

Labour Affairs

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Not So Comic Cuts

The Government's claim to be on the side of hard working families received a setback on BBC's Question Time on 15 October. Michelle Dorrell, a working class single mother of four children who voted Tory at the general election because she believed it would be best for her family, launched a near tearful attack on the proposed cuts to tax credits. Her attack was aimed at David Cameron who prior to the election promised that child tax credits would be protected. She said that she struggled at present to care for her children. Trembling with emotion, she stressed that the cuts would put them in an even worse position. Disgusted with Cameron's broken promise, she is now, apparently, supporting Jeremy Corbyn.

Tax credits fall into two categories: Working Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits. From next April, the level at which Working Tax Credits start to be withdrawn will fall from £6,420 a year to £3,850. While the level at which Child Tax Credits are taken away will fall from £16,105 to £12,125. For every pound earned above these new figures tax credits will fall by 48p, with the marginal rate of tax on extra income exceeding 80%. Independent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that around 3.3 million households, 2.7 million with children, will, on average, be £1,300 a year worse off; even when taking into account the increase in the personal tax allowance, improved help with child care and the introduction of the so-called National Living Wage.

The IFS also estimates that the cuts in tax credits will increase the number of children living in poverty from 2.5 million to 2.8 million. And a report by the Resolution Foundation reveals that a further 200,000 households will be living in poverty by 2020. Furthermore, from 2017 Child Tax Credits will be limited to two children. To add insult to injury, the government has got rid of the official child poverty target and removed income poverty from its list of poverty measures. So much for David Cameron's pledge at the Tory party conference to launch "an all-out assault on poverty."

When Gordon Brown introduced tax credits in 2003 as a means of improving family income total expenditure in

the first year, 2003/04, was in the region of £2.7 billion. As family incomes became depressed with increasing numbers of workers entering low paid employment and on zero hours contracts the tax credits bill soared. Today it is around £30 billion. Osborne is partly right to say it is too high. However, the answer is not to take a hatchet to the welfare budget but to pay workers a living wage. Government and business should invest in capital and labour to increase productivity. So as wages rise, the tax credits bill falls.

Osborne claims he is doing this with the introduction of the National Living Wage--in reality an increase in the minimum wage-- to the dizzy height of £9.35 per hour in 2019-20. (It was increased to £6.70 an hour on 1 October.) The facts, however, do not support his claim that the increase in the hourly rate, coupled with other changes, will result in working families being better off. A real improvement in family income would require an hourly rate of at least £12 in 2020. And the increase in personal allowance will help few low-income families, with three quarters of the increase going to those on above-average incomes.

The attack on welfare is a key part of the Government's welfare into work strategy. The Job Seekers' Allowance and other out-of-work benefits have already been cut with the aim of incentivising the unemployed to actively seek work, with most work available at the minimum or below minimum wage. But the cuts in tax credits are an attack on families in work and give a lie to the Tories claim to be the party of labour. Chancellor George Osborne rubs his hands with glee at the prospect of saving £4.5 billion from the welfare budget out of a target of £12 billion over the next five years. On past form this will pave the way for tax cuts, or a further increase in personal allowance, which will benefit high income earners disproportionately.

The Tories have labelled Labour the "Welfare Party." Fearing that this would stick, Harriet Harman, acting Labour leader, recommended abstention on the second reading of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill on 20 July. Harman had clearly forgotten that it is the duty of the opposition to oppose. Her riposte to the charge of Labour as the Welfare Party ought to have been: "Labour is the Welfare State Party,

not the Welfare Party.” John McDonnell was one of 48 Labour MPs who defied Harman and voted against the Bill, with McDonnell famously saying: “I make this clear: I would swim through vomit to vote against the Bill, and listening to some of the nauseating speeches tonight, I think we may have to.”

The UK is the fifth richest nation in the world, so the excuse that we cannot afford to properly fund the welfare state simply doesn't hold water. Corbyn is right: the desire to roll back welfare support is a political decision. The welfare budget currently stands at around £220 billion, with almost one half, £95 billion, paying for pensions and pensioners benefits. Total spending on pensions and associated benefits has increased by 25% since 2009/10, due to increasing life expectancy. And as people continue to live longer expenditure will increase exponentially, particularly if the 'triple-lock' protection mechanism on pensions remains in place. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said this should go. It costs £6 billion a year; more than enough to reverse the cuts in tax credits. But as most pensioners vote and a majority vote Tory we can expect little or no change. Much safer to bash the Working Poor, many of whom say "they're all the same", no matter how many times they get bashed.

While pensions remain protected there have been attacks on other benefits. Household Benefit has been capped at £23,000 within London and £20,000 outside regardless of family size. Both are below the annual average working wage of around £27,000. Life is about to get worse for millions of families. In addition housing benefit will be removed from 18 to 21 year olds making it impossible for them to acquire accommodation. Private sector rents have risen rapidly, creating a spiralling housing benefits bill paid as a subsidy to landlords by taxpayers, just as working tax credits are a form of taxpayer subsidy to low wage paying employers. While this has happened, Osborne has handed a £1 billion inheritance tax cut to owners of houses valued between £650,000 and £1 million.

Osborne is carefully setting traps for Labour. His aim of a budget surplus by 2020 and thereafter, outlined in the Charter for Budget Responsibility is just the latest. Initially, McDonnell was willing to support this but then changed his mind for which he was ridiculed by the Tories and some of his Labour colleagues, twenty one of whom failed to back McDonnell and abstained from voting. Osborne's plan has been described as economic nonsense by former Business Secretary Vince Cable. It has been ridiculed by a range of academic economists. But Osborne stubbornly refuses to change course.* A critical weakness of the Charter is that

running a surplus prevents governments from borrowing to invest.

Meanwhile the right-wing press continue to attack Corbyn. He is accused of being unpatriotic on relatively trivial grounds, while more serious forms of unpatriotic behaviour are ignored. Osborne is selling the nation's assets to foreign buyers, some of them state owned firms in France, Germany and elsewhere. It seems that Osborne welcomes nationalisation as long as it's not British. So which is the more insidious? Not singing the national anthem, which has nothing to do with the nation, or standing idly by while thousands of British workers are thrown out of work by rapacious foreign capitalists and governments over whom we have even less democratic control than our own?

Now China and France will build nuclear power stations at Bradwell, Hinkley Point and Sizewell receiving a generous subsidy at a sky-high cost which the consumer will bear. EDF, and its minority partners (Areva and two Chinese state-owned companies), who will build Hinkley Point, are guaranteed a minimum price, indexed to inflation for 35 years, of £92.50/MWh, compared to the current wholesale price of £40. Consumers and taxpayers are being ripped off and George Osborne considers it a good deal for Britain. Britain is open for business, he says. Yes, other countries' business.

Britain was the first nation to build a nuclear power plant. Its skilled engineers were the envy of the world. It lost those skills when the industry was privatised. Most of the estimated 25,000 construction jobs from the new build, including 6,500 at Hinkley Point, will be filled by foreign labour. Britain needs to re-train its indigenous workers with genuine skills. It needs an industrial strategy that creates well-paid, high quality work. Of course, Labour must oppose the government's attack on the welfare state. It must convince voters that it will not let welfare be abused. It must remind them that the reforming Labour government of 1945-50 was responsible for two decades of fast growth and low unemployment. But its chances of forming the next government must centre on persuading voters it has the remedy for a broken economy.

**Note: On 26 October the House of Lords voted for a delay to the cuts in tax credits while an independent study was carried out. Cameron accused 'unelected' Liberal and Labour Lords of abusing their constitutional position, claiming that the House of Commons had voted three times to support the cuts. But it is not only the Lords who oppose the current*

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

Progress of War (Part 2)

In the last issue we published Churchill's speech of 22 August 1916 on the Progress Of War. Below we set out the response by Labour's Philip Snowden. His speech picks up on Churchill's comments on prices and draws attention to the recruitment of men with a serious invalidity.

Mr SNOWDEN The right hon. Gentleman in the earlier part of his speech was rather severe in his criticism of the Government for their inactivity on this question, but he must take some share, at any rate, of the responsibility they must have in this matter. I was interested in the right hon. Gentleman's observations, because this is not a new question to some of us. Ever since the War began, and for long years before the War broke out, we on these benches were urging the importance of this question. Prices had been rising for fifteen years before the outbreak of the War. There has been an aggravation of tendencies which were previously at work during the last few years. I wonder what is the explanation of the right hon. Gentleman's attitude upon this question. We, by our propaganda in the House and in the country, have made this a popular question, and it has now become so popular that it pays politicians to begin to take an interest in it. Repeatedly during the first twelve months of the War we from these benches urged the Government to do something. We met with no response. Repeatedly, with a great deal more knowledge than the right hon. Gentleman has manifested this afternoon, we have put forward those demands which he has now

stated. In the early days of the War we asked that the Government should take over the shipping of the country, and we were met with precisely the same objections that the right hon. Gentleman was in the habit of throwing at Socialist proposals. I wonder if he knows that the proposal he made this afternoon is a plank in the Socialist platform.

For years the Liberal Publication Department was circulating a speech of the right hon. Gentleman, "An attack upon Socialism," showing the impossibility and impracticability of Socialism, proving how unwise it was to trust the State with anything, and talking about the incompetence of the State. The War has, indeed, made many changes, but surely it has wrought no greater miracle than to convert, the antagonists of Socialism into the protagonists of Socialism. But there are two sorts of Socialism, The "Times" had a remarkable leaderette a week or two ago, which stated that we must have a great deal of Socialism after the war. It said, for instance, that it was inconceivable that the railways should ever pass again under private control. But the kind of Socialism we are to have, it went on to say, was a Socialism which must come from the top and not from the bottom. That is to say, it is a Socialism which is to be imposed upon the; people and not brought about by the people themselves. It is a Socialism which is to be an aid to capitalism and not a Socialism for the benefit of the people. And that is the kind of Socialism to which the right hon. Gentleman has become a convert.

I turn from the right hon. Gentleman's speech to deal with the topic which was the purpose of my rising. I want to call attention to a very grave and urgent matter, namely, the passing into the Army of men who are physically quite unfit. This is not the first

occasion upon which this question has been raised. Other Members, as well as myself, have repeatedly, both by question and in Debate called the attention of the War Office to this serious matter and we have not been alone in directing attention to it. For months past the scandal has been so grave that even tribunals throughout the country have been compelled to protest against the practice. The Deputy-Chairman of this House, who presides over one of the military service tribunals upstairs, has more than once denounced the way in which the Medical board and the military doctors are passing men into the Army who are physically totally unfit. Speaking in March last of men who had provided themselves with evidence of unfitness, he said: They have submitted themselves to medical examination again and have been passed—for general service some of them—some with the remark that they may be of use as non-combatants—I presume that means clerical work at a military office. Mr. Maclean went on to point out what a wasteful policy this was and that it was not using the man-power of the State, to use the phrase of the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Churchill), in the most economical way. Each soldier, he went on, cost something like £300 a year. We do not desire for one moment to be associated with the ignorant outcry which is directed against the War Office in many respects. We realise fully what a tremendous undertaking is theirs, with millions of men flung at them and with a limited and depleted medical service at their disposal, but we do think that, with the evidence put before us, this matter should, in the interests of the State, be promptly and effectively grappled with. Mr. Maclean's protest had no effect, and he had occasion to call attention to the matter a month later in even stronger terms. He had before him a retired Civil servant who was

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cuts package. Many Tory MPs are also unhappy, no doubt fearing a voter backlash in their constituencies. Osborne's response to all this was to promise "transitional help" to those affected, while pressing ahead with the changes to the welfare system. The "transitional help" will probably be set out in the Chancellor's Autumn statement at the end of November. We will return to this subject following the Autumn statement.

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actually in receipt of a pension because of his physical disability. This man was claimed by the military authorities. He had been passed by the medical military authorities as physically fit, and the chairman of the tribunal said: This is another example of the way the Army medical examinations are conducted. In the interests of public economy we say this man should not be subjected to further medical examination. We shall forthwith exempt him.

Mr. Maclean has not been alone among chairmen of tribunals in calling attention to this grave public scandal. We have another Member of this House who is a chairman of an important Appeal Tribunal: I mean the hon. Member (Mr. Nield). He has repeatedly called attention to this scandal in the chair of the tribunal. Repeatedly he has threatened to report cases to the War Office. The most notorious of all the depots in the country for the examination of recruits is Mill Hill. Only a day or two ago a case was reported in the newspapers where a man had tried to enlist ten times. He had been rejected ten times, and finally he was told if he went to Mill Hill he would be passed. He went to Mill Hill and was passed. Only two nights ago a man called at my house. He had appealed to the local tribunal on grounds of physical incapacity. He was a poor, miserable, physical wreck to look at, his hand was crippled, and his fingers were drawn. He was thirty-seven years of age and weighed 7 St. 5½ lb. He had been sent to the military depot at Mill Hill. He was never asked to strip. The doctor examined his finger and said, "You have had a bad thing there some time," and with that examination he was passed for garrison duty abroad. Sir Frederick Milner has repeatedly called attention to this scandal, and has given some very glaring cases which have come under his own observation. I recently had a letter from a man in the Army who is attached to the Somersets, and this is what he said: They are still sending Somersets here. Hundreds came in during the week. It is a crying shame. The men they are sending now ought never to have donned the uniform. One fellow they brought in yesterday they had to carry from the station. He could not walk. There are heaps of consumptives here, fellows with a tile loose, men with short legs, men with weak backs, and men with

other various complaints. Most of these men will be fit for nothing, and it is only an expense for the country keeping them here. This sort of thing is not confined to one part of the country only. I could produce evidence, if time permitted, from all over the country showing that the examining medical officers of the Army are passing unfit men everywhere.

I have here three cases from Lancaster and in every case, if necessary, I could give the name and address of the person concerned. A certain man who lives in Victoria Avenue, Lancaster, was passed for the Welsh Fusiliers. He had a deformed foot. He was discharged within three weeks. Another man was informed that he had a strained heart and would most likely never be required. He was called up in the Welsh Fusiliers. A third man also had a diseased heart, and within a fortnight of being called up he was in a hospital suffering from pneumonia. There was a case in Accrington, which is close to my Constituency, of a man who was very well known in the town. For nine years he had not worked, except very occasionally. He had to winter at Torquay. He had only been out of doors five times in six months when he received a notice calling him up for military service. His friends went to the recruiting officer, who knew the man, but they were told he must report. He was unable to go to Preston, which was the examining centre of the district, by train and had to be taken in a taxi-cab all the way. He was passed for Home service. Like other Members of the House, I receive letters almost every day from men who have been passed for active service, and men who are on active service, suffering from hernia or from double hernia, who have to wear trusses. I have here two extremely painful cases. This happened in my own Constituency at Whalley, in Lancashire. This man could never work. He was consumptive—born in a consumptive family. He was passed at Liverpool Barracks for the King's Liverpool Regiment. In three weeks he was dead. I have a case here from Hull of a man who was passed last April for general service, although the Medical board was aware that he suffered from hernia and eczema in the feet, and he was then under treatment for stomach complaint. He was called up again two months later and reexamined at his own

request and bullied for having dared to ask for a re-examination, and was passed again although he brought this certificate from his private medical man. The bearer of this note has been under my care for about fourteen days, suffering from gastritis, and under Dr. Morgan previous to this for about six months. He lost two stone in weight, during the last six months. Occasionally he has vomited streaks of blood. His diet at present consists wholly of Benger's Food. I may add that his father died of cancer in the stomach in April, 1915, at fifty. I am seriously concerned about this man's condition, and have advised him to take some special professional advice. Although he is young, I feel that his symptoms are grave, especially considering his family history.

That was ignored by the War Office and the man was passed. Here is a case from Norwich, and I certainly must insist that the War Office will pay attention to the awful scandal that is brought to light in this document. This is of recent date. This man, on 13th July, was passed at Britannia Barracks, he is aged thirty-five. He is married and is consumptive. He had been under treatment for one year and three months. He had come out of a sanatorium, where he had been for thirteen weeks, discharged as incurable. He was unable to work. He received notice. He went to his private doctor, who said, "I suppose you will have to respond to the call, but of course it will be merely a formal matter and you will be discharged at once." He went. He was passed for Home service and sent to the 5th Middlesex Regiment. May I be allowed to read a line or two from a letter which this man has written from his regiment. He says: I was examined by two more doctors this morning, who asked me a lot of questions. They wanted to know if I had been medically examined at Norwich, and how long the doctor was doing it. One said, 'I suppose he put the stethoscope on your chest and took it off again.' They were very nice to me, and said it was a disgrace for me to be passed into the Army, and they carried on and even swore about the doctor at Norwich, and I should not be surprised if he did not hear further about this. I should be very much surprised if the doctor did hear further about it. I want to trouble the House

with only one further case.

Mr Lloyd George:

Have any of these cases been brought to the attention of the War Office? This is the first time I have heard of them.

Mr Snowden:

I will answer the right hon. Gentleman by giving him the next case.

Mr Lloyd George:

That is not an answer.

Mr Snowden:

I think when he has heard the case he will agree that it is a sufficient answer, because it is a case which I submitted to the War Office. It relates to Horace Pile, of Chichester. He was well known in the district as a consumptive, but to the surprise of everybody he was passed. In just over three weeks from the date he was passed he was dead. I raised the case by question in this House. The late Under-Secretary for War promised to make inquiry and he did so. Some time later I received the following reply, signed by H. J. Tennant. I may say that it took him five weeks to make the inquiries. You will recollect asking a question in the House on the 2nd of last month with reference to the case of the late Private H. Pile, of the 4th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. I have had inquiries made, and I find that there seems little doubt that the medical officer who examined this man overlooked signs of old-standing phthisis. It is, however, within the bounds of possibility that the old lesions had healed when the man was examined at Chichester, and that the attack from which he died was a recrudescence or tubercle of the lungs of the acute pneumonic form, which undoubtedly might show all the signs of a frank, acute lobar pneumonia. I need hardly say how much I regret that this man should have been passed for service. I am told by people who knew this man well that it did not require a doctor to see that he was suffering from consumption. Any man must know that the moment he set eyes upon the man. The letter of the War Office admits a good deal, and in that respect it is quite an exception among communications from the War Office replying to complaints. It admits that the medical officer was quite incompetent, in that he had passed for the Army as fit for service a man in a state like that, but the letter does not go on to say what action the War Office has taken. It is

extremely probable that that medical officer is still sending men to their death. I want to know what action was taken.

Mr Lloyd George:

I want to get at the facts. This case does not really answer the question which I put. Two or three cases which on the face of them are very bad cases have been quoted by the hon. Member, and I ask him whether the attention of the War Office has been called to them. His answer is to draw attention to a third case, in which the man has died. In other cases the men are still alive.

Mr Snowden:

Not all of them.

Mr Lloyd George:

Some cases were referred to in which the men are alive. I understood that the man with gastritis and the man who has got tuberculosis and who went into the Middlesex Regiment are alive. Has the attention of the War Office been called to these cases?

Mr Snowden:

The attention of the War Office has been called to some of the cases I have mentioned.

Mr Lloyd George:

I want the facts of each case, and the names of the persons concerned. There is nothing here to give me the slightest clue as to who the persons are. If the facts are given to me, of course I shall inquire into them.

Mr Snowden:

I gave a name to the right hon. Gentleman just now. I told him that I have the names and addresses of all these persons and am perfectly willing to give them to him.

Mr Lloyd George:

Very well, then.

Mr Snowden:

If the right hon. Gentleman had the time to look through the questions put in this House during the last six months he would see that I have brought many cases forward. Two of the cases I have already mentioned in Debate, but no action appears to have been taken. It would be quite impossible for me, having to do all my own work myself, to bring to the attention of the War Office every case that is brought to my notice. I have not the time to do it. I should require a number of secretaries to do it. The Financial Secretary to the War Office knows quite well how many letters he gets from myself and other

private Members. Our hands are full. In mentioning these cases, I want to point out that this sort of thing is going on all over the country. The "Daily News" for some days now has been calling attention to these matters, and publishing instances of men who have been passed into the Army totally unfit. I will give the right hon. Gentleman another case. I had a lad in my own Constituency whose eyesight was so bad that if he put his glasses down on the table he could not find them again except by groping. I had a long correspondence with the late Under-Secretary of State for War about this case, and finally it was decided in this way: The Under-Secretary told me that he had had a special examination of the lad by Army oculists, and that they had come to the conclusion that if he had three pairs of glasses he would be fit for active service. As such letters usually are, the letter was typed, but the late Under-Secretary had evidently read the letter and had come to the conclusion that it was capable of a very foolish interpretation, and he wrote in his own handwriting at the bottom these words: "I do not mean that he is to wear three pairs of glasses at the same time." That lad is now in France. With any pair of glasses his condition is such that if the glasses get dim he cannot see. The reason why he has been provided with three pairs of glasses is that he may change them occasionally—that is to say, that when a German is about to attack him he must ask the German to kindly wait until he has changed his glasses. Only this morning I had a letter from my own native place from a man who writes to tell me of a friend of his who this week has been passed for service. He is totally blind in one eye, and his vision on the other eye is three-sixteenths abnormal. With glasses that man cannot distinguish an object three yards away.

Colonel Sir H Greenwood:

Is he in the Infantry?

Mr Snowden:

Many of these men are passed for Home service; many of them are passed for sedentary work. It is most important that our National Reserves should be utilised in the most economical way. I will tell the House what the War Office are doing. They are taking university men, and men occupying important business positions, who are really doing useful work, and although these

men are not fit for general service—the very best they are only fit for garrison duty at home—they are taking them away from useful work, and the State is maintaining them in that practically useless position. What is the reason for this? I think I have the explanation. I put a question to the Secretary of State for War yesterday, which he answered, asking if he would give the figures of the number of men who had been recruited under the two Military Service Acts? He refused to do that. He said it was not desirable that this information should be conveyed to the enemy. I could have understood that if there had been no precedent for such a thing, but when the Government wanted a reason, or, at any rate, an excuse, for imposing compulsory military service, they did not hesitate to publish figures then of the number of recruits which had been secured during the preceding few months. They gave those figures to the world, and it was upon the strength of those figures that they secured their two Military Service Acts. The simple fact of the matter is that the Military Service Acts were obtained by fraud and deceit. The shirkers, married and single, were never there. The last six months have proved that to be the case, and all the recruiting officers throughout the country are now being instructed to rake in every possible man in order to get as large a number as possible. It was stated in the newspapers yesterday that instructions had been sent to the various recruiting officers to get every possible man, and the tribunals have been told the same.

IT WASN'T ME, MISTER

Oh, Poppy, why did you have to land
on me,
I'm against war, didn't you hear my
plea,
especially wars that wouldn't be good
for me,
yet here you are on my lapel
though I'm as radical as
hell,
you said I had to consider the
nation,
who would then put me on
probation,
which means I may not be able to have
my say,
though if I'd worn the white
poppy
I might look soppy
but militarism I wouldn't have to
obey,
so, Poppy, please fly away.

Wilson John Haire.

There is the one-man-business man whose case was promised sympathetic consideration when the last Bill was before the House. Thousands of men have been ruined throughout the length and breadth of the land, and I have had numerable letters from men who have had to leave their businesses for garrison duty at home simply for the purpose of getting numbers and not to add to the efficiency of the Army.

I see the representative of the board of Agriculture on the Front Bench. He knows quite well that men are being taken from farm work who ought to be left at farm work. I submitted to him last week the case of a man who had been taken from a farm in Cornwall. The cows were left un-milked and the hay waiting to be got in, and nobody to do it, and yet at the same time the War Office are offering 27,000 soldiers to go to do farm work. They are offering the help of untrained, unskilled soldiers to do farm work, and at the same time they are taking away trained and qualified men from the farms. Is that national economy? Is that adding to national efficiency? I assure the Secretary of State for War that the

matter I have brought to his attention this afternoon is causing a great deal of concern in the country. From one point of view it is perhaps not to be regretted, because the administration of the Military Service Act is causing so much dissatisfaction in the country that those who want to see this institution made permanent after the War will, I think, find considerable difficulty in doing so. The right hon. Gentleman has already intimated that he will be prepared to consider particular cases that may be submitted to him. He ought to realise that it is an utter impossibility for a Member of Parliament to submit every case. What we want is some general plan by the War Office which will prevent any of these cases arising. One thing I would suggest is that in such a case as the case I cited of the consumptive who was passed and who died in three weeks' time, an example should be made of the medical officer who was guilty of such a dereliction of duty. If there were a few examples like that they would have very salutary effects.

Reader's Letter on Corbyn and Nuclear Deterrence

Labour is divided over the use of a nuclear deterrent. Jeremy Corbyn states that he would never use a nuclear deterrent under any circumstances. Other members of Labour's leadership feel that it is important to maintain the threat of nuclear retaliation if we were to be attacked.

Perhaps one way to resolve this dilemma might be as follows. Trident should be scrapped thus saving £100 billion. About 20 deep silos would then be constructed in which missiles with nuclear warheads would be placed. The silos would need to be proof against a nuclear blast. There should also be deep chambers in which the relevant part of the RAF could store bombers and fighters. The bombers, obviously, would be capable of carrying nuclear missiles.

The cost of this might well be £10 billion. This would leave £90 billion.

All kinds of uses could be made of this – increasing the funding of the NHS; increasing the funding of schools and universities; increasing the funding of social security; increasing the funding going to the BBC. Some of it could be used for reducing the deficit.

The threat which Britain currently faces is that of Islamic terrorism. Ideally the way of dealing with this should be to fund and to help arm local forces which are attempting to deal with it, perhaps providing a future troops to help with training and use of equipment. The actual use of our troops should be confined to serving as part of UN peacekeeping forces and very limited operations on the model of the Israeli raid on Entebbe, which rescued numerous hostages.

Overseeing this should be a body called OfMil, which should take the overseeing of the military away from the immediate intervention of party politics.

Its initial policies should be: the above proposals concerning the nuclear deterrent; Intervention should mainly take the form of giving assistance to local fighters; that the actual use of British troops should be as described above.

The nuclear deterrent is a red herring. Seems inconceivable that the most likely candidate for using it, Russia, would actually invite a nuclear strike on its citizens. For that reason there is much merit in Jeremy Corbyn's view, but there should be just enough possibility for the deterrent to be credible.

Mark Cowling

Hitler and the Start of World War Two

By Brendan Clifford

A reply to the claim that “Hitler started the war he could easily have avoided” in ‘People’s Car, People’s Poison’ (Volkswagen) (Notes on the News. Labour Affairs October 2015.)

Which wars did Hitler start? Not the war with Britain certainly. It was Britain that declared war on Germany.

Hitler attacked Poland after Poland had made a military alliance against it with Britain and France. The British and French Governments then declared war on Germany while it was attacking Poland.

Even assuming that Hitler started the war with Poland, which enabled Britain to start the World War, it was not the application of Keynesian policies to the German economy that enabled him to do so. It was Britain’s collaboration between 1933 and 1938 to break the restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty at the end of World War I that did it.

Britain was the guarantor of the Versailles system. The United States Congress had repudiated the Treaty because Britain and France had refused to implement the policy on which the US had entered the War and defeated Germany. And Britain had prevented France from gaining a secure border against Germany and disabling Germany for future military action.

Maintenance of the Versailles curbs on Germany was therefore Britain’s business, very much more than anybody else’s. It maintained the Versailles system against the German and Austrian democracies during the 1920s, only conniving at some low level military collaboration between the Weimar democracy and the Soviet Union. And it vetoed the merging of the German and Austrian democracies, which both desired.

But then, after 1933, it effectively set aside the Versailles system, not by undertaking an orderly revision of it but by enabling Hitler to break it and by collaborating with him in the breaking of it.

The period of Anglo-Nazi collaboration—not “*appeasement*” but *collaboration*—went on for five

years. It culminated in the breaking of Czechoslovakia by Britain in 1938, and the gift of the Sudetenland to Hitler—about six months before Britain suddenly decided to make war on him, using Danzig as the occasion.

Danzig was a German city existing between the two parts of the German state—which was divided by the Versailles Conference into two geographical parts with a stretch of Poland running between them.

Danzig lay with the “*Polish Corridor*” which divided the two parts of Germany. It was not under the sovereignty of the Polish State but was a kind of city state under League of Nations authority, and was a complete anomaly in the Europe of nationalisms laid out by the Versailles Conference.

Poland did not succeed in getting any political influence within it during the twenty years since Versailles. And, because it was not given sovereignty over it, it refused to use it as a port. It preferred to construct a new port, Gdynya, in its own territory, not far away. And the League of Nations, the sovereign authority, had no political party that might have taken part in the civic life of Danzig.

Danzig was a self-governing German city, required to live in political isolation in an artificially contrived No-Man’s-Land. It might have been allowed to attach itself to the East Prussian region of the German state with little effect on the East European order of things, compared with the far-reaching changes made the previous year. But Britain gave Poland a Guarantee that it would go to war with it against Germany if Danzig was annexed to East Prussia, and it persuaded France to do likewise.

This amounted to a military encirclement of Germany. And that fact was sharply pointed out to Whitehall by the South African Government, which played a prominent part in Imperial affairs in those times.

The Governments of Weimar Germany, democratic Germany, had never recognised the Polish Border arrangements as legitimate. One of Hitler’s first acts of foreign policy

was to recognise the Polish Border in substance, but leaving the Danzig issue for later settlement, and he made a Non-Aggression Treaty with Poland in 1934. In 1939 he took Poland’s formation of a military alliance with Britain and France against Germany as a revocation of the Polish/German Treaty, and he attacked Poland. Britain and France did not deliver on their Guarantees to Poland. They let the Polish/German war run its course without interference. But they declared war on Germany and went about prosecuting it in a most leisurely manner, and chiefly by trying to get into a war relationship with the Soviet Union in Finland.

It might be argued that the annexation of Danzig to East Prussia would have been in breach of the Versailles Treaty and that Britain as the guarantor of Versailles did no more with the Polish Guarantee than prepare to defend Versailles—that might be argued if Britain had not been collaborating actively with Hitler since 1934 to break the Versailles Treaty.

Anglo-German collaboration against Versailles began in a serious way with the Naval Agreement of 1934, under which Britain gave Germany permission to construct a large Navy. This was not done as a revision of the Versailles Treaty. It was an act of Imperial British sovereignty. Britain did not regard itself as being subject to Versailles authority in its handling of Germany. It was a freely-acting Empire, the Superpower of the inter-War period, doing what it pleased in the world, as the USA does now.

One can speculate on why, having joined with France in humiliating Germany and tying it up in the Versailles straitjacket in 1919, it later began to empower Germany, especially after Hitler came to power, and helped it to free itself from the shackles of Versailles. The fact that it did so is undeniable.

Hitler was still virtually unarmed when he introduced military conscription, and when he put his little army into the demilitarised Rhineland.

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Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Tax Credits

On 15 September MPs debated the draft Tax Credits Regulations which when effected will cut the income of millions of working households. Introducing the debate Damian Hinds said it was the first of five pillars of supporting working Britain. In the interests of space some interjections have been omitted.

Tax Credits (The First of the Five Pillars of Ignorance)

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds):

I beg to move,

That the draft Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) (Amendment) Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 7 September, be approved.

The aspects of tax credits we are

voting on today are amendable by statutory instruments, as laid down in primary legislation in 2002 by the then Labour Government. These and other aspects of welfare reform have of course been debated at length in the Budget debate, as well as in departmental questions and elsewhere. The underlying issues will also be debated in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. In a response to a request from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), the Government have brought the vote on the statutory instrument measures to the Floor of the House to allow all hon. Members the opportunity to vote. Reforming tax credits and other benefits forms the first of five pillars of the Government's approach to supporting working Britain. The

second is the increase in the personal tax allowance; the third is the national living wage, the fourth is the major extensions to child care provision; and fifth is the overall sound economic management that is delivering growth in the number and quality of jobs, earnings and living standards.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):

A couple with two children, in which one works as a senior schools admission official earning £26,000 a year, will be more than £2,500 worse off next year because of the measure the Minister is proposing. Does he recognise that it will wreck the solvency of that working family? What does he think they should do?

Damian Hinds:

It is important we see these changes in the overall context. I outlined some

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Germany did not become a major European Power until 1938, when it merged with Austria—which had been forbidden by Britain in the 1920s as being in breach of Versailles when democratic Austria and democratic Germany wanted to merge—and when Britain broke up Czechoslovakia, giving Germany the German Sudetenland and the Czech arms industry.

Britain broke the will of the Czech Government to defend its very defensible mountain frontier against Hitler if he was rash enough to invade. It made a gift of the Sudetenland to Hitler. Then the Poles and the Hungarians took their pieces of Czechoslovakia on German authority, and the Slovaks declared independence with German encouragement. And the Czech rump of the state was occupied by Germany without resistance and was declared a Protectorate.

The complex of events that goes by the name of “*Munich*” made Germany the hegemonic authority in Eastern Europe. And all that remained of the Versailles

arrangement was the German city of Danzig, in the Polish Corridor but not under Polish authority. Early in 1939 Hitler proposed that the matter left over in 1934 should be settled by attaching Danzig to East Prussia and establishing land communication between the two parts of Germany by means of an extra-territorial road across the Corridor.

At that point Britain decided to make war on Germany, using the only remaining Versailles grievance as the reason. It overwhelmed Polish imagination by apparently putting the British Army at its disposal for conflict with Germany over Danzig. And France, whose foreign policy independence had been subverted by Britain in the early 1920s, did likewise.

With the two greatest armies in the world placed at their disposal, and with their own army having been victorious in the most recent international war in Europe, the Polish/Soviet War of 1920, the Poles fancied their chances against Germany.

Placing a regime like that of Nazi Germany under military encirclement—after having helped to build up its power for five years—and doing so over an issue like Danzig, could only be understood

realistically as preparation for war. And the manner of it was highly provocative.

Then German Intelligence saw that Britain and France were not making realistic preparations to wage war when the Polish Government activated the Guarantee. And Hitler broke the encirclement by striking at Poland, confident that Britain and France would leave the Poles to fight alone.

It might be that Hitler wanted to conquer the world and needed a war to get started. That seems to me to be a retrospective British concoction designed to explain away many things—but supposing it to have been the case, then it must be said that Britain laid on the opportunity for war for him.

I'm sure the new Labour Leader would have no time for this view of things. But he is going to have trouble with foreign policy in a situation saturated with Churchillian mythology, with his Party opponents desperate to show how warlike they are. And it could do him nothing but good if a little publication on the Left tried to keep to the factual sequence of British action in the world.

of the additional elements that are relevant. I certainly accept that they do not all come into play at exactly the same time, but in the course of time they do and by 2017-18 eight out of 10 households will be better off.

Lady Hermon:

I am most grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene at this early stage. A number of my constituents in Northern Ireland feel extremely aggrieved about the change to the income thresholds for eligibility for tax credits. Before I could support the measure, I have to urge the Minister to give some guarantees on how the Government plan to mitigate its worst effects for families throughout the United Kingdom—not just in Northern Ireland.

Damian Hinds:

I have been talking about some of the other elements, but these are matters on which the hon. Lady has a long track record of campaigning. Northern Ireland has a particular situation with regard to welfare reform and I hope all parties will come together to get through that. Discretionary payments are designed for housing issues in particular and were increased substantially in the summer Budget. It is possible that local authorities can use some of those funds to help out people who find themselves in particular difficulty, but I am of course very happy to meet her to go through this in more detail.

The regulations make three changes to the tax credit system. First, they reduce the working tax credit threshold from £6,420 to £3,850 and the child tax credit threshold from £16,105 to £12,125. Secondly, they increase the taper rate from 41% to 48%, meaning that when a claimant's earnings reach the new tax credit income threshold, their award will be gradually removed by 48p in the pound, rather than the current 41p, ensuring that state taxpayer help is focused on those who need it most. For recipients of housing benefit, the interaction between the two systems of support means the overall change in the withdrawal rate will be 2p, not 7p. Thirdly, the regulations reduce the income rise

disregard from £5,000 to £2,500, taking it back to its level between 2003 and 2006 and matching the rate of the income fall disregard. Following the introduction of real-time information, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has much more up-to-date information on claimants' earnings, so there is no good reason to have such a high disregard figure. These three changes form part of a wider set of welfare reforms, most of which are currently under consideration in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op):

The Minister knows that this is a serious matter, and Members on both sides are concerned about the work incentives and making sure we do not unfairly penalise people who want to get back into work. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) was right about the rapid increase in the marginal deduction rate to 93% from next April. He needs to address that specific point. How is it not a penalty to work?

Damian Hinds:

For people in receipt of housing benefit, the change in the marginal withdrawal rate will be 2p in the pound. The changes do not reduce the incentive to work, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, equally important are the incentive, ability and support to work more hours once in work and the fact that there are now more jobs offering more hours. Our reforms to child care are another key part of our support for people who want to increase their hours.

The context to these changes is that, despite making great progress towards balancing the budget, we still ran a deficit of 4.9% last year and are expected to have the second-highest deficit in the G7 in 2015. We need to eliminate the deficit and start cutting the national debt in order to build up our resilience to global economic shocks.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con):

Will the Minister confirm that when tax credits were introduced, they cost the Government £1.1 billion a year and this year will cost £30 billion, which is unsustainable, and that these

reforms are necessary to balance the country's books?

Damian Hinds:

My hon. Friend is right about the rapid escalation in the cost of tax credits—it trebled in real terms up to 2010—and that we are in the business of getting the country back into balance, because when we lose control of the economy, the people who lose out the most are those on the lowest incomes and in the toughest circumstances.

The burden of eliminating the deficit has meant a bigger tax contribution from those on higher incomes and now calls for further reductions in departmental spending while protecting our national health service. A further £5 billion comes from addressing tax imbalances and £12 billion from the welfare budget. That is the mandate on which we were elected. With near record employment, rising wages and stronger business confidence, now is the time to put the welfare system on a more sustainable, long-term footing, moving our country to a higher wage, lower tax, less welfare-reliant economy.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):

I am grateful to the Minister. He talks about an environment in which wages are rising. Wages are rising in some areas, but public sector workers have seen a tremendous reduction in their income capacity, and many of them will be affected massively by what the Government want to do. The Government need to think more about public sector workers, whose wages are not going up.

Damian Hinds:

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to note the hard work done by public sector employees. There are pay restraints going on in the public sector—I do not deny that for a moment—but wages are growing at 2.8% in real terms this year, which is pretty broadly based across the country, while output per head is growing more in the north than the south. For too long, low pay has been addressed in this country not by genuine reform and driving productivity, but by subsidising

it through the tax credit system. In the decade to 2010, tax credit expenditure more than trebled in real terms. The changes introduced in this order will build on the last Parliament's reforms and return real-terms tax credit spending to its 2007-08 levels—a decade into the Labour party's tenure in government. It is not a stand-alone measure, but part of what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor called a “new contract” with working Britain. It says to businesses, “You will have to pay higher wages, but you will get lower business taxes and a stable economy”; it says to people, “You can get higher pay and lower tax, but with less benefit top-up”; and it says to the country, “We are going to spend less and live within our means”. These regulations are an important part of that, and I commend them to the House.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):

Let there be no mistake: this statutory instrument will mean drastic cuts in the incomes of families with parents in low-paid work. Across the UK, about 7.5 million children live in about 4 million families that are in receipt of tax credits, and the vast majority of those families are in work. The key impact of the measure will be to reduce the incomes of more than 3 million working families by an average of more than £1,000 a year. We have a very short time today to debate a statutory instrument that will, at a stroke, make dramatic cuts to the incomes and life chances of millions of our citizens, and it deserves a lot more scrutiny than we are giving it today.

The Government have tried to argue this afternoon that their changes to benefits and tax credits are part of a plan to encourage people into work, but this measure overwhelmingly affects people who are already in work. Far from providing incentives for parents to enter the workforce, it actively reduces work incentives and makes it harder than ever for parents in low-paid work to support their families.

This is a hugely regressive measure. Our poorest working families are set to lose a dramatic proportion of their income. If we pass the regulations

today, tax credits will start to be withdrawn from any family earning more than £3,850 a year rather than from those earning more than £6,420 a year, as is currently the case. More than half a million families earning less than £6,420 a year will lose out disproportionately because of these cuts to work allowances. That is a massive reduction in the amount that families can earn before tax credits start to be withdrawn. Combined with the lower level at which universal credit will be withdrawn it means that, for example, a single parent earning £6,410 a year—roughly 20 hours' work a week on the minimum wage—will lose 48p in tax credits for every pound they earn above the new threshold, which will leave them about £1,200 worse off a year.

One hundred pounds a month probably does not sound like a lot to Conservative Members—*[Interruption.]* It might not be a lot to them, but for those on low incomes a drop in income of that magnitude will almost certainly mean very difficult choices about very basic things, such as the quality and quantity of the food they eat and how to heat their home. Many poorer families already struggle with heating costs in winter, especially in my part of the world, but it is not only people's health that is affected by living in cold and damp conditions. This is also about whether children have an adequately heated place to study and do their homework and the long-term consequences if they do not.

I recognise that disadvantage takes many forms, and we have heard a lot of rhetoric lately about social mobility, but the harsh fact is that income poverty is the single biggest driver of long-term disparities in children's outcomes. Children who grow up in income-poor households are likely to have poorer health throughout their lives. They attain fewer qualifications at school, end up in lower-paid jobs and die younger than their peer group.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):

The hon. Lady says that income-poor families have much poorer physical and mental health as well as educational attainment, but is that the case?

The fact is that someone on benefits or welfare has poorer outcomes, so the route out is by gaining work and earning a decent wage.

Dr Whiteford:

The hon. Lady is making a ridiculous argument and once again trying to pretend that there are people on welfare and people in work whereas in reality—as illustrated by the tax credit system—many thousands and millions of working people are dependent on benefits because of low pay. That is the key issue in this debate. The Government are attacking low-paid workers, just as they have over the last Parliament, while giving tax breaks to the wealthiest people in our society. The deep cuts to the incomes of the poorest families that the Government are trying to enact today will only exacerbate the inequalities we already have in our society and push opportunities even further out of the reach of those who already lag behind.

The most bizarre claim that has been made for the Government's austerity measures is that they will encourage people to work harder. I think that we should reject the rather insidious implication that people in low-paid jobs somehow do not work as hard as people in better paid jobs, because that is simply not the case. We must remember that those low-paid jobs are often far more physically demanding, and many people who are set to see their incomes cut under this measure are already working very long hours in exhausting and often pretty unrewarding roles.

In various parts of the country unemployment is still unacceptably high. Whether someone can easily pick up extra hours depends on which part of the country they live in, which sector of the economy they work in and what caring commitments they might have, whether for children or other family members. It is not so straightforward when lots of parents are chasing part-time work between the hours of 9 am and 2.30 pm, when their children are at school. A lot of part-time work needs to be done outwith those hours, when parents have real difficulties accessing childcare.

The charity Gingerbread has today

pointed out that some lone parents working full time on the minimum wage with one child will, by 2020, be no better off than non-working lone parents were in 2010. By 2020 many parents working full time will have fallen even further below the minimum income standard than they are at present, but essentially they will be no better off working full time than they would have been had they been out of work five years ago. Where is the work incentive in that? If we really want to incentivise work, we should be increasing work allowances, as my party proposed in the run-up to the general election, not cutting them. That would incentivise work and cut child poverty.

Once again, we have been told today that increases in the minimum wage will compensate for those losses, but the numbers simply do not stack up. Even if the Government proposed raising the minimum wage to the level of the current living wage, which is already £7.85 an hour—well above the Government’s proposed ceiling—the calculation of the living wage is based on not only the cost of living but the assumption that low-paid families are already receiving their full entitlement to tax credits at the current rate.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Resolution Foundation, trade unions and others have all pointed out that the proposed increases in the minimum wage, and indeed the increases in the personal tax allowance, will not make up for the loss of tax credits. The crucial point is that if we cut tax credits in the way the Government are proposing today, the minimum wage would have to rise substantially further, to around £11 an hour, just to keep incomes standing still in real terms.

The bottom line is set out clearly in the OBR’s estimates, which indicate that the higher minimum wage is likely to increase earnings by around £4 billion in total by 2020, compared with social security cuts of £12 billion in the same period, a large portion of which will come out of tax credits. The figures just do not add up. No matter how they repackage their minimum wage and tax changes, the Government are giving a little with one hand but taking a whole lot more with the other.

At the same time as the Government are slashing the incomes of the lowest paid families, the wealthiest families are set to benefit from huge inheritance tax breaks on properties worth over £1 million. For me, that exposes their perverse priorities on families. It is not so much robbing Peter to pay Paul as robbing Peter to pay Rupert and Sebastian.

My colleagues and I were elected on a commitment to fight the austerity agenda being recklessly pursued by this Tory Government. Almost half of all families in Scotland will lose out as a result of these

measures, pushing into reverse much of the progress we have made in recent years to reduce child poverty. Around 346,000 children in Scotland will be impacted by these cuts, and the Child Poverty Action Group estimates that 100,000 more children in Scotland will be living in poverty by 2020 as a direct result of the UK Government’s changes to tax and benefits.

The Scottish Government are attempting to mitigate the worst excesses of austerity, providing over £300 million between last year and next, but we need to remember that the people affected by cuts to tax credits are in many cases the same people already disproportionately affected by the freeze in child benefit, the freeze in housing benefit, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) noted, pay freezes and other austerity measures. Once again, other public services and the voluntary sector will be picking up the pieces from the collateral damage of the UK Government’s ideological crusade.

Finally, I want to address the removal of child tax credits for a third or subsequent child. This is just a further blow to poor families already struggling. This measure, along with the introduction of the two-child policy in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, will push more families with children into poverty, pushing them further behind in health and education, potentially for the rest of their lives. Only about one in six of the families receiving tax credits in Scotland has more than two children. Larger families are a rarity nowadays. By contrast, the majority—more than half the poorest families in Scotland—have only one child. In Scotland, it is in the more affluent areas that people tend to have more children, but across every income group our birth rate is unsustainably low. We need to be supporting family life and encouraging people to have more children if we are to dodge the demographic problems coming up on the inside lane. We should not be putting barriers in the way of those prepared to contribute to our society by doing the essential job of raising the next generation.

This Government have got it very badly wrong. Cutting the incomes of working families will only make it harder to tackle the embedded inequalities that already blight the life chances of too many children. Work should be a route out of poverty for families, but here in the UK it really is not. This statutory instrument pushes that aspiration even further out of reach. That is why my colleagues and I will oppose it and continue to press for the power to make these decisions in Scotland, for Scotland, in the interests of our people and in line with our commitment to building a fairer society.

The draft Regulations were carried by 325 votes to 290. Lady Hermon, who

expressed concern about the effects of the cuts on her constituents in North Down, voted with the Government. Previously in this Parliament she has voted with the Government on the Second Readings of the Welfare Reform Bill and the Trade Union Bill. Odd behaviour for someone who resigned from the Ulster Unionist party in 2009 because she opposed the link-up with the Conservative Party. Explaining her resignation she said, “At the present time, I can’t see myself standing under a Conservative banner...”

Of the 290 votes against, there were 221 (of 232) Labour, 48 (of 56) SNP, 7 (of 8) Liberal Democrat, 3 (of 3) Plaid Cymru, 1 (of 1) Green, 7 (of 8) DUP, 2 (of 3) SDLP, and 1 (of 2) Ulster Unionist member.

FIRST LET IT BE HUMAN

It lurches past your door,
bearing dried bloodstains from
centuries
before
but with fresh bloodstained teeth
showing that its biting hasn’t
ceased,
it scavengers the battlefields
of another where it kneels
before the stars and stripes,
its policies to shield,
now, hear its pitiful cries for
human
rights
when it denied a neighbour such
and caused a thirty-year
fight,
it asks to be excused its duty
to the EU
on that matter
whilst joining the queue
to put Syria’s head on a
platter,
most of the world needs more
human and civil
rights,
as the people of many nations
cite
but it must come from the lamb
that has been damned
when oppression is rife
and not from those who hold
the butcher’s knife.

Wilson John Haire

Froggy

This Month - News From Britain



In honour of the change that happened in England with the election of Jeremy Corbyn, Froggy will address English questions.

With the absence until now of the Labour Party as a serious opposition party, various groups sprang up to conduct various political campaigns. There is the National Health Action Party, set up in desperation at Labour conniving with the privatisation of the Health Service. There is '38 Degrees' a campaigning organisation set up in 2009, in imitation of groups like change.org and Avaaz. Founding members include the husband of Anita Roddick of the Body Shop; Gordon Roddick is also associated with a number of other causes including the *Big Issue*. This is their explanation of their name: "38 Degrees is the angle at which snowflakes come together to form an avalanche—together we're unstoppable."

The Conservatives actively dislike 38Degrees, because it works by getting its members to send emails en masse to MPs on a large number of issues. 38 Degrees work on non emotional issues, one good example being the 'Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014'; this Act was criticized by charities including the Royal British Legion for preventing non party organisations from taking part in election campaigns. 38Degrees, being a prime target of this 'gagging law', led a vigorous campaign against it; it didn't win the day, but it made the law known to millions who would otherwise have never heard of it.

38Degrees only launches campaigns after canvassing membership opinion. For example, on the question of the UK bombing ISIL, members were

equally divided so no campaign was started. Members are invited to start campaigns: "Campaigns by you: Is your local hospital under threat? Know a beautiful place that needs protecting? Is there a company that should be challenged to change its ways, or something the government can do to make the UK a better place? With 38 Degrees, you can start a campaign on any issue that's close to your heart. It only takes a few minutes to get started."

They have at least a million 'members', people who are on their internet mailing list, making regular donations in many cases. Most of the work starts and continues on the internet, but they also give out leaflets and collect signatures on the streets, pay for bill boards, take part in demonstrations, and organize visits to MPs, either in their constituency or in Westminster. Some members have started groups that meet for the purposes of campaigning.

David Lammy and TTIP

38 Degrees got its members to go out in the streets and collect signatures against TTIP, the US-EU trade treaty; taking part in this, I found the people on Green Lanes, North London, amazingly interested. Almost everyone stopped to talk about it. The idea that investors can sue governments who put obstacles in their way in the shape of regulations and social/environmental legislation struck people as particularly objectionable.

38 Degrees then got its members to make appointments with their MP to hand in the petition in a public manner; they provided leaflets, a banner, posters, badges and a large box representing a petition box. In that way

I and two others met David Lammy, M.P. for Tottenham, in the Main Lobby at Westminster. He asked if we were NHS workers, knowing that they are particularly vulnerable under TTIP, since it is a public service, where procurement is not yet completely freely available to private enterprise. He then said he understood how Tottenham people could be against TTIP, since they already suffer a loss of control in their everyday life, 'with outsourcing of jobs, and generally privatization.' He said he would raise the subject with Jeremy Corbyn and 'our bis' Angela Eagle; he said when asked that he would support Jeremy Corbyn against TTIP.

We will see what happens to this declaration of support when the question comes up in the House of Commons. The energy and resources harnessed by 38 Degrees and the NHA among others should transfer to the new Labour Party.

Prayers

Visiting the House of Commons I saw the agenda: '3 pm, House is sitting; prayers, Bp Bristol'. Each daily sitting in the House of Commons begins with prayers, read aloud, usually by the Speaker's Chaplain. Fact little known on the Continent! Or by the public probably, ready to be astonished and horrified if that sort of thing happens anywhere else in the world, especially in the non-Christian world.

Assisted Dying Bill

A mention in last month's *Labour Affairs* of the vote against this Bill implied MPs were out of touch in rejecting it. On the contrary MPs showed in their decision that they had thought about the subject and were not

swayed only by emotion or expediency as I would say the public is.

The bill does not concern people who are in pain or incapacitated, it only concerns those who want to avoid pain and incapacity in the near future; it concerns people with a terminal illness that leaves them 6 months or less to live, who are able to say they have made the decision to die, and are able to commit suicide by taking the fatal dose themselves. A doctor would bring the requisite drug, and the whole procedure would have to be approved by two independent specially licensed doctors and a judge.

This would cover only cases where the person is not already so affected by their final illness that they are unable to express themselves or unable to take their own life. It does not apply if the person is suicidal or even depressed.

It applies to people who are still in good enough physical and mental health, when suicide is presumably very difficult to contemplate and carry out on your own. The name of the Bill is misleading, because it is not assisted dying (that is what hospice doctors do), it is assisted suicide.

The guarantees are not as strong as they look: A very low number of GPs have indicated that they would seek a licence to participate in assisted suicide; moreover, the family doctor no longer exists, so in depth personal knowledge of cases would be the exception rather than the rule. The judge would not have to meet the patient; they would only have to confirm the doctors' decision, and in a time frame of 14 days.

The problem is not that a flood of people would avail themselves of this new legal possibility. The problem is that it changes the way suicide is considered by society. Instead of being relatively rare, and a catastrophe for all concerned, suicide becomes an option that has to be considered by everyone in that particular situation.

You are given 6 months to live; the specialist, yourself, your family and friends, all know that the option of suicide exists. Instead of suicide being a solution envisaged by a few, it becomes a possible solution that everyone has to accept or reject. Should I? Shouldn't I? Would it be better for others if I did? The Bill puts people under a horrible pressure. 'Choice creates the burden; it does not set you free' as the conservative MP for Winchester said during the debate.

Lyn Brown (Labour) said: 'My mum died suddenly and unexpectedly, riddled

by cancer, but I know that my mum, faced with a terminal prognosis in a world where there was the possibility of state-assisted suicide, acceptable and accepted by society, would have tormented herself during her last months with the question of when she should ask for that button to be pressed. She would have worried about the stresses that my sister and I would have endured, she would have worried about the weight of her care being shouldered by the nurses and the doctors, and she would have been anxious that folk would think that she was consuming too many resources, selfishly staying alive, costing money, when she could and should just die.'

'My mum was not vulnerable. She was not alone or a depressive. She was dearly loved; and yet I know that the mere existence of legal and assisted suicide would have placed an enormous burden on her. But what of those without a loving family? What of those elderly people—let's face it, they do exist—with families more interested in the cost of care, and its impact on their dwindling inheritance, than the priceless gift of life? Would not some of my more vulnerable constituents think that they ought to take a course of action because it is available and despite the safeguards in the Bill, which I acknowledge have been carefully crafted? Can we be absolutely sure that they would not be pressured into it?'

Lyn Brown's comments show that the pressure to commit suicide would come, even if you did not have grasping relatives, from society as a whole and from the State.

Once suicide becomes desirable for people in order to avoid pain and incapacity, there are no arguments against it becoming desirable for people who are in pain or incapacitated. It will be argued that the quality of life is worse when you can't express yourself, and can do nothing for yourself, so it's not fair to withhold assistance in dying in these cases, even though the person is not able to take the lethal dose themselves; then mental suffering should also be considered as a reason for helping someone to die. It is not logical to accept assisted suicide but refuse euthanasia.

People facing a terminal illness that will make them incapacitated may want to hasten the moment of death, to avoid that period of incapacity. But where does that leave people who live in a state of incapacity for years?

Emotional campaigns, using characters in popular soap operas, sway the public into

approving the understandable desires of a few, and stop the public from considering the effects on the rest of society. Individual choice is put before the interests of the whole society, since individual choice is considered more important than the public good.

A good society promotes life; it puts money and effort into finding cures for diseases and ways to ease suffering; it votes credits for research into palliative care. It does not offer suicide as an answer. It has a National Health Service and not individual paid insurance. 'In Oregon, patients with lung cancer and prostate cancer are already being denied treatment on their state health insurance plan and are instead being offered assisted dying.'

The Bill was defeated [330 votes to 118](#). Almost as many Labour MPs voted in favour of the bill as voted against it, including several members of Jeremy Corbyn's new shadow cabinet, such as Maria and Angela Eagle, Hilary Benn, Kate Green, Kerry McCarthy, Rosie Winterton and the new shadow work and pensions secretary Owen Smith. Jeremy Corbyn himself did not vote.

Jeremy Corbyn's election was welcomed by various disabled activist groups because he has always supported them. They were particularly opposed to this bill because of the message it contains is that disability is something that should be avoided even if the price is death. The Labour Party should have a policy of protecting all life, and investing in the hospice movement and improvements in palliative care in the NHS. It should start chipping at the worship of individual choice and replace it with a concern for public good.

Some of their MPs already have this point of view, for example Lyn Brown who said: 'I am afraid that I cannot support this Bill. My concern is that we will fundamentally change the way that our society thinks about and deals with the terminally ill, severely disabled people and the vulnerable, troubled and elderly.' Helen Jones said: 'This Bill is not just about individual autonomy; it is asking us to take a decision that will have a profound effect on society. This Bill is not simply about those who have a terminal illness and are expected to die within six months, because it will inevitably be extended. It is a Bill that will in future lead to consequences for this society that in my view no civilised society should contemplate. For that reason I will vote against it.'

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Cut Taxes, Sell Yourself to China

The Tory government is determined to cut state spending. China has plenty of cash, earned from many years of trade surplus. Happy to spend it on valuable Western assets.

The top Tories may also have learned from their friends in business that ‘human rights’ criticism of the Chinese government achieves little beyond annoying most Chinese. Pro-Western elements have very little strength in either Russia or China. Russia has open elections: Yabloko, the largest such group, got only one vote in twenty.¹ The Russian Communists got nearly one-fifth of the votes. If China ever did opt for Western-style competitive party politics, the main opposition would probably be a party calling for a return to Maoist values.

(I asked about this on the questions forum *Quora*. Several people who knew China better than I did agreed that it might happen.)

Letting China invest in our nuclear industry matches the reality of privatisation. Small shareholders thought they were going to be *empowered*. But they find that they are indeed small and can be ignored by major shareholders, many of them state-owned foreign companies.

A nuclear power station is to be built in Britain to a Chinese design – good for marketing that design globally. Also “the government has also been criticised for guaranteeing a price of £92.50 per megawatt hour of electricity - more than twice the current cost - for the electricity Hinkley produces.”² More expensive than on-shore wind power or large scale solar power, but this government is fixated on nuclear.

The Tories have decided they need China to keep Thatcherism alive. But China has always ignored Thatcherite ‘wisdom’ and gone for a

Mixed Economy, just what Thatcher tried to get away from. China is now shifting from an export-led economy to something more normal. Unlike Britain, it produces as much as possible of what its own consumers want. China has not spent much of its vast financial reserves on foreign goods – indeed, the drive against corruption has reduced the demand for foreign luxuries. And also hit golf:

“One owner of a golf equipment store in Shanghai, who was only identified by his surname, Huang, told Reuters that his store’s sales had dropped at least 30% last year.

“Golf in China was ‘about the social interaction’, he said. ‘If a company boss can’t play with a government official, there’s little point in him spending his money.’”³

Meantime some of the people whose job it is to make accurate economic forecasts are saying that China’s troubles are nothing serious:

“The head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, has said the outlook for China’s economy is not all ‘doom and gloom’.

“‘I would say that it’s a recovery that is decelerating a bit,’ she told the BBC, but said it was expected to gain momentum next year.”⁴

Shut Up, Tibet, says Britain

“‘It feels like it was when I was in China,’ Shao told the Guardian. ‘Then, every time I was arrested the Chinese police would search my rooms and take things. It reminded me of that.’

“Tibetan exile groups have also reacted with anger following the arrest of two women shortly after Shao for waving a Tibetan flag near Xi’s car. They also had their homes searched while under arrest.”⁵

These are standard British police bullying tactics against people viewed as hostile. Mostly those who have at

least talked about violence: but Tibetan protestors have never yet done anything violent outside of Tibet. Why be surprised? Tibetans have all along been misled by bad Western advice.

Encouraged to become a minor irritant to People’s China, when they might have got extra cultural privileges in return for clear loyalty. No Chinese government has ever accepted Tibet as an independent country: it is ludicrously unlikely that any ever will. Globally, no sovereign government has ever recognised their claims for independence. Nor did the ‘*International Commission of Jurists*’, self-appointed guardians of human rights other than food, education, work and physical survival. (You may starve, be killed by religious fanatics, remain ignorant or be left on a human scrap-heap, but your right to a lawyer and your right to badmouth your own people to foreign journalists will be fearlessly upheld by them.)

Tibetan protests annoy most Chinese, including almost all of the pro-Western dissidents, another tiny minority who think the West wants to help them. They are typical in seeing Tibet as an integral part of China, just as almost all Indians insist that Kashmir and other potential separatist areas are integral parts of India. Likewise Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese majority view of what were once independent Tamil kingdoms, and very similar in many other parts of the world.

None of the ‘help’ that the West gave to various dissidents and separatists was ever meant for their benefit. The West uses them to weaken potential enemies, not worried by a high risk of chaos. The main point is to disrupt: if it results in a friendly government, that is a bonus. Hence the same apparent errors in Former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. And the Rwandan massacre of Tutsis was

intimately connected with the armed invasion of Rwanda by well-armed Tutsi exiles backed by Uganda, and covertly by Britain and the USA. That was the first act in the tragedy: the massacres were a stupid, brutal and ineffective response, but definitely a response and a highly predictable response.

Or you could look earlier still. Arabs and Armenians incited against the Ottoman Empire in World War One. Many people know the tale of how Lawrence of Arabia was sent to create an Arab Revolt on the basis of false promises. Few realise that what happened to the Armenians was a foreseeable result of what both Russia and the West encouraged them to do. (You can find details in a book by Pat Walsh, *The Armenian Insurrection And The Great War*.)⁶

Blair the Bliar, Blair the Bungler

Back in 1991, some of us said that removing Saddam Hussein would wreck the chances of a secular Iraq. At that time, Islamic extremists were marginal.

Saddam Hussein was dictatorial and repressive, certainly. So were British rulers from Henry 7th through Henry 8th, Cromwell and down to George 4th. 1485 to 1830, nearly 350 years. No monarch after George 4th really ruled, but the task was taken on by a parliamentary oligarchy who waited till the 1880s to extend voting to some 60% of men living in the British Isles.

Other societies have done it faster, with an existing model. But not that much faster.

(Some people believe that a better world would have emerged without Britain's rise. Maybe, maybe not. What counts is to realise just how repressive a state needs to be in order to create a modern society that will then perpetuate the same values by general consensus.)

Saddam Hussein was repressive, and likewise Assad Senior and Assad Junior in Syria. Removing the repression was like opening Pandora's Box: all sorts of monsters emerged.

So what does Tony Blair say? He's recently explained:

"But I find it hard to apologise for removing Saddam. I think even from today 2015 it's better that he is not there than he is there."

"Mr Blair was then asked whether the invasion of Iraq was the 'principle cause' of the rise of ISIS.

"The former Prime Minister said: 'I think there are elements of truth in that. But we have got to be extremely careful otherwise we will misunderstand what's going on in Iraq and in Syria today.

"Of course you can't say that those of us who removed Saddam in 2003 bear no responsibility for the situation in 2015.

"But it's important also to realise – one, that the Arab Spring which began in 2011 would also have had its impact on Iraq today. And two – ISIS actually came to prominence from a base in Syria and not in Iraq.

"This leads me to the broader point, which I think is so essential when we are looking at policy today. We have tried intervention and putting down troops in Iraq. We've tried intervention without putting down troops in Libya.

"And we've tried no intervention at all but demanding regime change in Syria.

"It's not clear to me that even if our policy did not work, subsequent policies have worked better."⁷

We in the *Ernest Bevin Society* have been almost alone in saying that all of the interventions were foolish. That a home-grown dictator committed to secularism and modernisation was the best you could hope for. That current British 'niceness' was definitely not made by nice methods.

Now Russia is taking a hand. Accepting Assad Junior as the best leader who can actually rule. And making an interesting demonstration of power by successfully firing cruise missiles from inside Russia across 1500 kilometres to hit foes in Syria. They've apparently also been jamming US radar. Demonstrating that Russia remains a tough enemy to fight.⁸

Killing Doctors in Afghanistan

It was just another callous bombing by the US air force. Except this time they hit and killed Westerners. People able to complain and be listened to by the world's press.

"On Saturday morning, October 3, *Doctors Without Borders* patients and staff killed in Kunduz joined the countless number of people who have been killed around the world in conflict zones and referred to as 'collateral damage' or as an 'inevitable consequence of war.' There are no 'mistakes' under international humanitarian law...

"It is precisely because attacking hospitals in war zones is prohibited that we expected to be protected. And yet, ten patients, including three children and twelve of our staff, were killed in the aerial raids."⁹

(The British media always call them *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, the original French name. Since it's not what they call themselves, I reject this habit.)

Doctors Without Borders are acting as if the original United Nations dream of a world governed by International Law were real. It failed originally because neither the USA nor the Soviet Union wanted it so: each wanted to rule the world. It failed again in the 1990s, because the USA still wanted to rule the world. And was not

smart enough to realise that this would be better done by reforming and beefing up the United Nations than by treating it as an unreliable servant.

Interestingly, *Doctors Without Borders* are now taking their formal complaints to the *International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission*. And are careful to explain that this "is not a UN body; it was formed under the Geneva Conventions"¹⁰

USA –

Loss of the Middle-Class Dream

"You can't support a middle class family in America today on just \$2,500 a month – especially after taxes are taken out. And yet more than half of all workers in this country make less than that each month. In order to have a thriving middle class, you have got to have an economy that produces lots of middle class jobs, and that simply is not happening in America today."¹¹

\$2,500 a month is \$30,000 a year, about £19,500. 51% of all American workers make less. 61% make less than \$40,000, £27,000.

What happened to them? Ronald Reagan happened to them, selling an anti-state and anti-Trade-Union message. Letting them believe that ordinary hard-working people could manage fine without such things. Much more gullible and conformist than workers in Britain, they let all of the new wealth created since the 1970s go to the richest 1%. To a more-than-millionaire class that has a stranglehold on a political system where campaign spending is unlimited and slick advertising can manipulate vast numbers of fools.

But even the more-than-millionaire class is in trouble. Pope Francis, Putin, China's Xi Jinping, Iran's Hassan Rouhani and our own Jeremy Corbyn are just five big names in a global challenge.¹²

Learning Nothing From 2008

"Financial workers in the City, who were at their desks after Lehman defaulted, described colleagues sitting frozen before their screens, paralysed – unable to act even when there was easy money to be made. Things were looking so bad, they said, that some got on the phone to their families: 'Get as much money from the ATM as you can.' 'Rush to the supermarket to hoard food.'..."

"The collapse of a global megabank such as Lehman could cause the financial system to come to a halt, seize up and then implode. Not only would this mean that we could no longer withdraw our money from banks, it would also mean that lines of credit would stop. As the fund manager George Cooper put it in his book *The Origin of Financial Crises*: 'This financial crisis came perilously close to causing a systemic failure

of the global financial system. Had this occurred, global trade would have ceased to function within a very short period of time.’ Remember that this is the age of just-in-time inventory management, Cooper added – meaning supermarkets have very small stocks. With impeccable understatement, he said: ‘It is sobering to contemplate the consequences of interrupting food supplies to the world’s major cities for even a few days.’¹³

All caused by deregulation:

“The British stereotype of the boring banker began to change in the 80s when finance was deregulated. Following Ronald Reagan’s dictum, ‘Government is not the solution to the problem, it is the problem’, banks were allowed to unite under one roof activities that regulation had previously required to be divided between separate firms and banks.” (Ibid.)

But the centre-left was extremely timid about saying that the last three decades had been a major error *economically*. That it was useful only because the general atmosphere of deregulation allowed traditional morality to be dismantled without anyone having ever quite agreed to this. So surprisingly soon, the centre-right were able to rally and say that government spending was to blame. The Tories won two general elections on the basis, because we lacked heavyweight politicians who were ready to flatly say that this claim was nonsense.

All of the bad banking practices have returned, of course.

Snippets

Who Won in Portugal?

The recent election was initially seen as a victory for the pro-austerity government.¹⁴ The centre-right alliance *Portugal Ahead* got 107 seats for 39% of the votes, way ahead of their rivals.

But it is a parliament of 230. The anti-austerity Socialists got 86 seats from a vote of 32%. It was assumed that they would tolerate a minority government rather than work with the Hard Left. There are no possible centrist allies. The Left Block, allies of Syriza, have 19 seats from 10%. A *United Democratic Coalition* joining Communists and Greens got 17 seats from 8%. And the centre-left and pacifist People-Animals-Nature party have 1 seat from 1.4%. Could Moderate Socialists work with these?

It seems they could. The Socialists may have noticed that their equivalent in Greece has now almost vanished after several years functioning as weak accomplices in pro-rich austerity programs. The three main left parties got 122, enough for a stable government if the Hard Left would behave sensibly. It seems they will.

As I write, 26th October, the centre-right President is reluctant to recognise this coalition as the winners. Some reports call it a constitutional crisis:¹⁵ others say it is normal politics.

US guilt for Somali deaths in 2010-12

“Between October 2010 and April 2012, a quarter of a million people died in a famine in Somalia. Even in the war years, no one had seen dying like it...”

“The truth about famine in Africa is that it hardly ever occurs. The Somali famine is the only one to have taken place in Africa in the 21st century, and it had its own special causes...”

“Even at the height of the famine in August 2011, very little aid was getting to the epicentre in southern Somalia. Almost none of the big western aid agencies raising money to fight the famine were even present, confining themselves to a secure compound at the airport if they were in southern Somalia at all. Why?..

“The Somali and United States governments were forcing aid agencies to withhold food from southern Somalia in order to put pressure on al-Shabaab, a small Islamist group allied with al-Qaeda. Agency managers had been persuaded to go along with this strategy because, according to the Americans, al-Shabaab sometimes stole aid. A case could be made that food aid was a form of support to a proscribed terrorist group, an offence which carried severe penalties under US law. When the aid managers objected, the US reminded them that it was their biggest donor.

Reluctantly, the managers capitulated.

“As a journalist, I was most outraged by the fact that so few people were aware of what was happening, or, as I later thought was more accurate, that so few were even able to imagine it.”¹⁶

1848 And All That

Have you ever wondered why there are no films about Karl Marx? Now one is due out in 2016:

“The Young Karl Marx’ opens with 26-year old Marx who goes with his wife, Jenny, into exile, and depicts Marx’ encounter with Engels, the son of a textile factory owner, in 1844 Paris.

“Set against the backdrop of the 1848 rebellions, which culminated in police raids and riots, the movie charts Marx and Engels’ journey to complete *Communist Manifesto*, which gave birth to the labor rights movement.”¹⁷

Which sounds muddled: there were many labour, socialist and communist bodies around before Marx and Engels joined them. Still, it has to be worth something.

Previous *Newsnotes* can be found at

<http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/>

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He is not a true man of the world who knows only the present fashions of it. Woodrow Wilson

Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people. Eleanor Roosevelt

Great ambition is the passion of a great character. Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts. All depends on the principles which direct them. Napoleon Bonaparte

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Left, right or centre: Where should Corbyn and Labour be?

by Christopher Winch

Left and right in politics are metaphors. Unless they are given substance they mean little. The same goes for the centre in politics, which is supposed to be a region somewhere between left and right.

The centre of politics, is like a centre of gravity in physics, it moves according to the balance of forces within a body. There is no such thing as an absolute political centre. The centre is like a mirage, which as you approach it, moves away in the opposite direction.

If the centre of gravity moves to the right, under the ideological leadership of the Tories and liberalism more generally, then a Labour party struggling to move to the centre will actually shift that centre to the right in doing so. This is precisely the achievement of Blair, Brown and Miliband who, in seeking for the centre actually moved it away from the interests that they were supposed to be supporting (although whether they really wished to support those interests may be doubted).

An opposing force will bring the point of resolution of conflict and of compromise nearer towards itself, rather than towards its opponent, particularly if it is effective in expressing the interests of the people whom it claims to represent. This is the task that faces the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn.

If the political term 'left' has any substance at all, it means acting in the interest of people whose source of well-being lies in having a secure and reasonably paid job. That is the vast majority of the electorate. So a Labour Party has to act in their interests in order to secure their confidence. This is not the same thing as following what it assumes to be their current opinions as expressed in surveys or focus groups, but rather starting from their most deeply felt desires and needs.

These include: job security and satisfaction, prospects for their children, security in ill health and old age, a decent home to live in, a civilised

environment to enjoy and freedom from lifelong debt. Maintenance of these conditions also implies not living in a society marked by huge income and wealth differentials, one which is supported by an adequate level of taxation that is seen to be fair. A political movement that addresses these issues in a persuasive manner will not go without success and will move the political centre of gravity in its own direction.

To do this, Labour would need to commit to ensure a decent pension system, the building of affordable homes to buy and rent, adequate income for an efficient and stable NHS. To pay for this a proper progressive income and council tax, strict measures against tax evasion and avoidance and a tax on property, or at the very least a tax on the capital gains on property are needed. There is no point in pretending that such things do not need to be paid for, but every point in indicating how that could happen.

To do all these things will need a productive economy composed of good jobs. Firms need to be run in the interests of those who work in them, as well as those who own their capital and buy their products.

This is why industrial democracy, as supported by the TUC, should be an early priority for Labour. Government has a role to play by investing in and encouraging firms that orient themselves ambitiously on the value chain, producing high value, high specification goods and services, rather than pandering to deadbeat firms that use the taxpayer to subsidise their products. There is no good reason why buying bonds from firms that meet that criterion should not be a way of financing change in the economy if it is used carefully. This is what 'people's QE' means and if explained properly it should be a popular policy.

The electorate will not look kindly on a party that creates money for banks to speculate with while refusing any serious help to the productive economy.

Such a policy also needs to ensure that vocational education is there to supply the workforce that is needed for high value added companies. Even the Tories realise this. To take these issues seriously, to work with the trade unions to achieve them and to be politically astute, that is speaking to people clearly and honestly, making alliances with the like-minded and refusing to be intimidated by opponents and being serious about realising such objectives will move the political centre of gravity away from the Tories.

It is obvious that all these things require leadership. In recent decades, Labour politicians have assumed that their role is to find out what the public currently thinks, or thinks it wants and then devise policies to secure those things. But the public as an entity does not think these things through in a vacuum; they will respond to good ideas and arguments for policies which seem well articulated and look as if they stand a chance of being achieved. In the absence of such things they may well be influenced by what forces in their environment have the loudest and most plausible voices at a particular moment. When focus groups come to gauge their opinions, this is what they are likely to hear reflected back.

This means that political leaders must not only stand for something attractive, but be willing and able to persuade people that it is achievable and that they can produce the means for achieving it. Leadership means persuading people to adopt your views, not following views that you may not agree with yourself in the hope that that will lead to votes. Leadership is to a considerable extent the art of persuasion and of refusing to be intimidated. It also means not giving up at the first setback but persevering. The Labour party has lacked that kind of leadership for some time now; it is to be hoped that it has now received something more like what is needed.

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Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Charter for Budget Responsibility

MPs debated the Charter for Budget Responsibility: autumn update on 14 October. This was John McDonnell's first real test as Shadow Chancellor. Twenty one Labour MPs abstained from voting. For reasons of space, a number of interjections have been omitted.

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne):

I beg to move,

That the Charter for Budget Responsibility: autumn 2015 update which was laid before the House on 12 October, be approved.

Despite all the details of fiscal policy that we will discuss, and the mechanisms in the charter we are debating, the questions before the House and the country are very simple:

is Britain going to pay its way in the world? Are we going to live within our means and bear down on our debts, so that next time disaster strikes we are better prepared? Do we have the strength and determination to finish the job that we started of turning Britain around and providing security to working families at every stage of their lives? Or will we be profligate again

and spend money that we do not have, borrow for ever, mortgage the future of our children with debts that we could not pay ourselves, and consign Britain to a future of high debt, instability and low growth? No. Our answer, and the answer in the charter, is that we will put economic security first.

We resolve to put the livelihoods and living standards of working people ahead of the irresolution of politicians who lack the discipline to control public spending and deliver financial stability. We commit to learn from the mistakes of the past, not to repeat them, and we choose to put security first. After all that Britain has been through, it is remarkable that the proposition in this Charter for Budget Responsibility should even be contentious. It states that now the economy is growing we should be reducing our exorbitant debts, and that we should do that each year by reducing the deficit until we eliminate it altogether and run a surplus. Once we have achieved that surplus, in normal times we should continue to raise more than we spend and set aside money for when the rainy days come. It is as simple as that: we should fix the roof when the sun is

shining.

Mr Osborne:

I will give way to the former shadow Chancellor.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op):

I am clear that we should not turn our face against a surplus, but it is important that the Chancellor's definition of "normal times" safeguards some of our vital public services and ensures that we protect the most vulnerable in our society. Is there a danger in automatically going for a surplus without protecting some of those very basics for society? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Osborne:

I was about to pick up on the point that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) just made, which is that the hon. Gentleman has shifted his position in the last few days. The former shadow Chancellor was telling us that the position adopted by the Labour party on this charter sends the wrong message to the general public, and in the brief period when he was shadow Chancellor he argued from this Dispatch Box that we should run a surplus. At the time I think he was trying to make the argument that the people who suffer most when Governments lose control of the public finances are precisely the most vulnerable in society and those who lose their jobs or get cast out of work. It is not trade union barons who lose their jobs when the economy fails; it is the poorest, not the richest in society who pay the price, and the most progressive thing that a Government can do is to run a sound fiscal policy and provide financial stability to the working people of this country. That is what we are debating.

What are the objections to our approach? There are those who

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In addition to this, the Labour leadership needs to engage again with the trade union movement. There are currents within this movement, most notably within the TUC, which want to work to make trade unionism relevant to current and future workers. The Labour leadership should give every encouragement to those who want the unions to engage with company governance, vocational education and working with local authorities to help revive communities economically. Without leadership and the willingness to persuade

sceptics, this will not happen.

It is not possible to say when Labour will govern again. Events may make this happen sooner than most people think. But Labour will never govern to any purpose if it allows politics in Britain to go on drifting rightwards, in the direction of those who have insufficient interest in the welfare of most of the population. First of all it needs to be an effective opposition, offering leadership to those who look to it. After that it can start to think about being in government. The next two years will show whether Labour really is capable of changing its spots.

say—including in the last couple of days—that the economy is not strong enough and that we need more growth before we cut the deficit. That advice on growth and the deficit normally comes from those who gave us the greatest recession and the largest deficit in our modern history, but let us put that aside for a moment. The British economy has been pretty much the fastest-growing of any major advanced economy in the world, this year, last year and the year before.

We have had the latest jobs numbers today and they show we have more people in work than at any point in the history of this country—the highest employment rate in the history of this country. Unemployment is down 79,000, full-time work is up and, while inflation is falling, pay is now rising strongly at 3% a year. This is the strong economy that the British people have built with their hard work and sacrifice. If this is not the time to be reducing your deficit and your debt, when is? We are aiming for a budget surplus in 2019, because if we are not running a surplus nine years or more after the end of the recession, when the economy has been growing for these nine years, when will we ever run a surplus? The real answer from people who oppose this charter is never. Speaking of which, we turn to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):

When the Labour Members of the Treasury Committee rightly identified this proposal as a gimmick in the Treasury Committee hearings in July, did the Governor of the Bank of England, or any of the other eminent economic brains we questioned, give a single word of defence for this political gimmick?

Mr Osborne:

It is not a political gimmick to have sound public finances. What is a political gimmick is coming out on the eve of your conference with some policy that says you support what we are doing, and then two weeks later turning up in the House of Commons and voting against it. Indeed, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw has described the policy of the Labour party as “a huge joke”. The truth is that the people who oppose this charter never want a surplus. They want to run a deficit forever. They never want Britain to be earning more than it spends. [*Interruption.*] They say “Nonsense.” Will they give me a date when they would like a surplus to be run from? I am setting a date—2019, years from now, at the end of this decade, nine years after the end of the recession. That is the date we are voting on. The truth is that they want to borrow forever. They want to run a deficit forever. They believe our debts should rise and rise, and never come down; they just do not have the courage to admit it to the British people.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab):

The Chancellor is completely wrong. The objection to the game he is playing and the trap he thinks he has so cleverly set is that he has completely failed to hit all of the promises and all of the targets that he has established. Instead of indulging in this ridiculous game-playing, he should be concentrating on preparing Britain to weather the international storm and preparing for the problems we could face as a result of the slide in China.

Mr Osborne:

That is precisely what we are doing. We are precisely preparing Britain to weather the storms. We came in five years ago. We promised to turn this economy around. We promised to take Britain back from the brink of disaster. And do you know what? We have a record number of people in work. I can see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions over there. A record number of children are no longer in workless households. We have the gender pay gap at the lowest rate in its entire history. Inequality is down, child poverty is down and the shambles we were left, as Ben from Exeter might put it, by the Labour party is what we are clearing up right now and we will continue to do so.

The second objection to the charter is that somehow reducing the deficit and running a surplus is inconsistent with a progressive state and great public services. Tell that to the Canadians or the Swedes, two great social democracies with surplus rules for two decades or more. Tell that to all the other countries in the world which, like Britain under this Government, are on course to run a surplus by 2020—Australia, Germany, Cyprus, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore and Korea. Tell that to the British taxpayers, who have seen the deficit reduced while their public services have improved over the past five years, with crime down, satisfaction with local government services up, and more children than ever in outstanding schools. The truth is that running a deficit forever is not socialist compassion; it is economic cruelty and Britain wants no more of it.

The very purpose of this charter is that we prepare for the future, reduce our debts and run a surplus in normal times, precisely so that we do have the resources to help the poorest and the most vulnerable when economic bad times come.

We do not stand here and claim we have abolished boom and bust—that ridiculous and dangerous suggestion that got Britain into this mess in the first place. We know there are ups and downs to the economic cycle. We warn again and again of the risks out there—from slowing emerging markets to the endemic weakness of the eurozone—and it is precisely because no one knows when the economy will be

hit by the next shock that we should take precautions now. That is what we are doing in this charter.

Britain’s national debt as a share of its national income is more than 80% of our GDP. Unless we reduce it, we will not be able to support the economy and the British people in the way we would like to do when the shock comes, because we would not have the room for manoeuvre. Failing to address that is deeply irresponsible.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con):

According to today’s figures, unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds in my constituency is down 72% since the Chancellor walked into No. 11. That is what budget responsibility looks like. Will he promise to stay in the centre, moderate ground of British politics and keep fixing the roof while the sun is shining and reject the hard-left nonsense we are hearing from the Opposition?

Mr Osborne:

I absolutely give my hon. Friend that commitment, because we have a responsibility to represent the working people of this country, who have been completely abandoned by the Labour party. That makes us the true party of labour here in this House of Commons. Of course, the problem with people who say that now is a good time to borrow is that they always say it is a good time to borrow: in bad times they say we should borrow because we cannot afford not to, and in good times they say we should borrow because we can afford it. According to them, there is never a right time to stop borrowing and start saving. That is precisely the thinking that got Britain into a mess eight years ago.

This budget charter provides the discipline we need along with the flexibility we might require. It says that debt as a share of GDP should be falling every year when the economy is growing normally, but when recessions come or economic growth is very weak and below 1% the rule is suspended and the automatic stabilisers kick in. Then the Chancellor of the day will come to Parliament and present a plan to return the public finances to health and Members will either support or reject that plan. That is simple, clear, accountable, strong and flexible. It is a commitment to sound money and stability—the bedrock of economic security for working people.

The third argument we have heard today is that we do not need fiscal rules at all and that they are meaningless. Again, I disagree. I believe that democratic Governments should set out their approach to public spending. It is the public’s money, after all, and we should be held to account by them. Successful countries do set out long-term objectives and hold their Government Departments to account, rather than lurch from one year to another.

Of course, rules are meaningless if

people are their own judges of the rules they set—we know that from the golden rule the Labour party set when it was in office—but we have an independent Office for Budget Responsibility and it is the impartial judge of whether we deliver what we promise.

There is an argument that because we have the OBR it can come to its own conclusion about the soundness of our fiscal policy, but that is profoundly undemocratic. Public spending should be determined by this House of Commons. That is why we are having this debate and this vote tonight. Under our system, the rules are set democratically and are independently judged, and the people can hold us to account.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green):

This might be clever politics, but it is staggeringly bad economics. The Chancellor is incredibly irresponsible to imply that borrowing is always bad. If we borrow to invest, we increase jobs, stabilise the economy and increase tax revenues. That is good for the economy, not bad for it.

Mr Osborne:

That is borrowing forever. There is never—*[Interruption.]* When would the hon. Lady stop borrowing and run a surplus? I am happy to give way to her as the representative from the Green party. When is the moment to stop borrowing and run a surplus?

Caroline Lucas:

The moment to stop borrowing is when we can no longer afford to pay it back—*[Laughter.]* We can perfectly afford to pay back our investment, which is why economists are laughing at the Chancellor—*[Interruption.]* If we are investing in jobs, that gets taxes going back into the Revenue, which is good for the economy. That is why economists are saying that the Chancellor's silly trick is very bad economics, even if it is very clever politics to make all his friends laugh a lot. People across the country are not laughing, because he is increasing austerity and increasing the burden on the poorest.

Mr Skinner:

If everything in the Tory garden is lovely and if the Chancellor believes in fixing the roof while the sun is shining, why did he desert the people of Redcar?

Mr Osborne:

We have not deserted the people of Redcar. We have provided £80 million of support to local people affected by the closure of that steel plant. That steel plant tragically closed under the previous Labour Government and there was nothing like that support for the workers then. We stand behind the workers of Redcar and we stand behind the workers in every steel plant to see what we can do, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman this: we will not have

steel plants or any other plants open in this country if we do not have economic stability in Great Britain.

That point brings me to the final and perhaps most dangerous objection to this charter rule, which is when people say that Britain does not have to go to the bother of saving money and trying to pay for things but can instruct the Bank of England to print the money and use it to finance Government spending directly. The leader of the Labour party calls it

“quantitative easing for people instead of banks”—

that is an accurate quote from his leadership campaign. It sounds seductive, but it is actually called monetary financing. It might be a novel argument in this House of Commons and in the British political debate, but that is because no one has seriously proposed that approach in our country in recent decades. It is a very old argument.

Monetary financing is a very old argument in the economic history of the world and we know that it invariably leads to rising prices, soaring inflation, savings being wiped out, money being debased, stability being destroyed, jobs being lost and total economic chaos. It might sound new and attractive, but it is in fact very old and very dangerous.

This is what current and former Labour Members have said about that approach. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, warns that it is “really bad economics”. Jack Straw, pointing to the history of Weimar Germany and Venezuela, said it was

“bound to end in tears”.

The last Labour—*[Interruption.]* The Labour party now dismisses the views of Jack Straw and the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford. It probably also dismisses those of the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie), who said to me a few weeks ago, “This approach will hurt the very people we should be standing up for, they will pay the price—the poor and the vulnerable.” Yet it is the much advertised economic policy of the shadow Chancellor and his Labour leader. It has been supported by the Labour movement, and it must be challenged and defeated.

I welcome the shadow Chancellor to his place, and I look forward to working with him when we can agree. In that respect, he made a good start, with his first big pronouncement on Labour's approach to fiscal policy two weeks ago. He said: “We will vote for it on the basis that we want to assure people that we will tackle the deficit, we will balance the budget, we will live within our means”. That is precisely what the charter is for, and I thank him for

encapsulating precisely the basis on which I urge all Members to support it, whatever their party. If they cannot support us, I urge them at least to abstain.

Of course, since the shadow Chancellor spoke a couple of weeks ago, he has performed the most spectacular U-turn. We were told when he got the job that he would be a divisive figure. I just did not realise the split would be between two opposing views both held by himself. I have been standing at these two Dispatch Boxes for 10 years, and today, as on such occasions in the past, I have a sheaf of quotes from people in the Labour party from the past couple of days. I could read them all out, but the truth is that the complete chaos, confusion and incredibility of Labour's economic policy is more eloquently expressed by Labour MPs than by any of my colleagues. To call the whole episode a shambles is an understatement—like saying the charge of the Light Brigade did not achieve all its objectives.

The serious point is this: in my experience, shadow Chancellors come and go, but what is permanent is the economic approach the Labour party is committing itself to tonight. It is becoming the party of permanent fiscal irresponsibility and never-ending borrowing, the party that would run a deficit forever—a Labour party that is a standing threat to the economic security of the working people of this country. It is not too late for Labour MPs to dissociate themselves from this reckless cause that their party has embarked upon, so I say to them: join us tonight, vote for budget responsibility and economic sanity, for eliminating our deficit and for reducing our debt, and help us prepare Britain for an uncertain future. Let us give those who elect us a Government that live within their means, a country that earns its way in the world, and economic security for the working people of Britain. I ask the whole House to support the charter tonight.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab):

I suppose I should deal straightforwardly with the U-turn. Yes, two weeks ago, I recommended that Labour MPs vote for the charter, and today I shall urge them to vote against it. Is that embarrassing? Yes, of course, but a bit of humility among politicians never goes amiss. When circumstances and judgments change, it is best to admit to it and change as well, so I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Prime Minister's change of heart on the bid for the Saudi prisons contract.

Let me be clear: I have changed my mind not on the principles of the need to tackle the deficit, but on the parliamentary tactics for dealing with this charter. Labour will tackle the deficit. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor has a record of ignoring

the targets he sets in these charters and mandates, treating his own charter with contempt, so I recommended two weeks ago that we should do the same. It is difficult to take seriously the charters and mandates when time after time the Chancellor has come to Parliament to revise his own charter. It is difficult to take it seriously when he has consistently failed to meet his own targets.

I remember the promises; I was here. The Chancellor promised to wipe out the deficit in one Parliament, but he did not get through half. In 2010, he promised to reduce borrowing to £37 billion by 2014-15. Last year, it was £87 billion—135% more than forecast. He promised public sector net debt would fall to 69% of gross domestic product in 2014-15. Today, it stands at 80% and above. It is no wonder that the charter has been seen as one of the puerile political traps the Chancellor likes to set.

Voting against the charter makes someone a deficit denier; voting for it would lead to the Chancellor claiming for the next five years that we had signed up to support every one of his cuts in public services and benefits. I regret that the procedure followed today is an unamendable order—a take-it-or-leave-it order. My initial view was to use today's debate for a bit of traditional parliamentary knockabout to ridicule the Chancellor's performance against his own charter. I admit it: I was trying to out-Osborne Osborne.

Apart from the economic analysis and professional advice I have received, what really changed my mind was a trip to Redcar last week, where I met steelworkers and their families in tears at losing their jobs, their livelihoods, their futures. The Government's failure to invest in our manufacturing industry, even if only to mothball the plant until better times arrive, has meant the end of steelmaking in Teesside and immense distress to families. The Government's refusal to invest will be embedded in this charter as it now moves on to limit all public sector borrowing.

This charter will be used time and again as an excuse for the Government's refusal to intervene and invest, but the more we know about its potential use, the more my view is strengthened—it has to be vigorously opposed. It will be used to justify cutting services and support to families across the UK, including the cuts to tax credits, which are the working families' penalty. I cannot support the cuts to tax credits for working families. These are people who have done everything asked of them: they have gone to work and looked after their children, yet because of the policy direction in this charter they are going to be hit with a £1,300 cut. Neither can I support the continuing attack on disabled people, which is inherent in this

fiscal mandate.

Disabled people are already harassed—some to death—by the brutal work capability assessment and often by benefit sanctions, yet they are to lose over £30 a week. Disabled people under this Government and under the coalition, have been hit 18 times harder than other citizens by the impact of cuts. I do not want the Labour party to be associated in any way with these policies, and to dissociate ourselves clearly we need to vote against them tonight.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):

Everyone understands the hon. Gentleman's views, but he has to explain to the House what circumstances have changed in the last two weeks. There has to be some element of consistency, and of trust in the Opposition: trust that, in future, he will not be blown off course so easily.

John McDonnell:

The hon. Gentleman has clearly not been listening. It was professional advice. It was watching the economic headwinds grow. But, in addition to that, it was meeting families who had lost their futures in Redcar that made me decide that we need a Government who would invest and would not leave them adrift. It is increasingly clear that the charter and the fiscal mandate are not economic instruments, but political weapons. This is not an economic debate. It is about the politics of dismantling the welfare state, the closing down of the role of the state, and the redistribution of wealth from the majority to the minority. Austerity is not an economic necessity; it is a political choice.

Over the last five years, the focus of the economic debate on the deficit has reflected the capture of the economic narrative by the right since the crisis in 2008. Over six years, the Conservatives have managed to convince many people that the economic crisis and the deficit were caused by Labour Government spending. It has been one of the most successful exercises in mass public persuasion and the rewriting of history in recent times. Today I am going to correct the record.

The facts speak for themselves. The Conservatives backed every single penny of Labour's spending until Northern Rock crashed. The average level of spending under Labour was less than it was under Mrs Thatcher. It was not the teachers, the nurses, the doctors and the police officers whom Labour recruited who caused the economic crisis; it was the recklessness of the bankers speculating in the City, and the failure of successive Governments to ensure effective regulation. In opposition, this Chancellor and his colleagues wanted even less regulation of the banking sector that crashed our economy. The deficit was not the cause of the economic crisis, but

the result of the economic crisis.

Mr Clarke:

What happened under the last Government was that the Chancellor and his regulatory authorities allowed first the dotcom bubble and then the crazy credit boom. Tax revenues temporarily soared to astonishing levels. The Labour Government carried on running a deficit on top of those tax revenues, and then the revenues collapsed, leaving us with the worst annual deficit in the G20. The last Government were complicit in the consequences of 2008.

John McDonnell:

And when that expenditure was being determined in the House, this side supported it, and never objected. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may well have rejected it, but I remember his Budgets. His Budgets balanced, but when they balanced, there were 40,000 homeless families in London. People were dying on waiting lists before they got their operations. Those were the consequences of his economic policies.

Focusing on the deficit continues to mask the underlying weaknesses and failures of our unreformed economic system. We are witnessing a recovery based on rising house prices, growing consumer credit, a ballooning current account deficit and still inadequate reform of the finance sector. I worry that some of the warning signs are reappearing. But the Conservatives have adhered to their dictum: never let a crisis go to waste. They have skilfully used their narrative of the deficit to enable them to cut public services, slash benefits, and give tax cuts to the rich and corporations. Successive charters and fiscal mandates brought before this House have been cynically used as a weapon in that cause.

The purpose of the original Fiscal Responsibility Act 2010, brought in by Labour, was to bolster the then Government's economic credibility. I recall what the current Chancellor said. He described it as little more than a political stunt. But he soon learned what a useful tool charters and mandates can be, and immediately upon the coalition's election, he introduced his own. The fact that he missed most of his targets was irrelevant to him; what was more valuable was that charters could be picked up whenever needed and prayed in aid to excuse any attack on the welfare state and any cut in benefits, and provide a means to redistribute wealth upwards.

The charter before us today also has little basis in economics. Let me quote Dr Ha-Joon Chang, Professor Thomas Piketty, Professor David Blanchflower, Mariana Mazzucato and Simon Wren-Lewis. Those eminent economists in our society said that it has

“no basis in economics. Osborne's proposals are not fit for the complexity of

a modern 21st-century economy and, as such, they risk a liquidity crisis that could also trigger banking problems, a fall in GDP, a crash, or all three.”

They go on to say that if the Government

“chooses to try to inflexibly run surpluses... Households, consumers and businesses may have to borrow more overall, and the risk of a personal debt crisis to rival 2008 could be very real indeed.”

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):

We are getting to the crux of this debate, which is that this fiscal charter is intellectually moronic. It essentially commits this House to never borrowing to invest, even when the cost-benefit analysis of that investment is such that the country would benefit greatly. That is why it has not one serious economist backing it, other than the self-styled experts on the Government Benches.

John McDonnell:

I could not have said it better myself. Can we move on?

The Chancellor may not appreciate these economic points, but I believe many of his advisers do. That is why there is a sizeable get-out clause for the charter rules not to apply outside normal times when there is a significant negative shock to the UK economy. Not only are the social consequences of this programme devastating, but the scale of the cuts we are witnessing represents a false economy. They jeopardise the long-term economic prosperity of our country. It is a false economy to cut adult social care when the burden is shifted on to hospitals and accident and emergency departments. It is a false economy to pursue an ideological sell-off of council housing eventually to put up the rents and eventually increase housing benefit. It is a false economy, ironically, that when this Government came to office there were 70,000 people at HMRC and within the next year that is planned to fall to 52,000—a cut of more than 25% in the number of tax-collecting staff, when HMRC says that tax evasion is as high as £10 billion a year. But the worst false economy is the failure to invest. This will be a direct result of Government policy embedded in this charter, with its limits on all public sector borrowing. Economists from across the spectrum have written and commented on the need for investment for the future. The World Economic Forum ranks the UK 10th for the quality of our infrastructure, behind Germany, France, the Netherlands and Spain. This Chancellor’s strategy has given us investment as a share of GDP lower than all the other G7 countries, falling even further behind the G7 average in recent years.

That is why business leaders, trade unions and a host of others are calling for

investment. It is incomprehensible for the Chancellor to rule out the Government playing a role in building our future. For him to constrain himself from doing so in the future, no matter what the business case for a project, has no basis in economic theory or experience. We also face an uncertain medium-term future for the global economy. In recent weeks there has been mounting evidence of a decline in global demand, particularly in the emerging markets.

Economists have warned of the potential for a future slowdown in western economies as a result. Former chief economist at the World Bank, Larry Summers, wrote last week that the dangers facing the global economy are more severe than at any time since the height of the crisis. Faced with these potential challenges, it makes no sense to close down the fiscal options available, especially when there is a possibility that monetary policy options may also be constrained.

I want to break the stranglehold that the focus on deficits has had on the economic debate in this country in recent years. Yes, the deficit is vitally important, but we need a paradigm shift to open up the wider debate on what makes a healthy economy, a prosperous economy, in which everybody shares in that prosperity and in which everybody is secure, not just the wealthy few, where everybody has a decent home in a sustainable environment, is able to develop their talents to the full, has secure, stable, well-paid and rewarding employment, and support when they fall on hard times. We will tackle the deficit, yes, but we will not tackle—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members should listen and they will hear.

We will not tackle the deficit on the backs of middle and low earners, and especially not on the backs of the poorest in our society. We will tackle the deficit, but we will do it fairly and to a timescale that does not jeopardise sustainable growth in our economy. We will balance day-to-day spending and invest for future growth, so that the debt to GDP ratio falls, paying down our debts. We will do this, first, by ending this Government’s programme of tax cuts to the wealthiest in our society. This winter, when the letters go through the letterboxes telling working families how much they will lose in tax credits, we will be reminding them that their tax credit cut has paid for a cut of billions of pounds in the inheritance taxes of the richest families in this country.

Secondly, we will give HMRC the resources and powers to tackle tax evasion and avoidance—no more Facebooks paying less than £5,000 in tax despite £35 million in bonuses and total global profits of £1.9 billion—but above all else we will grow our economy. We will use smart Government institutions to strategically invest in the key areas that increase GDP in the future: education, health, research, technology, human capital formation and training—a progressive economic agenda that recognises that wealth creation is a collective process, working in partnership with businesses, workers, public institutions, and civil society organisations

that create wealth in this country. That is why we will establish a national investment bank to invest in innovation across the entire supply chain, from the infrastructure we need to the applied research and early stage financing of companies. To tackle the growing skills shortages we will prioritise education in schools and universities along with a clear strategy for construction, manufacturing, and engineering skills to build and maintain sustainable economic growth. The proceeds of that growth will reach all sections of our society.

So we are launching the debate on the economy we need and the economic instruments and policies needed to achieve that prosperous and sustainable growth. That is why we are reviewing every aspect of economic policy and systematically assessing our economic institutions, the Bank of England, HMRC and the Treasury.

Today I can announce that I have appointed a former member of the Monetary Policy Committee, Professor David Blanchflower, to lead a review into whether the Monetary Policy Committee should be given a broader mandate. He is joined by Lord McFall, the former Chair of the Treasury Committee.

This is Labour’s radical project. It is based upon the sound advice of some of the best economic brains in the country. We will be testing our policies and economic instruments and we will be asking the Chancellor to give us access to the resources of the Office for Budget Responsibility to model our proposals. I am asking the same of the Governor of the Bank of England.

We are seeking the widest public engagement in our economic policy discussions. The dividing lines between us and the Government are not just on how to tackle the deficit and who pays for the crisis. They are more fundamental. It is about for whom the economy works and the role of the strategic state in this process. So today we will oppose this charter as an instrument for imposing austerity on our community unnecessarily. We are bringing to an end the petty game playing and moving on to a more serious debate of how the economy can work for everybody.

The vote was carried in favour of the Government by 320 votes to 258.

The 21 Labour MPs who abstained were: Rushanara Ali, Ian Austin, Adrian Bailey, Ben Bradshaw, Anne Coffey, Simon Danczuk, Chris Evans, Frank Field, Mike Gapes, Margaret Hodge, Tristram Hunt, Graham Jones, Helen Jones, Liz Kendall, Chris Leslie, Fiona Mactaggart, Shabana Mahmood, Jamie Reed, Andrew Smith, Graham Stringer, Gisela Stuart. (Ian Austin and Chris Leslie spoke against Osborne’s Charter and then abstained from voting.)

MPs who voted with 195 (of 232) Labour MPs were: 50 (of 56) SNP, 8 (of 8) Liberal Democrat, 3 (of 3) Plaid Cymru, 1 (of 1) Green Party, 1 (of 3) SDLP. The 8 DUP MPs did not vote, nor did the 2 Ulster Unionists and the Independent MP Lady Hermon.

Consumerism and Inequality

A Discussion Article by Jaime Dixon

The consumerism generated by capitalism throughout the 'Developed' or 'Northern' world is a major obstacle to tackling Climate Change, a crucial problem for humanity requiring immediate action. So the next question must be: why is capitalism still so widely accepted? Why do workers in the 'North' vote overwhelmingly to support pro-capitalist parties?

A crucial though less obvious feature of capitalism is that by forcing its 'free' market into every corner of life it puts a price on everything, and it thereby becomes a great social leveller: kings and lords, upper-class birthrights and privileges decline as possession of money, which by luck or cunning, can be acquired by anyone regardless of their origin, comes to measure social status. As a result, other than massive and growing inequalities of money, the 'North' is now a society with an extremely high level of personal equality, a level that was totally unimaginable throughout human history up to perhaps 40 years ago for gender, race, single mothers, LGBT, etc.

But crucially this equality ideology of capitalism has also caused constantly growing agitation by workers for an equal and just economic share of their social production, because capitalism as noted encourages them to see themselves as the social equals of their bosses. This causes desperate problems for capitalists because capitalism therefore lacks the acceptance of inequality which earlier civilizations had, civilizations that could last perhaps a thousand years with little change in spite of the inequality of class divisions, slavery, emperors, racism, gender discrimination, etc. Only money matters today, and that can come and go regardless of status deceptively easily, as we all realise.

England's history demonstrates the capitalist dilemma. In response to this rapidly growing agitation for equality, the capital-owning class must react, like any ruling class or Mafia, in two ways: one section of the exploited is violently repressed, another is bribed to keep them usefully loyal insiders. Violence was used by the state in the 1819 Peterloo massacre of English protesters. In the 1840s, while the famine was starving a million people in Ireland, massive amounts of food were being exported under British army guard to Liverpool. Towards 1850 when Chartist agitation for equality grew in England, this time instead of violence the Corn Laws were ended and imports of cheap food allowed as a bribe to quieten the agitation. Colonies were constantly plundered by England's Imperialism to deliver 'bribes' to English workers (noted by Engels¹).

Most of the wars fought during Hobsbawm's Age of Empire² and continuing today were essentially imperialist, competing for access to cheap labour, food, and raw materials. The English working class was thereby kept comfortable enough to forgo dangerous agitation, to favour capitalism, even volunteering as soldiers in the Imperial army and winning electoral equality over the years (though as Pinochet's coup in Chile, the bombing of Serbia and intervention in Syria shows, voting must be pro-capitalist). But after two diverting world wars caused mainly by imperial rivalry, eventually agitation arose again with demands for economic justice by English workers (e.g. the 1974 and 1985 Miners' strikes) along with US soldiers to their great credit refusing to fight in Viet-Nam, many street protests and also strong and often violent agitation by the colonies for their own liberty, for the equality of races and nations. This widespread and varied agitation, sharing a general affirmation that all humans must be

treated equally, was a new and dangerous crisis for capitalism. As there were no further colonies to invade Thatcher and the North in general needed a new source of wealth to continue the bribes which until now had quietened agitation by their own workers.

Up to this time colonies were generally not manufacturing, this was reserved for the North so that for example India sent its raw cotton to England then bought back the spun and woven goods. The direction Thatcher's capitalism now took was that a new bribe to keep English workers loyal was available if the colonies and Third world in general were given the liberty they were increasingly demanding, and then would become industrialised with their low wages to export cheap manufactures back to England. Reagan in the US and the rest of the North did the same. This worked very well for the capitalists and it remains the present situation: a glut of cheap manufactures from the developing nations, often produced by children working in disgraceful conditions, while the North with diminishing manufacturing drifts toward a consumerist financial economy where billionaires speculate to produce damaging bubbles and get bailed-out when a bubble bursts. As T. Picketty notes,³ since the 1970s the trend of incomes becoming more equal has reversed, the number of billionaires gallops.

It is important that the 'bribes' mentioned are not just mechanical cash devices, there is a subjective element in the economic situation. To take the example of China and the US: 'consumerism' arises when a worker in the US receives \$15/hr. while the worker in China producing equally sophisticated manufactured goods is only paid \$2. This means that even after capitalist profit-taking the worker in the US when shopping can still trade 1 hour of labour for several hours of equal-quality Chinese labour. This then is like a winning gambler cashing in the chips: you go shopping and spend 1 hour's labour value and take home 2! The more you shop the more your profit grows! This indirect exploitation of foreign workers is the economic foundation of the 'buzz' of the 'consumerist' consciousness.

The instinctive grasp of this situation by the US worker who then votes for capitalism is what matters. Workers when shopping will intuit that the product bought contains a surplus of socially-necessary labour in comparison with their own labour. For example a US worker may exchange one hour's labour at a minimum-wage retail job for the price of a pair of imported jeans. The cotton must be: planted-grown-harvested-spun-woven-dyed-cut-sewn. Then zips-pockets-hems-buttons-belt loops-rivets-labels-packaging-transport. This is why shopping by the US worker obviously means gaining a surplus of labour. The same is true, though less obvious, if both workers are on car-assembly lines each in their own countries. Consumerism thus is generated by a worker-to-worker relationship, not worker-to-capitalist.

In striking contrast shopping for manufactured goods pre-1980 was an experience of being exploited by capitalists, of how the wages earned exchanged for a less than equal amount of labour value because when a worker shopped, those workers who produced the purchases were in the same economic area so were paid at approximately the same rates (the missing cash of course funding capitalist profits). This is why shopping for the working class didn't have that particular 'profit-buzz' it has gained since our 1980's Consumerism arrived. This

gain by northern workers of economic profit from global exploitation compensates for the exploitation by our own ruling class, and is the fundamental reason why workers in the North vote always for capitalism.

(to follow the money trail more closely: China's trade with the US is in surplus by approximately \$300 billion of imported value or about \$4,000 per US family. If a US worker is paid \$15/hour, that \$4,000 embedded labour can be bought for 270 hrs. of US worker's labour. Chinese labour content of that \$4000 is (at \$2/hr wages though sold at perhaps \$6/hr after profit, tax, etc.) 670 hours. So theoretical max. 'profit' 400 hours labour value, which is (@ \$15/hr) possibly perceived by a US family as \$6,000 gain or 'profit' annually, a substantial 20% of the US worker's wages. That's just China, then there's US trade with Mexico, Bangladesh (wages \$2/day!), etc.)⁴

This system is also demonstrated by northern workers increasingly defining themselves as 'Middle Class'⁵. This economic term originally described someone such as a working shop-owner or small producer who at the same time had a few employees, so was a worker and capitalist-employer at once, thus in the 'middle'. As described above, this situation is replicated in how northern workers still do a full day's work but also when consuming are profiting from developing-world workers, so they instinctively - and correctly - term themselves "Middle Class." Also reflecting this situation is the diminishing of campaigns for shorter working hours and strikes, both common up to the 1980s, because such actions would reduce the immediate money income to swap for that consumerist profit (US: in 1970 there were 381 strikes, in 2012 only 11 strikes⁶). Many of the northern working class have joined the middle class, a class which consumes more than it produces.

The essential point is that the above-described capitalist encouragement of a demand for equality hasn't ceased, but has caused a growing insistence on democracy and equality by workers in the ex-colonies and southern world in general, repeating the struggle for what was historically won by northern working classes up to 1980 within their own countries, again putting pressure on capitalism. But this time there are no more colonies to plunder to answer this demand, so the only solution for the capitalist ruling class is to claw back some of the gains of their own workers. This is happening in our spreading austerity 'crisis' as northern workers increasingly get kicked out of their 'middle class' Consumerist lifestyle to face the hard reality of capitalism, in Greece under strict austerity, in the US living in tent cities on charity food and medicine. This is causing growing and dangerous agitation against the system.

One solution proposed for an exploited country in the South is to cut links with imperialism, as Cuba was forced to. But problems arise from this, Cuba had limited access to some of the main advances in technology created by the global scientific community. Also people in Cuba can't always know that the consumerist lifestyle shown in world media is enjoyed only by a few, that if they restore links with Imperialism they are most likely to wind up on Bangladesh or at least lumpen wages rather than with nice cars and the latest fashion. This is an ongoing struggle for Cuba, and the fact that infant mortality in Cuba is better than the

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US, that Cuba led the victory over Ebola, that medicine and education are free for all, aren't always strong enough arguments for the youth aspiring to the polluting consumerist culture enjoyed by us in the northern middle class. This pressure also probably helped to bring down the Berlin wall. Workers' aspiration to join the exploitative middle classes is an ongoing problem for socialism. Possibly a continent-wide delinking could survive in the present stage of Imperialism.

However while wages remain low enough in the developing-world our self-centred competitive consumerism will continue to divert many northern workers. It will therefore remain difficult to build that society which champions the unity and caring which is the prerequisite for a deep enough understanding of the sacrifices needed to stop climate change. This is not totally unrealistic, we can note the material sacrifices people willingly accepted in England during WW2, and afterwards there was considerable nostalgia for that community focussed on a moral cause and thereby socially unified in spite of the minimal amount of rationed consumer goods.

But without an inspiring cause, would we in the developed 'North' consuming at the rate of four planets accept our equal global share to halt climate change: one family car for only two days per week, meat once, fish twice, two eggs, one airplane trip every five years? I don't, and certainly most of northern society as it behaves at present would not, though countries like Cuba manage it. So we in the North, as the saying goes, 'vote with our feet' to consume four planets - no surprise then that we also vote for consumer capitalism with our ballots.

Because consumerism arises from an exploitative worker-to-worker relationship, it will end as workers in the South do the maths to insist on equality and justice, and unite on a continental or worldwide basis to demand that their wages mirror their production, replicating that which Northern workers historically won within their own countries. When these wages reach even one-third of our Northern wages there will be little margin left to fund our diverting consumerism and finally capitalism's inequality and injustice will be fully experienced in the North. Our widespread consumerism will fade, capitalism will begin to crumble, and action on the climate can emerge. We can help by encouraging Southern-world workers to unite to demand the global equality which will end our Consumerism -hopefully soon enough to avoid climate disaster.

1 --Letter Engels to Kautsky, 1882: "... English workers gaily share the feast of England's colonies..."

2 -- E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875-1914*, London, 1987.

3 -- T. Picketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, Cambridge MA, 2014. *The growing wealth gap since the 1970s is one of the book's main arguments.*

4 --Trade: US Census Bureau. -Wages: *Monthly Review*, Feb.2013 p.29.

5 --US: over 50% -Pew Research, 2012. --England: 36% -Ipsos Mori Poll, 2013.

6 --US Census Bureau, 2012.

The above discussion article includes thought provoking ideas which our readers may wish to comment upon.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

REFORMS TO ITALY'S SENATE

Anyone reading Italian Premier Matteo Renzi's Tweet of 13 October would think that he had been responsible for a popular reform. He gave thanks to those who, like himself, worked to follow the dream of a more straightforward and strong Italy. His Minister for Constitutional Reform, Maria Elena Boschi was also tweeting happily about what had been a beautiful day for herself, and the party and, of course Italy. Photos in the press showed her looking as thrilled as if she'd just won the lottery.

Italy's lower house, The Camera, had just approved a law to change the composition of, or, as it was called, "to reform", the upper house. Currently the Italian Senate has 315 elected *senatori*, although there are a handful of eminent Senators for life. The Camera has 630 *deputati*. The system now includes a strategy for adding a premium of additional members to the party winning the highest number of seats. This was designed to stop the frequent changes of government by stabilising the position of the party, or coalition in power.

Under the law that Boschi has driven forward for Renzi, the new upper house will have just 100 *senatori*. Representation is based on the 21 regions, giving a total of 95 *senatori*, 21 of whom have to be mayors. The *Quote Rosa*, the pink quota (with a different meaning in Italy) stipulates that there should be "an equilibrium between females and males in the representation". The remaining 5 senators will be a modification of the existing Senators-for-Life and these *Senators Nominated by The President* will have a term of office limited to 7 years. The Senators for Life, now 4 after the death of eminent musician and conductor Claudio Abbado, will add to the total of 100 *senatori*.

The new Senate's terms are not entirely clear at this point. Renzi's Twitter claim of making a stronger Italy is completely contradicted by the proposal for a Senate that is nominated rather than elected by the people. For this to work democratically and openly in an Italy where cronyism, corruption and the mafia run the regions is an impossibility.

The *senatori's* reduced terms of reference are the second enormous change. The scope of the *senatori* will be severely limited. They will be able to scrutinise and vote on new laws, but not to change them. Their decisions do not have to change the intentions of the *deputati* in the Lower House. Any power will, in essence, be limited to dealings with the regions. Alfiero Grandi, a member of the lower house and of *CGIL*, (*The Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), Italy's largest Trades Union, was critical of the new law. On 28 October he wrote in *Libertà e Giustizia* that the law would demote the Senate to *Serie B*, so making a reference to what all Italians would know as the second division of their football league. Powerless.

Having 215 fewer *senatori* will curtail the expense of running the vast fleets of spotless dark blue official cars in Rome. There will also be a sharp reduction in costs as it is not clear whether the *senatori* will be paid. *La Repubblica* (13 October) says that as the mayors are already being paid a salary no more can be expected.

Grandi goes on to make the highly legally significant, but in effect irrelevant point, that Renzi's government was itself elected under an electoral law (*il porcellum*) that was declared unconstitutional by the Italian Court. He questions the legitimacy of Renzi's government and is, like many commentators and parliamentarians, opposed to what is widely

seen as a dangerous diminution of democracy in Italy.

The passing of the law itself was a very colourful Italian process. *La Repubblica* of 13 October started their report by listing the symbolically loaded strategies that the majority of the Lower House had used to register disapproval. In Italy this is done by refusing either to vote or abstain. References were made to Mussolini's time when his opponents were force-fed castor oil as an unpleasant and undignified torture. Beppe Grillo's M5S group (Movimento Cinque Stella) were amongst those pointedly absent, leaving their seats patriotically covered with the Italian tricolour flag. Others went out to the Aventino, which is another Mussolini-era protest made by leaving the house and symbolically going up the Aventino Hill. There were placards, passions and refusals to applaud the result. Out of a possible total of 630 *deputati*, 179 voted in favour - less than a third of the possible total, while only 16 voted against and a mere 7 abstained. 428 *deputati* had avoided voting.

There will be a referendum to confirm the law. However, this will be held in 2016, possibly in October. Alfiero Grandi speaks for much of the opposition when he talks about Renzi's *burglary* of the Constitution. Renzi finds it easy to blackmail or to threaten people to do what he wants. In part because there is never much of an appetite for an election.

Renzi's manipulations are undermining the strength of support for his Pd party. The ratings vary, but Grillo's M5S are creeping up to be a credible threat with around 5 points of difference. Berlusconi's Forza Italia Fi and Salvini's Lega Nord could stand as a joint force of significance. But they don't work easily together at present and both leaders are losing approval ratings. Salvini's Lega Nord were able to build strong support on the anti-migrant vote. But migrants are finding new routes and the interest and pressure has waned.

The Pd is split and the anti-Renzi faction is likely to join with all the other anti-Senate reform parties who are gearing up to join the NO camp when the referendum comes. The left-wing of the Pd have protested often but ineffectually against Renzi. This has had the effect of illuminating the disunity which has discredited the party. This has fuelled its fall and, as a consequence the M5S's rise. The opposition to the reforms is largely confined to the political classes; the pressure in the country against the reforms is not large. The political class commands little respect in Italy anyway and the Senate changes were met with indifference. The ratings for Renzi himself have diminished. At 60% a year ago, they are now 44%, but are still higher than any other possible leader. At this point Beppe Grillo and the man likely to succeed him, Luigi Di Maio rate 31%, while Silvio Berlusconi lags behind, and is still falling, at 26%. The review of the polls were published by *La Repubblica* by on 17 October. Things could be different next week.

But, said Ivor Diamante, who commented on the *La Repubblica* reviews, the immediate danger for Renzi comes from within. He has "personalised" his government. Perhaps he is still continuing to model himself on Tony Blair and his "sofa government". The clear divisions in his party are insidious and Diamante considers that they could destabilise his power-base. He concludes by questioning whether a leader such as Renzi with a "personal government" style, might not be able to sustain a future as a Premier without a party behind him.