

# Labour Affairs

Incorporating the Labour and Trade Union Review

No 264 February 2016

Price £2.00 (€ 3.00)

## Open Letter to Hilary Benn on the Syrian Bombing

The Western powers sowed the wind in 1991, by needless violence against Iraq. Sowed the wind with a double dose by the total destruction of Iraq's only viable secular authorities in 2003. Then gave the Middle East a triple whammy by encouraging Syrian protestors to make the impossible demand that President Assad resign before any multi-party election, when he seemed ready to compromise. (And might plausibly have won such elections without trickery, which the West decided was much more than he deserved.)

British governments, including the one you were part of, have sowed the wind. And now we all reap the whirlwind in the shape of Daesh, ISIS, the so-called Islamic state. Much more seriously, since Daesh are aggressive but a small minority, we reap the whirlwind with growing hostility between the West and Islam as a whole. But your best idea is to sow the wind yet again – bombing Syria with no clear aim in mind.

Sadly, you prefer comfortable fantasies to facts that you as a former Minister and current Shadow Foreign Secretary ought to be familiar with. You say of the Islamists:

“They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy — the means by which we will make our decision tonight — in contempt.”<sup>1</sup>

It's not something to do with the West's bombings? The not-always-accurate drone strikes? The massive sales of modern weapons to various Arab authoritarians, including Iraq for as long as Saddam was seen as useful? Or with the earlier policy, carried out from 1991 to 2003, of making ordinary Iraqis suffer in the hope this would get rid of Saddam? Or with the betrayal of Arabs after World War One, when they were led to believe that Britain wanted an independent Arab state? Or the whole matter of Israel?

Did you bother to study what bin Laden said back in 2004? He said:

“I say to you that security is an indispensable pillar of human life and that free men do not forfeit their security, contrary to Bush's claim that we hate freedom.

“If so, then let him explain to us why we don't strike for example - Sweden? And we know that freedom-haters don't possess defiant spirits like those of the 19 - may Allah

have mercy on them.

“No, we fight because we are free men who don't sleep under oppression. We want to restore freedom to our nation, just as you lay waste to our nation. So shall we lay waste to yours.

“No one except a dumb thief plays with the security of others and then makes himself believe he will be secure. Whereas thinking people, when disaster strikes, make it their priority to look for its causes, in order to prevent it happening again.”<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qaeda and similar don't attack Sweden, because Sweden hasn't waged war on Muslims. They probably expect most Swedes to go to hell, but also consider this to be Allah's business.

Britain and the USA have repeatedly meddled in Arab and Muslim affairs, and it has *never* been to support democracy as such. Democracy in the sense of multi-party elections is demanded *sometimes*, to get at hostile regimes. But just as often it has been ignored or attacked. Cases in point include:

Inaction amounting to support in 2013 when the Egyptian army removed the democratically elected President, who was a moderate Islamist.

Inaction amounting to support for the suppression of an 'Arab Spring' by the Shia majority in Bahrain in 2011. Shia are at least two thirds of the population, but Sunni grouped around the monarchy are in charge.

Inaction amounting to support in 1992 in Algeria, where Islamists looked likely to win honest multi-party elections.

Compliance with the US-organised coup in Indonesia in 1965, which replaced an imperfect democracy with nearly 35 years of corrupt military dictatorship.

A highly active role in the overthrow of democratically-elected Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran in 1953.

No, Mr Benn, Britain and the USA have *never* supported democracy among Muslims or anyone else when it might produce the 'wrong' result. Two more instances:

A back-up role in the USA's abuse of United Nations power to overthrow in 1960 the democratically elected

government of Patrice Lumumba in Congo, formerly Belgian Congo and for a time Zaire. And still an appalling mess. This brutal trickery ended the possibility that the United Nations might be trusted as an impartial body that would uphold democracy.

Helping cause the entire tragic Vietnam War (better viewed as Vietnam's American war<sup>3</sup>). The USA chose an anti-Communist to rule South Vietnam and break the promise of nation-wide elections that Ho Chi Minh was likely to win. President Diem supposedly won a 1955 referendum with 98.2% of the vote, including 605,025 out of 450,000 registered voters in Saigon.<sup>4</sup> This same Diem was also overthrown with US approval in 1963, though his subsequent murder may have been against US wishes. Many experts saw it as disastrous, removing the only anti-Communist with significant nationalist credentials.

If the aim of Britain and the USA is seen as *hegemony*, it all makes sense. But are you surprised that Muslims don't like it? Or that with Arab Socialism now largely marginalised, they turn to Islamists, the only powerful group opposing this bungling hegemony?

And it is a real bungle. The Anglo hegemony has been far from competent. Restoring the autocratic Shah of Iran in 1953 helped secure many years of cheap oil, but also paved the way for the 1979 take-over by Shia Islamists and the reversal of decades of secularisation and Westernisation. Those were also the first Islamists who were well-adapted to modern technology and mass communication, and to have borrowed many ideas and methods from secular leftists.<sup>5</sup> Many more have learned from them, including sectarian Sunni hostile to Iran.

Even in 1979, something like al-Qaeda or Daesh seemed most improbable. The Iranian clerics and their overseas supporters did not approve of terrorist attacks outside of their own territory, except possibly the Lockerbie bombings for which Libya was blamed. Secular Palestinians had earlier waged a long campaign and utterly failed. The global terrorist version of Islam has its roots in the US-supported war against the pro-Soviet governments in Afghanistan. But it need not have lasted after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, or it might have stayed just anti-Russian. The *deciding* factor was the vast suffering inflicted on Iraq between the First Gulf

War in 1991 and the invasion of 2003. The West wanted to remove Saddam, but *didn't* want him replaced by either Islamists or Kurds, the two main forces. Rather than make some sensible decision based on hard facts, they continued to sponsor acceptable Iraqi oppositionists whose total unimportance was demonstrated after 2003. Saddam was open to some sort of deal, but the Anglo hegemony had unrealistic expectations that reached their height with the 2003 invasion. These were shown up by subsequent failed attempts to remake Iraq as an obedient little follower of Western values.

And that's a bungle you were very much involved in, Mr Benn. You suggest that "Labour must emerge from Iraq's long shadow"<sup>6</sup>, but what does that amount to? Your sudden switch from opposing the bombing of Syria to supporting it against the majority of your own party suggests that you have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. That you fail to understand that the West cannot manufacture new pro-Western forces where they are marginal or a small minority. That you fail to understand that the West sending in its armies simply makes such people look like traitors.

What Labour needs to do is to condemn the whole of British foreign policy from 1991 as a total bungle. Not moral, and not advancing Western interests even from the most selfish point of view. But instead you say:

"What we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated. It is why, as we have heard tonight, socialists, trade unionists and others joined the International Brigade in the 1930s to fight against Franco. It is why this entire House stood up against Hitler and Mussolini."<sup>7</sup>

Now that's being very soft on the Tories. Many Tories admired Hitler until he became the open foe of the Anglo hegemony, with the *Daily Mail* a noted enthusiast. Rather more admired Mussolini, *including Churchill*, though this has been well-hidden by biographers including Roy Jenkins and I doubt you'd know that.<sup>8</sup> But you must be aware that most Tories supported the semi-fascist Spanish military rebels, and the West backed Franco for decades afterwards. And he was succeeded by a normal Western democracy, so perhaps he was best left alone once the Civil War was over. But it is possible that if Fascism had lost in Spain, there would have been no Second World War.

Have you forgotten how Chamberlain helped the military rebels by stopping

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ISSN 0953-3494

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Published by the Ernest Bevin Society

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the legal and democratically elected government of Spain from buying weapons for its volunteer forces? Or did you never know? Chamberlain stood up and said that he had ‘no knowledge’ of the massive intervention by German and Italian troops, even though it was repeatedly reported through neutral and reliable news-channels. Someone should have defied Parliamentary convention and called him a bare-faced liar, which he was.

However sketchy your knowledge of history, you must know that Chamberlain made life easy for Hitler at a time when Germany still had a small weak army. When he re-militarised the Rhineland, he had almost nothing. Britain and France mysteriously did nothing.

Or you might look at the ‘Hitler Games’, the celebration of Nazi values that was the 1936 Berlin Olympics, attended by all the usual participants apart from Republican Spain. (Including even Harold Abrahams, Jewish hero of the film *Chariots of Fire*.<sup>9</sup>)

The Anglo hegemony has always been very willing to accommodate fascism. Semi-fascist Portugal was a NATO ally and allowed to oppress its African colonies until its own revolution. Saddam’s semi-fascist Baath regime was quite free to rule, slaughter, and torture and to gas its Kurdish rebels for as long as Iraq was seen as useful to the Anglo hegemony. And recently in Ukraine, the West was happy to underwrite the unconstitutional removal of an elected President.<sup>10</sup> Happy to back people who celebrated the memory of self-declared fascist Stepan Bandera and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, people who both started and ended the war in alliance with Nazi Germany, while fighting them between-times after the Nazis suppressed their Declaration of Independence.<sup>11</sup> (And who made a pragmatic alliance with Jews despite disliking them, but killed many Poles, ethnic rivals in territory once part of Greater Poland.)

But at least the Anglo hegemony won the Cold War? Moot. The Cold War was won because the Soviet Union’s attempt at hegemony were widely seen as even worse – especially after the suicidal crushing of internal reform that had the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as its central act. And then the equally half-baked decision in 1979 to shove aside home-grown Afghan radicals, very similar to how the USA removed Diem in Vietnam. Or waged war to remove Saddam.

*In the modern world, people will not be ruled by a government that they see*

*as alien.* That was the problem with the Arab Spring – protests began with pro-Western elements, but outside of Tunisia they were very much a minority. The only free election Egypt ever had gave 37.5% to moderate Islamists, another 27.8% to harder-line Islamists: nearly two thirds of the electorate. Just 9.2% to the New Wafd Party, the nearest thing to a democratic pro-Western force.<sup>12</sup> Another 8.9% went to a peculiar alliance of secular leftists and Sufi suspicious of mainstream Islamists, but it was clear who won. And since this was intolerable to the Anglo hegemony, the army was given the green light to restore the previously-scorned dictatorship.

Your basic error is supposing that our current comfortable British social order is somehow ‘the norm’ which people will somehow automatically achieve if not prevented by dictators and other wicked people. You need look no further than Ireland to see that this is not so. 19th century Britain wholly failed to integrate the Irish once it dropped formal discrimination. There, the major failure was the monstrous shirking of normal governmental responsibilities by a British government obsessed with Free Market dogma during the Irish Potato Famine. It enforced the export of vast amounts of food other than potatoes, food that could easily have fed all of those who had raised it. (A decision praised by Ruth Dudley Edwards in her history of the *Economist* magazine.<sup>13</sup>) Ireland actually developed itself under de Valera, a man who had a leading role in two separate insurgencies against regular parliamentary governments, the 1916 Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War. (But was impeccably democratic in the Irish War of Independence, which happened after Sinn Fein won a large majority in the 1918 election.) Also a man who later led a strong assertion of hard-line Catholic values and moderate Corporatism. Who stood neutral in World War Two, when Ireland helping the Allied cause in the Battle of the Atlantic would have been enormously useful. But looking at how Ireland turned out, we can be glad that the Irish Free State was left free to become the Irish Republic and develop in its own way. It’s British-ruled Northern Ireland that remains a mess.

The Anglo hegemony – now supported sycophantically by the Irish Republic – might have worked had the West followed the advice of a wise minority who called for a Marshall Plan for Russia and the other components of the fallen Soviet Union after its 1991 collapse. (Including George Soros, at that time little-known, though his

later remarks on Russia have mostly been foolish.) In the 1990s, Russia was keen to reject its own Leninist heritage and copy the West. China was still wobbly after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. The Anglo hegemony might have got two of the world’s biggest armies on its side, had it understood the underlying realities. But most of the rich and influential don’t know their arse from their elbow outside of the limited and highly artificial world of Western High Finance and the various tricks by which they bias Western electoral politics to serve themselves. They believed that the Marshall Plan and similar were near-disasters that just happened to win over former foes in West Germany, Italy and Japan as highly useful and reliable friends. They thought that US bombing and a slew of dirtwater mercenaries could do the job in Iraq. And it seems that many of them *still* believe that they very nearly had a brilliant success, except that someone conveniently far removed from their own friends caused it all to go wrong. (Surprisingly, the appalling Donald Trump talks more sense on this than rival Republicans or than Hillary Clinton.)

That’s the company you’re keeping. Not moral, and not very competent or successful either. They remind me of the old joke about the one sure way to go gambling in Las Vegas and return with a small fortune – you go there with a large fortune!

They had a large fortune in 1991, a small fortune now. Do you and your New Labour colleagues really want to remain part of it?

1 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm151202/debtext/151202-0005.htm#1512031001687>

2 Full transcript of bin Ladin’s speech, published by al-Jazeera in November 2004, <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html>

3 Following those fought against Imperial Japan and restored French colonialism.

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_of\\_Vietnam\\_referendum,\\_1955](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Vietnam_referendum,_1955) as at 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

5 <http://gwydionwilliams.com/46-globalisation/the-radical-rightists-of-1979/>

6 <http://guardian.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>

7 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm151202/debtext/151202-0005.htm#1512031001687>

8 <http://gwydionwilliams.com/44-fascism-and-world-war-2/why-churchill-admired-mussolini/>

9 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold\\_Abrahams#Life\\_after\\_running](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Abrahams#Life_after_running) as at 19/1/2016

10 <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/2014-04-magazine/2014-04-editorial/>

11 <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/2014-04-magazine/2014-04-newsnotes/#Toc419207187>

12 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_parliamentary\\_election,\\_2011%E2%80%9312](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_parliamentary_election,_2011%E2%80%9312)

13 <http://gwydionwilliams.com/50-new-right-ideas/430-2/>

# Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT (MR. BERTRAND RUSSELL'S LECTURES).

On 19 October 1916, Philip Morrell Liberal Member of Parliament for Burnley criticised the government's decision to ban Bertrand Russell from speaking in certain locations in England and deplored the move to prevent him from travelling to the United States to lecture at Harvard University. The decision was made on the basis of a leaflet on conscientious objectors written by Russell. Morrell's support for Russell was opposed by Charles Butt Stanton a former revolutionary socialist turned fervent war supporting nationalist. Stanton had been a miner in South Wales and member of the ILP. He served as ILP member for Merthyr Tydfil from 1915 to 1918, winning the seat in a by-election following the death of Keir Hardie. In 1918 he was elected for the new seat of Aberdare as a National Democratic and Labour Party candidate, defeating the official Labour Party candidate. He lost the seat in 1922 to George Hall, the official Labour Party candidate.

## Mr. MORRELL

I do not propose to pursue any further this question of the conscientious objector, except to say I am certain that anyone who has followed this question closely, as I have done, will welcome most cordially the proposal made by the Noble Lord who has just spoken. If some sort of solution like that could be found, we should be saved the scandal of such scenes as occurred at Birkenhead a fortnight ago, when two men were really tortured in a public park in front of a very large number of their friends. Most of the difficulties with which this House has been asked to deal again and again would never have arisen if the scheme put forward by the Noble Lord, and more or less approved by a Committee, had been adopted. I hope my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will take the matter into his consideration, and get the plan adopted. My object in rising was to call attention to another kind of case which has arisen under the [Defence of the Realm Act](#). It is the case of Mr. Bertrand Russell, which was referred to at Question Time yesterday. In bringing forward this case I want to say at once I do not desire to claim any particular pity or urge that any particular hardship has been done to a single individual. I bring it forward, in the first place, because I believe it

is typical of many other cases now occurring under the [Defence of the Realm Act](#), and, secondly, because I believe it involves most important and fundamental principles of government—principles which cannot be disregarded without the greatest harm to the community.

With regard to Mr. Russell himself, it is unnecessary for me to say anything at all. He is the bearer of a most distinguished name, he is a grandson of a Prime Minister, the descendant of a long race of distinguished men, and he himself has achieved distinction which no one will deny in the fields of philosophy and mathematics. Whatever people may say about his political opinions, no one will question his eminence as a thinker and philosopher. He has a reputation which extends far beyond this country, which is European in its extent, and extends also to America, where he is well known. Such a man, at any rate, you would expect would be treated by the Government, even if he was in disagreement with them, with fair consideration. I do not ask for any special favour. I say that he ought to be treated with fair consideration; I shall endeavour to show that he has been persecuted and pursued with a malignity which recalls the methods of the Middle Ages. I will take Mr. Russell's case from the beginning. At the beginning of this year Mr. Russell was attracted by the problem of the conscientious objector, and this at a time when the conscientious objector had far fewer friends than he has now, when his sincerity was denied, and when it required great courage to take up his case. Mr. Russell thought it was right that the conscientious objector should have the protection which Parliament intended. For some time, at great personal inconvenience, he worked in the offices of the No-Conscription Fellowship, in order to obtain protection for these men. In the course of his work there Mr. Russell took part in preparing a leaflet entitled "Two Years' Hard Labour for Refusing to Disobey the Dictates of Conscience." The leaflet was of a straightforward

character, simply describing what had happened in the case of a certain conscientious objector. That leaflet was distributed, and it came to Mr. Russell's knowledge that men who had been distributing it had been, in some cases, sent to gaol by magistrates. It seemed to him unfair that these men should suffer for the distribution of a leaflet, unless the author himself was prepared to take his part of the responsibility. Quite rightly he at once wrote to the "Times" a letter, saying in effect, "I am the man who wrote this leaflet. If any proceedings are taken they should be taken against me." As the result of that letter Mr. Russell was prosecuted and fined £100. In due course his furniture was sold to pay the fine. That was the first stage in what I describe as the pursuit of Mr. Russell by the Government. In present circumstances conviction almost invariably follows a Crown prosecution in such matters as these.

I now come to the second stage. Mr. Russell was informed that an engagement of many months' standing to deliver at Harvard University, in America, a course of lectures on mathematical logic could not be carried out because the Foreign Office declined to allow him to leave this country. A letter was sent to the Ambassador at Washington, and finally a message was communicated to Harvard University that Mr. Russell was considered too dangerous a character to come and deliver lectures on mathematical logic. Except for that action, Mr. Russell would now be on his way to America to deliver this course of lectures. His passport was refused. It was a heavy loss to him in every way, pecuniarily and otherwise. It naturally aroused a great deal of comment in the United States. He has received letters from the university regarding the action of the Government, and the matter has been commented on again and again in the American newspapers. Here you have one of the most distinguished living mathematicians, one of the best known philosophers in this country, not allowed to go to deliver a course of lectures on mathematics at Harvard

Editorials and older articles at our website,  
<http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/>  
 This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

University! Following that, the Council of Trinity College, Cambridge—I am not suggesting that the Government are responsible for this—took action to deprive Mr. Russell of his lectureship. I only mention that because it is part of the same principle of vindictiveness and persecution which the Government, by their action, seemed to be encouraging. Mr. Russell found himself prevented by the Government from lecturing on his own subjects in America and prevented by the Council of Trinity College from lecturing at Cambridge. He then made arrangements to deliver at various provincial centres throughout the country a course of lectures on the philosophical principles of politics. All the arrangements were made. The lectures, for which a fee was to be charged, were to deal solely with the principles of government. I have the syllabus here, and it includes such subjects as “Capitalism and the Wages System,” “Pitfalls in Socialism,” “Individual Freedom and State Control,” “National Independence and Internationalism,” and “Education and Prejudice.” Mr. Russell himself, in a statement which he has issued in regard to these lectures, says: My proposed course of lectures on ‘The world as it can be made’ is not intended to deal with the immediate issues raised by the War; there will be nothing about the diplomacy preceding the War, about conscientious objectors, about the kind of peace to be desired, or even about the general ethics of war. On all these topics I have expressed myself often already. My intention is to take the minds of my hearers off the questions of the moment—

**Mr STANTON**

He did not do that at Cardiff.

**Mr. MORRELL**

I am dealing now with the lectures he proposed to give. My intention is to take the minds of my hearers off the questions of the moment, and to suggest the kind of hopes and ideals that ought to inspire reconstruction after the War. He prepared a series of lectures, one of which was delivered by him at Manchester, and was also read last night at Glasgow. I will deal with that later. What course did the War Office take? It seems almost incredible that this distinguished mathematician, who proposed to lecture on the general principles of politics, should have been treated as he was treated. The War Office, taking their powers under the [Aliens' Restriction Act](#) and the [Defence of the Realm Act](#) combined, said that he was not to go into any area which was a prohibited area under the [Aliens' Restrictions Act](#)—an

act intended to deal with aliens and spies. He might go to Manchester; he must not go to Liverpool. He might go to Surrey; he must not go to Sussex, because it is a seaside county. He might go to Cambridgeshire; he must not go to Norfolk. In fact, under this Order he was prevented from going to almost all the centres—Newcastle, Glasgow, Edinburgh—where he had arranged to deliver his lectures. Here you have a distinguished man, bearing the name of Russell, who is English right through, a man well known for his patriotism—whether you agree with his sentiments or not, whether you agree with his views on the War or not, he is well known for his love of his country, and for what he has done for his country—and you treat him as an alien and a spy. You make an Order under these absurd Acts saying that he is not to go into these prohibited areas. What are the reasons which led to this extraordinary action? They were given by the Secretary of State for War yesterday. The right hon. Gentleman said: We had information from a very reliable source that Mr. Bertrand Russell was about to engage in the delivery of a series of lectures which would interfere very seriously with the manning of the Army— In other words, to discuss before a select audience, who had paid for admission, such subjects as “Individual Freedom and State Control,” “The Sphere of Compulsion in Good Government,” and “Tyranny of Majority” was considered very dangerous and likely to interfere very seriously with the manning of the Army. The right hon. Gentleman also said: I do not in the least care what the lectures are called, but they undoubtedly interfere with the prosecution of the War in this country, and lead to weakness, inefficiency, and, if tolerated, would hamper us in the prosecution of the War.”—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 18th October, 1916, cols. 539–40. I wish the right hon. Gentleman were here to tell us whether he has ever taken the trouble to inquire into the subject matter of these lectures, or to satisfy himself in any way as to the action taken by his officials.

**Mr. CURRIE**

Can the hon. Member say who was, or would have been, in the chair at Mr. Russell's lecture at Glasgow?

**Mr. MORRELL**

I can. As a matter of fact the lecture was actually delivered last night, though not by Mr. Russell. It was delivered by Mr. Smillie, president of the Miners' Association. The gentleman in the chair was, I believe, a very distinguished man, named Sir

Daniel Stevenson, an ex-lord-provost of Glasgow.

**Mr. CURRIE**

Is that the same Sir Daniel Stevenson who suggested that Lord Roberts' pension should be stopped?

**Mr. MORRELL**

I know nothing myself about Sir Daniel Stevenson. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does?

**Mr. CURRIE** I may inform the House that that is so.

**Mr. MORRELL**

All I know is what I find in the “Manchester Guardian,” which says that he is an ex-Lord Provost of Glasgow. This lecture, which it would be criminal for Mr. Russell to deliver in person, was delivered by Mr. Smillie to an audience of a thousand persons—all of whom had paid for admission—with the result that they passed an unanimous resolution protesting against the action of the Government in persecuting Mr. Russell as they have done. What good do the Government think they have done by action of that sort? If these lectures were so bad for recruiting or so bad for the Army, as the Secretary of State says they are, what business has he to allow them to be delivered at all? Is it not gross negligence that they should be delivered in any circumstances?

**Mr. MORRELL**

Sinful!

**Mr. MORRELL**

Ought he not at once to prosecute the man who read the lecture, Mr. Smillie, for having been guilty of these treasonable utterances? But if they are, as everybody knows they are, perfectly innocent and proper lectures, what is the good of having these Orders just in order to annoy a man who happens to be against you? In order to annoy Mr. Russell you have Orders of this kind promulgated. We shall be told that Mr. Russell was asked to give an undertaking: that nothing he said would be against the regulations made under the [Defence of the Realm Act](#), and that if he had given that undertaking the lectures might have been delivered. Why should a man be asked to give an undertaking of this sort before he may lecture? The War Office who were to receive the undertaking tell us that this man was to give a vague undertaking that he would say nothing of which the War Office would disapprove. If he says anything that is dangerous to the country the War Office or the Government have it in their power to prosecute him.

## Corbyn's Voting Record: My Party Right Or Wrong?

by Dick Barry

Jeremy Corbyn's Labour opponents have accused him of voting against the Labour government (1997-2010) on 500 occasions, thereby absolving themselves of acts of disloyalty to their party leader. But did Corbyn vote against the Labour whip on 500 occasions? And if he did, how many of these defied a 3-line whip which compels MPs to support the government? Unfortunately, we do not know the definitive answer to that, but the website of 'the public whip' appears to point to a 3-line whip being a minority of Corbyn's votes against.

The website of 'the public whip' which monitors the voting record of every MP shows that over the period of a Labour government between 1 May 1997 and 12 April 2010, Corbyn rebelled on 487 occasions. This represents 18.97% of a total of 2567 divisions (out of 3807) in which he voted. The break down is as follows:

Between 1 May 1997 and 14 May 2001 Corbyn voted in 889 divisions out of 1273 (69.8%). In these 889 divisions he voted against Labour on 77 occasions (8.7%). Between 7 June 2001 and 11 April 2005 he voted in 729 divisions out of 1246 (58.5%). In these 729 divisions he voted against the government on 172 occasions (23.6%). And between 5 May 2005 and 12 April 2010 he voted in 949 divisions out of 1288 (73.7%). In these 949 divisions he voted against on 238 occasions (25.1%). During the period of the Con/Lib Dem coalition from 6 May 2010 to 30 March 20-15, Corbyn voted in 909 divisions out of 1239 (73.4%). In these 909 divisions he voted against the Labour whip on 46 occasions (5.1%). It should be stressed that the majority of the votes against the Labour government were against aspects or clauses of legislation and only rarely against a second or third reading of a government bill.

Most of Corbyn's 77 votes against Labour between 1 May 1997 and 14 May 2001 follow a pattern which became clearer as the Labour government's programme rolled out. Issues that mattered greatly to him included immigration, internal security, terrorism and foreign policy. It is these issues that tended to dominate his opposition to Labour over the 13 years in government. In September 1998 he rebelled against the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill 4 times. And against the Immigration and Asylum

Bill on 3 occasions in November 1999. In April 2000 he voted against the Freedom of Information Bill 5 times and in July he rebelled against the Football Disorder Bill also on 5 occasions. Between February 1999 and May 2001 the pattern was broken somewhat when he voted against the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill on 10 occasions.

Corbyn's 172 rebellions against Labour between 7 June 2001 and 11 April 2005 reveal a man who thinks deeply about human issues. Many of his votes against continued to focus on foreign policy, internal security and the treatment of immigration. For example, in November and December 2001 he voted against aspects of the Anti-Terrorism and Security Bill on no fewer than 28 occasions. And in June and November 2002 he rebelled 17 times against the Nationality and Immigration Bill. In April, May and November 2003 he voted against the Criminal Justice Bill on 10 occasions. In 2003 his opposition to the invasion of Iraq prompted him to vote against that and related issues on 12 occasions. In 2004 and 2005 he opposed the Identity Cards Bill 5 times. And in February and March 2005 he rebelled against the Prevention of Terrorism Bill on 24 occasions.

Corbyn's 238 rebellions against Labour between 5 May 2005 and 12 April 2010 continued to follow a distinct pattern. These acts of 'disloyalty' included 31 votes against prevention of terrorism legislation. They also included votes against a Freedom of Information Bill, identity cards, again, and the Lisbon Treaty. In addition his votes were against biometric registration of immigrants, the retention of Trident, control orders, aspects of the Iraq inquiry and a third runway at Heathrow. His views on most of these issues were and are well known. For Corbyn they were, and continue to be, matters of conscience. To expect him to fall into line and vote contrary to his deeply held beliefs would be an act of personal betrayal.

Note: A one-line whip means attendance is requested but it's not a problem if the vote is missed. A two-line whip requests attendance unless it has been cleared with one of the whips to be absent. A three-line whip is essential, an MP has to attend and vote with the party. (see [www.w4mp.org](http://www.w4mp.org))

## NHS - No Hounding Socialism

It's a great big giant but  
gentle  
born in 1948 of parents  
governmental  
a prodigy at an early age  
in saving lives it was  
engaged  
many who had been in ill-  
health all their lives  
were shown mercy when the  
big one arrived  
it was cash on the nail  
before that  
now it was the welcome mat  
but its compassion didn't  
influence the  
Lilliputians  
when they decided on  
retribution  
though it hadn't done  
anything wrong  
they decided it didn't belong  
the world had changed and  
money was king  
time to take down the giant  
time to sling  
every value that reflected  
social democracy  
the free market can't be a  
mockery  
time to tie the giant down  
trip it up make it lie flat on  
the ground  
but it's resisting though  
they've tied one hand  
while the other one punches  
out at the attempted  
re-brand.

Wilson John Haire.

# Bombing Syria: MPs reply to constituents

*Dick Barry and Mark Cowling wrote to their MPs, Tania Mathias (Twickenham) and Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough), expressing concern over the bombing of Syria. The MP's replies are published below.*

Dear Mr Barry

Thank you for contacting me about military action in Syria. I am grateful to you and the many other constituents who have taken the time to share views with me on this incredibly important and difficult issue.

In 2003, I was opposed to the Iraq War and I marched against it on the streets of London. That war was a mistake – it lacked clear legal backing, it lacked the support of other countries in the region, and crucially it was based on the false premise of weapons of mass destruction and a threat to the UK that did not exist.

The question that faces us now is not about the Iraq War, and, whilst we must always learn the lessons of the past, we must also not allow past mistakes to prevent us from taking necessary action in the present. The threat from Daesh in Iraq and Syria is a real one – the killing of British tourists in Tunisia, the seven foiled plots on UK soil, the attacks in Paris, and the thousands of deaths perpetrated by Daesh in the Middle East are clear evidence of that threat. If Daesh is not stopped, more people will die. The question is about how best we stop them.

After a great deal of thought and discussion, I believe that the UK should have the authority to extend its air strikes into Syria. I do so not because I think that it is a quick or a perfect solution, nor because I believe it will instantly make us safe, but because I am now convinced that it is right for the UK to make our contribution to defeating the Daesh threat in every way possible, a threat that affects us now, whether or not we are involved in Syria.

I do not believe we can simply assume that Daesh is not a threat to us until we intervene – indeed, this is manifestly not true given the number of attacks that our security services have already thwarted here. The truth is that these militants do not hate us for what we have done; they hate us for who we are. The central reason that the Paris attacks shocked us so much was because we all fundamentally knew that it could have been London that was attacked – and if Daesh had its way, it would have been London. The threat to the UK exists now, irrespective of where we are attacking, and I do not believe we can fail to play our part in tackling it.

I will not pretend that, simply by extending our airstrikes into Syria, Daesh will be defeated – indeed, the airstrikes in themselves may not make a huge difference. As I am sure you are aware, we are already striking Daesh in Iraq and have done so with some success – Daesh has lost 30% of its territory in Iraq, its brutal attacks on minorities like the Kurdish people have been reduced, and there have been no reports of any civilian deaths as a result of British bombing. To refuse to fly over the Iraq/Syria border – a border for which Daesh has no respect – makes no military sense, and that is why no other nation is bombing only in Iraq and not Syria, where Daesh has its stronghold. We must surely attack them where they are plotting to attack us, and as such this is an extension of a conflict in which we are already involved.

Unlike the Iraq War of 2003, action in Syria has a clear and unambiguous legal basis. UN Security Council Resolution 2249, unanimously agreed, calls on nations to take “all necessary measures” to prevent attacks by Daesh and to “eradicate the safe haven they have established in Iraq and Syria”. Additionally, following Daesh’s attacks in Paris, the French have asked us, as one of their closest allies, to join them in an act of self-defence – I do not pretend that this is in itself a justification, but we have to question what we would think if we had been attacked in this way and France refused to support us. If - as I believe - the threat to the UK is a real one, then we cannot outsource our self-defence to our allies.

Airstrikes must, of course, form one part of a wider international strategy to defeat Daesh and establish a lasting peace in Iraq and Syria. The guarantee of a further £1bn from the UK for post-conflict reconstruction, in addition to the £1bn we have already contributed, is extremely welcome, as is the forthcoming Vienna Conference which will attempt to broker a ceasefire in the existing Syrian civil war. Many have said that we need to do more to stop Daesh’s financial and military backing – I agree that we need to do much more on this front, but part of doing means targeting of Daesh’s oil convoys by airstrikes. I wholeheartedly support the calls for wider diplomatic and political efforts, but I believe they must be in addition to, rather than instead of, an extension of airstrikes. Daesh will not surrender, it will not negotiate, and it will not stop until it is defeated – I wish that a peaceful solution were possible, but I am afraid that it is simply wishful thinking to believe that Daesh can be stopped without military action.

I can understand the reservations and outright opposition to further action that many constituents have expressed, and I have nothing but respect for those who disagree with me on this. Yes, innocent people will die; and yes, Daesh will have another reason to want to attack us; but the tragic truth is that thousands of innocent people have already died at Daesh’s hands and more will do so until Daesh is defeated. The threat to the UK is real and present now – I cannot excuse the actions of terrorists on the basis that we somehow provoked them by our mistakes in the recent past.

What is being proposed is far from perfect, but we may be waiting forever if we insist on waiting for a perfect solution. This has been considered fully and carefully by Parliament and the Government over a period of months, extending to well before I was elected in May. The Prime Minister has, I believe, given as comprehensive and as reassuring case as he reasonably could be expected to and has presented a clear and specific proposal that sanctions airstrikes against Daesh in Syria as part of a much wider strategy. Our actions will undoubtedly have some negative and unintended consequences, but I am in no doubt that our inaction has had many worse consequences. It is with sadness that I support what the Government has proposed, but I do so with the profound belief that there is no other way to defeat this generational threat both to the UK and to the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children in the Middle East.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Best wishes,

Tania Mathias

Dear Mark,

Thank you for writing to me regarding proposed air strikes in Syria.

Deciding whether to involve our armed forces in military conflict is the most difficult choice Members of Parliament can be asked to make and I arrived at my decision after careful consideration of the arguments for, and against, military action.

To support military action I would need to be convinced that there was a coherent and credible military and political strategy, as well as being assured of the legality of any potential action. Most importantly, I would need to be confident that any action would strengthen, not undermine, our national security. In these respects, I believe that the Prime Minister failed to make a convincing case for UK military action.

While I agree that Daesh (ISIS) must be defeated militarily, I do not believe the plans put forward by the Prime Minister will prove effective and at the same time will inevitably increase the risk of terrorist attacks here at home.

The US-led coalition has been bombing in Syria for over a year, yet has so far been unable to contain or weaken Daesh. This is because other than the Syrian Kurds in limited areas, there are no credible, non-Islamist ground forces other than President Assad's. As the experience so far in Syria and Iraq has shown, guerrilla-type organisations such as Daesh cannot be defeated by air strikes alone. In addition, it is impossible to target Daesh without incurring a significant loss of civilian life, especially without the assistance of allies on the ground who can provide up to date information.

Considering the unwillingness of any outside actors in the Syrian civil war to commit ground troops, the bombing campaign is unlikely to be successful until a coalition of forces already inside of Syria is formed which can then be supported by air strikes to take and administer territory currently held by Daesh. This lack of local allies is a strategic problem which the addition of a small number of UK aircraft will not solve.

For this reason, the plan proposed by David Cameron does not have a clear, achievable military objective, and risks involving UK forces in a protracted bombing campaign and dragging us further into the conflict. I believe it would be irresponsible for me to support such action.

It is my belief that military action should only be supported if it goes hand-in-hand with a coherent political strategy and I am so far unconvinced that the Prime Minister has such a strategy. The Syrian civil war is a complex war with many different players with differing objectives. Turkey has prioritised fighting the Kurds and overthrowing Assad over defeating Daesh; Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have provided important support to Sunni jihadist groups in Syria; while Russia, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah are fighting to ensure the survival of the regime in Damascus.

I am opposed to engaging UK military personnel in such a politically and militarily congested battlefield without a clear and credible strategy. It is also concerning that some of our allies have been arming, trading with and providing financial support to jihadist militias. The UK should redouble its efforts to tackle nations and individuals who are encouraging these groups.

Only in 2013 the Prime Minister made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Parliament to approve military action in Syria against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, a move which would have proven disastrous and would have tipped the balance of the war in favour of Daesh and other jihadist militias. It seems the Government are unsure of who our allies and enemies are and who we should support or oppose in the conflict. The downing of a Russian jet by Turkish forces further illustrates these dangers.

There needs to be a peace agreement between the Assad regime and its opponents leading to a transitional administration which could then take on IS, while at the same time avoiding the collapse of the Syrian state. The recent Geneva II Conference on Syria has shown that some progress is being made in this regard. I am not opposed on principle to UK military action in Syria, but any action should be subordinate to international diplomatic efforts to end the war. This must include a comprehensive plan for humanitarian assistance for any refugees who may be displaced by the action and a post-war plan for Syria if we are to avoid repeating the mistakes of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. I cannot support UK military action which precedes or is independent of a credible political and diplomatic strategy.

Finally, I was not convinced of the legality of the proposed military action. The Prime Minister, if he wishes to intervene in the Syrian civil war, should seek a Chapter VII United Nations Resolution which would provide a clear legal base for strikes. The current resolution is not in my view sufficient. With 3 out of the 5 permanent UN Security Council members already involved in the Syrian conflict, so long as a credible political and military plan is proposed, a Chapter VII UN Resolution should be achievable. It would be a mistake to become involved in another war in the Middle East without a clear legal basis or UN approval.

While I voted against UK military action, I will continue to push for the Government to come forward with a coherent, achievable strategy for Syria and the broader region. I want to see the UK make every effort to defeat Daesh and bring to an end the tragic Syrian civil war, but having examined the plans put forward by the Prime Minister, I fear the proposed military action will make things worse, not better.

Thank you for writing to me and sharing your views. Listening to the opinions of constituents has been important in reaching my decision and I will continue to bear in mind the points you have raised.

Yours sincerely,  
Andy McDonald  
MP for Middlesbrough

# The ADS Annual Dinner

by Dick Barry

Every year a number of Parliamentarians attend the Annual Dinner hosted by ADS (aerospace, defence, security, space), as guests of defence or defence related companies. This year the dinner will be held on 2 February. At the time of writing (20 January) no details of those who will attend were available. Last year the dinner was held on 3 February and ADS published the list of Parliamentarians in attendance: 42 MPs and 2 Members of the House of Lords. The list included 9 MPs who lost their seats at the 2015 general election and 5 who retired. Of the remaining 27 MPs who attended and are still sitting in the House of Commons, 16 were Conservative, 10 Labour and 1 Liberal Democrat (Nick Clegg).

Ten months later, on 2 December the House of Commons voted to bomb Syria. Of the 27 still sitting MPs who attended the ADS dinner earlier in the year, 21 (15 Conservative, 5 Labour and 1 Liberal Democrat, Nick Clegg) voted for the bombing of Syria and 6 (5 Labour and 1 Conservative, Julian Lewis) voted against. The Labour Members, who voted for bombing, with the constituency and guest company named, were: Margaret Beckett (Derby South)(Rolls Royce), Vernon Coaker (Gedling)(ADS), Kevan Jones (North Durham)(Marshall ADG), John Spellar (Warley) (GKN), and John Woodcock (Barrow-in-Furness)(BAE). Those who voted against bombing were: Ivan Lewis (Bury South)(Airbus), Ian Lucas (Wrexham)(Finmeccanica), Madeleine Moon (Bridgend)(Finmeccanica), Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central)(ADS), Owen Smith (Pontypridd)(Airbus).

Kevan Jones a supporter of Trident resigned as shadow defence minister (his boss Maria Eagle was moved from shadow defence secretary to shadow culture secretary) in protest at the appointment of Emily Thornberry as shadow defence secretary. Thornberry opposes the UK's so-

called independent nuclear deterrent. Vernon Coaker who voted for the bombing of Syria remains in the shadow cabinet as shadow Northern Ireland secretary. Owen Smith who voted against the bombing stays as shadow Welsh secretary.

Note: The ADS website says that "ADS supports the defence sector's contribution to the UK's economic health by shaping the market, generating business development and providing network opportunities in support of our UK member companies. Through our ongoing work to promote a UK Industrial Strategy, ADS supports and works with the UK MoD, the Home Office, the FCO, UKTI DSO and the Security Services, helping member companies to grow and export. The Defence Team at ADS also provides a number of specialist services (such as advice on export licensing, commercial issues, offsets, international trafficking in arms regulations and the EU Defence & Security Directive)."

## The Companies

All information is taken from the company websites.

**Airbus:** a global aircraft manufacturer, including military aircraft, with its headquarters in Toulouse, France.

**BAE Systems:** design, manufacture, upgrade, and support combat and trainer aircraft, combat vehicles, and provide ammunition, precision munitions, artillery systems and missile launches to a global customer base. It is also a leading supplier of cyber intelligence and security capabilities. BAE employs some 83,400 people in over 40 countries, including Australia, India, Saudi Arabia, UK, and USA. Its headquarters are in London, UK.

**Finmeccanica:** a world-class advanced engineering company in the UK. It is committed to delivering winning, cost-effective solutions in the aerospace, defence, security, cyber and space sectors. Finmeccanica in the UK and all its operating

companies are supporters of the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant, demonstrating their pledge to the Armed Forces Community.

**GKN:** a global engineering group. Its aerospace section is a first tier supplier with industry-leading capabilities in aerostructures, engine systems, wiring, transparencies, ice-protection systems, landing gear and MRO and servicing.

**Marshall ADG:** the largest independent aerospace and defence company, delivering innovation and excellence in engineering support solutions and services. It employs around 2,000 workers at its Cambridge Airport headquarters. It also has offices at Abbotsford and Ottawa, Canada, and Leiden, Netherlands. In December 2015 a £369m contract to support the RAF's fleet of C-130 Hercules transport aircraft was awarded by the MoD.

**Rolls Royce:** designs, develops, manufactures and services integrated power systems for use in the air, on land and at sea. It is one of the world's leading producers of aero engines for large civil aircraft and corporate jets. It is the second largest provider of defence aero engines and services in the world. For land and sea markets, reciprocating engines and systems from Rolls-Royce are in marine, distributed energy, oil & gas, rail and off-highway vehicle applications. In nuclear, Rolls-Royce have a strong instrumentation, product and services capability in both civil power and submarine propulsion. It has customers in over 150 countries including: Bahrain, China, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and USA.

An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

# Rail, Rents, and Housing: Part 1

by Eamon Dyas

In September 2015 the local Labour council gave permission for one of the biggest housing construction projects in London on the Greenwich Peninsula. The Labour council has sought to justify this to locals on the basis of the number of affordable homes that it will include. Of the 16,000 new homes 4,000 will be classified as “Affordable”. But affordable in this context is a meaningless concept without a measurement to set it against. An article in the *Guardian* in 2014 provides the current definition of “Affordable” as used by the authorities in a measurable context:

“In the good old days, councils and housing associations built social rented housing – often called council housing. It was a simple idea in which rents were based on a formula that combined local wages and local property values so that, for much of southern England, rents would be set at around 50% of local market rents – even lower in very expensive areas. Social housing rents allowed people to work without being dependent upon housing benefit.

“No more. Now, councils and housing associations have been told to replace social rented housing with a new product called, confusingly, affordable housing.

“In a move worthy of George Orwell’s Ministry of Truth, affordable rent will be higher than before, set at up to 80% of the local market rent. Across whole swathes of southern England affordable rented properties will simply not be affordable to people on low incomes.” (Affordable Housing Does Not Mean What You Think It Means, by Colin Wiles. *Guardian* 3 February 2014).

In Greenwich at the end of 2015 the average rent for a one-bedroom

property was £307 per week (£1,228 per month), a two-bedroom £422 per week (£1,688 per month), and for a three-bedroom £621 per week (£2,484 per month). It doesn’t take a genius to conclude that 80% of such rental costs is well beyond anything that is affordable by those in need of social housing. Greenwich is not the wealthy borough that a visit around its historic centre would indicate. It is the largest borough in London and embraces such places as Plumstead and Woolwich where poverty and unemployment are among the highest in London. In fact the unemployment figures for the borough as a whole show that in 2014 (the latest figures I have been able to find) it had the fifth highest levels of unemployment (over 8%) in London only surpassed by Barking & Dagenham, Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Ealing.

This disparity between the rental costs of housing and the ability of the local population to pay is something that seems to fly in the face of free market thinking. According to such thinking the charges demanded in the rental housing sector adjust to the prevailing “effective market demand”. This means that no matter how many rental units that are available the ceiling price will be set by the ability of prospective tenants to pay. This is obviously not what has been happening in south-east London or for other parts of London for that matter. What explains this is the fact that the rental sector in London is a peculiar one when it comes to the application of “effective market demand”.

Domestic property is a unique commodity insofar as it is intrinsically linked to place. It is literally rooted to the place in which it was produced. In a physical sense, the consumer in this instance comes to

the product (or commodity) rather than the product (or commodity) coming to the consumer. Generally speaking, in the past capitalists invested in the construction of new domestic properties or the purchase of existing domestic properties on the basis of their assessment of the market-expressed needs of the areas in the immediate vicinity of the properties concerned. Market-expressed needs in this sense operate as a kind of local micro-market where local characteristics that determine effective market demand can vary significantly from one area to another. This is apparent in the way in which London differs from its hinterland or more starkly the way in which Manchester might differ from a place like Oldham which, though only 5 miles away represents a world of difference.

Unlike other places in England where there are local populations that are wedded to their areas for family or community reasons London is mostly made up of an itinerant population. In places like Oldham young couples still prefer to live close to their parents and wider family and so will rent or buy homes in the same locality. As long as this constitutes the bulk of the property market the local prices will reflect the balance between what a landlord can charge and what the prospective tenant can afford. In many ways the property markets in such areas operate as a type of closed self-regulated system – as a kind of micro-market. Couples prefer to live locally and that impulse, provided it constitutes the determining factor in market-expressed demand, ensures that the price of housing continues to enable them to live locally. For that reason a two-bedroom house in Oldham can cost as little as £70,000 to buy

and a month's rent around £300. All of this could change however if the local characteristics change in a way that can influence the local property market – if the readily available stock of houses for some reason is suddenly diminished (the housing stock still reflects the days of its cotton industry when Oldham was one of the most affluent parts of the UK) or if affluent Mancunians, in sufficient numbers, found the difference in the price of property between Manchester and Oldham sufficient to overcome their antipathy to the place.

While the kind of micro-markets that are exemplified by Oldham at one time existed in parts of London (and south-east London was once one such area) this is no longer the case.

### **South-east London and rail policies.**

I have already touched on the current property and rental prices being charged in this part of London but this is something that has only happened within the last generation. It was not always like this. Compared to the present the riverside along south-east London had traditionally been a relatively low-density area with docks and wharves dominating the topography. In their hey-day such places provided much employment not only directly in terms of dock-work but in the many ancillary activities catering for the many needs of the docks. Alongside the docks were the timber-yards, glass and bottle makers, coopers, granaries, iron-smiths, carpenter shops, engineering and machinery repair yards, scrap yards, coal-yards and small boat-building yards. As well as the activities that were directly related to the function of the docks there were also many businesses catering for the needs of the dockworkers and their families most of whom lived locally. Businesses such as

bakers, outfitters, shoe-repairers, furniture-makers, grocers, butchers, newsagents and cafes were all reliant upon the business taken to them by the dockworkers and their families.

With the first regular container ship service between the U.S. and Antwerp in 1966 the writing was on the wall for the London docks and by the late 1970s all commercial dock operations in the London metropolitan area had virtually ceased to exist. Containerisation meant that most of what had been London's port activity was now moved to the Tilbury container port 35km downstream from central London and with it went the employment opportunities of the docks as well as most of the now superfluous ancillary businesses.

Because most of those employed by the cargo handling and ancillary services lived locally the abandonment of this activity created a situation where many moved away and others, if they could find employment at all, were compelled to travel outside the area to their new places of employment. But the physical area could not easily escape the imprint of its infrastructure heritage. Although its activities had a global relevance it had been a local employment economy for generations and this was reflected in terms of the area's lack of cross-London public transport connections (a look at a public transport map of the time shows this graphically and while things have changed since then the general picture remains similar).

As a result of the decline of the docks by the early 1980s the area became one that was mostly composed of derelict docks and warehouses. At first there was an attempt on the part of the authorities to plan for this decline and the governments of the 1970s as well as the GLC attempted to initiate a

“soft landing” for the decline. Central to this was a targeted public transport policy.

Studies were commissioned under the Heath government as early as 1972 and in 1974 the boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets formed a Docklands Joint Committee under the GLC. The plans that emerged from this body were constructed around the recognised need to develop new public transport links between central and north London and the area in order to meet the new transport requirements of the local populations as well as to encourage alternative business and employment opportunities into the area. Among these plans was a 1976 proposal to build a Tube line linking Charing Cross railway station to Woolwich by way of Surrey Quays and North Greenwich. Although London Transport in fact obtained Parliamentary powers to build such a line the new government under Margaret Thatcher in May 1979 called a halt to such plans with the government now insisting on a lower-cost option with a more restricted application.

The cancellation by the first Thatcher government of the original plans for a new transport link to south-east London in favour of a cheaper and less ambitious project eventually resulted in the emergence of the Docklands Light Railway. However, because its primary purpose was to facilitate the growth of the proposed new financial district around Canary Wharf, the restrictions placed in the way of this project meant that what emerged represented the abandonment of any plans to embrace the areas of most need in south-east London. The first part of the DLR was opened in

1987 and went from the Isle of Dogs to Tower Gateway on the north side of the river. It was not until 1998 that the Jubilee Line Extension embraced some of the areas of the old south-east London docks at Rotherhithe and Surrey Quays. As far as the DLR extension to Lewisham, Greenwich and Deptford was concerned as late as 1995 the government was insisting that the £100 million funding for such a project would have to come from private sources.

This insistence was based on a new government policy which had been introduced by John Major's conservative government in 1992 and involved the part funding by private finance of major capital projects that would previously have been paid for from central government funds. As a result of this it was not until December 1999 that the Lewisham, Greenwich and Deptford extension of the DLR was finally opened to the public with Woolwich only joining the network in January 2009.

In the meantime, in marked contrast the areas north of the river along Wapping, Limehouse and Canary Wharf, the dock area south of the river continued to decline with property and rental prices reflecting its relatively unfashionable nature (I remember personal experiences in the 1990s when taxi drivers would not travel from north London to south London because of the relative improbability of them collecting a return fare on the way back). The price of property in places like Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and New Cross which were closest to Tower Bridge and the City remained infinitely more affordable than the price of property situated a similar distance from the City on the north side of the river. The only area south of the river which could be said to command similar property and rental prices to those north of the river in the 1990s was the river-side restoration of Shad Thames and Butler's Wharf - areas immediately adjacent to the south-side of Tower Bridge.

True to form the Bill proposing the much-vaunted Crossrail project had been presented to Parliament in 2005 but in a form which did not include any station in south-east London. It was only because the Select Committee examining the project in 2006 insisted on the inclusion of Woolwich in the scheme that south-east London was made part

of the Crossrail network. But even then the government of the day continued to hold out against adding Woolwich to the network using the argument of additional cost. However, by the time the Bill was approved by Parliament in July 2008 the government had agreed to include Woolwich. (Since then the public transport facilities in the area of south-east London close to the city has been improved by the inclusion in 2010 of the old East London line into the London Overground system).

Thus, the "unnaturally" low cost of property in south-east London created in part by the absence of an effective public rail system linking the area with the rest of London meant that when it did arrive the improved rail system fused this part of London to the type of property and rental market that had already dominated the rest of the capital. From now, as far as rents were concerned, the only way was up as the property market in the area was brought into equilibrium with the wider market.

It has long been known that the construction of a railway increases the value of the land in the area of the stations constructed on its route. As early as 1879 one commentator observed that the construction of railways had the effect of doubling the value of some estates. (See: *Our Railways: Should they be Private or National Property*, by Edward J. Watherston. Published by Edward Stanford, London, 1879, p.50). And what was true of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is even more true of the present time. This is a modern property investor commenting on the investing potential of Woolwich in south-east London on 26 September 2014:

"Taking into account the capital growth and investment in the area, again particularly Crossrail, I can only see property demand going up, and like in any other business if demand is higher then the returns will be as well. Crossrail will make Woolwich even more desirable for commuters and the added investment to facilities in the area will attract people looking to rent." ("Is Woolwich a Good Place for Buy-To-Let?" by Paul Wright. <http://se18propertyblog.co.uk/woolwich-good-place-buy-let-part-three-yield/>).

In London it is the need to live in places that provide relatively easy and affordable access to their place of work that attracts people to reside

in areas that offer such access. Every estate agent knows this and uses the prospect of a new rail or Tube station being constructed in an area as a major selling point. And besides the prospect of significantly increasing the value of property such things also have the effect of increasing the rental value of such property. The impact of such things on rent was also apparent to the commentator of 1879:

"At present, a house with garden in Hampshire will bring but a fraction of the rent a similar one will at Kensington. The difference in rent usually can be measured by the amount of railway fare." (*Our Railways: Should they be Private or National Property*, by Edward J. Watherston. Published by Edward Stanford, London, 1879, p.50).

In other words the additional costs of traveling from outside London to their place of work acts as an incentive for people to reside in London at prices that reflect the relative additional traveling costs of residing further afield. People generally calculate the relative difference between the higher rent of living closer to their place of work and the lower rent plus the travel cost of living further away. If they feel that the difference is manageable they generally prefer to live closer to their place of work. It is that natural impulse which manifests itself in the capacity of the London market to achieve a higher rental than equivalent properties located further away. A central ingredient in all of this is of course the cost of travel.

However, when the railways were privatised under John Major, in the Railway Act of 1993, the government sold its capacity to determine the cost of rail travel and with it an indirect lever by which it could influence the cost of property and rental prices in London. Instead of railway transport forming a part of a coherent plan for the management of the property market in the service of society generally it is now subject to the ongoing and endless needs of the increased dividends of individual shareholders.

*Part 2 of Rail Rents and Housing will appear in the March issue of Labour Affairs.*

# Froggy

## News From Across The Channel



### American bases back in France?

The French Cabinet of ministers has agreed to put forward a bill concerning NATO. It would authorise an agreement that France is part of the 'Protocol on the Statute of NATO military headquarters.' It seems that passing this bill would enable NATO bases to be present once more on French soil. France had been one of the founding members at the end of WW2. The European Headquarters of NATO was placed near Paris.

De Gaulle wanted to assert France's independence; he was irked by the presence of American bases on French soil. He wanted "entire sovereignty over its territory at present compromised by the permanent presence of allied military personnel, or by the habitual use of its airspace." Without leaving NATO, and leaving in place a plan for fully reintegrating it in case of need, in 1966 he removed all French armed forces from the NATO Integrated Command, and demanded that all non-French NATO forces leave. The Supreme HQ Allied Powers Europe relocated to Belgium, where France sent its military delegation. France was no longer part of the Nuclear Planning Group, and did not commit its nuclear armed submarines to NATO. French NATO forces were still stationed in Germany.

NATO was set up to oppose the war time ally, the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the role of NATO came into question. In the event, NATO expanded to include all former Communist East Europeans states, even Albania, plus the three Baltic republics which were part of the Soviet Union. These nations host NATO summits and military exercises. The alliance has moved from being anti-Soviet to being anti-Russian. France and Germany have vetoed Ukraine from joining however.

How was France going to rethink its relations with NATO in the new situation? The test came very soon. The UN and NATO involved themselves in the war in Yugoslavia. What was France to do? France wanted to be involved. French General Bernard Janvier was supreme U.N. military commander in that conflict. He had disagreements with NATO. By 1995, under Chirac and with no public discussion, the then Foreign Minister said at a meeting in Brussels that France was

resuming its seat on the alliance's military committee, and that it would send its defence minister to NATO meetings.

In May 1995 the first NATO exercise took place in France since De Gaulle. But Chirac put conditions on rejoining the Integrated Command which were not accepted. Nicolas Sarkozy asked to rejoin it, without conditions, and that is how France came back under the military command, in 2009, and welcomed NATO personnel in its military headquarters.

This policy change was discussed in Parliament in 2008, there was a motion of censure against the government on 3 April for proposing this, signed by 228 parliamentarians, including François Hollande, Laurent Fabius, Manuel Valls and Bernard Cazeneuve (today's president, foreign minister, prime minister and home office minister). And it is this group of politicians which is seeking approval for a possible new NATO headquarters in France.

In 2002 NATO created a second strategic command to deal with the new, Post-Soviet, situation, the 'Supreme Allied Command Transformation' (ACT) based in Norfolk, Virginia. Since 2009, ie since Sarkozy rejoined Integrated Command, French air force generals have headed ACT; it is the crowning of their career; the first, General Stéphane Abrial, had been an air force commander in the first Gulf War, and delegated to NATO HQ in Brussels. The second, Jean-Paul Palmoméros, was in charge of some air-ground operations during the Yugoslav war. The present one, Denis Mercier, has been involved in the military interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya.

One of the responsibilities of ACT is 'to persuade nations singly and collectively, to acquire the capability to enable concepts to be implemented by NATO forces'. This means persuading other countries to increase their military budget (up to 2% of GDP is the aim, decided at the Newport NATO summit, September 2014) in order to be able to take part in military operations designed by NATO. ACT has bases all over Europe, and especially Eastern Europe; it also has 'Centres of Excellence' one of which is in France near Lyon.

France has stopped its decrease in military spending. It has extended itself in Africa, with an 'anti-terror' programme

in five countries, in Iraq and Syria, in Guyana and other overseas territories, and now in France itself. The five African Sahel countries are Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad. Before his election Hollande had promised to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, but this has not happened.

With a military policy such as this, France needs the help of NATO; you could even argue that NATO may play a positive role in restraining French ambitions, as it did at the end of August 2013, when France was ready to bomb Damascus, with *Le Monde*, the newspaper of record, urging it daily. Where is the campaign against this military policy?

I could only find opposition from the National Front. Regarding the NATO headquarters bill, it asks: 'Will the government explain, if there will be NATO military installations in France? If not, why the bill?' It goes on: 'NATO is the US military arm, seen as such by the whole world; the more France is integrated to the US, the less France has influence. The French government is sending the world a message of submission to US power: the rest of the world is disappointed in its hopes and expectations of France.'

The National Front seems to be the only political group that can see beyond the 'jihadist threat' and look calmly at the world situation. It refuses to demonize Russia and to support the United States' military adventures. The rest of the population seems persuaded to accept and even support an ever increasing number of costly and murderous military adventures under the pretext of the 'war on terror'. We can perhaps draw some comfort from the celebrations this January 2016 commemorating the Charlie Hebdo murders of January 2015. At the Place de la République in Paris, an actor read Victor Hugo saying in 1870: 'Saving Paris means saving civilisation', and the French army choir sang a Commune song. But the square was practically empty. The population is not so enthusiastic in its support for Hollande. Unfortunately, there is no alternative: Hollande and Sarkozy follow the same foreign policy. If a Frenchman wanted to stop this crazy spiral of war, he would only have the National Front to turn to.

# WELFARE AND WORK REFORM BILL :

## INTERVIEW WITH PAUL MORRISON

*On 12 October Dick Barry and Chris Winch interviewed Paul Morrison, policy adviser to the Methodist Church, about the Welfare and Work Reform Bill.*

DB: What is your response to the Government's claim that the welfare budget is too high and needs to be reduced?

PM: There are a number of responses to that. The first one is really simple. The only real measure of expenditure over time is the proportion of national product. So what proportion of the national wealth are you spending? If you take that measure the high point for working age welfare was 1994 at the end of the second recession of the Conservative government. That's the high point of the number of people claiming out-of-work benefits. And it's been basically steady for two generations now. So the first question is if you think it is out of control and it's too high you can't justify that statement by saying it's increased. It just hasn't. The only part that has substantially increased is that part of the welfare budget that goes towards pensioners. That again is entirely due to government policy and the government doesn't wish us to challenge that. The other question is whether or not we are being too generous to the people who are out of work or to the people on low incomes. And no measure of their income or of how well the children are doing suggests that they are getting an extraordinary good deal or that the deal is so good the people are choosing to be on out of work benefits. It's just not true.

We started the welfare state in 1946 because we thought it was worth it and we did spend a lot of money doing it. Now if we can't afford it it's because we have made the decision that we don't want to afford it. That's another matter entirely. But we can't convince ourselves that we are being extraordinarily generous to the poor and we need to be less generous. We have been just as generous as we have always been, which isn't very.

And if you want to make it less it's not because finance is telling you to but because your own instinct is telling you to. And that's a different matter and one the churches would be entirely against and I personally would be entirely against.

DB: So what you're really saying is that as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product the welfare budget hasn't really increased.

PM: It's flat.

DB: But the total budget has increased because GDP has increased.

PM: Yes, there is a graph in the 'Lies We Tell Ourselves', one of our reports, which takes as the base point 1990, and plots the total for each major Departmental budget and how each has changed. You find that the health budget went up most, pensions second, but welfare went up less than the total spending of the government. So as a proportion of government spending welfare has become less. Health and pensions went up and the only one that substantially went down from 1990 was defence and it went down largely because of the end of the cold war and then it picked up and now spending on defence is increasing as a proportion of GDP. But the Consumer Price Index or real terms spending is about the price of bread not missiles or scanners in hospitals. So if you use this GDP measure welfare spending is flat. An argument that the Centre for Social Justice make which has some validity is that when we had economic growth welfare spending didn't go down very much. That's because incomes became more unequal and the Brown government through tax credits redistributed wealth, which is why even though there are fewer people unemployed, there are fewer people out of work, benefits had to redistribute a bit of money to top up the incomes of people at the bottom, because the incomes of people at the bottom weren't going up with economic growth. So since the market didn't do that the state interfered and did that.

DB: Well that leads us on to another question. What do you think is the likely effect of the House of Lord's decision to challenge Osborne's tax credits cuts? And how do you think he will react to it?

PM: The only answer to that is what is the sensible way of reacting to it. Osborne's motivations are about politics as far as I can see. And they are about positioning the Conservative party for a win in 2020. Some people say it's about positioning himself to be next Prime Minister, but I wouldn't want to make a judgement on that. So what is politically expedient is by and large what Osborne will do. What is economically sensible is the only rational answer. And the rational answer is said best by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, that the answer to the problem of tax credits is tax credits. You have to supplement income in some way. Tax credits supplement family income. Wages supplement individual income. So by increasing wages at the bottom end you will slightly even the playing field. But low paid people tend to live together. People at the bottom of the heap in the lowest paid jobs tend to work the lowest number of hours. So if you increase their hourly rate it will improve their well-being but not a lot. Whereas tax credits look at the entire income of the household and top up the entire income. So that means that by just upping wages a large number of people are not going to be helped. Their standard of living is going to go below what would be unacceptable.

CW: In effect what one element of the tax credits does is provide recognition by the state that people need support in bringing up families.

PM: Yes. Tax credits are focused on families with children. They are basically given as an assessment of need. Wages never will be. And when you had a society in which you had one earner or maybe one and a half earners or one main earner anyway, and somebody staying at home looking after the

children, wage rates and whether or not families were doing well were quite well linked. Not perfectly linked. You still needed family credit and all the various other things to link them more closely. Beveridge wanted child benefit to be not a subsidy but a subsistence allowance for every child in the country because he recognised that having children was expensive. That was one of the key elements of poverty and still is today. But now wage rates and whether families do well aren't actually that tightly linked because people work a limited number of hours; there may be one person earning in a family or there may be two. All of these things make it so much more complicated. Beatrice Webb's concept of a national minimum is vastly more important than that much more complicated and diverse labour market, than it is in a labour market where wage rates and well-being are linked.

CW: One of the things that's happening is that you don't have anymore a living wage in the old sense where you had a single household bread winner who earned enough to bring up children as well as support his wife.

PM: For very good reasons that concept's gone. If a woman wants to earn enough to look after her entire family, brilliant. She has as much right as any male to do that. Resolution Foundation data from about three years ago showed that the increase in the standard of living of British people was linked to the second earner earning more. So the primary earner's living standards didn't increase. But family income increased because women became more and more engaged in the labour market. If you are unemployed or you have long term health problems you are more likely to be married to someone who is unemployed or has long term health problems. That means that these problems tend to polarise. People who are doing badly out of the system club together. And people who are doing well out of the system come together. Which means that if you have this idea of a living wage for one person you have a large number of families with twice that. And quite a large number of families who don't have enough access to the labour market to get anywhere near. So you would still need a benefits system to redistribute income or you would have to accept that some people have a dark and dismal life and the children will do so after them and that is not something any of us would wish to contemplate.

DB: You mentioned the living wage. What is your opinion of Osborne's national living wage?

PM: You don't get to call a wage a living wage unless you can live on it. A living wage is based on a measure of how much it costs a person to live. The national living wage is a political trick which ups the minimum wage for over 25 year olds. Nothing wrong with the minimum wage. It's a good idea, we are all for it. But it's not a living wage. What they've done is stolen the brand of the living wage and thrown away the principle of the living wage. And it's the principle we care about, not the brand. And the principle is you measure how much it costs someone to live in this society and you work out how much a full-time worker would need to get that. And that is a living wage. Anything else is a minimum wage.

CW: Presumably one of the problems there is that it doesn't take account of dependents.

PM: The living wage makes assumptions. It has to for all the reasons we have talked about before. It also takes into account whether or not you claim your benefits which means that by cutting tax credits the living wage must go up. So it's not a perfect measure but it's a good honest attempt and that's all you can expect. You can't expect perfection in those sort of wage rates. And if everybody was paid the living wage you would still need a benefits system to redistribute wealth to people who can't work full-time or whose needs are extraordinary for some reason or another.

CW: I think one of the things that people don't understand very well is what happens to different groups of people. Are fairly prosperous people affected or is just people who are on the very bottom end of the wage distribution? Who is actually in receipt of these benefits?

PM: Child benefit goes up to about £50,000 household income. It used to be universal but higher rate taxpayers had it removed from them because there was a hoo-ha about that if you were a couple.

CW: Yes, there were all kinds of anomalies weren't there?

PM: Yes, so what they ended up introducing was another really strange tapering means testing system. This time for people in the upper rates of income which is just a bizarre way of going on. Child tax credit is best viewed as a means tested supplement to child benefit. It's given to everybody who has a child if their income is sufficiently low that it needs to be topped up. It goes quite far up the income spectrum but not very far. It tapers away quite quickly. It dies out

about half way up the income spectrum. It's a sizeable portion of the bottom quarter to a third. And then the working family tax credit is for people in work but it means working sixteen hours if they are single, thirty hours if they are couple. And it goes to about the same level, about a third of the way up the income spectrum. If you start losing it there you are in quite a bit of trouble.

What is really clear is that, and there is a graph of it in the 'Enough' report, these cuts are structured so pensioners are basically unaffected. There is a small deviation at the bottom end but they are pensioners who are looking after their grandchildren. Then you have families without children. They are losing a middling amount, about 6 per cent of their income. Families with children when you get to the bottom fifth of the population, 12 per cent of income has gone. They are people who are already struggling. So it's really tightly focused on families with children. It's those poorest families with children who are hit hardest. The ones out of work are hit very hard indeed. The ones in work and receiving benefits are hit quite hard. But by the time you get to the top half of the income spectrum all of this has no effect.

The budget was entirely about removing support from those at the bottom end. The various tweaks in income tax benefit those further up the scale, especially changing the limit to the higher rate threshold. And inheritance tax is for people near the top end. Previously the property taxes meant that you got a curve that went up and then it showed the poorest losing most and by middle income nothing much happening. The richest losing was almost exclusively to do with property tax and stamp duty. People with a £1 million house have already made a lot of money on the asset but in income measurement the asset value doesn't count. So although they are paying more tax they have made a lot from the asset which is not a part of that calculation. This time there's not even that. It's just that by the top ten in the scale there's not even a tick of them losing.

CW: Before we leave this topic does this mean that some people, perhaps single people with dependents who are on what would be regarded as a reasonable middle income, are actually dependent on tax credits and will lose out?

PM: I was at one of the briefings that was given to members of the House of Lords before the tax credits vote. What changed people's minds was

Gingerbread inviting one of their support group members to come in. She's a teacher working four days a week on a good salary, £28-29,000. She's a single parent. One of the important things she did was defuse all the bubbling prejudices about single parents. She said she was two weeks before the birth was due and my husband texted me saying he was wasn't ready to be a father and then I didn't see him for six months. So that was her story and that prejudice was defused. And then someone explained that tax credits meant she was able to work. That she had the resources to pay for the child care and that allowed her to stay in the labour force. Fantastic. We want people to do that. But without tax credits it would be extraordinarily difficult for her to maintain that. So if you think about somebody in London on £26-28,000 who rents accommodation, a single parent doing the best they can, tax credits are needed for them to make their way in the world.

One of my problems talking about this group is that those further back are the worst hit and they not as photogenic. The whole narrative about hard working families makes us care about her because clearly she is a hard working family. People who are hard working but less obviously so are also being hit but we tend not to focus on them. One of the things the church has to say is that we are looking at their stories and they are just as important and just as undeserving of the thump as the person we have decided is deserving.

DB: Ian Duncan Smith says that all these problems will be resolved with the introduction of Universal Credit. What is your take on that?

PM: When you say the words Universal Credit in Caxton House sunlight appears behind one because the world will be marvellous when this happens. It was meant to happen two years ago but now they say it's definitely happening in two years, so don't worry. It's just a nonsense. Straightforward nonsense in many ways. The first nonsense is that universal credit is less generous than the system it replaces. That's not something government will tell you but it knows it is less generous. They say 3.1 million families will be better off but they don't say 2.8 million families will be worse off. Why would that be relevant? 200,000 children live in poverty but we don't know how many children they put into poverty because they didn't tell us. We asked them but for various reasons we didn't get a correct answer. The reason they get to say that all will be well is that they

make a key assumption that everyone will claim the maximum amount of universal credit. They will have 100% take up. Pensions don't have 100% take up. The take up of tax credits of males between 25 and 30 is less than 30%. They are assuming it will go from 30% to 100%. That is how they get to say how marvellous this is.

Another reason why it's nonsense is how you treat people who are self-employed. It makes an assumption about them. The average income of someone who is self employed is about £10,000. Universal credit will assume their income is £13,000. You will get your benefits as if you were earning £13,000 which means that your benefits will be taken away because they are assuming you are earning £3,000 more than you actually are. And remember an average is an average. That means there are as many people earning below £10,000 as are earning above £10,000. Huge numbers of the jobs that are being created are self employed and they will be assumed to be earning a great deal more than they actually are. So they are in real trouble and the mechanisms by which they have to report their income are extraordinarily difficult and a lot of people just won't bother. They will just fall off the system completely, I would have thought.

A further problem with universal credit is that it is phenomenally complicated. It is called a simplification. It is the most vastly complicated simplification I have ever seen. If you look at the bottom of a bowl of spaghetti it's quite simple. You just see that bit. But if you look into the bowl of spaghetti it is just everywhere. All those strands interacting with each other in bizarre ways that you don't quite understand and nobody designed in. You then have monumental calculations because universal credit is not replacing the current six benefits. It is the six benefits. Mashed together with one taper rate. Each benefit has its own taper rate but by mashing them together they will have their own taper rate.

CW: And Osborne wants to increase that taper rate?

PM: Yes, but just with the tax credits. He's doing that with the system that exists not with the new system in the fullness of time. If I can just finish on the complexity because the complexity is fascinating. By mashing it all together you have a system whereby it's really hard to know what people get. I know that the job seeker's allowance is £73. But what I can say what somebody's income is going to be under universal credit is extraordinarily difficult to tell.

With universal credit doing the maths is really difficult and they don't have a system that is capable of delivering simplicity. And I don't think anybody believes they will have a system capable of delivering it. The Department for Work and Pensions skirts around the truth with such delicacy it's hard to know where they lie. They have what is called the universal credit IT solution which sounds as if they have a solution for universal credit IT but it's not true. They have the old system put together with glue and tape which is why universal credit is extended to different job centres, it's not actually universal credit that's there. And it can't be given to all the claimants because some claimants are very difficult to do the maths for and the universal credit IT solution can't do it.

So whenever anyone talks about the universal credit IT solution as they did a while back. It was christened the enhanced universal credit IT solution. But the enhanced universal credit IT solution simply doesn't work. And it may never work. If it doesn't universal credit is dead. It's very difficult to see that it's going to happen and it will bring real problems. Budgetary problems but also problems for the poor people who are going to be left without benefits. So universal credit is less generous and vastly complicated. Awful things can be done inside universal credit because nobody understands what they do. A key example of that is something called work allowances which was absolutely integral to the design of universal credit. When I get a job I can earn some money before the taper rate kicks in. Universal credit won't be taken from me for the first £200 I earn. Similar to an income tax allowance. The idea being that when most people go to work they have to pay bus fares, buy new clothes, so they don't feel better off because the benefit is tapered away and they are putting money into expenses. And they might not want to take a job for a couple of hours because the benefits start being cut and they will have to tell people and it will all be too complicated. So, absolutely fundamental to the design was that I can earn this much, I can start a new job without feeling any worse off. That's gone! Work allowances gone! About £4 billion of cuts, just gone! Universal credit now looks less and less like anything revolutionary. It looks essentially like a bureaucratic process that is failing slightly. It might be rescued from the fire, but it depends how good their IT contractor is.

DB: You mentioned earlier the 'Enough' report. Is that a response by

the Christian churches to Osborne's proposals?

PM: I am the main author of 'Enough.' It was written with Quakers, Scots Episcopalians, Baptists, United Reform, Methodists. The thing that we saw was the most dangerous in the Welfare and Work Reform Bill was the disconnect between the needs of the family and the amount of support that was being offered. It's never been good and it's never been done in a systematic way but by and large the stated aim of the welfare state was to provide a family with a basic income, a safety net, or with enough money to survive. The Welfare Reform and Work Bill deliberately says we recognise your family has these needs but because we disapprove of your behaviour or wish to encourage different behaviour we are not going to help. And that fundamentally changes what the welfare state is about.

We did some polling and that said that the British public doesn't believe that that is what the welfare state is about. The British public believes that the basic minimum should be maintained, regardless of the behaviour of the claimant, especially for families with children. This disconnect is happening only for families with children. It's happening in two places. The first is the two child rule. That if you have a third or a fourth child you have to live on the same level of tax credits as if you had two children. So, the government are recognising that families have more need. They know they have more children but because they disapprove that they have more children they are not getting any help. Which is extraordinary. It is utterly against what the welfare state was about.

The other is the benefit cap. The benefit cap was linked to average earnings. The new benefit cap is linked to nothing at all. The only thing the government has to take into account is the state of the economy. Which is extraordinary. The benefit cap saves around one quarter of a billion pounds a year. The British economy is around £1.7 trillion. It's spin rather than anything sensible. And the Secretary of State doesn't have to take into account whether people can live on it. This is a welfare benefit that is meant to be safety net and it doesn't take into account whether or not people can live on it. That disconnect is appalling. One of the things that the report says is that it is ineffective. Finally the government published sensible data on the benefit cap and the best analysis is that of all the people capped 4.7% responded in the way the government wanted. That means that 95.3% of families who had huge losses, in some cases an average loss of about £3,500 a year, it had no effect on their behaviour. And when you look at the demographics of the people you find that the reason they weren't in work was because they were sick or were unfit for work or they were looking after children but the cap was applied to them.

On the two child rule we looked at whether or not welfare and child bearing were related and the DWP's own research says it won't have any effect. So they are doing this knowing that it won't have any effect. It's about making a moral statement. You make your moral statement by depriving children. It's ineffective. It will not work. In fact in the United States where you remove benefits from women what you find is that they tend to have more children. Because disempowered women are less able to say no, are less able to control their own fertility. Women with money, with control over their lives, control their lives without the state telling them what to do. Our moral position is that you have to be fair to the child. That child did not choose to be the third or fourth child. To be fair to that child you have to ensure that they have a standard of living that is sufficient. Not to do so is being unfair to the child and that is immoral.

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. Martin Luther King, Jr.

America is not anything if it consists of each of us. It is something only if it consists of all of us. Woodrow Wilson

## PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME

He stood there repeating the word  
kill,  
but not in those exact  
words,  
for words they fly like  
birds  
when you open the cage  
at will  
rarely can you bring them  
back,  
they're gone to build nests and  
to breed,  
producing young who will  
proceed  
to fly over the city of the  
wrecked  
counting bodies, naming  
names,  
swooping into the Houses of  
Parliament  
just as the PM  
hyperventilates  
new reasons for those people  
in flames.  
Encouraged, the ghosts  
follow in,  
the sky is molten as the sun  
blinks,  
but don't look up  
or think,  
as an Eton conscience dismisses  
sin,  
and looking up you might become  
awake.  
As a creation of an academic  
Madame  
Tussauds  
you'll soon melt as a waxy-faced  
fraud.  
Didn't you meant kill but with less  
shrill  
you fake.

Wilson John Haire.

# Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

## ISIL and Syria

The debate on the bombing of Syria on 2 December featured two contrasting speeches from Jeremy Corbyn and Hilary Benn. As far as we are aware they were not reproduced by any media outlet, apart from the usual distortions of Corbyn's comments and almost universal praise for Benn's. In the interests of balance we publish them in full below. Most interjections and interruptions have been omitted.

### Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):

The whole House recognises that decisions to send British forces to war are the most serious, solemn and morally challenging of any that we have to take as Members of Parliament. The motion brought before the House by the Government, authorising military action in Syria against ISIL, faces us with exactly that decision. It is a decision with potentially far-reaching consequences for us all here in Britain, as well as for the people of Syria and the wider middle east.

For all Members, taking a decision that will put British servicemen and women in harm's way, and almost inevitably lead to the deaths of innocents, is a heavy responsibility. It must be treated with the utmost seriousness, with respect given to those who make a different judgment about the right course of action to take. That is why the Prime Minister's attempt to brand those who plan to vote against the Government as "terrorist sympathisers", both demeans the office of the Prime Minister and, I believe,

undermines the seriousness of the deliberations we are having today. If he now wants to apologise for those remarks, I would be happy to give way to him.

Since the Prime Minister is unmoved, we will have to move on with the debate. I hope that he will be stronger later and recognise that, yes, he made an unfortunate remark last night, and that apologising for it would be very helpful and improve the atmosphere of this debate.

### John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):

My right hon. Friend is appropriately pointing out that by not withdrawing his slur on me and others, the Prime Minister is not showing leadership. Does he also agree that there is no place whatsoever in the Labour party for anybody who has been abusing those Labour Members who choose to vote with the Government on this resolution?

### Jeremy Corbyn:

Abuse has no part in responsible democratic political dialogue, and I believe that very strongly. That is the way I wish to conduct myself, and I wish others to conduct themselves in that way.

### Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab):

Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Prime Minister came to the Dispatch Box and made a clear apology with a simple "I'm sorry", he would clear the air immediately and we could move on with this debate?

### Jeremy Corbyn:

As he often does on these occasions, the Prime Minister

appears to be taking advice from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on this matter. If he wants to apologise now that is fine. If he does not, well, the whole world can note that he is not apologising.

Since the Prime Minister first made his case for extending British bombing to Syria in the House last week, the doubts and unanswered questions expressed on both sides of the House have only grown and multiplied. That is why it is a matter of such concern that the Government have decided to push this vote through Parliament today. It would have been far better to allow a full two-day debate that would have given all Members the chance to make a proper contribution—you informed us, Mr Speaker, that 157 Members have applied to speak in this debate.

### Jeremy Corbyn:

I am pleased that he made that intervention about the Kurdish people, because at some point over the whole middle east and the whole of this settlement, there must be a recognition of the rights of Kurdish people, whichever country they live in. The hon. Gentleman and I have shared that view for more than 30 years, and my view on that has not changed.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Prime Minister understands that public opinion is moving increasingly against what I believe to be an ill-thought-out rush to war. He wants to hold this vote before opinion against it grows even further. Whether it is a lack of strategy worth the name, the

absence of credible ground troops, the missing diplomatic plan for a Syrian settlement, the failure to address the impact of the terrorist threat or the refugee crisis and civilian casualties, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Prime Minister's proposals for military action simply do not stack up.

Every MP has to make a decision today, every MP has a vote today, every MP has a constituency, and every MP should be aware of what constituents' and public opinion is. They will make up their own mind. Obviously, I am proposing that we do not support the Government's motion tonight and I encourage all colleagues on all sides to join me in the Lobby tonight to oppose the Government's proposals.

Last week, the Prime Minister focused his case for bombing in Syria on the critical test set by the very respected cross-party Foreign Affairs Committee. Given the holes in the Government's case, it is scarcely surprising that last night the Committee reported that the Prime Minister had not "adequately addressed concerns". In other words, the Committee judged that the Prime Minister's case for bombing has failed its tests.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** The Committee resolved four to three that the Prime Minister

"has not adequately addressed concerns"

contained in the Committee's second report. The right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), who would have resisted, were absent. It is on a narrow point where, logically, it is almost impossible for the Prime Minister to adequately meet those concerns, given the fact he is not in a position to produce sufficient detail to satisfy some of my colleagues. It is a very weak point for the Leader of the Opposition to rely on. He needs to go to the substance.

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He and I have often had very amicable discussions on many of these issues and I am sure we will again. The fact is, however, that at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs

Committee the verdict was that the Prime Minister had not adequately addressed concerns. Obviously, I understand there are differences of opinion. Goodness, there are plenty of differences of opinion all around this House, on both the Government and Opposition Benches. I therefore ask the Chair of the Select Committee to recognise that a decision has been made by his Committee.

After the despicable and horrific attacks in Paris last month, the question of whether the Government's proposals for military action in Syria strengthen or undermine our own national security must be at the centre of our deliberations. There is no doubt that the so-called Islamic State has imposed a reign of sectarian and inhuman terror in Iraq, Syria and Libya. There is no question but that it also poses a threat to our own people. The issue now is whether extending British bombing from Iraq to Syria is likely to reduce or increase that threat to Britain, and whether it will counter or spread the terror campaign ISIL is waging across the middle east. The answers do not make the case for the Government motion. On the contrary, they are a warning to step back and vote against yet another ill-fated twist in this never-ending war on terror.

Let us start with a military dimension. The Prime Minister has been unable to explain why extending airstrikes to Syria will make a significant military impact on the existing campaign. ISIL is already being bombed in Syria or Iraq by the United States, France, Britain, Russia and other powers. Interestingly, Canada has withdrawn from this campaign and no longer takes part in it. During more than a year of bombing, ISIL has expanded as well as lost territory. ISIL gains included the Iraqi city of Ramadi and the Syrian city of Palmyra. The claim that superior British missiles will make the difference is hard to credit when the US and other states are, as mentioned in an earlier intervention, struggling to find suitable targets. In other words, extending British bombing is unlikely to make a huge difference.

Secondly, the Prime Minister has

failed to convince almost anyone that, even if British participation in the air campaign were to tip the balance, there are credible ground forces able to take back territory now held by ISIL. In fact, it is quite clear that there are no such forces. Last week, the Prime Minister suggested that a combination of Kurdish militias and the Free Syrian Army would be able to fill the gap. He even claimed that a 70,000-strong force of moderate FSA fighters was ready to co-ordinate action against ISIL with the western air campaign. That claim has not remotely stood up to scrutiny. Kurdish forces are a distance away, so will be of little assistance in the Sunni Arab areas that ISIL controls. Neither will the FSA, which includes a wide range of groups that few, if any, would regard as moderate and which mostly operates in other parts of the country. The only ground forces able to take advantage of a successful anti-ISIL air campaign are stronger jihadist and Salafist groups close to the ISIL-controlled areas. I think that these are serious issues that need to be thought through very carefully, as I believe the Prime Minister's bombing campaign could well lead to that. That is why the logic of an extended air campaign is, in fact, towards mission creep and western boots on the ground. Whatever the Prime Minister may say now about keeping British combat troops out of the way, that is a real possibility.

Thirdly, the military aim of attacking ISIL targets in Syria is not really part of a coherent diplomatic strategy. UN Security Council resolution 2249, passed after the Paris atrocities and cited in today's Government motion, does not give clear and unambiguous authorisation for UK bombing in Syria. To do so, it would have had to be passed under chapter 7 of the UN charter, to which the Security Council could not agree. The UN resolution is certainly a welcome framework for joint action to cut off funding, oil revenues and arms supplies from ISIL, but I wonder whether there are many signs of that happening.

**Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con):**

The right hon. Gentleman and I do

not agree on very much, but I very much agree with him on the necessity to cut off oil supplies. I am therefore at a complete loss when it comes to understanding why he would oppose airstrikes, which play such a crucial part in targeting the oil supplies that provide funding for ISIL/Daesh.

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

The problem is that the oil supplies sold by ISIL go into Turkey and other countries, and I think we need to know exactly who is buying that oil, who is funding it, what banks are involved in the financial transactions that ultimately benefit ISIL, and which other countries in the region either are or are not involved. That is despite the clear risk of potentially disastrous incidents. The shooting down of a Russian military aircraft by Turkish forces is a sign of the danger of a serious escalation of this whole issue.

**Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green):**

The number of ground troops is, as my right hon. Friend says, unknown, and their composition is also unknown, but what we do know is that they are, by definition, opposition fighters: they are anti-Assad. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister still has a question to answer about how we can work with them to retake ground from Daesh without becoming drawn into a wider conflict with Russia, given that they are on the other side?

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

That is an important point. The hon. Lady has been very active in trying to promote peace and humanitarian resolutions to the many conflicts that exist around the world.

Fourthly, the Prime Minister has avoided spelling out to the British people the warnings that he has surely been given about the likely impact of UK air strikes in Syria on the threat of terrorist attacks in the UK. That is something that everyone who backs the Government's motion should weigh and think about very carefully before we vote on whether or not to send RAF pilots into action over Syria.

It is critically important that we, as a House, are honest with the British people about the potential

consequences of the action that the Prime Minister is proposing today. I am aware that there are those with military experience—Conservative as well as Labour Members—who have argued that extending UK bombing will

“increase the short-term risks of terrorist attacks in Britain.”

We should also remember the impact on communities here in Britain. Sadly, since the Paris attacks there has been a sharp increase in Islamophobic incidents and physical attacks. I have discussed them with people in my local mosque, in my constituency, and they are horrific. Surely this message must go out from all of us in the House today: none of us—we can say this together—will tolerate any form of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism in any form in this country.

In my view, the Prime Minister has offered no serious assessment of the impact of an intensified air campaign on civilian casualties in ISIL-held Syrian territory, or on the wider Syrian refugee crisis. At least 250,000 have already been killed in Syria's terrible civil war, 11 million have been made homeless, and 4 million have been forced to leave the country. Many more have been killed by the Assad regime than by ISIL itself. Yet more bombing in Syria will kill innocent civilians—there is no doubt about that—and will turn many more Syrians into refugees.

Yesterday I was sent this message from a constituent of mine who comes from Syria. (*Laughter.*) I am sorry, but it is not funny. This is about a family who are suffering. My constituent's name is Abdulaziz Almashi. “I'm a Syrian from Manbij city, which is now controlled by ISIL”, he wrote “Members of my family still live there and Isil didn't kill them. My question to David Cameron is: ‘Can you guarantee the safety of my family when your air forces bomb my city?’” [*Interruption.*] It is a fair question, from a family who are very concerned.

Security on the streets of this country, in all our communities, is very important. That is why we have supported the Government's action in no longer pursuing the strategy of cutting the

police, and also increasing security in this country. Clearly, none of us wants an atrocity on the streets of this country. My borough was deeply affected by 7/7 in 2005—

**Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab):**

I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for giving way. Does he accept that the 70,000 moderate Sunnis who the Prime Minister claims are in Syria comprise many different jihadist groups? There is concern across the House that in degrading ISIL/Daesh, which is possible, we might create a vacuum into which other jihadists would come, over time. Surely that would not make the streets of Britain safer.

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) makes a serious point. We have to be careful about what will happen in the future. As the Prime Minister and others have said, we must be aware of the danger that some people, mainly young people, will become deeply radicalised and end up doing very dangerous things. Is the radicalisation of a small but significant number of young people across Europe a product of the war or of something else? We need to think very deeply about that, about what has happened in this world since 2001, and about the increasing number of people who are suffering because of that. I rest my case at that point.

There is no EU-wide strategy to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims. Perhaps most importantly of all, is the Prime Minister able to explain how British bombing in Syria will contribute to a comprehensive negotiated political settlement of the Syrian war? Such a settlement is widely accepted to be the only way to ensure the isolation and defeat of ISIL. ISIL grew out of the invasion of Iraq, and it has flourished in Syria in the chaos and horror of a multi-fronted civil war.

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab):**

The Prime Minister spoke often of the choice between action and inaction, but those of us who will be voting against the airstrikes also want to see

action. The Prime Minister said almost nothing about cutting off the financial supplies to Daesh that buy the bombs and help to radicalise recruits. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need action on that matter?

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

We absolutely need action to ensure that there is a diplomatic and political solution to the crisis. I welcome what the Prime Minister said about speeding up the process in Vienna, but surely the message ought to be, “Let’s speed that up,” rather than sending the bombers in now, if we are to bring about a political settlement.

We need the involvement of all the main regional and international powers. I know that that has been attempted. I know that there have been discussions in Vienna, and we welcome that, but it is regrettable that Geneva II—*[Interruption]*—The aim must be to establish a broad-based Government in Syria who have the support of the majority of their people, difficult as that is to envisage at the present time. Such a settlement could help to take back territory from ISIL and bring about its lasting defeat in Syria, but ultimately, the solution has to be brought about by all the people of Syria themselves. On that, surely, we are all agreed. The Government’s proposal for military action in Syria is not backed by clear and unambiguous authorisation by the United Nations. It does not meet the seven tests set down by the Foreign Affairs Committee, and it does not fulfil three of the four conditions laid down in my own party conference resolution of a couple of months ago.

In the past week, voice has been given to the growing opposition to the Government’s bombing plans—across the country, in Parliament, outside in the media, and indeed in my own party. I believe that this is in consideration of all the wars that we have been involved in over the last 14 years. These matters were debated a great deal during my campaign to be elected leader of the Labour party, and many people think very deeply about these matters. In the light of that record of western military interventions, these matters

have to be analysed. British bombing in Syria risks yet more of what President Obama, in a very thoughtful moment, called the “unintended consequences” of the war in Iraq, which he himself opposed at the time. The spectre of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya looms over this debate.

To oppose another war and intervention is not pacifism; it is hard-headed common sense. That is what we should be thinking about today in the House. To resist ISIL’s determination to draw the western powers back into the heart of the middle east is not to turn our backs on allies; it is to refuse to play into the hands of ISIL as I suspect some of its members want us to. Is it wrong for us here in Westminster to see a problem, pass a motion, and drop bombs, pretending we are doing something to solve it? That is what we did in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Has terrorism increased or decreased as a result of all that? The Prime Minister said he was looking to build a consensus around the military action he wants to take. I do not believe he has achieved anything of the kind. He has failed, in my view, to make the case for another bombing campaign.

All of our efforts should instead go into bringing the Syrian civil war to an end. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya: I ask Members to think very carefully about the previous decisions we have made.*[Interruption.]* What we are proposing to do today is send British bombers—

Sometimes in this House we get carried away with the theatricals of the place, and forget there are millions of people who have sent us to this House to represent them. We should be able to conduct our debates in a decent, respectful and civilised manner. Short as this debate is, given the number of Members who want to speak, I hope all those Members who have applied to speak get called.

I conclude with this point: in my view, only a negotiated political and diplomatic endeavour to bring about an end to the civil war in Syria will bring some hope to the millions who have lost their homes, who are refugees, and who are camped out in various points

all across Europe, dreaming of a day when they can go home. I think our overriding goal should be to end that civil war in Syria, and obviously also to protect the people of this country. I do not believe that the motion put forward by the Prime Minister achieves that, because it seems to put the emphasis on bombing now, whereas I think it should be not on bombing now, but on bringing all our endeavours, all our intelligence and all our efforts—*[Interruption.]* It is very strange that Members do not seem to understand that there are millions who watch these debates who want to hear what is being said, and do not want to hear people shouting at each other.

For those reasons, I urge Members on all sides of the House to think very carefully about the responsibility that lies with them today. Do we send in bombers, not totally aware of what all the consequences will be, or do we pause, not send them in, and instead put all our efforts into bringing about a peaceful humanitarian and just political settlement to the terrible situation faced by the people in Syria?

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):**

Before I respond to the debate, I would like to say this directly to the Prime Minister: although my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I will walk into different Division Lobbies tonight, I am proud to speak from the same Dispatch Box as him. He is not a terrorist sympathiser. He is an honest, principled, decent and good man, and I think the Prime Minister must now regret what he said yesterday and his failure to do what he should have done today, which is simply to say, “I am sorry.”

We have had an intense and impassioned debate, and rightly so given the clear and present threat from Daesh, the gravity of the decision that rests on the shoulders and the conscience of every single one of us, and the lives that we hold in our hands tonight. Whatever decision we reach, I hope that we will treat one another with respect.

We have heard a number of outstanding speeches. Sadly, time will prevent me from acknowledging

them all. I would just like to single out the contributions, both for and against the motion, from my right hon. Friends the Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper); my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and for Wakefield (Mary Creagh); my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden); my hon. Friends the Members for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood); the hon. Members for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), and for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat); the right hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie); and the hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey).

The question that confronts us in a very complex conflict is, at its heart, very simple. What should we do with others to confront this threat to our citizens, our nation, other nations and the people who suffer under the cruel yoke of Daesh? The carnage in Paris brought home to us the clear and present danger that we face from Daesh. It could just as easily have been London, Glasgow, Leeds, or Birmingham and it could still be. I believe that we have a moral and practical duty to extend the action that we are already taking in Iraq to Syria. I am also clear—and I say this to my colleagues—that the conditions set out in the emergency resolution passed at the Labour party conference in September have been met. We now have a clear and unambiguous UN Security Council resolution 2249, paragraph 5 of which specifically calls on member state “to take all necessary measures... to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL... and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria” The United Nations is asking us to do something; it is asking us to do something now; it is asking us

to act in Syria as well as in Iraq.

It was a Labour Government who helped to found the United Nations at the end of the second world war. Why did we do so? It was because we wanted the nations of the world working together to deal with threats to international peace and security, and Daesh is unquestionably that. Given that the United Nations has passed this resolution, and that such action would be lawful under article 51 of the UN charter—because every state has the right to defend itself—why would we not uphold the settled will of the United Nations, particularly when there is such support from within the region, including from Iraq? We are part of a coalition of more than 60 countries, standing together shoulder to shoulder to oppose the ideology and brutality of Daesh.

We all understand the importance of bringing an end to the Syrian civil war, and there is now some progress on a peace plan because of the Vienna talks. Those are our best hope of achieving a ceasefire—now that would bring an end to Assad’s bombing—leading to a transitional Government and elections. That is vital, both because it would help in the defeat of Daesh and because it would enable millions of Syrians who have been forced to flee to do what every refugee dreams of—they just want to be able to go home.

No one in the debate doubts the deadly serious threat that we face from Daesh and what it does, although we sometimes find it hard to live with the reality. In June, four gay men were thrown off the fifth storey of a building in the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor. In August, the 82-year-old guardian of the antiquities of Palmyra, Professor Khaled al-Asaad, was beheaded, and his headless body was hung from a traffic light. In recent weeks, mass graves in Sinjar have been discovered, one said to contain the bodies of older Yazidi women murdered by Daesh because they were judged too old to be sold for sex. Daesh has killed 30 British tourists in Tunisia; 224 Russian holidaymakers on a plane; 178 people in suicide bombings in Beirut, Ankara and Suruç; 130 people in Paris,

including those young people in the Bataclan, whom Daesh, in trying to justify its bloody slaughter, called apostates engaged in prostitution and vice. If it had happened here they could have been our children.

Daesh is plotting more attacks, so the question for each of us and for our national security is this: given that we know what it is doing, can we really stand aside and refuse to act fully in self-defence against those who are planning these attacks? Can we really leave to others the responsibility for defending our national security? If we do not act, what message will that send about our solidarity with those countries that have suffered so much, including Iraq and our ally, France? France wants us to stand with it, and President Hollande, the leader of our sister Socialist party, has asked for our assistance and help. As we are undertaking airstrikes in Iraq, where Daesh’s hold has been reduced, and as we are doing everything but engaging in airstrikes in Syria, should we not play our full part?

It has been argued in the debate that airstrikes achieve nothing. Not so: the House should look at how Daesh’s forward march has been halted in Iraq. It will remember that 14 months ago, people were saying that it was almost at the gates of Baghdad, which is why we voted to respond to the Iraqi Government’s request for help to defeat it. Its military capacity and freedom of movement have been put under pressure. Ask the Kurds about Sinjar and Kobane. Of course, airstrikes alone will not defeat Daesh, but they make a difference, because they give it a hard time, making it more difficult for it to expand its territory. I share the concerns that have been expressed this evening about potential civilian casualties. However, unlike Daesh, none of us today acts with the intent to harm civilians. Rather, we act to protect civilians from Daesh, which targets innocent people.

On the subject of ground troops to defeat Daesh, there has been much debate about the figure of 70,000, and the Government must explain that better. But we know that most

of those troops are engaged in fighting President Assad. I will tell Members what else we know: whatever the number—70,000, 40,000, 80,000—the current size of the opposition forces means that the longer we leave it to take action, the longer Daesh will have to decrease that number. So to suggest that airstrikes should not take place until the Syrian civil war has come to an end is to miss the urgency of the terrorist threat that Daesh poses to us and others, and to misunderstand the nature and objectives of the extension to airstrikes that is proposed.

Of course we should take action—there is no contradiction between the two—to cut off Daesh’s support in the form of money, fighters and weapons, of course we should give humanitarian aid, of course we should offer shelter to more refugees, including in this country, and yes, we should commit to play our full part in helping to rebuild Syria when the war is over.

I accept that there are legitimate arguments, and we have heard them in the debate, for not taking this form of action now. It is also clear that many Members have wrestled and, who knows, in the time that is left may still be wrestling with their conscience about what is the right thing to do. But I say the threat is now and there are rarely, if ever, perfect circumstances in which to deploy military forces.

We heard powerful testimony earlier from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) when she quoted that passage. Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative in London, said last week:

“Last June, Daesh captured one third of Iraq overnight and a few months later attacked the Kurdistan Region. Swift airstrikes by Britain, America and France and the actions

of our own Peshmerga saved us... We now have a border of 650 miles with Daesh. We have pushed them back and recently captured Sinjar ...Again Western airstrikes were vital. But the old border between Iraq and Syria does not exist. Daesh fighters come and go across this fictional boundary.” That is the argument for treating the two countries as one if we are serious about defeating Daesh.

I hope the House will bear with me if I direct my closing remarks to my Labour friends and colleagues. As a party we have always been defined by our internationalism. We believe we have a responsibility one to another. We never have and we never should walk by on the other side of the road. We are faced by fascists—not just their calculated brutality, but their belief that they are superior to every single one of us in this Chamber tonight and all the people we represent. They hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy—the means by which we will make our decision tonight—in contempt.

What we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated. It is why, as we have heard tonight, socialists, trade unionists and others joined the International Brigade in the 1930s to fight against Franco. It is why this entire House stood up against Hitler and Mussolini. It is why our party has always stood up against the denial of human rights and for justice. My view is that we must now confront this evil. It is now time for us to do our bit in Syria. That is why I ask my colleagues to vote for the motion tonight. *[Applause.]*

#### GUERNICA STILL BURNS

The picador’s dying horse screams  
the press lies trampled in reams  
a dead matador holds a broken sword  
a relieved bull looks on ignoring  
mother and baby lying dead  
and the dying with the corpse being  
wed

Spain has lost its compassion  
a monstrous war is in session  
this is not a medieval scene  
an electric light bulb beams  
Guernica

Picasso mostly remembered only by  
grandpa  
the German Condor League has been  
here

1630 hours Monday April 26<sup>th</sup> 1937  
the year

for two hours the planes high in the  
sky

safe from rifle and machine-gunfire  
says bye bye

still the world pays homage to this  
mural

while thinking in the plural  
bombs rain down on many  
populations

Britain France Russia the US are in  
copulation

some nations can do no wrong  
it depends on where your thinking  
belongs

meanwhile Guernica still burns and  
glows

remember that mother with baby in  
tow

that shows

how animals and humans in their  
dying seconds

share grotesque looks as death  
beckons

like the placid bull we look on  
relieved

that we have been reprieved.

Wilson John Haire. 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2016

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an undermining tabloid-type campaign to blacken her by suggesting that Renzi and Boschi share “hot smiles”. Boschi declared that attacks on her were attacks on the government. But a recent scandal over the M5S Mayor of Quadro in Naples and the Mafia has suggested that Grillo’s movement has quickstepped its way around an embarrassment in a manner that is both Italian and human.

# Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

## WHAT CRISIS?

On 26 April 2001 the Economist caused a stir and triggered litigation when it featured Silvio Berlusconi on its cover above the question: “*Why Silvio Berlusconi is unfit to lead Italy*”. Berlusconi lost the court case and costs were awarded against him. Bill Emmott, editor at that time, has since gone on to highlight what he considers the endemic political and financial crises in Italy. Silvio Berlusconi features because he is the most obvious and colourful player. Emmott has made films and written books such as: *Good Italy, Bad Italy - why Italy must conquer its demons to face the future* (2012). He has also set up *The Wake Up Foundation* as his attempt to warn Italy in particular and other western countries in general about the challenges to liberal democracy. Predictably the web has a spoof Economist cover with the heading “*Is Bill Emmott fit to criticise Italy?*”

Meanwhile criticism of Italy continues. Currently Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is under attack from the Euro hierarchy for the country’s position on migration and banking, both of which amount to huge and linked crises. On 19 January 2016 *Huffington Post* ran a piece from Alessandro De Angelis about a meeting between President Mattarella and emeritus President Napolitano. They discussed with great anxiety what they termed the current “*perfect storm*”. They wanted to ascertain whether Europe was actually attacking Italy the country, or the government of Renzi? De Angelis concluded by making reference to that Economist cover by concluding with, in English, “*Is Renzi fit to lead?*”

On 21 January 2016 *The Guardian* published an article by Renzi himself. He used it to promote his record and attack the EU. Obviously the piece: “*Europe isn’t working for this generation*”, was written to counter criticism, but Renzi’s stance is positive, valuing only his vision. Interestingly he made

no direct reference to being under attack from any quarter. Renzi claimed that his 22 months in office have “*simplified Italy*” and he headlined his government’s legislative changes. The Pd, or Partito Democratico is on the left, but the changes are not left or even centre-left as might be expected. His “*transformations*” to the labour market in general and also to school teachers’ contracts have weakened the employee’s position in law while strengthening employers’ rights. They steamrolled a great deal of effective union opposition.

The revisions to the electoral law have still to be approved by a referendum in October. The electoral changes have removed the upper Senate, “*the county will no longer require 315 senators*”. The upper chamber did duplicate and complicate governance but it will be replaced by a cheaper, less influential, more advisory body. The flaw is that, bizarrely, in a country famous for nepotism, favouritism, influence etc, it is going to be populated with nominees from the regions.

The two issues central to Renzi and Italy’s current position relate to the migrant crisis and to the banks. Renzi’s article minimises the latter to “*the recent turbulence around some Italian banks*”. Italy has coped with cross-Mediterranean migration for a number of years. The EU and European countries have largely ignored the humane way that Italy has characteristically coped. The Dublin accord that requires the arrival country to process and be responsible for migrants is a contentious issue for Italy. Now that migrant numbers have reached what Cameron dehumanises as being a swarm, Europe has taken notice, although action is uncoordinated and entirely nationally self-interested.

Bill Emmott, late of the Economist, contributes occasional pieces for *La Stampa*. On 19 January he opined that Schengen should be suspended by all countries in order to save it,

arguing that this will avert a collapse of the entire EU. Meanwhile Renzi is currently battling the EU over financial support for refugees. Italy would welcome more financial support and consideration for its efforts. However, the grant of 3 billion euro to Turkey to encourage it to contain the migrant crisis and reduce numbers crossing to Greece has upset Rome. The double insult for Italy is that it has been asked to fund part of this grant and sees no reason why it should contribute.

The second stick that the EU is currently using to beat Italy is over the Italian banking crisis. Four small banks, the two most significant being *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena* (which had been in trouble for some years) and *Banca Etruria* were bailed out in a way that is contrary to EU law. Renzi maintains that he acted in the most effective way but his indecision and dithering has counted against him. He also utterly rebuffs the torrent of criticism from Mario Dragi amongst others. The banks’ difficulties do also reveal corruption. In the context of working to resolve the Italian banking crisis, the request to fund Turkey is in this and every other context something that Renzi can not countenance.

As this is Italy there is another interesting complication. Renzi’s Minister for Constitutional Reforms and Relations, Marie Elena Boschi was instrumental in constructing and implementing the constitutional reforms (that go to referendum in October) for the Government. She is a shareholder and her family has a large financial share in the bailed-out *Banca Etruria*, mentioned above. Beppe Grillo’s M5S (Movimento cinque stelle), always keen to act against any hint of complicity and corruption then brought a vote of no confidence against her. She easily survived it and continues. Although a look at the internet shows

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