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What Price Sovereignty?

Much political debate in the UK concerns the repatriation of sovereign powers from the EU back to the UK. Given this concern, one would think that the anti-EU sceptics would be mainly concerned with the protection of national prerogatives at all costs. However, this is not necessarily the case. The EU is currently negotiating a trade agreement between itself and the US which will seriously compromise national sovereignty. The Eurosceptics do not like this because it is the EU that is doing the negotiating, but there is little evidence that they have much difficulty with the substance of the negotiations, which is about the abolition of much more parliamentary prerogative than the EU has ever attempted. To our knowledge they have never once raised this issue.

In order to understand what is going on, it is necessary first to explain the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a trade agreement that has been undergoing negotiation since 2013 between the US and the EU to create the largest free trade zone in the world.

There is also the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), between 12 countries —US, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Brunei, Chile, Singapore, Peru, Malaysia and Vietnam— which has been in negotiation since 2011. That has gone through 30 rounds of talks, the TTIP only 4 so far. If both were signed, the US would have deals with countries accounting for 2/3 of the world's output. It is an alternative to the World Trade Organisation negotiations, which involved China and India among other countries not keen on deregulation and total free trade. China is not a party to TPP.

But both these sets of negotiations are stuck at the moment.

The Transpacific Partnership talks started in 2011 and are stuck by disagreement between Japan and the US, Japan insisting on 5 'sacred' areas where it will keep tariffs: rice, meat, wheat, dairy and sugar. A recent agreement between 2 parties of this proposed free trade zone will give an idea of the size of the objections to free trade in the Pacific area.

In early April 2014 Japan and Australia signed a bilateral trade agreement, where Japan would lower its tariff on beef from 38.5% to 23.5% over 15 years.

Meanwhile, the Transatlantic Treaty negotiations are not brought to the attention of the public, in fact they are conducted very quietly, to avoid opposition. When Francois Hollande, the French president held a joint press conference with Obama in Washington on 11 February 2014, he recommended accelerating the process, before 'fears and negative feelings' held it up, that is, before people realised what was happening and started to campaign against it. The Financial Times in an editorial on 16 February this year ('No time to waste on Transatlantic Trade') also called for speeding up, for fear that the new Commission and European Parliament coming into being in 2014 will be less favourable to free trade and liberalisation.

The brakes on Europe-US trade are not so much tariffs, which are mostly low anyway, but regulations, such legislation on food safety, car safety, and environmental safety. This regulation will be combated on two fronts: there will be new 'common regulations' and investors will be able to sue states if their

regulations prove to be obstacles to successful investment, that is to say, profit. This will be conducted in special courts not subject to ordinary judicial process. Jos Dings and Pieter de Pous, members of the EU's TTIP advisory group of experts, explained in a letter to the Financial Times in response to the pro TTIP editorial of 17 February mentioned earlier:

"First, the European Commission and the US want to include a clause for "investor-state dispute settlement". This would allow businesses to bypass regular court systems and sue governments directly, in special arbitration panels, for anything they claim not to be "fair and equitable" treatment – typically legislation designed to deliver public benefits. Such panels are deeply flawed. The claimant – business – has a 50 per cent say in who presides over them, and the panels' decisions are not bound by legal precedent. Arbitration is fine for settling contract disputes; it should not get to judge the validity of laws. Second, the EU and the US also want to set up a new (of course, unelected) body with the power to scrutinise all legislation that one of the two blocs might initiate."

Partisans of the Partnership argue that such powers to sue already exist in thousands of bilateral trade agreements, and cause no problem. Asked about the current case where Philip Morris Tobacco is suing Australia over blank packaging of cigarettes, they reply hopefully that this type of case would not happen in Europe. Canada cancelled a ban on a toxic additive used by the oil industry to avoid such a court case. But De Gucht, the EU trade representative on the TTIP negotiations, said that arbitration cases would be heard in public and would pose no challenge to health and safety and other government regulations. However, he brought no evidence for this so it seems to be a hopeful sentiment only. Indeed it is hard to see what the point of the arbitration procedure would be if investors were not able to bring such cases to court. One can see this mentality at work in the EU's dealings with developing countries. For example EU investors are suing Egypt for

increasing the minimum wage, and Peru for introducing limits on toxic emissions; this presumably upsets profit on investment already undertaken. American business lawyers would do the same to Europe if the TTIP went ahead.

Sigmar Gabriel, the German Economy minister, wants the special arbitration panels removed from the Partnership; Nicole Bricq, the French trade minister, also opposes them. That means that both countries are not against the Partnership as such, as they seem prepared to accept it with some clauses removed.

Legislation for consumer and worker safety should be universal, otherwise consumers and workers in some countries are disadvantaged or even put at risk, and countries with low regulation have an unfair advantage as regards attracting investment. One of the aims of the Partnership is setting common regulatory standards, harmonising environmental, food safety and data privacy standards. The question is, where would the Partnership set the level of regulation? High or low? Opponents of the Partnership cite cases where the level would be set lower as a result of the Partnership: chlorine disinfected chicken, use of chemicals banned in 160 countries including Russia and China in pig breeding, non labelling of GM foods, no Tobin Tax, airlines not having to pay for carbon emissions etc. And the Snowden revelations have cast a shadow on 'harmonising data privacy standards.' A survey revealed that Germans have no faith at all in American standards, whereas Americans prefer their own standards but have a degree of faith in European standards; a majority of both Germans and Americans favoured the Partnership in principle however.

As with Ukraine, right and left disagree. In France, Copé, leader of the Center-Right Party UMP, Hollande and the Socialist government favour TTIP. Some trade unions, the Communist Party, the Left Party, the Greens and the National Front are against. So is Xavier Bertrand, an ex-UMP minister, who sees it as a trap for the EU and for France, because of the

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Editorial Board

Dick Barry Christopher Winch
Jack Lane Madawc Williams

labouraffairs@btinternet.com

Distribution

Dave Fennell

Editorial Address

No. 2 Newington Green Mansions
Green Lanes
London N16 9BT

USA practice of dumping towards the EU on three fronts:

- Currency: the US prints dollars, and the dollar is weaker than the euro, making trade unfair.

- Labour laws; there is no national minimum wage in the US.

- The environment: the US are not party to the Kyoto agreement.

The US also subsidise their industry and agriculture on a much greater scale than Europe; they favour their own small and medium enterprises through the Small Business Act, where some US States reserve some of their public works and public services to their own small and medium firms. European giants of waste disposal, water, transport and construction want TTIP in order to break into that protected market. The US are protectionist not in words, but in practice.

France has fought to exclude culture from the TTIP negotiations and gained her point. However, she appears to accept the principles of TTIP despite the damage that it could do to other sectors of the French economy such as agriculture, which could be devastated by American produce.

Taken together the provisions of

TTIP have the potential to compel the states of the EU to repeal laws protecting workers' rights, the environment and public safety to name but three areas. Lawyers from large companies will also be able to head off potential legislation simply by threatening law suits against legislation which they consider will damage their interests. In matters of what they consider to be in their own interests firms will be sovereign over nation states.

Judging by their behaviour so far, nearly everyone in parliament from eurosceptics to nearly all sections of the Labour Party seem to be happy with the negotiations that are taking place. They are quite willing to see parliamentary sovereignty removed in the interest of big business. But they also realise how unpopular this will be with the public, hence their silence. The only question is whether UKIP will burnish its nationalist credentials by raising the issue. As it is, our three liberal parties seem happy to sign away the interests of the British people.

Their behaviour betrays a view of parliamentary democracy that has little concern for the popular will. Last month we pointed out

that parliament bowed the knee to the US anti-Russian campaign and did not protest when our Foreign Secretary misled the House about the legitimacy of the Ukrainian putsch regime. It appears again to be in awe of the powerful; the US and corporate interests who are ready to ride roughshod and suppress democratically enacted legislation in the interests of 'free trade' and 'growth', both slogans that are shorthand for the interests of international capitalism.

War's one of those things, don't you think, where everyone always thinks they're in the right have you noticed that? Nobody ever says we're the bad guys, we're going to beat shit out of the good guys.

Caryl Churchill, A Number

Vietnam was the first war ever fought without any censorship. Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind.

William Westmoreland, Time magazine, Apr. 5, 1982

The Future of Britain's National Health Service

Keep Our NHS Public organised an election meeting on Monday 28 April at the Camden Irish Centre, attended by candidates from the Labour Party, the Green Party and the National Health Action Party, on the topic, naturally enough, of the NHS.

Two local Councillors, one Tory one LibDem, were among the 30 odd present in the audience. The Labour European candidate got the hardest time, as she couldn't reply to those who told her that she was all very well, but they heard nothing from the leadership that reassured them that Labour would stand up for the existence of the NHS.

All candidates and many in the audience asking questions mentioned the Transatlantic Partnership as if it was a very well known issue, and greatly to be feared.

The overall impression gained from the meeting is that the attack on the NHS is so intense and so cleverly conducted it is likely to be successful.

The National Health Action Party is presenting candidates for the European elections. There is nobody else to vote for.

BRINGING ON WW3

It's a kaleidoscope of many blood lines,
shake it and the moral lesson becomes clear,
of gangsters, juntas, and killers who leer,
with the prayer-ridden America they combine
to destroy secular nations, to destabilise,
to stop developing nations developing,
to give developed nations a walloping.
Should it be any great surprise, so reprise
that it is a plot to take over the world,
signed up for the blood-spangled banner kit.
But will huge nations kneel before this writ,
to give up their identity, their flags to furl.
How long now before a terminal hit,
as the pipes of war continually skirl.

Wilson John Haire. 24th April, 2014

Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

Germany And Belgium

In the last issue (April 2014) we published a substantial part of a long statement of 3 August 1914 by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and the response to this by Ramsay MacDonald. Later that same day Grey came back to Parliament to report on correspondence he had received from the Belgian legation regarding an offer from the German Government. This was published in the April issue, but for reasons of space the responses to this, and Grey's earlier statement, from Philip Edward Morrell and Keir Hardie, were held over to the current issue. These are published below, following Grey's statement.

Philip E. Morrell was Liberal MP for Henley, 1906-10, and Burnley, 1910-18. His family made a fortune from the brewing industry and Morrell was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. His mother was the daughter of the President of St John's College, Oxford, and his father-in-law was Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Morrell died in 1943. Keir Hardie was born into a working class family in Newhouse, North Lanarkshire. He was elected as an Independent for West Ham South in 1892. In 1900 he helped to form the Labour Representation Committee from which the Labour Party was born in 1906. He represented Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare from 1900 until his death in September 1915 at the age of 59.

Sir Edward Grey:

"I want to give the House some information which I have received, and which was not in my possession when I made my statement this afternoon. It is information I have received from the Belgian legation in London, and is to the following effect:--

"Germany sent yesterday evening at seven o'clock a Note proposing to Belgium friendly neutrality, covering free passage on Belgian territory, and promising maintenance of independence

of the kingdom and possession at the conclusion of peace, and threatening in case of refusal, to treat Belgium as an enemy. A time limit of twelve hours was fixed for the reply. The Belgians have answered that an attack on their neutrality would be a flagrant violation of the rights of nations, and that to accept the German proposal would be to sacrifice the honour of a nation. Conscious of its duty, Belgium is firmly resolved to repel aggression by all possible means."

"Of course, I can only say that the Government are prepared to take into grave consideration the information which it has received. I make no further comment upon it."

Mr Morrell:

"I assure the House I feel very strongly and keenly the responsibility of my position. I hope the House will give me a short hearing while I endeavour to put before it, as clearly as I can, why many of us---and I believe I speak for a good many on this side of the House---feel unable to agree with the Government in the policy they are now pursuing. I am quite ready to admit that the Foreign Secretary made, as he told us he did, every possible effort to secure peace in Europe. The only question we ask ourselves is whether, since the failure of his efforts, he has really made a sufficient attempt to make fair terms with Germany, and to secure the neutrality of this country in the war which has unhappily broken out."

"First of all, let me deal with what he said. The right hon. Gentleman has told us he admits there are no formal obligations binding this country to intervene in this war. None whatever. No formal obligation with regard to France, at any rate up till yesterday. As regards the letter of 22nd November, 1912, which he read out to this House, I submit that it is conclusive from that point. That letter perfectly and clearly intimated to France that we could not undertake to support

her in a European war, and, as he fairly put it, it was entirely open to this House, and it is so even now, to decide whether we are going to intervene in this war at all."

"We may consider our own interests, or rather we may consider and are bound to consider the views of those who send us hereto this House when we are dealing with a question of this sort. What are the two formal reasons which are given us why it is essential for us, at the present time, to undertake warlike operations against Germany and Austria? There are only two reasons. They are, in the first place, that we are bound to protect the Northern coast of France, and, in the second place, that we are bound to intervene to prevent any passage of German troops across Belgian soil. In spite of the cheers which have greeted this statement, I venture to think that the right hon. Gentleman in the speech he made went some way to supply the answer to those two reasons that he urged. With regard to the coast of France, he made it perfectly clear that the German Government offered to this country, that if we pledged ourselves to neutrality, Germany would undertake not to attack the northern coast of France. That was an undertaking which was cheered from this side of the House and which found a good deal of sympathy. But the right hon. Gentleman went on to say that that was far too narrow an engagement."

"Then I come to the second point---to the question of Belgium. I want the House to realise that we are not dealing with a country which refuses all negotiations. Germany has never put herself in that position. She has not said, 'We refuse to negotiate; we claim the right to march our troops across Belgium, and we claim the right to attack the coast of France.' That is not what Germany says. I quote the words of the right hon. Gentleman as I took them down. 'They would guarantee Belgian integrity'---(An HON. MEMBER: "At the end of

the war!")---and the reply to that was, 'We cannot bargain away our interests in Belgian neutrality.' In other words, we are asked now to involve this country in all the perils of this great adventure, because, forsooth, Germany is going to insist on her march some troops---(Interruption)---because Germany insists on her point of view. I am quite prepared to admit that if Germany threatened to annex Belgium, or to occupy Belgium, or if she disregarded the rights of nationality, we might be bound under our Treaty Obligation to go to war to protect Belgium. But what, after all, is the actual fact? What is it we are asked to do?"

"We are asked to go to war because there may be a few German regiments in a corner of Belgium territory. I am not prepared to support a Government which goes to war under those circumstances. We are not merely proposing to go to war for inadequate reasons, but we are doing even more than the Belgian Government are asking us to do. As I understood the right hon. Gentleman, the Belgian Government asked him if he would give diplomatic support, and the reply was that he did not think diplomatic support was sufficient. We have to consider whether it is worth the while of this country to do even more than the Belgian Government asks us to do, in order to have the privilege of intervening in a European war. I do not agree with it. I do not think that these two reasons, although they may be diplomatic reasons, are the real reasons why we are going to engage in this perilous venture."

"I believe we are going to war now because of the fear and jealousy entertained in this country unfortunately, and fostered by large sections of the Press---the fear and jealousy of German ambition. I believe that is the real reason why hon. Gentlemen opposite are asking this country to go to war, and I do not think there would be any war fever in this country except for the demands made by the Party opposite and their supporters in the Press. At any rate, I believe I am justified in saying it is absolutely clear that it is fear of Germany

which is to-day driving us to war. I ask myself whether we have not in times past suffered enough, paid enough treasure, and paid enough of the blood of the subjects of this country in order to preserve what John Bright once called that 'foul fetish---the balance of power in Europe.' I ask myself, too, whether we can now be sure we shall preserve that balance of power."

"The right hon. Gentleman said very little about Russia. Let us remember that in going to war in this way we are going to war just as much to preserve the despotism of Russia as to interfere with German ambition. For my part, although I have no particular love for the German Empire, or for German methods, I have still less love for Russia or Russian methods. Without engaging in a war to support despotism, in my opinion it is perfectly possible for the right hon. Gentleman and the Government to arrange an honourable neutrality with Germany, a neutrality which would be perfectly honourable to this country. I regret it still more because I think the country is being rushed into war without its knowledge."

"No one a week ago could have foreseen that we were going to take a step like this. After listening to the right hon. Gentleman and the reasons he has given, while we must admit the strength of his speech and its sincerity, I say I do not believe he has given a sufficient reason for our undertaking at this time, here and now, the terrible peril and danger of involving this country in war. I have only one other point. The right hon. Gentleman said, at the end of his speech, that we shall not suffer much more if we engage in war than if we stand aside. He used words to that effect. It was an unworthy remark in an otherwise able speech. It was a pity he should appeal to the British people on these grounds. If we engage in war, we shall suffer in our country, and we shall also suffer, I believe, as regards our influence in Europe. I regret very much at the end of eight years the best you can say of the policy which has been pursued---of the Triple Entente---is that it should have landed us into such a war as this."

Mr Keir Hardie:

"I desire for a very few minutes to intervene in this Debate. Both Houses of Parliament have passed, with absolute unanimity, a Bill for the relief of the Stock Exchange. We Members, from these benches, offered no objection, but we now demand to be informed what is going to be done for the relief of the inevitable destitution which is bound to prevail among the poor? As the Foreign Secretary informed us, whether we take part in the conflict or not, there is bound to be much suffering. That involves starving children. Will the Government pass with the same promptitude as we have done the Bill for the relief of the Stock Exchange and the business interests, the Bill to compel education authorities to feed hungry school-children? We ask for an answer. We are far more interested in the sufferings of the poor than we are in the inconvenience to members of the Stock Exchange. Most of the Members of this House have a more direct interest in the Stock Exchange than they have in the sufferings of the poor (HON. MEMBERS: "No, no!" "Shame!" and "Name!")."

"The proof of that will be found if the same promptitude be shown in redressing and alleviating the poverty of the poor as we have shown in the other case. What action is to be taken, not merely to ensure a sufficient food supply, but to safeguard the public against being robbed by food speculators? Surely that issue is urgent and important! Not only will workers be thrown out of work by the million---it will not simply be by the thousand, but by the million---but the unscrupulous gang who form the food ring will take advantage of the war crisis to rob the poor than the market justifies. They have already commenced, without justification of any kind. We are entitled to demand from the Government---not merely to request, but to demand--- to be informed what action is to be taken to safeguard the interests of the working classes in the crisis we are now approaching."

"One word more. The decision of the Government has been to come without consulting the country. It

remains to be seen whether the Government and the House of Commons represents the country on this question. So far as some of us are concerned---here I do not speak for the party with which I am connected for the present moment, but for myself personally---we shall endeavour to ascertain what is the real feeling of the country and especially of the working classes of the country, in regard to the decision of the Government. We belong to a Party which is international. In Germany, in France, in Belgium and in Austria, the party corresponding to our own is taking all manner of risks to promote and preserve peace. (An HON. MEMBER: "Why do they not control the German Emperor?") I am asked, why do they not control the German Emperor? For the same reason we do not control the Liberal Cabinet---we are not strong enough. But we are growing. My point is that in all these countries the party corresponding to our own is working strenuously for peace, and especially throughout Germany."

"I confess that I heard with a feeling akin to wonder this afternoon the refusal by our Foreign Secretary on behalf of the Cabinet, even to consider the offers made on behalf of the German Government to keep this country out of the dispute. If the neutrality of Belgium can be secured after the war, if the Germans offer not to bombard the coast of France---if these can be made the basis for further negotiation, then every form of justification of the Cabinet for going into the war will have been taken away. I say respectfully to the House that some of us will do all we can to rouse the working classes of the country in opposition to this proposal of the Government, but especially we have the right to ask what action is now going to be taken to alleviate, as far as possible, the sufferings of those who are bound to be hard hit by war, whether we take part in it or not. Our honour is said to be involved in entering into the war. That is always the excuse. I suppose our honour was involved in the Crimean War, and who to-day justifies it? Our honour was involved in the

Boer War. How many to-day will justify it? A few years hence, and if we are led into this war, we shall look back in wonder and amazement at the flimsy reasons which induced the Government to take part in it."

Violation Of Belgian Neutrality

The following day, 4 August, Andrew Bonar Law, Canadian-born leader of the Conservative Party, asked Prime Minister Henry Herbert Asquith if he had any statement he could make to the House. Hansard heads Asquith's statement 'ULTIMATUM TO GERMAN GOVERNMENT' 'Reply Demanded by Midnight (4th August)'

The Prime Minister (Mr Asquith):

"In conformity with the statement of policy made here by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary yesterday, a telegram was early this morning sent by him to our Ambassador in Berlin. It was to this effect:

"The King of the Belgians has made an appeal to his Majesty the King for diplomatic intervention on behalf of Belgium. His Majesty's Government are also informed that the German Government has delivered to the Belgian Government a Note proposing friendly neutrality entailing free passage through Belgian territory and promising to maintain the independence and integrity of the Kingdom and its possessions, at the conclusion of peace, threatening in case of refusal to treat Belgium as an enemy. An answer was requested within twelve hours. We also understand that Belgium has categorically refused this as a flagrant violation of the law of nations. His Majesty's Government are bound to protest against this violation of a Treaty to which Germany is a party in common with themselves, and must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium may not be proceeded with, and that her neutrality will be respected by Germany. You should ask for an immediate reply."

"We received this morning from our Minister at Brussels the following telegram:---

"German Minister has this

morning addressed Note to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs stating that as Belgian Government have declined the well-intended proposals submitted to them by the Imperial Government, the latter will, deeply to their regret, be compelled to carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the French menaces."

"Simultaneously---almost immediately afterwards---we received from the Belgian Legation here in London the following telegram:---

"General staff announces that territory has been violated at Gemmenich (near Aix-la-Chappelle)."

"Subsequent information tended to show that the German force has penetrated still further into Belgian territory. We also received this morning from the German Ambassador here the telegram sent to him by the German Foreign Secretary, and communicated by the Ambassador to us. It is in these terms:---

"Please dispel any mistrust that may subsist on the part of the British Government with regard to our intentions by repeating most positively formal assurance that, even in the case of armed conflict with Belgium, Germany will, under no pretence whatever, annex Belgian territory. Sincerity of this declaration is borne out by the fact that we solemnly pledged our word to Holland strictly to respect her neutrality. It is obvious that we could not profitably annex Belgic territory without making, at the same time, territorial acquisitions at expense of Holland. Please impress upon Sir E. Grey that German Army could not be exposed to French attack across Belgium, which was planned according to absolutely unimpeachable information. Germany had consequently to disregard Belgic neutrality, it being for her a question of life or death to prevent French advance."

"I have to add this on behalf of His Majesty's Government: We cannot regard this as in any sense a satisfactory communication. We have, in reply to it, repeated the request we made last week to the German Government, that they should give us the same assurance

in regard to Belgian neutrality as was given to us and to Belgium by France last week. We have asked that a reply to that request, and a satisfactory answer to the telegram of this morning---which I have read to the House---should be given before midnight.”

Message From Imperial Duma Of Russia
House of Commons 25 August 1914

Mr SPEAKER:

“I have to inform the House that since the House adjourned, I have received a telegram from the President of the Imperial Duma of Russia, M. Michael de Rodzianko, which I should like to read to the House:---

“August, 10th 1914.”

“*The Duma of the Empire, assembled in extraordinary Session, in view of the exceptional events passing in the civilised world, begs the House of Commons of Great Britain to accept their warm and sincere greetings in the name of the sentiments of profound friendship which unite our two great nations. The whole of Russia has welcomed with enthusiasm the resolution of the British people to give their powerful support to the friendly nations in the historic struggle which is developing at this moment. May God bless the arms of the friendly nations of the Triple Entente. Long live his Majesty King George and his valiant Fleet and Army! Long live the British Parliament! Long live Great Britain!*”

“In reply I sent the following telegram:---

“*I hasten to thank you warmly for the telegram in which you have been good enough to convey to me the sentiments of friendship which the Duma of the Empire has expressed towards the House of Commons. As soon as the House meets again, towards the end of this month, I shall not fail to inform it of this graceful manifestation of the cordial relations which so happily exist between our two countries.*”

Some Comments On The London Underground Dispute

by Chris Smith

In November of last year London Underground (LU) announced its plans for the future of the Underground. Titled ‘Fit for the Future--Stations,’ the proposals included a restructuring of grades for staff and the closure of **every** ticket office on the underground network. 900 positions will be lost forever but there will be no compulsory redundancies. The press at the time mainly concentrated on the news of the partial 24 hour running of the network at weekends.

All ticket office staff--Station Assistant Multi Functional (SAMF), will be downgraded to Station Assistants with a loss in salary of nearly £6,000 a year. For some grades the restructuring may result in a loss of as much as £11,000 per year. All supervisors for instance will have to reapply for the new grade of customer service manager, and those who don't qualify will be downgraded. It is possible that some SAMF staff may apply for a higher grade and get this, but in the main most SAMF will be downgraded. LU claim that the plans are about modernising the network. But the unions argue, correctly in my opinion, that the modernisation aspects of the plans can be introduced within the current structure of the grades. In reality, the plans are about cost cutting.

Subsequent to the ‘Fit for the Future’ announcements by LU, the Rail, Marine

Transport (RMT) and Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) unions sought talks regarding these plans. They found however that management only wanted to talk about **how** to implement their plans. They did not and would not negotiate on the ‘Fit for the Future’ plans, even though this is how it should have been done, first through the company council. Indeed the voluntary severance package which they put forward was of itself a breach of procedure as it was presented as a *fait accompli* to staff. Given the complete intransigence of management, both the RMT and TSSA ran ballots which overwhelmingly backed industrial action, including strike action.

We were subject to the usual rubbish by Boris Johnson and other Tories, complaining that only a minority of tube workers voted for strike action. Nevertheless, the ballot returned an overwhelming yes vote. Johnson and other right wing Tories have been arguing for some time that strike action should only take place if more than 50% of members eligible to vote, do so. Not 50% of those who actually vote. This is absurd. More than 50% of the electorate did not vote in the election that put Boris Johnson in office as London Mayor. And I suspect this applies to a number of MPs. Furthermore, Police Commissioners, which this government introduced, were

elected into office by ballots which in places barely reached double figures.

It is also worth noting that it was the Tories who abolished workplace ballots which had very high turnouts and replaced them with postal ballots. Johnson incidentally, got into office the first time by promising **no** ticket office closures. He did not mention in his re-election campaign that he had changed his policy. So I think it is reasonable to say that his original promise stood at the time of his re-election, a promise he has now broken. Before the strikes began both the RMT and TSSA attended Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS) meetings to try to resolve the dispute. Mike Brown, LU's Chief Executive Officer, at one stage alleged on the BBC that the RMT had not turned up for a meeting, which was news to the RMT as it had attended **all** ACAS meetings.

A very successful two day strike was mounted. Probably the most surprising thing about the strike was the level of public support. Strikes are not popular, not even with staff who go on strike and end up losing pay. However all staff reported a positive response from members of the public; a telling sign of the hostility of the public to the plans for ticket office closures. LU passengers have told staff to "stand firm" and if necessary go back on strike. Hostility that is usually directed at the unions was directed towards LU's management and Boris Johnson. The message from the public at ticket offices is clear: please defeat these crazy proposals and keep our ticket offices open. The preceding is the polite version of customer responses.

LU management have been claiming that ticket office use has been declining and that people do not want them anymore. Actually most people do want ticket offices to remain open. While it is true that ticket offices are not as busy as they used to be, they are still used by a lot of people and their closure is not in the best interests of LU or its customers.

At this point perhaps a brief word

is called for on LU's use of statistics. For example, LU's claim that only 3% of journeys begin at a ticket office. Even if one accepts this figure, it needs further explanation. 3% of journeys may begin at a ticket office, but something like over 20% of ticket **sales** take place at a ticket office. Once a ticket has been purchased, whether it is a one day, one week, or one year, travel card, of course the rest of the journeys do not begin at a ticket office.

After the first set of two day strikes and just before the second of the two day strikes, an agreement was reached between RMT/TSSA and LU at ACAS. Both unions temporarily called off their industrial actions. The agreement reached said briefly: 1) LU would suspend its 'Fit for the Future—Stations' plans, and would enter into meaningful and detailed discussions with the unions. 2) All voluntary severance applications would be put on hold and no new applications would be sought. 3) A station by station review would take place, which could result in some ticket offices remaining open.

Subsequent feedback from the unions does not seem positive and I doubt if a station by station review can be undertaken in seven weeks.

Despite LU's claim that this is about modernising the network and is what customers want, in reality their plans are aimed at cutting costs. The RMT's response to LU is that it should bring back all maintenance work in house. RMT also wants LU to open up its books so that the unions can make counter proposals. This is akin to workers' control, but it's probably not what RMT have in mind. Interestingly, although their focus is on cost cutting, one aspect of LU's plans that have not been given much public airing is the proposal to increase the number of Group Station Managers, to be called Area Managers, by **400%**! Yes, that's right: **400%**! Close ticket offices, reduce frontline staff, but massively increase the number of senior managers. Just what the customer ordered!

Since the above was written the meetings at ACAS have revealed that the fears of staff and their Union

representatives have been realised. LU say they have listened---they haven't---and say that no one will now have to apply for their jobs. However, the station by station review of ticket office closures have seen only 5 ticket offices reviewed. Add to this LU's Chief Executive Phil Hufton's stated aim that **all** ticket offices will close, then the only reasonable conclusion that anyone can come to is that the whole review procedure is a sham.

The RMT issued the following statement in response to these "talks": 1) LU promised the unions---and Londoners--- a "station by station review," and that some ticket offices could stay open. LU broke that promise---there has been no station by station review. (5 ticket offices is not a station by station review. CS.). 2) LU intends to cut 1793 frontline posts and create 900 new managers--- from 228 to 1068---one manager to every four staff! (at a cost of £70,000 per manager. CS.). 3) Pay for top managers up; pay for operational staff down.

In response to the RMT's call for strike action Boris Johnson had this to say: "No one will be forced out of a job, no one will lose pay. Fewer than 3% of journeys start at a ticket office." (London Evening Standard. 25/4/14). It seems that the Mayor of London is unaware of what his management team under the "Fit for the Future" proposals are actually trying to implement. This is the man in charge of London's transport and he wants to be Prime Minister! Mr Johnson, try and find out what you are actually supporting.

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature....Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life

Marx, German Ideology (1845)

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



Local elections

The Socialist Party had done very well in previous local and regional elections; the competence of their local elected representatives is recognised. In the March 2014 elections, they have lost many seats. Matters of national importance such as unemployment and loss of spending power, and the opposition to same-sex marriage, especially among Muslim voters, account for the decline.

Last month's Froggy omitted one aspect of the voting system, which is that there are 2 modes of voting, depending on the size of the town/village: over 1,000 inhabitants, and people vote for a list, usually on political lines. Under 1,000 inhabitants, people vote for individuals, who may or may not be grouped in lists. Only *commune* of over 1,000 inhabitants have to have 50% women candidates. Nevertheless smaller places have made a point of presenting 50% of women, whose names are listed alternately on the voting paper.

French has a word that means either town or village, considered as an administrative unit: *la commune*. Paris is *la commune de Paris*, and a village of 100 inhabitants is also a *commune*. Each has a Mayor and a municipal council, and an equivalent set

of powers. This is a situation unique in Europe.

There are around 36,000 *communes* in France, of which a little under 10,000 have more than 1,000 inhabitants. No other European country has that number of local administrative units. There have been a number of government efforts to amalgamate these units into larger ones, with little success. The fact that a village of 100 inhabitants made a point of presenting their 14 candidates in alternate men/women names, although presented in a negative light by Froggy last month, shows a commendable amount of self-belief in a small community.

National Front local results.

Results are only presented in political terms in *communes* of over 1,000 inhabitants. Mayors were elected as follows:

The National Front's successes are very moderate; they occurred mostly in towns where there were three candidates, i.e., where the Socialist or the UMP candidate did not withdraw to prevent the NF candidate winning the seat. Some of the NF highest ranking party members failed to get elected.

The NF Mayors and municipal councils are being watched, and they will try to avoid their previous failures, when they made symbolic gestures, for example renamed streets and banned cultural events, antagonising people without gaining anything. In Fréjus for example, the new NF Mayor says Halal meat will continue to be served in school dinners, despite party campaigning against Halal meat in schools. On the other hand, he also removed the European flag from the front

Centre Right (UMP) and associates:	4,878
Socialist Party and associates:	3,023
“Divers”:	1,730
Extreme Left:	98
National Front + 2 Extreme Right:	14
Greens:	11

of the Town Hall building.

Sale of Alstom?

The French may be on the point of losing ownership of one of their most prestigious firms, Alstom.

Alstom is the French company that makes TGV trains among other things; its field of activity is transport and electric power. Sarkozy had saved the group in 2004 by buying a 20% share in it, which he sold two years later to the construction and telecom firm Bouygues. Now Alstom is struggling because of the economic slowdown in Europe and emerging markets and competition from Siemens and General Electric. The American firm General Electric wants to take it over, to improve its own economic performance. Will Holland manage to save Alstom for France?

Anti-family measures

There is maternity leave and paternity leave, immediately after the birth of the baby. After that, there is parental leave, unpaid, available until the child is three years old. The 'first parent' (ministerial speak for 'mother') taking parental leave is still part of the firm she was working for in the sense that half or the whole of the period of leave counts for length of service, the benefits offered by the Firm's Committee, such as organised holidays, are still available, and the parent gets their job back when the leave is over. How that parental leave works in practice depends on the firm and mainly on whether the family can afford to live without the first parent's income.

The Minister for Women, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the same who was filmed encouraging little girls to play war, wants to reduce parental leave by 6 months. The rationale is that first parents should not be away from the job environment too long.

The last 6 months of parental leave are still available, but they must necessarily be taken by the 'second parent'. 18,000 fathers availed themselves of parental leave in 2013. The Minister wants that figure to be 100,000 in 2017, hence the new law. In practice, she is taking away from women the

possibility of staying at home to look after children for as long as they used to.

Men and women are still not equal, say the statistics, because men on average earn more than women. But income is not the only way to measure inequality. It may be the easiest, since money can be counted. And inequality of income may not be the worst sort of inequality. Being able to do what you want with your life is valued by people, but it can't be reduced to figures or translated in money terms. If the man is able to do what he wants to do with his life, he is lucky. The same for a woman. If they both get to do what they want to do in life, they are equally lucky. This holds whether one gets paid in the process, and the other does not. Making it even more difficult for a mother to stay with her children when she wants to, is to prevent her from doing what she wants with her life.

Defining equality or inequality in the things that really matter is a difficult and pointless exercise. Staying at home with children, although difficult in a society where families are isolated from one another and mothers often lonely, is valuable not because the mother would then be 'equal to the father' in personal satisfaction, but because people should be able to do what makes them happy, where possible. In this particular case, it is also good for children, and arguably for all members of the family.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

The magazine *Marianne* (Marianne represents the Republic, and the masthead of the magazine cover shows the Republic guiding the people, in a painting by Delacroix) has started a campaign against it, with on its cover a picture of the American Eagle, and the headline: 'How we are going to be gobbled up by the US'.

France Inter has an item during Friday lunchtime news programmes where they explain at length some important point. On Friday 25 April, they explained the TTIP, briefly and clearly, then gave Le Hyaric, MEP, director of

l'Humanité and author of a book on the TTIP entitled '*Dracula and the Peoples of the World*' the rest of the available time to present a thorough critique of the proposed trade treaty.

The TTIP has support among French corporations such as *Veolia Environnement S.A.*, a transnational company with activities in four main service and utility areas traditionally managed by public authorities - water supply and water management, waste management, energy and transport services. They would like to sell these services to cities in the United States; however, some US States reserve their public works and public services to their own small and medium firms. European giants of waste disposal, water, transport and construction want TTIP in order to break into that protected market. Veolia is already suing a government for its actions on the social front: it is suing the Egyptian government for raising the minimum wage. On the other hand, the French agricultural sector would be destroyed if American imports were allowed in.

The campaign is only just starting. Hollande and Obama—and the European Commission—did everything to keep the negotiations quiet. When Hollande held a joint press conference with Obama in Washington on 11 February 2014, he recommended accelerating the process, before 'fears and negative feelings' (*les peurs et crispations*) held it up, i.e. before people realised what was happening and started to campaign against it. But the TTIP is beginning to be talked about.

The same energy of character which renders a man a daring villain would have rendered him useful in society, had that society been well organized.

Mary Wollstonecraft

The Afghans are a brave, hardy, and independent race; they follow pastoral or agricultural occupations only... With them, war is an excitement and relief from the monotonous occupation of industrial pursuits.

Engels, On Afghanistan (1857)

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Big People Pay Small Taxes

1960s radicalism created many of the personal freedoms that later generations take for granted, apparently believing that these things would have been conceded without a fight. But 1960s radicals were also mindlessly anti-state, thinking 'the less government, the better'. They were scornful of the struggles of their own parents, who had fought much harder than any 1960s radical to create the welfare and full employment that was then taken for granted

1960s radicals wanted some sort of mix of socialism and anarchism, along with 'green' policies and respect for other cultures, values which are now mainstream when once they were fringe. But on economic management, they had no clear idea and allowed a big recovery of power by the rich. They justified wanton attacks on the successful Mixed-Economy system of the 1940s to 1970s by saying their own system has never been tried. Which reminds me of the old joke about a man who's asked if he can play the violin and answers 'I don't know, I've never tried'.

In fact it *has* been tried. Small self-regulating systems have repeatedly withered in the face of modern commerce, whenever the state was ready to step aside and see what develops. 1960s radicals played a large role in the computer revolution: there's a book called *Hackers*¹ that describes how the original hobbyists and open-source enthusiasts got going. And how they got ousted by commercial interests, or else turned into regular business people. That's where Apple and Microsoft came from, along with others who soon perished because of bad luck or a failure to properly adjust to modern business practice.

Things might have been different

had 1960s radicals said 'the Mixed-Economy system is a vast improvement on anything that has existed before, so let's improve it further'. Instead they stuck to the notion of 'the less government, the better'. This laid them way open to the New Right, with dodges like tax evasion seen as almost normal and smart.

One interesting new case has just come up:

"Mr Ecclestone, the chief executive of Formula 1, is currently on trial in Germany facing corruption charges. It is alleged he was behind a £26m bribe paid to a bank official. Prosecutors allege the bribe was paid to ensure that Mr Ecclestone retained control of the sport. Ecclestone admits paying former banker, Gerhard Gribkowsky, but says he was effectively the victim of blackmail as he was worried the banker would tell the tax authorities he had set up an offshore family trust."²

The significance of this trust is as follows:

"Panorama's investigation goes back to 1995 when Mr Ecclestone secured ownership of the lucrative TV rights of Formula 1. Shortly afterwards he moved this prize asset offshore, giving the rights to his then wife, Slavica. She transferred them to a family trust in Liechtenstein, before selling them for a huge profit, free of UK tax. It may be the biggest individual tax dodge in British history, and is legally watertight provided Mr Ecclestone did not set up, or control, the trust. If he had done, Mr Ecclestone has admitted, he could have faced a tax bill of more than \$2bn - or £1.2bn."³

He could have afforded to pay, having several billions to his name. But he's got away with it, with the tax authorities taking a soft line, as they almost always do when faced with obvious cheating by

the rich.

The tax laws could be changed to include a little common sense – that a business should be taxed where it actually operates, with tax split between several different tax regimes if that is where it operates. The pretence of operating in some low-tax area should be treated with the derision it deserves. But that would go against the notion of 'the less government, the better', which has become part of the intellectual climate.

Long past time to point out that this has not worked.

Rising Inequality

Another produce of 1960s radicalism was loss of confidence in Trade Unions as agents of sensible reforms. Militants used them for a lot of rather pointless militancy, while sneering at the prospect of Workers Control. They thought that workers could be tricked into revolution when they didn't feel at all revolutionary. This caused a reversal of a lot of the gains that had been made since the 1940s. The incomes of the rich shot up, especially in the USA:

"Until the 1980s, corporate CEOs were paid, on average, 30 times what their typical worker was paid. Since then, CEO pay has skyrocketed to 280 times the pay of a typical worker; in big companies, to 354 times. Meanwhile, over the same thirty-year time span the median American worker has seen no pay increase at all, adjusted for inflation. Even though the pay of male workers continues to outpace that of females, the typical male worker between the ages of 25 and 44 peaked in 1973 and has been dropping ever since. Since 2000, wages of the median male worker across all age brackets has dropped 10 percent, after inflation"⁴

Even the original balance was

unfair. A modern Chief Executive Officer would certainly have earned their post, but could anyone seriously believe that they were *thirty* times as hard-working or skilled than the average employee?

It is even less plausible that CEOs have got at least nine times better than their 1980s counterparts, which is what their current pay would suggest. Conventional economics is based on a dogmatic belief that if they get it in a “free” economy, they must have earned it. But this does not match what we see in the real world.

If you think about it in terms of power, it is another matter. Once the New Right had convinced large numbers of workers that they were ‘single-combat heroes’ who did not need trade unions or other forms of collective security, the balance tipped enormously. The bosses of big companies operating globally were always in a much stronger position than their workforce and could close down entire industries where the trade unions were too strong. The only control was what shareholders thought the top bosses were worth – and the people in charge of managing the bulk of the shares were very much the same type of people as those top bosses. The same individual might play both roles for different companies.

Despite the loss of working-class strength, workers still seem to believe they are ‘single-combat heroes’, or ought to be. This applies in particular to what used to be called “white-collar” jobs. People doing them seldom wear white collars nowadays, often not even suits. But they have been fooled into identifying with the people above them rather than people like themselves. Their aspiration is to be ‘single-combat heroes’ outside of any collective identity, part of the message they’ve inherited from 1960s radicals. Popular culture has become dominated by superheroes winning while detached from society and with superior powers.

Another approach is cynicism. Life isn’t fair and you can’t expect it to be. To which I reply, it should be made fairer and can be made fairer. That life is much fairer than it

was at the start of the 20th century, when there were huge advantages in being white, male and rich, but also oppressive conventions that hemmed in even this privileged minority.

Some of the economic fairness has been lost since the 1980s, when people were persuaded that the highly successful tax-and-spend policies pursued since the 1940s were somehow unfair. But the unfair advantages from being white and/or male continue to erode, mostly due to state enforcement of anti-discrimination rules.

The hippy idea that everything would work out fine if the state stopped trying to regulate things has been tested and mostly found not to work. It needed state action to break racial and sexual inequality, which still have some strength despite being driven underground.

Piketty’s Heretical Capitalism

Thomas Piketty’s book *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* has some good points, but is another example of the pervasive influence of the decay-products of 1960s radicalism, in particular the idea that government is bad and can’t do much. I’m planning a detailed analysis of the book for the next issue: for now note that he is no socialist and largely tries to explain rising inequality on technical grounds rather than political. And ignores the large and persistent state role in the economy by balancing government assets against government debts, showing that the two very nearly balance out.

If large parts of economic activity pass through the hands of the state, then it is a minor detail that debts and assets balance. The state is still the dominant element, as it has been since the 1930s or 1940s, depending on which state you are talking about. The New Right ‘revolution’ was supposed to fix this and has not. The state now subcontracts the provision of services to private corporations, which are supposed to be more efficient but mostly are not.

The USA spends an amazing 17.6% of its gross national product on various sorts of health-care,

mostly private and profit-based.⁵ Most developed European countries spend 9 to 12%, while delivering better overall care. In the USA, unlike Europe, people may not get health treatment or operations they need if they can’t pay. There is also a suspicion that in US medicine, people who can pay get treatments that they might have been better off without.

Money is a way for people to interact without having any fixed or significant social relationship. It took time to invade areas where there was some sort of fixed or significant social relationship, and the process remains incomplete. But social restraints on money have been viewed as sinful since the 1980s, and that’s done the damage.

And who has it allowed to rise? George Soros is one of the most famous. Having managed to get out of Hungary after World War Two, he was a very average student at the LSE, and then a failed salesman selling knickknacks to tobacconists. Managing to get a job at a London merchant bank, he once again failed to make the grade and they were glad to let him go. Then in New York he suddenly found his niche, finding differences in pricing that could yield an enormous profit if treated as a subject for speculative trading.⁶ Yet he still managed to very nearly get wiped out on one speculative venture that went badly wrong.⁷

Success in modern business is a mix of talent and luck. Sir James Goldsmith, as famous as Soros a few years back, was technically bankrupt at one point in his career and survived only thanks to a totally unexpected strike by French bank staff that gave him time to get back into balance. A lot of the other self-made millionaires have had similar incidents during their rise. Had they failed at any point, no one would have suspected that this was potentially a very famous and admired person.

To make an analogy, imagine that people were given the chance to play six rounds of Russian Roulette, with a one-in-six chance of death each time. Those still alive at the end are then given a huge fortune.

Each time, the chance of survival is 5 in 6, so about one third would be alive at the end of the day, and undoubtedly convinced that they were somehow special.⁸ Yet this is exactly what blind chance would predict.

The successful speculators may be mostly the lucky survivors who took too many risks but got away with it. But this has proved a very negative model for the economy as a whole. Overall growth rates have not improved since the 1970s in the USA and Britain, and have markedly declined in Japan and Continental Europe. But the distribution of rewards has got very much worse.

Technological progress has always made life better for a rich minority. How far this extends to the rest is much more moot, and it can often be negative. The Roman Empire destroyed the lives of free farmers and other small producers and made them worse off, reduced either to slaves or an urban mob.

The Industrial Revolution in Britain did initially bring very little benefit to the poor majority, and arguably a deterioration. This changed only in the last third of the 19th century. It continued through the 20th century, except that the once-privileged working class in the USA has seen little real improvement since the 1980s. (Since they were dumb enough to vote for Ronald Reagan and go on voting for his heirs.)

No one talked about the 'Miracle of the Mixed Economy' back in the 1970s, when everything was up for grabs. There was a confrontation between dogmatic capitalism and dogmatic anti-capitalism, with anti-capitalism losing badly. A lot of the trouble was the size and militancy of Trotskyism: a kind of Sargasso Sea of politics, where stuff goes in and nothing except rot results.

Misrepresenting Representative Democracy.

Parliaments were invented to balance power between traditional rulers and a rich elite. In their original design, they were never intended to give power to the whole population, or even to all white

males. That particular ideal was first realised on a stable basis in the USA in the 1830s, and led on fairly directly to the Civil War they fought in the 1860s. Meantime the British Empire only very gradually democratised for its white males, and later for white women also.⁹ White males were not a majority of the voters in the British Isles until the 1880s, and only when it had been shown that they would mostly vote for rival factions of the elite. Votes for all adult males in Britain and Ireland came only in 1918, with women included if they were over 30.

The USA democratised for white males quite early, with women getting the vote in 1920 but a lot of black voters excluded by trickery or intimidation until the 1960s. It also never achieved real 'people power' even for white males, despite the people being theoretically able to achieve this from the 1830s. Small independent property was all along the choice of the majority, the actual way of life in the 19th century. But the majority of the people never managed in practice to control those they elected.

Knowing the history of the thing, I was not at all surprised that someone's research revealed that in the USA nowadays, the views of the people are seldom implemented while the views of the rich elite tend to be decisive:

"The US is dominated by a rich and powerful elite." So concludes a recent study by Princeton University Prof Martin Gilens and Northwestern University Prof Benjamin I Page. This is not news, you say. Perhaps, but the two professors have conducted exhaustive research to try to present data-driven support for this conclusion. Here's how they explain it:

"Multivariate analysis indicates that economic elites and organised groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence. In English: the wealthy few move policy, while the average American has little power."

The two professors came to this

conclusion after reviewing answers to 1,779 survey questions asked between 1981 and 2002 on public policy issues. They broke the responses down by income level, and then determined how often certain income levels and organised interest groups saw their policy preferences enacted.

"A proposed policy change with low support among economically elite Americans (one-out-of-five in favour) is adopted only about 18% of the time," they write, "while a proposed change with high support (four-out-of-five in favour) is adopted about 45% of the time."

On the other hand:

"When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organised interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the US political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favour policy change, they generally do not get it."

"They conclude:

"Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association and a widespread (if still contested) franchise. But we believe that if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organisations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened."

Eric Zuesse, writing in *Counterpunch*, isn't surprised by the survey's results.

"American democracy is a sham, no matter how much it's pumped by the oligarchs who run the country (and who control the nation's 'news' media)," he writes. "The US, in other words, is basically similar to Russia or most other dubious 'electoral' 'democratic' countries. We weren't formerly, but we clearly are now."¹⁰

I'd disagree with the claim that it was ever otherwise. If the majority of the US population got looked after between the 1940s and 1970s, this was not because they were in control. Merely that the elite was scared of possible discontent, of global Communism and of a revival of fascism. When the rich

elite decided that these fears were outdated, they started making more demands. And got them answered by a political system they had always been in charge of.

The machinery of Representative Democracy mostly fails to deliver the bulk of what the voting majority want. You get some stuff, and it is always worth voting, but don't expect too much.

Sometimes Representative Democracy delivers something that's the very reverse of what people thought they were voting for. Hardly anyone would intentionally vote for a party that would bring about a Civil War, but lots of voters have in practice done this. The first such case was in the USA: the new Republican Party in the 1860 Presidential Election certainly didn't have as its slogan "Elect Abe Lincoln for a four-year civil war, the complete abolition of slavery and official equality for negroes". Most Northern states had laws preventing non-whites from voting, and only a minority of Northerners felt strongly about slavery. Yet this unwanted outcome was just what they got, thanks in part to foolishness by the South. And when the various Southern states voted for secession, this was mostly done by delegates who had said they were against it when being chosen. A direct vote would probably have preserved the Union and kept alive slavery for much longer.

The USA was just the first of many. The Spanish Civil War grew directly out of electoral polarisation. Likewise the secession of the former East Pakistan as Bangladesh, and the polarisation between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon.

In Ukraine, the first few elections after independence were fairly normal, with rival parties fairly evenly split between the regions.¹¹ It was the 2004 election and the Orange Revolution that polarised politics and has caused East Ukraine to think seriously about separation.

By Jingo, We Won't Die for Ukrainian Fascists

Despite all of the fuss the British elite have been making, there is a marked lack of enthusiasm in

Britain for any more war. The grand efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan are generally seen as failures. And no one is prepared to suffer significantly for West Ukraine.

A lot of it is selfishness, the shallow and greedy individualism that the New Right promoted, presumably expecting something else to result. The British media have largely managed to cover up the key shift that happened between 21st and 22nd February, when an attempt at compromise was rejected and West Ukrainian parties sized power and claimed the right to vote out the elected President, contrary to the Ukrainian constitution.

Kiev is dominated by a mob that mixes pro-Western elements with two varieties of fascist. They have shared ground in desiring a "Pure Ukraine", with the entire population cured of seeing anything positive in Russian culture or the Soviet legacy. They do this with the support of at most 60% of the population and perhaps much less. It is notable that they are relying on an intimidated parliament and choose not to wait for new elections.

The pro-Western element of the "Pure Ukraine" side are the same people who came to power in the 2005 Orange Revolution, and made a complete mess of everything. This is what led to the re-election of the people who thought it best to work with both the West and Russia. But then the European Union offered a very bad deal for further integration. Armenia had similar negotiations, but chose Russia over the European Union back in September 2013.¹² (Armenia also seized Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic-Armenian region within Azerbaijan, back in 1994, and no one does anything about it.) Ukraine under President Yanukovich made further efforts to get a deal with the European Union after Armenia dropped out, but in the end he rejected it, which is when the protests started. Protests by basically the same people who failed before, but now joined by a strong fascist element.

Svoboda began in 1994 as the Social-National Party of Ukraine. Their rise was slow, from less than 50,000 in 1994 to nearly 180,000 in 2007. They then took off, getting

more than two million votes in 2012, 10% of the electorate. Highly concentrated, of course, getting a third or more in three regions in the far west.¹³ And more than 17% in Kiev itself, which is why they've been such a major force in the protests.

Note also that the politicians of Western Ukraine don't have the same aversion to fascism that exists in most of Europe. As I detailed in the last *Newsnotes*, the Ukrainian fascist Stepan Bandera was hailed as a 'Hero of Ukraine' by Viktor Yushchenko, the President who came to power with the 2004 Orange Revolution. The loose connections between the Iraqi Baaths and European fascism were used as a pretext for invasion, but it seems that a different Eternal Truth applies in Ukraine.

The West Ukrainian sympathy for fascism is also rather foolish. Lenin and his heirs wanted Ukraine incorporated in their system. Hitler wanted a Ukraine without Ukrainians, according to *Mein Kampf*, and there is nothing to indicate he ever changed his mind on this. Yet Stepan Bandera helped Nazi Germany both at the start and at the end of the war, with a middle period in which his followers were an independent underground army after the Germans arrested him and suppressed his proclamation of an independent Ukraine.

Currently the Kiev regime wants to keep Ukraine as the Soviet Union defined it, but with East Ukraine subordinated to an extreme version of West Ukrainian values. This was always bound to lead to Civil War. Even if it turns out to be true that Russian Special Forces were the initial spark, the basic divergence of opinion already existed.

Secession

In an ideal world, any national group would have the right to separation, provided it could win a majority in some definite and coherent territory. And provided it gave secure rights to anyone who would be left a minority in this new arrangement.

This is not the world we actually inhabit. The UN speaks of "Self-

Determination”, but also upholds “Territorial Integrity”. Most of the time, the world’s sovereign governments decide that “Territorial Integrity” trumps “Self-Determination”.

Supposing this were reversed? There are lots of territories that might want to take advantage, and numerous smaller territories within them that might want to go their own way.

“The list of would-be seceders around the world is staggering. In Spain, the Basques and Catalans have long wanted to break away, but there also active nationalist movements in most of the other regions. In Belgium, the Flemish and Walloon halves of the country exist in a state of mutual loathing. Carinthia wants to break away from Austria; Brittany from France; Bavaria from Germany; Moravia from the Czech Republic; Frisia from the Netherlands, and on and on. And that’s just Europe. Imagine how many secessionist movements there are in Africa (six in Ethiopia alone), Asia (a dozen in Burma) and the Americas. The US doesn’t just have secessionists at federal level; in quite a few of the states, there are counties that want to break away.”¹⁴

This exaggerates slightly – often there are large separatist movements but a majority would vote for continued union. But there are also many more cases than those mentioned above. Tibet gets a lot of publicity, but there are dozens of regions of India that might want to go their own way, most notably the Indian-governed part of Kashmir.

Actual politics has been wildly inconsistent, and no one has clean hands. The USA supported Panama’s secession from Columbia in 1903. In Former Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia and the rest had a theoretical right to secede under the Yugoslav constitution, while there was no reliable protection for majority-Serb areas outside the official definition of Serbia. Naturally this led to ethnic warfare, with the worst of it happening in the extreme mix of Bosnia. It might have been avoided if the process had been done by stages, maybe by first admitting Yugoslavia to the European

Union and then dismantling it step by step. But the mess that the West helped create was at least consistent with “Territorial Integrity” trumping “Self-Determination”.

Kosovo was different, it was a region within Serbia with no constitutional right to secede. The West found pretexts to allow it to do so, and also rather irrationally upheld its “Territorial Integrity”, with majority-Serb areas in the north forced to join the secession along with ethnic Albanians who hated them.

Putin noted this breach of principle when justifying the incorporation of Crimea. And the possibility of more secessions in East Ukraine.

The USA has continuously cheated, and keeps on being surprised that the cheats are treated as cheats that anyone can do. US politicians expect rules to be respected by others even when freely broken by themselves. It is the sign of a ruling stratum in decline.

My view is that the best hope for peace globally would have been to uphold and make official the current semi-official rule that “Territorial Integrity” trumps “Self-Determination”. But when the actual “Territorial Integrity” has broken down and the resultant violence has probably played itself out, the new *status quo* might as well be respected. I’d not support any Serb attempt to re-conquer Kosovo, or even the majority-Serb portions that abstract justice would have given them. I’d not see any merit in trying to force Crimea back into Ukraine, where in fact it does not belong.

It is also unreasonable for the Kiev Regime to cite “territorial integrity” while refusing to integrate the bulk of the population East Ukraine. The dominant West Ukrainian attitude seems to be that Russian-speakers should not be there and that the entire Soviet heritage should be repudiated. Why should East Ukraine accept that?

The World Wide Web as a Power Vacuum

“The inventor of the world wide web has marked the 25th anniversary of

his creation by calling for a ‘Magna Carta’ bill of rights to protect its users.

“Sir Tim Berners-Lee told BBC Breakfast the issue could be compared to the importance of human rights.”

“He has been an outspoken critic of government surveillance following a series of leaks from ex-US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden.

“Sir Tim called on people to take action and protest against surveillance.”¹⁵

Existing laws should protect people from having their privacy violated without reasonable suspicion of serious crime, with the definition of ‘reasonable suspicion’ being left to a judge unconnected with the people making the investigation. Browsing the contents of someone else’s computer via the internet is as much an intrusion as picking their locks and searching their house. It has to be done, otherwise you’d get a proliferation of criminal or extremist organisations that would be a much bigger threat to personal freedom than the state could ever be. But it should not be done lightly.

Beyond this, what would such a charter say? The original Magna Carta gave extra privileges to a minority, the “free men” at a time when a majority of men were serfs and women had few rights even if they were upper class. It was imposed by barons with swords against King John. And didn’t achieve much: counted for little until lawyers began citing it centuries later. A much better way of making royal power limited and also effective within those limits was found during the reign of John’s son Henry 3rd with the establishment (with much difficulty) of Parliament. Which might be an idea worth copying.

A functional Web Parliament would need to have representatives from each sovereign state, chosen however that state pleased. And also have representatives from major internet corporations, who thereby become part of a suitable ‘group-think’. I’m sure web users would prefer something else, but an assembly that fails to represent the actual balance of power will

achieve nothing. (China has had various parliaments from 1912 down to the present day, and none of them counted for anything or were respected by the general population.) If you start from a bad balance of power, it can be ratcheted to something better, as happened with the English Parliament.

Libertarians and anarchists tend to denounce 'group-think': it is part of their own group-think, which they don't realise they have. It is normal for people to fail to recognise their own group-think, just as most people don't consider that they themselves talk with an accent. 'I am normal, you are conformist, they have group-think'. But realistically, a functional Web Parliament would have to evolve a shared identity, just as all functional parliaments have done throughout history.

The alternative libertarian or anarchist view has been popular from the 1960s. In some ways it has been liberating, but it has also damaged the social structures that used to keep inequality within tolerable limits. And the web as it has actually developed has laid people wide open to commercial pressures. Forced most of them to get their web services from some big corporation.

The popular anarchic outlook sees a power-vacuum as ideal, and then gets very surprised when this vacuum gets filled by something they did not expect and do not approve of.

The growth of the Internet and World Wide Web has been the biggest cause to date of creating a system with an intended power-vacuum, where it seemed that anyone could do anything and also post and communicate for free. But this was always an illusion, it was only ever as free as ICANN would allow. And ICANN in turn is only as independent as the US government wishes it to be. And the actual outcome is that the vacuum has been filled with gigantic corporations, each with a near-monopoly of its own function. They grew from small beginnings, but soon merged with the existing business class even when they didn't come from it (as Bill Gates did).

With the current confrontation, Russia is seriously considering getting control of the portion of the internet used by Russians.¹⁶ The current situation is in fact bizarre: it's as if all the 'snail mail' in Russia were sent to a gigantic network of sorting offices in the USA, which then decided where to send it, sending most of it back to its intended destinations in Russia. And could snoop on it while they handled it, obviously.

The suggested alternative is that messages from Russia stay in Russia unless destined for someone outside of Russia. (Note also, this applies to the UK and most other countries, but China has taken control and shown that it isn't so hard.)

Snippets

It seems likely now that we will never learn the truth about the lost Malaysia Airlines plane that's believed sunk somewhere in the southern Indian Ocean. Several apparent signals were heard, but they have not been heard recently, probably because the battery failed.

Having no more 'human interest' stories to fondle, the media have lost interest. But the whole tragedy need not have been a mystery had some simple and relatively cheap reforms been made the last time an aircraft went missing. It might even have prevented it: one theory is that the chief pilot chose to commit suicide but also wanted to avoid having it known. Alternatively, if the pilot was innocent, proper data would have avoided a suspicion of mass murder that is now likely to cling to him indefinitely.

The magazine *New Scientist* proposed some simple and cheap reforms, including underwater locators that "ping" for much longer.¹⁷ But once again, this simple measure is being ignored. The same old foolishness of being very reluctant to impose any regulations that business don't want.

"The US created a text-message social network designed to foment unrest in Cuba, according to an investigation by the Associated Press news agency.

"ZunZuneo, dubbed a 'Cuban Twitter', had 40,000 subscribers at its height in a country with limited web access.

"The project reportedly lasted from 2009-12 when the grant money ran out.

"The US is said to have concealed its links to the network through a series of shell companies and by funnelling messages through other countries...

"Executives set up firms in Spain and the Cayman Islands to pay the company's bills and routed the text messages away from US servers.

"A website and bogus web advertisements were created to give the impression of a real firm, the Associated Press reports."¹⁸

"Last October, Hassan al-Shimari, Iraq's minister of justice, quietly submitted a draft law to the Council of Ministers for review. If implemented, the Jaafari Personal Status Law (so named because it is based on the Jaafari school of Shia jurisprudence) will fulfil a longtime goal of the country's conservative Shia leaders: to exert religious control over critical family matters such as marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance for the country's Shia -- some 60-65 percent of the population...

"Iraq's existing personal status law dates to 1959. It includes several progressive provisions loosely based on various schools of Islamic law. It sets the marriage age at 18 for both boys and girls; prohibits arbitrary divorce; significantly restricts polygamy (including by requiring a judge's permission and proof that the husband can treat both wives equally); and guarantees equal inheritance for men and women. Together, these provisions marked a considerable legal step forward for Iraqi women who went on to make notable educational, economic, and political strides under the secular Baathists. Religious leaders, however, resented the code from the outset because it forced religious conformity. Shia leaders, in particular, viewed it as yet another example of Sunni oppression."¹⁹

There is of course nothing inherently liberal about Sunni: Saudi Arabia is dominated by the

Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam. And the 1959 law is older than the Baath, who seized power briefly in 1963 and returned to power in 1968, lasting till the West overthrew them. But they were committed to women's rights.

The original reforms were due to Arab progressives led by Abd al-Karim Qasim, in an alliance that originally included Baathist and Communists. Qasim was executed in 1963 as part of a Baathist coup that was widely believed to have had British and US support. Baath were useful against Communists, but when the Cold War ended, they were one of several Cold War allies the USA then ratted on. But the US have failed to remake Iraq in their own image, or remake it at all. The society is hopelessly split between Religious Shia, Sunni and Kurd.

“South Sudan” was never a real entity. Just the part of Sudan that rebelled against the dominant Arab identity. But since it was mostly Christian, it got some sympathy from the USA, especially among Afro-Americans. Sudan was bullied into letting it go.

Once on their own, the various peoples found themselves rivals for power, wealth and cultural identity. South Sudan is now falling apart in a brutal conflict.²⁰

It looks like Syria will hang on as the last real survival of Arab Secularism. A report in the right-wing but realistic *Daily Telegraph* was definite on the matter:

“I would judge not just that support for the regime is holding up, but that President Assad could very well win a popular election, even if carried out on a free and fair basis. Such elections are in fact due: the president must hold a poll before July 17 if he is not to exceed his constitutional term of office. An announcement is expected soon.

“Discussing this vote, I found – to my surprise – that even people outside the governing Ba’ath party, including some of Assad’s political opponents, said they would support him.”²¹

Mostly because the actual fighting has become dominated by hard-line Islamists. A result that should have been foreseen, but was not.

(Endnotes)

- 1 *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, by Steven Levy. The 25th Anniversary Edition is available as a relatively cheap paperback.
- 2 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27144637>]
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 [<http://www.alternet.org/economy/robert-reich-how-fix-sky-high-ceo-pay-companies-pay-workers-serfs>]
- 5 [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_total_health_expenditure_\(PPP\)_per_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_total_health_expenditure_(PPP)_per_capita)]

6 *Soros: The Life and Times of a Messianic Billionaire*, by Michael T. Kaufman. Vintage Books 2002. pages 76-80

7 *Ibid*, page 100.

8 This is based on each player having a five-sixth chance of surviving each round. And equivalent to each player rolling six dice in a single throw, with one of the dice-faces meaning a death-sentence. Some players would get two or more death-sentences, while other would get none.

9 In the British Isles, there was never any racial test for voting. But there were also very few non-whites before the 1950s, and even fewer who would have qualified as voters. In those parts of the British Empire where it mattered, racial criteria were always used.

10 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-echochambers-27074746>]

11 I detailed this in the last News-notes

12 [<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2013/september/armenia-chooses-russia-over-eu/78090.aspx>]

13 [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Svoboda-2012.png>]

14 [<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2014/mar/24/will-orkney-shetland-join-micronationalists-independence-vote>]

15 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26540635>]

16 [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/vladimir-putin-web-breakup-internet-cia>]

17 [<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn25317-five-ways-to-make-sure-we-never-lose-a-plane-again.html#.Uzgm-bilOWO0>]

18 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-26872866>]

19 [<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141065/isobel-coleman/status-anxiety>]

20 [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-26798721>]

21 [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10770311/Syria-As-the-bombs-fall-the-people-of-Damascus-rally-round-Bashar-al-Assad.html>]

The convoluted wording of legalisms grew up around the necessity to hide from ourselves the violence we do to each other.

Frank Herbert, Dune Messiah

Terrorism has replaced Communism as the rationale for the militarization of the country [America], for military adventures abroad, and for the suppression of civil liberties at home. It serves the same purpose, serving to create hysteria.

Howard Zinn, Terrorism and War

Surely there never was so evil a thing as money, which maketh cities into ruinous heaps, and banisheth men from their houses, and turneth their thoughts from good unto evil.

Sophocles, Antigone

Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.

Marx, The Grundrisse (1857)

Socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires.

Ronand Wright, America & Americans

Socialism is not a science, a sociology in miniature: it is a cry of pain.

Émile Durkheim, Le socialisme

Socialism is a scareword they have hurled at every advance the people have made in the last 20 years. Socialism is what they called public power. Socialism is what they called social security. Socialism is what they called farm price supports. Socialism is what they called bank deposit insurance. Socialism is what they called the growth of free and independent labor organizations. Socialism is their name for almost anything that helps all the people.

Harry S. Truman, speech, Oct. 10, 1952

Reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form.

Marx, Letter from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher to Ruge (1843)

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

“IS SHE ANY GOOD?”

On 23 February The Daily Telegraph’s Tom Kington, writing from Rome, quoted an Italian communications lecturer talking about media comments on senior female politicians. She said “It all supports the idea that women shouldn’t really be in those positions in the first place”.

This is not as straightforward a declaration as it seems, rather a cry of exasperation. The new Prime Minister Matteo Renzi had just appointed women to take half of his cabinet seats - a totally revolutionary move. A general dropping of jaws was followed by an uproar in the press and media. The popular press concentrated on the trivial, largely ignoring comment on the experience of the women. One minister’s electric blue trouser suit was criticised. Another minister was said to have a quality rear-end unmatched since Pippa Middleton was spotted at William and Kate’s wedding. They even noticed a pair of rouged cheeks which apparently made a minister look like “Heidi in the summer”. This all created enough of a stir to be reported in the UK press.

The Italian media knew that the Italian public would be fascinated by this rubbish. As in the UK, a hunger has been created for gossip, celebrity and any kind of scandal. It is cheaper to source than factual serious reporting and sells copy. Post-Berlusconi, the Italian press could have encouraged their consumers to be thinking about the

results of their recent voting. It sounds pious but the media could and can encourage more critical thinking about the democratic process if it chose to. On 11 May 2010 the UK press wouldn’t have lowered the tone with cheeky images of the pneumatic Eric Pickles, or laughed at Michael Gove’s glasses. But then Cameron’s cabinet lacked female targets, only having the dull and “kitten-heeled” Theresa May. Blair shamelessly used his *Babes* for effect, and so new were they that they let him get away with it.

Matteo Renzi, admirer of Tony Blair, was previously the mayor of Firenze. He is the leader of the centre left Partito Democratico (PD) party. As happens in Italy he started his term of office by negotiating the necessary alliances to form a working majority. Beppe Grillo’s party, the M5S, have many parliamentary seats but he adamantly refuses to taint his movement by forming pacts with any existing parties. He, and he leads dictatorially, considers all to be corrupt. Renzi finalised his government by making alliances with groups leaning further to the right than was comfortable for many in his party. Certainly the left groups outside the PD, such as Nichi Vendola, leader of Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL) would have nothing to do with him.

So he made a pact with the right-leaning Berlusconi. This shocked. But Renzi is a pragmatist. This power-hungry and energetic young

man, noted as being the same age as Mussolini when he came to power, has cunningly manoeuvred himself up to the political heights. He intends to stay there. He knew that he needed not only the numbers of Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party but also the personal support of this enduringly influential man. Italy needs strong, decisive and un-corrupt, or even less corrupt, government. Renzi wants to make changes and this is a fresh start. Many want to believe that his government will work. Many are sceptical, or perhaps just realistic about his chances of success.

Renzi won his election to be head of the PD and was confirmed as Prime Minister by President Giorgio Napolitano. No national election was required. Renzi moved quickly to suggest that parliamentary seats should be filled 50/50 with men and women. This Quote Rosa, discussed also in other European countries, was such a different idea that he knew it would be vetoed. It had made a point, and was dropped. In the context of chronic female unemployment and female salary averages just under 17% less than men, it was brave.

Then in mid-April (2014) Renzi made his nominations for the heads of nationalised industries. Four were nominated to be Presidents. All were well qualified, Emma Marcegaglia, appointed to Eni (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi - Gas and power company) extremely well so. This was

followed by putting five women at the top of the five lists for Euro Candidates for the May elections. That way at least five women would represent Italy in the European Parliament. Men were still outraged but the media tone appeared to be less aggressive and showed that the public could be interested in the women's achievements. Amusingly *La Repubblica* had full length shots of all the new leaders. The paper demonstrated their lack of sexism by printing the men's photos twice the size of the women's. And, there were no comments about anyone's hair, shoes etc.

The British generally think that they can be proud of having the *Mother of Parliaments* and a solidly superior democratic governmental system. This is the English way of viewing the world and other countries are ridiculed and sneered at. But, the Italians have a bicameral legislature with a total of 945 members in two elected houses, not one as in the UK. The composition of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic have oddities and Renzi is currently trying to make changes. It is suggested that a few "people of merit" be added to the elected second chamber; there are currently a few Senators for Life. This might seem uncomfortably reminiscent of the UK. But it bears no resemblance to the UK's highly partial system which includes members who inherited their seats by an accident of birth as well as senior clerics of only one of the several religions.

Corruption has always

seemed to be something that happens elsewhere, in Italy for example. But the UK is equally bad. MPs, Lords and Ladies (plus bankers etc) have shown an enthusiasm for fiddling expenses. David Laws and Maria Miller were among many to have been taking expenses dishonestly. Senior national appointments such as that of Paul Flowers the "Crystal Methodist" to head the Co-op Bank and Cameron's appointment of the bankrupt Tony Caplin to head the Public Works Loan Board, all smack of crooked practices. Emma Harrison, boss of A4e lauded for the company's work with the unemployed, resigned from her position as a Government Tzar when 9 members of staff were convicted of fraud. Outrageously, and in the way of our leaders, she had given herself £8.6m in share dividends, as well as a generous salary. Unfortunately dishonesty is not confined to men.

Matteo Renzi is attempting to help qualified women into powerful positions. There is a strange dissonance between what he appears to be doing here and his connections with Berlusconi and his colourful history with women. No matter, everyone has their price. It is naive to see this as altruism. He is a wily operator. It could be a way of surrounding himself with people who are young, biddable and grateful. Or, perhaps he can see that the introduction of significant numbers of females could weaken the influence of the Italian male networks that often reveal mafia roots and/or paralyse government. Particularly to disrupt his government. He could be

competing for votes with Grillo's M5S who have as their 3rd out of 20 manifesto points the imposition of Anti-corruption Laws. Or could this simply be a cheap and easy way of ingratiating himself with female voters? It certainly is cheaper than making structural changes to help women into employment or to increase the availability of childcare from a low 1 child in 10 in a nursery place.

When female appointments are made to senior UK posts the tone of reporting always seems to encourage readers and viewers to question whether these women are "up to the job". Men don't suffer the same scrutiny and are instinctively trusted or given the proverbial benefit of the doubt. Whatever the motivation behind Renzi's move to increase the participation of women, he is boldly trying to change the monopolistic position of men in powerful positions. The UK should look to Italy and other countries which see the benefits of considering and sharing the views of both sexes. For example the Governments of Rwanda, Costa Rica and Italy all have significantly more women in their parliaments (respectively: 63.8%, 38.6%, 31.4%) than does the UK (21.6%). The quick reaction to this might be to say that none of these countries are world beaters, why bother! But is the UK a successful world-beater in any fields anymore? What does it do well? Is the UK free of corruption? Is it a better example of democracy and equality than other countries? Therefore, change is needed.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

First World War (Irish Soldiers).

It seems that there are to be no exceptions in the coming “commemorations” of the First World War. No one person, group or regiment will be allowed special leave from this August. And absence without leave will not be tolerated for any one person, group or regiment. Especially those Irish soldiers who, for whatever reason, volunteered to fight on the side of their historical oppressors.

It appears that the Government are using the “commemorations” as a means of drawing Ireland ever closer to Britain. On 2 April, Northern Ireland Minister of State Andrew Robathan told MPs that, “The Northern Ireland Office is committed to delivering the Government’s programme for the first world war centenary in Northern Ireland in a manner which promotes reconciliation and contributes to a peaceful, shared future. The Department is also co-ordinating closely with the Irish Government on the centenary and the wider decade of commemorations in Ireland.”

This is an interesting comment. Will the “wider decade of commemorations in Ireland” include the centenary of the Easter Rising in 1916? And if so, how will the British Government explain its part in its suppression and the execution of its leaders?

Furthermore, will the “wider decade of commemorations” include the elections to the First Dail in 1918 and the overwhelming victory of Sinn Fein, who won 73 of the 105 seats. Elections held during British military occupation with armed personnel on the streets.

Robathan praised the “200,000 Irish personnel who volunteered to fight in the first world war.” And made the following observation: “It is difficult to tell who was a regular, who was Irish and from the north, or whatever. They were just termed British in those days. Some 49,000 were killed in the first world war and we do commemorate them. As a Government we get on extremely well with the Irish Government. For myself, I laid four wreaths on Armistice day at Islandbridge, Glasnevin and elsewhere---the first time, I think, that a British Minister has done that since partition.”

For those interested, Robathan announced that “there is to be a programme of events, including a ceremony on 4 August in Dublin---probably in St Patrick’s Cathedral. This will be followed that evening by a ceremony in St Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast.” No doubt, the newly anointed statesman Martin McGuinness will be present at the latter.

Asylum Seekers

Sarah Teather, Lib Dem MP for Brent Central, who will step down at the next election disillusioned with dishonest politics, raised the question of help for asylum seekers in the UK. She wanted to know what support was provided to meet essential living needs under sections 95 and 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Teather is no doubt aware of the widely held view that asylum seekers get whatever they ask for: free food and transport and mobile phones are just some of the benefits it is believed they receive. James Brokenshire, Minister for Security and Immigration, set the record straight.

James Brokenshire:

“Asylum seekers are supported by the Home Office if they are destitute. The support package usually consists of accommodation, with gas, electricity, water and other utilities provided free, plus a weekly cash allowance to cover essential living needs. The cash allowance is currently £36.62 a week for a single adult, but it is higher in cases where there are children in the household. A family of two adults and two children would receive approximately £180 a week.”

“The Government completed a full review of payment levels in June 2013. The review concluded that the levels were sufficient to

meet essential living needs. That decision was challenged in the courts by Refugee Action, a group that campaigns for asylum seekers, and the court issued its judgement yesterday. It decided that there were some errors in the way in which the 2013 review had been conducted. It found, for example, that items such as household cleaning products and non-prescription medicines should have been considered as essential and therefore factored into the overall assessment of the adequacy of the payment levels. The court did not decide that the current payment levels were too low. That question will be considered by the Government in a fresh review of the payment levels. We are, of course, considering the full implications of the judgement and whether or not to appeal.”

Ukraine: Where Is The Left?

On 28 April, following a recess of more than two weeks, Foreign Secretary William Hague updated MPs on the events in Ukraine. His position was supported by Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander and every backbencher from all sides of the Chamber, with the notable exception of Sir Peter Tapsell, the Father of the House. In order to speak a Member must be called upon by the Speaker, but it is significant that no one on the Labour left participated in the debate. Were any present but unable to catch the eye of the Speaker? Hague’s and Alexander’s contributions were littered with vaguely disguised venom towards Russia and Vladimir Putin who has assumed the mantle of an aggressive cold war dictator. Whereas the unelected Ukraine Government have been accorded legitimate democratic status. Hague fed MPs the usual line of the UK’s sole interest being a “democratic Ukraine that is able to make its own decisions.” A principle the UK refuses to apply to the numerous dictatorships it supports around the world. Hague’s final comments about Russia invading and annexing by force part of a country and fomenting instability and disorder, take the biscuit for downright hypocrisy. They should be written in stone and presented to the puppet

leaders of every country invaded and/or destabilised by the UK.

William Hague:

“From 6 April, illegal armed groups began to occupy Government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Lugansk. From 12 April, in an apparently co-ordinated fashion, police and security service buildings were seized in smaller towns across the east of Ukraine. Like the armed men without insignia who took control of Crimea in February, many were well equipped, operate like professional soldiers who have trained together, and wear matching uniforms. Russia’s claim that these groups are purely local militias has no credibility. NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, has stated that ‘what is happening in eastern Ukraine is a military operation that is well planned and organised and we assess that it is being carried out at the direction of Russia.’ We share that assessment.”

“On 14 April, I attended the EU Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Luxembourg where we decided upon additional sanctions. Those sanctions were then suspended in the light of talks in Geneva between Ukraine, Russia, the US and the EU on 17 April, which succeeded in agreeing steps to reduce tensions. The agreement committed all sides to refrain from violence or provocative actions in the south and east of Ukraine. It required all illegal armed groups to be disarmed and to vacate all illegally seized buildings and occupied public places in return for an amnesty for protesters, in a process assisted by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s special monitoring mission. The Ukrainian Government promised to take forward an inclusive, transparent and accountable constitutional process. I spoke to the Ukrainian acting Foreign Minister Deschytisia immediately after the Geneva agreement, and strongly welcomed the agreement.”

“The Ukrainian Government have made determined efforts to implement the agreement in good faith. They have put a draft amnesty law to the Ukrainian Parliament, begun a constitutional reform

process, including decentralisation and the expansion of local authority power, and continued to collect illegal weapons. They are removing roadblocks around the Maidan, and protesters are vacating government buildings in Kiev. In addition, they have condemned anti-semitism or intolerance. The Prime Minister announced on Good Friday that the United Kingdom is providing £1 million to support the deployment of up to 400 additional observers to strengthen the OCSE mission in Ukraine. I pay tribute to the Ukrainian Government for the steps they have taken and for behaving with immense restraint in extremely difficult circumstances.”

“In contrast, Russia has so far failed to implement any part of the Geneva agreement. I spoke to Foreign Minister Lavrov last Wednesday and although I welcomed his participation in the Geneva meeting, I said to him that I could not identify a single positive step that Russia had taken to implement the agreement. It has not condemned the act of separatists or called on armed militants to vacate buildings and put down their arms. It has done nothing to rein in pro-Russian separatist groups, which continue to attack Ukrainian arms depots and military personnel, take over Government buildings and detain journalists and OSCE military observers, which we utterly condemn. The detention and parading of those observers, who should be released immediately, is utterly reprehensible and does further damage to the standing of Russia and the reputation of such groups operating in eastern Ukraine. The deplorable shooting today of the mayor of Kharkiv is another sign of the violence being instigated against those who opted to support a united Ukraine.”

“Furthermore, last week Russia announced further military exercises on Ukraine’s borders, Russia’s UN ambassador claimed that it had the right to deploy so-called ‘peacekeepers’ on Ukrainian territory and Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Russia reserves the right to attack Ukraine to defend ethnic Russians. There is of course no evidence of threats to, or attacks on, Russians

in eastern Ukraine. I proposed to Foreign Minister Lavrov that Russia could demonstrate its good faith by making an immediate public call by making an immediate public call by making an immediate public call for the full implementation of the Geneva agreement. I also proposed that Russia's acting head of mission in Kiev could join in assisting the OSCE special monitoring mission on the ground, including by negotiating with the groups illegally occupying buildings. I warned the Foreign Minister that in the absence of such steps, the European Union and others would impose increasing sanctions."

"As I have often said in this House, we do not view the developments in Ukraine as presenting a zero-sum strategic choice. Ukraine can be a bridge between east and west and be able to maintain good relations with Russia. Our national interest lies in a democratic Ukraine that is able to make its own decisions and in a rules-based international system. Both considerations now require the adoption of further measures to increase the cost to Russia of its actions. G7 Heads of Government issued a statement on Friday pledging to move swiftly to impose additional sanctions on Russia. We also undertook to prepare to move to broader co-ordinated sanctions, including sectoral measures, if necessary. Russia's accession to the International Energy Agency and the OECD has been suspended, the EU has suspended visa liberalisation talks and there will be no G8 meeting in Sochi this year but a G7 meeting without Russia in Brussels instead."

"The US has previously sanctioned 38 individuals and two entities. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan have adopted similar measures and 33 individuals are subject to EU asset freezes and travel bans. At the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a resolution was adopted suspending the voting rights of Russian members. I pay tribute to Members of this House for the role they played in that vote. Permanent representatives in Brussels have been meeting today to finalise adding substantially to the list of individuals sanctioned by the

European Union. Subject to final procedures, that will be officially agreed within the next half hour and the names of those concerned will be published tomorrow. We are in further discussions in the EU about future steps, including preparations for a third tier of sanctions involving far-reaching economic and trade measures. Those preparations are now well advanced and the European Commission has sent proposals to each member state."

"Increasing the scope of the sanctions placed on Russia is the right response to the failure to implement the Geneva agreement and the continued destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. In the past two hours, the United States has announced that it is imposing sanctions on seven further Russian Government officials, including two members of President Putin's inner circle, and on 17 companies also linked to Putin's inner circle, as well as additional restrictions on 13 of those companies. The United States has also announced that it has tightened policy to deny export licence applications for any high-technology items that could contribute to Russia's military capabilities."

"As these developments show, Russia is already paying a serious price for its actions, and the longer it breaches the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, the heavier the price it will pay, undermining its own influence in its neighbourhood, steadily disconnecting Russia from the international community and damaging Russia's own prosperity and security over the long-term. We have already seen the flight of more than \$63 billion in capital out of Russia and the fall of the Russian stock market, and Russia's economy is now forecast to shrink this year. The European Commission is preparing a comprehensive plan to reduce European countries' reliance on Russian energy, and the G7 Energy Ministers will meet next week to discuss ways to strengthen our collective energy security."

"The Ukrainian people deserve their own opportunity to make free democratic choices, free from corruption and from external interference. We are sending experts to help to improve public

financial management, working with the World Bank to strengthen governance in Ukraine, co-hosting a forum on asset recovery starting tomorrow here in London to locate the proceeds of corruption, and helping to support free, fair and inclusive presidential elections on 25 May. We have helped to secure an increase in European Union assistance to help to ensure economic stability in Ukraine, bringing the total support available from existing EU budgets to more than £1.4 billion and we are calling for expert EU assistance to strengthen law enforcement and the rule of law. We support IMF plans to put in place a two-year programme worth potentially more than \$17 billion that will help Ukraine to make the reforms it urgently needs and to build a stronger and more prosperous economy for the future."

"Russia's actions have caused deep alarm not only in Ukraine, but among its neighbours with Russian-speaking minorities, in particular the Baltic states. On 16 April, NATO agreed a set of measures to provide reassurance and confidence to NATO allies. These include more air policing and naval missions, and deployment of additional military staff from allied nations to strengthen NATO's preparedness, training and exercises. The UK has contributed four Typhoon aircraft to boost NATO's regular Baltic air policing missions, which have left today, we are contributing to AWACS reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania, and we stand ready to provide more support as NATO's response develops. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe is discussing these measures with colleagues in Estonia today, and I intend to travel to the region next week, including to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova."

"It cannot be acceptable in the 21st century not only to invade and annex by force on the back of a sham referendum part of a neighbouring country, but to use military exercises and proxies to foment instability and disorder in that country, in an effort to disrupt its democratic elections. These are policies we have to be clear

we oppose, and we must be ready to take measures that make very clear that approach. Russia's actions betray its fear of democracy and the rule of law taking root in their neighbourhood. These actions are not consistent with being a strong and confident country, and are also in breach of international agreements and the UN charter to which Russia is a party. It is in Russia's power to help find ways for tensions to be reduced in Ukraine, and the doors of diplomacy remain fully open. We will continue to talk to Russia and to urge it to seek de-escalation. But repeated intensification of the crisis and violation of international law and refusal to implement agreements require a strong response from the international community, and the United Kingdom will be part of that, in keeping with our international responsibilities and in defence of our national interest."

Sir Peter Tapsell:

"I put it to my right hon. Friend that the rescue of the failed state of Ukraine from civil war needs to be kept entirely separate from any attempt to overthrow the historic treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774---(*Interruption.*)---Well, we base our defence of Gibraltar and the Falklands on ancient treaties, so they should not be disregarded. The treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca transferred the sovereignty of the Crimea from the Ottoman empire to the Russian empire. Hundreds of thousands of Russians sacrificed their lives in the 1940s in defence of that, and even Mr Gorbachev has publicly announced that he regards the Crimea as an integral part of Mother Russia---and the whole of the Russian people take the same view."

Mr Speaker:

"We do not have time for an exhaustive recital of the contents of the treaty, but we are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the essential flavour of it."

William Hague:

"Treaties of the 18th century are important, and we do indeed rest our case in some international disputes on those treaties, including the treaty of Utrecht. My right hon. Friend should nevertheless bear in

mind the fact that Mr Krushchev transferred the sovereignty of the Crimea to Ukraine---(*Interruption.*) I think I am receiving some support from the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). Russia took that decision---also a validly taken international decision---so my right hon. Friend should reflect on the fact that we now try not to settle disputes in the same manner as in the 18th century. The fact that Russia annexed the Crimea by force in the 1770s does not allow the Russians to do so in the 21st century." Of course, the UK, being what it is, a belligerent, military nation, is exempt from this high-minded moral principle.

Was Yanukovich Illegally Removed?

Two days later, on 30 April, Tory backbencher (Sir) Edward Leigh posed the following to the Solicitor General: "whether he has given advice to the Government on whether the removal of President Yanukovich was in accord with the provisions of Article 111 of

the Constitution of Ukraine." The Solicitor General offered this evasive reply: "By long-standing convention, observed by successive Administrations and embodied in the Ministerial Code, the fact that the Law Officers may or may not have advised or have been requested to advise on a particular issue, and the content of any advice, is not disclosed outside of Government."

As David Morrison has argued in a series of articles on Ukraine, and as the editorial in the April Labour Affairs confirmed, the Ukrainian Parliament failed to implement the conditions for the removal of a President as laid down in Article 111 of the Constitution of Ukraine. This may have been the Solicitor General's advice to the Government, but protocol prevents him from disclosing it. How convenient for William Hague and the Government who can claim that all is legitimate in Ukrainian Government circles.

Article 111 Of Ukraine Constitution

The President of Ukraine may be removed from office by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by the procedure of impeachment, in the event that he or she commits state treason or other crime.

The issue of the removal of the President of Ukraine from office by the procedure of impeachment is initiated by the majority of the constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

To conduct the investigation, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine establishes a special temporary investigatory commission whose composition includes a special Prosecutor and special investigators.

The conclusions and proposals of the temporary investigatory commission are considered at a meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

For cause, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, by no less than two-thirds of its constitutional composition, adopts a decision on the accusation of the President of Ukraine.

The decision on the removal of the President of Ukraine from office by the procedure of impeachment is adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by no less than three-quarters of its constitutional composition, after the review of the case by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and the receipt of its opinion on the observance of the constitutional procedure of investigation and consideration of the case of impeachment, and the receipt of the opinion of the Supreme Court of Ukraine to the effect that the acts, of which the President of Ukraine is accused, contain elements of state treason or other crime.

It's A Fact

Number of out of work benefit claimants (Great Britain) and duration of oldest claim

August 2011

All claimants-4,842,010

Up to 1 year-1,937,380

1 to 2 years-503,230

2 to 3 years-290,420

3 years and over-2,111,170

August 2012

All claimants-4,721,460

Up to 1 year-2,138,490

1 to 2 years-649,290

2 to 3 years-313,940

3 years and over-1,619,740

August 2013

All claimants-4,395,860

Up to 1 year-2,051,340

1 to 2 years-881,810

2 to 3 years-389,270

3 years and over-1,073,440

Parliamentary Written Answer
17/3/14.

The value of UK imports of coal, primary oil and petroleum products from Russia between 2008 and 2012 was:

Year 2008

Coal £1,570 million

Primary oil £2,184 million

Petroleum products £1,091 million

Year 2009

Coal £1,130 million

Primary oil £1,156 million

Petroleum products £770 million

Year 2010

Coal £533 million

Primary oil £1,278 million

Petroleum products £1,186 million

Year 2011

Coal £945 million

Primary oil £2,316 million

Petroleum products £1,805 million

Year 2012

Coal £1,092 million

Primary oil £3,321 million

Petroleum products £1,819 million

PWA 31/3/14.

The amounts (in thousand tonnes) of coal and imported oil from Russia by the UK for each year between 2008 and 2012 compared to total demand for those fuels were:

Year 2008- Coal 21,249 (33% of total demand)

Primary oil 8,295 (10%)

Petroleum products 1,435 (2%)

Year 2009- Coal 17,726 (25%)

Primary oil 5,065 (7%)

Petroleum products 2,066 (3%)

Year 2010- Coal 8,322 (15%)

Primary oil 5,000 (7%)

Petroleum products 2,306 (3%)

Year 2011- Coal 12,126 (22%)

Primary oil 6,058 (8%)

Petroleum products 2,407 (4%)

Year 2012- Coal 16,933 (25%)

Primary oil 7,491 (11%)

Petroleum products 2,630 (4%)

PWA 31/3/14.

In the next six months the UK is planning to participate in 37 joint and multinational exercises in a NATO context

These exercises will take place on the territory of, in the waters around or in the skies above the following countries

Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greenland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, UK, USA

PWA 3/4/14.

In 2012, 39,619 thousand tonnes, tt, of steam coal (mainly used by coal-fired stations) were imported into the UK, representing 72% of coal used for electricity generation (54,906 thousand tonnes)

Imports of steam coal were

Russia 17,459 thousand tonnes

Colombia 11,749 tt

USA 8,858 tt

European Union 583 tt

Republic of South Africa 546 tt

Canada 153 tt

Other countries 272 tt. Total all

countries 39,619 tt

PWA 9/4/14.

The number of vacant dwellings in England at October in each year from 2009 to 2013 was:

5 October 2009 (770,496)

4 October 2010 (737,147)

3 October 2011 (719,352)

1 October 2012 (704,357)

7 October 2013 (635,127)

PWA 30/4/14.

The number of long-term vacant dwellings in England at October

in each year from 2009 to 2013 was:

5 October 2009 (316,251)

4 October 2010 (299,999)

3 October 2011 (277,529)

1 October 2012 (254,059)

7 October 2013 (216,050)

PWA 30/4/14.

The number of reported fatally injured cyclists by gender in each year (Great Britain) from 2003 to 2012 was:

Year 2003; Male 89, Female 25. Total 114

Year 2004; Male 107, Female 27. Total 134

Year 2005; Male 131, Female 17. Total 148

Year 2006; Male 122, Female 24. Total 146

Year 2007; Male 112, Female 24. Total 136

Year 2008; Male 97, Female 18. Total 115

Year 2009; Male 83, Female 21. Total 104

Year 2010; Male 85, Female 26. Total 111

Year 2011; Male 85, Female 22. Total 107

Year 2012; Male 109, Female 9. Total 118

PWA 30/4/14.

The number of seriously injured cyclists by gender in each year (Great Britain) from 2003 to 2012 was:

Year 2003; Male 1,916, Female 380. Total 2,296

Year 2004; Male 1,816, Female 358. Total 2,174

Year 2005; Male 1,811, Female 399. Total 2,210

Year 2006; Male 1,898, Female 398. Total 2,296

Year 2007; Male 1,978, Female 450. Total 2,428

Year 2008; Male 2,009, Female 441. Total 2,450

Year 2009; Male 2,156, Female 450. Total 2,606

Year 2010; Male 2,162, Female 498. Total 2,660

Year 2011; Male 2,536, Female 549. Total 3,085

Year 2012; Male 2,650, Female 572. Total 3,222

PWA 30/4/14.