Maria Eagle (Liverpool Garston & Halewood) referred to one such individual. She told MPs, "Hillsborough is something that I have campaigned on since I was first elected in 1997. As a lawyer by trade, I am dismayed to see the utter failure of the legal system to right the wrongs and smears of Hillsborough. Only Taylor's interim report partially succeeded. All the other legal proceedings – from the inquests to the civil actions, the contribution proceedings, the judicial reviews, the criminal investigations, the Stuart-Smith scrutiny, and the private prosecutions--failed. The Hillsborough independent panel has succeeded. It has enabled the incontrovertible truth of what happened on the day and subsequently to be spread beyond Merseyside."

"Accountability, especially for the black propaganda campaign, matters very much to this House. Those who ordered and orchestrated that campaign have had many years of impunity to enjoy their burgeoning careers. One of the people I named in this House in 1998 as being involved in orchestrating it is Sir Norman Bettison, currently Chief Constable of West Yorkshire police but at the time a chief inspector, then superintendent, in South Yorkshire police. I should make it clear that he has always denied any involvement in the 'dirty tricks campaign', as Trevor Hicks has somewhat mildly dubbed it – the black propaganda campaign, I call it – in public statements."

"I have here a letter from which I would like to read an extract. It was written in 1998 to Ann Adlington, then a solicitor working for the Hillsborough family support group. It is from Mr John Barry, who says that he was at Hillsborough and saw the disaster unfold. He sent

it to me with a covering letter in 2009, and has recently given me permission to make it public. It says: 'I was doing a part-time MBA at Sheffield Business School. One of my fellow students was a middle ranking police officer with South Yorkshire Police...Some weeks after the game and after I had been interviewed by West Midlands Police, we were in a pub after our weekly evening class. He told me that he had been asked by his senior officers to put together the South Yorkshire Police evidence for the forthcoming inquiry. He said that 'we are trying to concoct a story that all the Liverpool fans were drunk and we were afraid that they were going to break down the gates, so we decided to open them'. I was quite astounded that he had shared this information with me, knowing that I had been very close to the scene of the disaster and had been greatly affected by it. We didn't discuss it further.'

"Mr Barry confirmed to me in the covering letter in 2009 that the middle-ranking officer to whom he refers is Norman Bettison. He has agreed to swear a statement to that effect and I have put him in touch with the families' solicitors. Here we have an account of a contemporaneous conversation in which Norman Bettison boasts that he is engaged in a South Yorkshire police plot to fit up the Liverpool fans and deflect blame from the force. That is indeed what happened subsequently, so what Sir Norman denies in public he boasts about in a private conversation. Sir Norman Bettison has given inconsistent accounts publicly over the years about what his role was. In late 1998, when he was appointed chief constable of Merseyside, he accepted that he was a member of what the Hillsborough independent panel calls the Wain unit. In a written statement he said: 'The unit was tasked with looking at what happened on the day of the disaster...The unit also liaised with and passed information to WM police who were undertaking the formal and independent investigation into the disaster....After the immediate work of the unit was complete, I was given a specific role to monitor the public inquiry and the inquest and brief the Chief Constable on progress.'

"On 13 September 2012, the day after the panel's report was published, Norman Bettison put out a statement exonerating

himself and restating two of the Hillsborough smears that were part of the black propaganda campaign I referred to in 1998, namely that fan behaviour made the police's job more difficult and that Liverpool fans arrived late at the ground and caused a surge at the Leppings Lane end. In the 2012 statement he said about his role: 'Shortly after the conclusion of the Taylor Inquiry, I was posted to other duties. I had nothing further to do with the subsequent Coroners Inquests and proceedings.' That is completely different from what he said in 1998 about having a special task reporting to the chief constable until after the inquests. It is my belief that Norman Bettison has always known more than he has admitted to publicly. I met him one to one in my parliamentary office in late 1998 at the request of Sir David Henshaw, the then clerk to the Merseyside police authority, following the understandable furore that erupted when Norman Bettison was appointed chief constable of Merseyside. At that meeting he let slip the liability split in the contribution proceedings---in other words, the percentage of the blame that South Yorkshire would accept for the disaster when paying out damages. That was very sensitive information from South Yorkshire police's point of view and it was never made public; it was a requirement of the settlements that it be kept secret."

"I knew what percentage of the blame each defendant had agreed to accept, because as a trainee solicitor at Brian Thompson and Partners I had legally privileged access to some of my principal's Hillsborough files. My principal was on the Hillsborough steering committee of lawyers, dealing with civil litigation on behalf of some families. Only someone who was at the heart of dealing with Hillsborough from the South Yorkshire police side would have known what percentage of the blame they accepted, and Norman Bettison knew that information. The Hillsborough independent panel report itself suggests that Norman Bettison had a much wider role than he has admitted. He was present and took notes at the five-hour meeting between senior officers and the South Yorkshire police legal team on 26 April 1989, at which it was decided that officers would write their own statements instead of having them taken. That would not have been usual

practice."

"Norman Bettison compiled and introduced a video for South Yorkshire police, which was shown on 3 October 1989 to Michael Shersby MP, who represented the interests of the Police Federation in Parliament, and which tried to emphasise aspects of the disaster that deflected blame from the police. He also brought it to Westminster and showed it to more MPs, in an attempt to undermine Taylor's findings that South Yorkshire police were to blame for the disaster. Norman Bettison was involved in what looks like a crude attempt to smear and discredit Lord Justice Taylor, as reported by The Independent on Sunday on 16 September 2012, which led to the then chief constable of South Yorkshire police, Peter Wright, travelling to see the Director of Public Prosecutions to suggest that Taylor should be charged with perverting the course of justice. He also received daily reports of how well the smears were being received by the coroner at the inquests---the means by which police sought to undermine Taylor's report and achieve historical revisionism. I very much welcome the Independent Police Complaints Commission investigation into his role."

This is a devastating contribution to the quest for justice for the 96 and their families. Since Maria Eagle spoke Sir Norman Bettison has announced his retirement from the police force. It came shortly before a meeting of the West Yorkshire Police Authority to discuss his role in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster. He therefore avoids possible disciplinary action, and will keep his pension, but he will no doubt be asked to appear before the Independent Police Complaints Commission. He has, as one would expect, dismissed the claim by Maria Eagle that he helped to concoct a false version of events for the tragedy as "incredible and wrong." Bettison, of course, is not the only senior police officer who will be called before the Independent Police Complaints Committee, but his subsequent role as described by Maria Eagle was critical to the cover up by South Yorkshire Police. The steps forward announced by the Attorney-General and the Home Secretary are just the beginning of what could be a long process. There will be no swift justice for the 96,

but justice there must be.

Richard 111: Bring Up The Body.

Richard 111, the last Plantagenet King of England, was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. History has not been kind to him. He is widely accused of the murders of his two young nephews, one of whom, Edward, should have become King Edward V, in the Tower of London. He was described by Archbishop Moreton as a monster of abominable cruelty, which rather fits him up for the aforementioned murders. After the death of Edward IV in 1483, Richard was acclaimed King on a show of hands, or rather a small chorus of voices. Upon his death, his body was taken to the Grey Friars in Leicester and quietly buried. Some historical sources claim that after some time his remains were exhumed and thrown into the River Soar. On a nearby building an inscription read: "Near this spot lie the remains of Richard 111, last of the Plantagenets, 1485."

Fast forward 527 years to 25 October 2012 and MPs are discussing where to lay to rest the remains of Richard 111 believed to have been discovered near Leicester. In response to questions from Labour's John Mann (Bassetlaw) and Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) on the re-burying of Richard 111, Sir Tony Baldry said, "The remains that are thought to be those of Richard 111 are at present with Leicester city council's museums department and the university of Leicester's archeological department, which are carrying out tests to see whether it can be demonstrated that the remains are indeed those of Richard 111. Once those tests are concluded, the nature, place and marking of any reinternment will need seriously to be considered."

Baldry went on to say, "I was concerned about how many other kings might come up, as I never thought my career would involve the question of how we might bury kings. I am glad to say that the Church can account for all of them. I am afraid to say that the head of Charles 1, king and martyr, is still separated from his body, but they are both at St George's Windsor. The only one still missing is Henry 1, who seems to have got lost somewhere in Reading after the

dissolution of the monasteries. I can account for all the other kings and queens being properly and Christianly buried."

It seems odd that MPs should spend their time squabbling over where to bury what may be the remains of a king who died 527 years ago and who for many people was, to put it mildly, not a nice person. But then kings in the middle ages were not noted for their kindly disposition. A number were serial adulterers and murderers, who fathered countless numbers of children and eliminated rivals and genuine successors to the throne. Henry 1, for example, son of William the Conqueror, had a large number of mistresses by whom he had at least 20 sons and an unknown number of daughters. He may also have been involved in the death of his brother William 11 (William Rufus) who was killed by his own men while hunting in the New Forest in 1100. Should the remains found in Leicester be those of Richard 111, and he is given a 'Christian' burial, let's hope that a search party is not gathered to find the remains of Henry 1.

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Or elements of it may have been scattered in deep tunnels within Vietnam: it has since emerged that the Vietcong had more tunnels and deeper tunnels than the USA ever knew about. Former US commander General Westmorland believed till the end that COSVN was real, just unfortunately not found. Unlike Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction", it is hard to disprove. But still very unlikely.

Cambodia was shattered by the USA pursuing what was almost certainly a myth. The ensuring chaos led to an immense increase in strength by the Khmers Rouges, chaos usually favouring radical authoritarians or ruthless conservatives and disappointing any anarchists that may be around. (I've not heard there were any in Cambodia, but there were plenty in Russia and Spain and even a few in China. Mao as a young man was interested in anarchism, but correctly concluded that it would achieve nothing in a country already torn apart by rival warlords.)

The Khmers Rouges failed to cope with several years of chaos and bombing, followed by the USA casually dumping

its supporters in Indochina and leaving Cambodia with the threat of a Vietnamese invasion. It was an early example of what has become a familiar pattern: the USA smashes an imperfect system and then evades responsibility when something worse follows.

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Iran is not alone

John Cherian

The successful Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran shows that Iran is far from being isolated internationally and that in fact it remains a major player in the West Asian region.

The 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) took place in Tehran from August 26 to 31 at a time when war clouds were hovering over the horizon in West Asia. Israel was making repeated military threats against Iran and the situation in Syria was threatening to get out of control. Israel and its major ally, the United States, tried to persuade India, Egypt and other important countries to either boycott the summit or send low-level delegations. But Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could not have avoided a trip to Tehran given India's status as a founding member of the movement. Besides, a visit by the Indian Prime Minister had been long-pending. India was duty-bound to allay the misgivings in Iran about some of its recent policy decisions relating to the imposition of unilateral sanctions by the West. Also, bilateral issues needed to be discussed.

Ahead of the summit, India, Iran and Afghanistan held discussions to finalise the plan to develop the strategic Chabahar port in south-eastern Iran. This port will provide an alternative route for Indian goods to Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. The newly elected Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsy, was present to hand over the NAM presidency to Iran. The last summit was presided over by his ousted predecessor, Hosni Mubarak. Incidentally, Morsy's visit was the first high-level visit by an Egyptian leader since the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The leaders of India, Egypt and Iran were photographed sharing the high table. India and Egypt have a pronounced pro-U.S. tilt in their foreign policies. Iran was perhaps trying to make the point that the U.S. now could not take their support for granted. Indian officials, however, took pains to explain that Manmohan Singh was not aware of the seating arrangements and was taken by surprise when he was positioned next to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Manmohan Singh had long, separate meetings with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Ahmadinejad. India wants to emphasise the idea that it still values its traditional relationship with Iran and will strive to maintain "strategic autonomy" in the conduct of bilateral relations.

Both Washington and Tel Aviv had advised United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon against going to Tehran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had personally appealed to him not to attend the summit, brazenly describing Iran as "a regime that represents the greatest threat to world peace". It is another matter that Ban Ki-moon, in his interaction with the media, mainly echoed the views of Iran's enemies. He dutifully criticised Iran for its human rights record and its stand on Israel and

on the issue of nuclear proliferation.

During his meeting with Ban Ki-moon, Khamenei demanded that the international body take action against Israel's huge unaccounted nuclear arsenal. In his opening speech at the summit, he emphasised that Iran had no desire to possess nuclear weapons. He said possessing nuclear weapons was "a great sin" and called for the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in West Asia. The majority of NAM members are signatories to the NPT. Iran is duty-bound to ensure that there is no violation of the treaty during its three-year tenure as the NAM chair. Iran's non-compliance with the NPT will not go down well with the rest of the NAM members.

Opening the ministerial-level summit, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said his country supported the goal of NAM to abolish all nuclear weapons by 2025. There are an estimated 20,000 nuclear weapons on the planet.

Despite the best efforts of the West, the summit was attended by leaders of almost all the 120 NAM member-states, comprising more than two-thirds of the U.N. membership. Forty heads of state were present in Tehran. In a statement totally devoid of diplomacy, Netanyahu said that the presence of such a large number of leaders in Tehran "was a stain on humanity". The leaders reiterated their resolve to adhere to the broad goals of the movement—non-intervention in internal affairs, non-discrimination and national liberation. These goals, formulated in 1961 by Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser, two of the five founding leaders of the movement, remain valid even today.

The summit in Iran coincided with the 59th anniversary of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-sponsored coup against Mohammad Mossadegh, the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran. NAM is the last big anti-imperialist grouping to remain intact. On top of the Tehran summit's agenda were issues such as Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy, the situation in Syria, the West's double standards on terrorism, and the use of force to settle disputes. International laws and sovereignty of states have been routinely trampled upon since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the advent of a unipolar world. The decolonisation process is yet to be completed.

Before the summit, Ahmadinejad was in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to attend the annual Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting. He shared the dais with the Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, quite prominently. In order to ensure the presence of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the summit, Iran hurriedly cancelled the invitation issued to Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. Ahmadinejad did not raise any contentious issue at the OIC summit despite the unilateral

move to suspend Syria from the organisation in violation of its charter. Ali Akbar Salehi said that suspending Syria was a mistake and that it would only complicate the search for a solution to the conflict in that country. The 57-member OIC, founded in 1969, has the goal of "promoting solidarity among members and upholding peace and security". The Iranian position that the conflict in Syria can be resolved through mediation involving the countries in the region is finding wide acceptance.

Final declaration

In his speech at the summit, Morsy reiterated his call for the removal of the Syrian government but suggested the setting up of a contact group on Syria comprising Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Egypt. This position reflects the line adopted by Russia and China at the Security Council. In the final declaration of the summit, Iran tried to incorporate a paragraph on the Syrian situation decrying outside interference. But owing to strong objections from countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there was no reference to the burning Syrian issue. All decisions in NAM are taken on the basis of consensus.

Ayatollah Khamenei had earlier criticised the role played by the Security Council in world affairs. With the U.N. Secretary-General sitting by his side, Khamenei said that the "control room of the world [the Security Council] is under the control of the dictatorship of some Western countries". He pointed out the irony of the U.S. preaching non-proliferation when it possessed "the largest and deadliest stockpiles of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction and is the only country guilty of their use". He went on to add that the U.S. had helped "the usurping Zionist regime with nuclear weapons and created a major threat for the sensitive region".

NAM member-countries handed Iran a significant diplomatic victory by unanimously supporting Iran's right to peacefully harness nuclear energy. The Tehran Declaration also acknowledged the country's right to ownership of a full fuel cycle, which means the right to uranium enrichment. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released another report on the Iranian nuclear programme to coincide with the NAM summit. Contrary to stories in the Western media, the IAEA report shows that Iran has actually reduced the amount of 20 per cent enriched uranium required to produce weapons-grade enrichment. Iran has wanted to negotiate in good faith with the West on the issue but the U.S., prodded on by Israel, wants to use the nuclear issue to facilitate regime change in Tehran. In late 2010, Iran had offered to keep its enrichment activities below 5 per cent in return for the West providing fuel rods for its reactor. That offer was refused. Iran repeated the offer in 2011 only to be rejected once again by the West.