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The Nationalisation and Privatisation of English Education

The White Paper on Education, bombastically entitled 'Educational Excellence Everywhere', is the natural conclusion of the privatisation of education begun under Blair through the agency of Andrew Adonis. It is, however, a curious kind of privatisation, where funding and ultimately accountability rests with central government, but without local or regional intermediaries. Academy schools are run by trusts controlled by a sponsor who can appoint most of the governing body. The White Paper proposes that all schools become academies by 2023, the great majority of them to be located in multi-academy chains (MATs). Currently around 60% of secondary schools and 15% of primary schools are academies, implying that the great majority of schools will be converted will-nilly over the next seven years.

It is difficult to see why the government is so set on cutting local authorities out of any significant role in running education. Although academies were originally set up in order to take over schools from incompetent local authorities, their record overall has been no better. Fundamental problems with British education have been alleviated but not diminished. The White Paper points to improvements since 2012 in literacy levels, from 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 not achieving expected standards by the age of 11 (p.5). This is a good achievement for local authority led primary schools over a four year period, even if it still leaves an awful lot to be desired. On the other hand, even with 60% academisation, "around two in five young people leave secondary school without five or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalents including English and maths." (p.6). So the schools which are really showing improvements are to be subject to structural upheaval, while those that are still struggling are to serve as the model to be emulated by all other schools. The Government's own figures demonstrate the vacuity of the reasons for such an upheaval.

There can be little doubt that local authorities do not always do a good job with their educational responsibilities.

However, the government's own figures suggest that, with suitable guidance they can do a lot better. One of the reasons that Conservative local authorities are so opposed to the Government's proposed measures is that they take a pride in their work as education providers. They, along with Labour, the teaching trade unions and parent groups, not to mention dissident Tory MPs, will provide considerable opposition to these proposals. On the other hand, the fact that the SNP will not intervene in a purely English affair means that the Government holds a strong hand and the measure will probably go through.

Why should anyone object to mass academisation of schools? We have already given one reason. A decent education system depends on the success of its primary schools. If they fail to do their job properly, then pupils reaching secondary school will not be able to access the curriculum and education for them is, to all intents and purposes, over. But we have seen that it is the primary schools that have shown themselves to be capable of improvement and they are largely in the hands of local authorities. The current structure, together with investment in the quality of teaching staff in primary schools is the way to secure further systemic improvement. However, academisation will mean that no school will need to employ qualified teachers, since academies do not need to do so. This in itself, together with measures to exclude universities from the preparation of teachers, will strike a blow at the quality of primary teaching. By presenting teaching as a 'craft' carried out by enthusiasts liberally endowed with 'common sense' the government hopes to raise the standard of teaching. There is no evidence from anywhere in the world that amateurism in the difficult job of primary teaching succeeds better than a systematic and professional approach.

The second reason is that the performance of academies has been indifferent, no better than that of local authority schools. We have seen that great improvements have taken place in the local authority sector with little in the academy sector. The White Paper goes on about the importance of

leadership of schools. Leadership is needed to provide coherent aims and the right priorities, to maintain a sensible management structure, to initiate co-operation between schools and to engage successfully with parents. By all means ensure that schools get effective leaders with the right priorities, together with accountability structures which ensure that they do what they are supposed to do. But the main resource of a school is its teachers. There is no substitute for recruiting, investing in and retaining the very best teachers. Academisation will, if anything, jeopardise this.

Academies and academy chains will be subject to no scrutiny except for eight Regional School Commissioners. The main job of 'holding schools to account' for their performance will be academy and academy chain trusts and governing bodies (p.111). But these are the very people who will be running the academies. So much for independent scrutiny. No-one in their right mind can imagine that 8 commissars across the whole of England will be able to control and improve wayward academies. In a quasi-nationalised school system the privatised buck will definitely stop at Whitehall. How Whitehall is going to deal with the inevitable problems and crises that the new system will throw up is anybody's guess.

There are very good reasons to suppose that there will be problems. Governing bodies will be self-appointed technical specialists, breaking down the stakeholder model of governance that has existed since 1978. Academies can run their own affairs, setting up their own management structures, salary levels and even running businesses out of their premises. Academy trusts can be run by commercial organisations who can make money by getting 'their' schools to commission services from them. There are plenty of cases of schools paying bloated salaries to senior employees, one notorious but not untypical example being an academy chain 'CEO' pocketing £400k per annum of taxpayers' money. The exclusion of parent governors from the governing boards of academy chains

increases the likelihood of such continuing abuse.

Although a hybrid form of nationalisation and privatisation, the national character of English schooling will diminish. Academy chains will run schools as they want them to, without regard to common standards set across the country. They do not even have to teach the national curriculum, thus setting aside one of the valuable reforms of the Thatcher period. The idea seems to be that Multi-academy Trusts (MATs) to which the great majority of schools will belong, will act in competition with each other like businesses, thus improving standards. But they are already in competition with local authorities, with no discernible competitive advantage, so the idea that competition between them will drive up standards looks like a fantasy.

Structural reform will cost hundreds of millions of pounds and will divert teachers and school leaders from their main tasks. This will jeopardise standards. There is no evidence for the view that further structural reform will improve education. The problems with English education are deep-rooted. They consist in a labour market large sections of which does not value education, a teaching workforce of variable quality that suffers from significant attrition and areas of the country where education is simply not seen as that important. There is no quick fix for a distinctively English problem with education. A decent occupational labour market with high quality and stable jobs would certainly help. A well-qualified teaching force with priority given to the primary sector would also help. The proposed combination of nationalisation and privatisation has the potential to cause chaos and to set back the considerable improvements that have been made over the last twenty years or so. These have been achieved by a combination of government action and inter-school co-operation within the context of local authorities. The improved performance of London schools has testified to this. It is now about to be jeopardised.

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Beware The IDS Of March

Ian Duncan Smith's resignation as Work and Pensions Secretary poured oil on a blazing fire. The Tories were already divided on the EU. By resigning, IDS made that division deeper still. His stated reason for resigning, that the cuts to benefits for the disabled were 'deeply unfair' while raising the tax allowance for middle income earners and slashing capital gains tax, rings hollow against his record as a serial benefits cutter. It was said, although denied by IDS and his supporters, that his resignation was intended primarily to damage Cameron and Osborne and thus undermine the campaign for an 'In' vote in the EU referendum. But whatever the reason, it greatly weakens the Government.

IDS said something that many of us have believed all along: that the Government are indifferent to the impact of cuts on the working poor and disabled because they are 'not our voters'. A point also made by the Liberal Democrat David Laws in his memoir, 'Coalition: The Inside Story of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government'. IDS and Laws were government insiders so they ought to know better than the rest of us. Given this, Osborne's mantra 'We are all in this together' is even less convincing than when it was first uttered. One is reminded that David Cameron was a special adviser to Chancellor Norman Lamont during the early 1990s recession when he said, 'If it's not hurting, it's not working'. Now, as then, it is hurting but the pain is felt mainly by the working poor and the disabled.

Osborne's budget statement included cuts of £4.4 billion to disabled benefits. On BBC's Question Time on 17 March, Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said the cuts were simply a proposal, a mere suggestion, and that consultations were being held with appropriate bodies. This must be the first time that a budget has included a mere suggestion. But even a 'suggestion' of cuts of such magnitude to disabled benefits was too much for some Tory backbenchers. Their opposition and cries of outrage from disabled groups forced a climbdown by George Osborne, who will now have to find savings of £4.4 billion elsewhere if he is to meet his aim of a budget surplus in 2019-20 and in subsequent years. Predictably, he has said that the details of these alternative savings will not be announced until after the EU referendum. However, by ruling out any planned cuts to the welfare budget before 2020 he has narrowed his options. He will therefore either have to abandon altogether the cap on welfare spending introduced in 2014 or look for savings in other areas.

Some commentators have said that

Osborne's aim of a budget surplus by 2019-20 has a less than 50:50 chance of being met unless he targets the benefits of well-off pensioners. But these and the state pension have been declared off-limits by Cameron and Osborne. There was certainly scope for savings from a pensions budget of around £108 billion of a total welfare bill of £211 billion. But the over 65s have a high propensity to vote and many vote Tory. So we can discount any move to remove the benefits of well-off pensioners. Osborne could have increased fuel duty now that oil and petrol prices are low but he is clearly afraid of the car lobby. Instead fuel duty is to be frozen for the sixth consecutive year and there is to be no increase in road tax. He could have saved money by leaving corporation tax at 20% but businesses like HSBC, who pay their CEOs astronomical salaries, will benefit from the new 17% levy. He could also have imposed a windfall capital gains tax on house sales.

Osborne's reputation as a canny Chancellor is collapsing before our eyes. He has failed to meet almost every target he set himself, while claiming he is building a strong economy. The national debt for example will be £150 billion higher in this parliament reaching a total of £1.75 trillion. And his forecast of a budget surplus by 2020 is predicated on higher tax revenue and lower spending. A case of wishful thinking. Productivity and investment continue to be low which London's Crossrail and HS2 will do little to address. Employment at 31.2 million is at a record high but most jobs created over the past six years, although full-time, are insecure and low paid. One of the reasons for this is the failure to invest in a more productive workforce because this is a long-term objective for CEOs who are motivated by short-term movements in share price. And the so-called National Living Wage, (actually an increase in the Minimum Wage), currently at £7.20 an hour rising to £9.20 by 2020, will not make up for losses elsewhere.

Osborne boasts that wages are rising and that the employed are better off than they were six years ago. But statistics show that over the last six years the top half of income earners are the winners while those in the bottom half are the

losers. There is gross income inequality in the UK which Osborne ignores and which the OECD highlighted in a report published in February 2015. The report showed that the average income of the richest 10% was almost ten times as large as the poorest 10% and said that the level of income inequality among the total population in the UK has been well above the OECD average in the last three decades.

Local government budgets are being slashed resulting in cuts in services, with care for the elderly a notable victim. Councils are able to implement a 2% levy to pay for care services but how many will actually use the income for that purpose? Some councils are selling public assets to make up the shortfall in revenue. At a national level, last year Osborne sold government shares in RBS and this year shares in Lloyd's Bank Group will go the same way. Other public assets earmarked for sale include the Green Investment Bank and the Land Registry. By 2020 it is expected that £5 billion of corporate and financial assets will be sold, as part of a £20 billion sale of public assets.

Labour's response to all this has been fairly muted. Corbyn and McDonnell have aired their grievances but press coverage has been mostly negative. Their responses to the budget were credible but received little support from colleagues. This has been the pattern throughout the current parliament and is being repeated in some constituencies where apparently, anti-Corbyn members are refusing to work for the party. Whatever the result of the EU referendum the Tories will continue to be a divided party. Voters dislike a divided party. Labour now has a golden opportunity to present a united front to the electorate. It should begin to speak with one voice against the government's damaging policies. But to do that three areas in particular need to be addressed: economic/industrial policy, defence and welfare. Harold Wilson once said that Labour is the natural party of government. The petulant performance of many of Corbyn's colleagues since his election as leader has handed that mantle to the Tories. It is time to take it back.

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

On 31 October 1916 Ronald McNeill introduced a debate on the relations between Greece and her Allies. His comments were challenged by Irish Nationalist MP Arthur Lynch. The debate is published below in full.

Ronald McNeill, 1st Baron Cushenden PC (30 April 1861-12 October 1934) was a British Conservative politician. He was born in Ulster and educated at Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford. Having unsuccessfully contested the seats of West Aberdeenshire (1906), Aberdeen South (1907 and Jan 1910), he was elected for the St Augustine's division of Kent in 1911. In 1918 he became MP for Canterbury, and in 1922 was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, a post he held, with a short interval for the first Labour Government of 1924, until 1925.

Arthur Alfred Lynch (16 October 1861-25 March 1934) was an Irish Australian civil engineer, physician, journalist, author, soldier, anti-imperialist and polymath. As a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party he represented Galway Borough from 1901 to 1902 and West Clare from 1909 to 1918. He fought on the Boer side during the Boer War in South Africa, for which he was sentenced to death but was later pardoned. He supported the British war effort in the First World War, raising his own Irish battalion in Munster (10th Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers) towards the end of the war, although his unit never saw active front line service.

ALLIES AND GREECE.

Mr. R. McNEILL:

At Question Time to-day I addressed a question by private notice to my Noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with regard to the condition of Greece. My Noble Friend, who, unfortunately, did not get my notice until a late hour, was unable to give any reply, owing to the fact that he had not had any opportunity of consulting the Secretary of State. I then gave notice that I would refer to the matter on the Motion for the Adjournment. In touching upon this subject I want to say that I realise—no one realises more clearly than I do—that at such a time as this the question of our foreign relations is like a very delicate instrument which cannot be touched except with great care and discretion. I think we all feel that in introducing into public debate matters touching

upon the conduct of the Foreign Office we are always a little apprehensive lest we may do more harm than good. It is, therefore, my intention, as far as I can, to say nothing which can in any way embarrass my Noble Friend or the Foreign Office, and I hope that I shall say nothing which he would regard as indiscreet.

I am sure that my Noble Friend realises, and the House realises, that at the present moment there is something of a climax, a misgiving in the country with regard to the whole of our position in the Near East—with regard to our position in the Balkans generally, and especially with regard to our position in Greece. Let me recall a few circumstances. We have an Army of undefined size at Salonika. We have been engaged there for many months in defensive and now in offensive operations. We are on the soil of a State which is not a fighting Ally of ours, but a neutral, and we are there under rather peculiar circumstances. We are there, invited by the constitutional Government of Greece, and that invitation affords our justification for being in that place. As all the world knows, that constitutional Government has been replaced, and for some time past M. Venizelos, the statesman who issued the invitation to the Allies to use Greek territory for operations in the Balkans, has been dismissed from office.

In spite of an election which gave him popular support, he has, by circumstances with which the House is familiar, been compelled to relinquish the task of forming a Ministry, and he has been driven into opposition, constitutional or unconstitutional, to his Sovereign. He has formed a provisional Government, and he has formed, at all events, the nucleus of an army, and these civil authorities and military authorities are, to the best of their ability, supporting the cause of the Allies. We are, therefore, confronted with the extraordinary anomalous state of affairs of a *de jure* Government, presided over by one hostile, and openly hostile, to our cause and the cause of the Allies, and we have at the same time a rival Government presided over by the constitutional statesman who is responsible for our presence there. The question arises, What should be the attitude of our Government towards these rival authorities? If one were to approach the question altogether apart from what

the Prime Minister has called juridical niceties, we should support that authority which is on our side rather than that authority which is not on our side. That is what would appeal to the ordinary plain man who is unconcerned with diplomatic niceties. That, up to the present, has not been done. We are taking up an attitude which does not appear to be pronounced on one side or the other.

Certain news has been published to-day—and that is why I venture to bring the matter before the House—which, I think, adds to the disquiet and misgiving with which the attitude of our Government is regarded in the country, and, I believe, in this House. It is stated in the Press to-day that the Foreign Office at Athens has issued an official statement to the Press. I am not going to refer to the precise terms of that statement, because I am not sure that it is accurately reported in this country, but what is of much greater importance than the actual terms is the way in which they are regarded in Greece by the rival parties. That official statement, I understand, is accepted there as an announcement that the Governments of the Allies have definitely refused to extend any official recognition to M. Venizelos, to his Government or to his party.

The news goes on to say that this announcement is regarded, as one would expect it to be, with very great jubilation by the King's party, the pro-German party, which is hostile to us, and that it is causing corresponding depression and discouragement to those who are our Allies, supporters, and friends. Nor does it stop there, because, apparently under the influence of this idea, right or wrong, that M. Venizelos, if not repudiated is not supported by the Allied Governments, we are told that his supporters have been arrested. There is obviously the danger that if they are arrested, and if the officers who have given their adhesion to his movement are cashiered, he will necessarily lose all the authority he possesses, he will lose the support he hitherto enjoyed, and, consequently, the party in Greece which supports us and our Allies will decline in strength and authority, and those who are hostile to us will correspondingly grow in strength.

If that is the position of affairs, certainly it is not one which we can regard with equanimity and still less

with pleasure. I do not want to lay any stress on the fact that it appears to irregularise our position in Greece even more than before. We are there at the invitation of M. Venizelos, and, apart from any other reason, I should have thought that that in itself would have imposed the obligation on us to do everything possible to support him at the expense of his enemies. But I quite realise that there is a number of forces at work on this very complicated problem of Greece and the Balkans with which none of us are familiar. There are, obviously there must be, circumstances which are known to the Foreign Office and which are not known to us. I do not think that they can be known to us. Therefore, I am not going on this occasion to press the point that I have raised in any spirit hostile to the Government or the policy which they are pursuing. I am merely stating the facts, or the alleged facts, as they present themselves to my mind, and as I believe they present themselves to a great number of minds in this country. And my Noble Friend will realise that if those facts do so present themselves to our minds, it is inevitable that there should be much misgiving and much dissatisfaction, resulting perhaps in criticism of the conduct of our foreign relations, which is not finding hostile expression, for the reason which I have already given.

We do not wish to do anything which might prove to be more harmful than useful, but I do hope that my Noble Friend will respond to the invitation extended to him at Question Time by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dublin University. My right hon. Friend suggested that if I mentioned the subject this evening—and I hope that I have done so without any hostility to the Government—as showing what was in our minds, the Foreign Office would find some means of allaying the feeling which is existing by making a statement to the House, it is not for me to suggest in what way that opportunity can be afforded. We have had a secret Session of this House, and I do not know that the precedent has impressed us very favourably. But still it does not at all follow that, because the secret Sessions which we have already had were not quite so successful as we might have hoped, when we have a subject like this, which is definitely acknowledged to be one which cannot be openly treated, but about which there is a great deal of anxiety, that the precedent of the secret Session might not be followed with great success.

Then there is the other precedent which has been referred to several

times by Members of this House both at Question Time and I think in debate, the precedent of the French procedure of commissions. I do not know whether my hon. Friend would consider it possible—and I do not know whether it would be favoured by the House—to have a Commission, of some sort, of responsible Members representing different parties in this House, to whom the Foreign Office could feel that they might make communications in safety. This might give a certain amount of confidence to the House and to the country. I do feel very strongly that unless the Foreign Office can devise some way of taking the House, or a portion of the House, more into their confidence than they have done hitherto, this disquiet, which is at present spreading through the country, may grow, and it may become very considerable, and before long it may be impossible to restrain criticism of a type very different from that which I have advanced this evening. The Foreign Office, therefore, in their own interest, in the interest of the Government and in that of the country, which after all ought to be identical, would be well advised, if not now, then at some convenient time, certainly at some very near date, to make a statement which would remove the disquiet which at present troubles the country.

Mr. LYNCH:

The hon. Gentleman who has just sat down has disappointed me. When he rose like a pillar of strength I thought that he was going to set the axe, like a backwoodsman, at the evil; but he touched on it with a light touch, as he said, the touch of a lady pianist. In the course of his remarks he proposed a secret Session. If that secret Session were promised, I do not know that I would not withhold some of the observations which I may make to-night. That proposition has been already made and rejected by the Foreign Office, in their wisdom.

After all, I do not know that we have not arrived at a crisis when we must speak to the country as well as to this House with the utmost frankness and candour. For the lack of frankness and candour is what is killing the operation of our Front Bench. At this stage, however, I want to take to task the Noble Lord personally. I spoke on a subject relating to this a few nights ago, and in the course of his reply, which contained no argument at all, he concluded by saying that my observations were unworthy of a Member of this House. That was intended to be offensive. There was a time, which I somewhat regret, when

for a remark of that kind I would have had a man out on the terrain. To-night I will content myself with saying that these observations of the Noble Lord were worthy of a member of the Government, for they were lacking in courage, in candour, and in truth. For what I said I had grounds for saying. Those grounds I will make patent to this House and this country. I was called to order quite rightly by the Deputy-Speaker, who informed me that some of my remarks were not in order unless they were preceded by a substantive Motion. I declare to this House that if matters proceed in this fashion I will not hesitate to put down that substantive Motion, so that I can speak on that subject also with the utmost freedom.

We have reached a state of affairs in Greece which may be the turning-point of the whole of this campaign. Our handling of the situation in Greece will determine the Eastern Campaign, the campaign in the Balkans. It will determine whether Bulgaria shall be crushed, and Turkey isolated, and Germany hemmed in, or whether Germany will continue months hence, and perhaps years hence, to have free access to the East. So that the question which we are discussing is one of the most vital importance.

On the one hand we have an enemy king. Does any man in this House doubt, does any man apart from the Foreign Office, which always hoodwinks itself, or takes the attitude as if it were hoodwinking itself, doubt for one moment what are the real intimate convictions and the whole attitude of King Constantino of Greece? He is a relative of the Kaiser a relative of all the Royal families of Europe. The Kaiser is a relation to whom he looks, singular as it may seem, with fervid admiration—even adoration. He has adopted in the reality the fulsome expressions which we used to read in the daily Press ten years ago with reference to that august person. King Constantine is an outpost of Germany; that is known to every man in this House who thinks at all. He is a man who has set himself to use all his abilities—limited, I am glad to say—all his obstinacy, all his powers of intrigue, and all his influence, backed up by the prestige which still clings to the Royal office, to defeat the ends of the Allies. No methods are too tortuous, no design too dark for his acceptance, and that man is being propped up on his shaking throne by our Foreign Office.

We have, on the other hand, M. Venizelos, a great Liberal, one of those men who have shown themselves devoted

to the purest ideals of progress, a man who has sacrificed his whole career, who has done more—who has placed his very life in the scale in the cause of the Allies. Are they prepared to desert him? I will tell the Front Bench a story of a great Englishman, Nelson himself. He was being pursued by a Spanish fleet, and one of his ships got behind. It was commanded, I believe, by Captain Hardy, the man in whose arms he died. What did Nelson say? “We cannot desert Hardy,” and, in spite of vast and overwhelming odds, he turned his face to the enemy and put them to flight. The Foreign Office would have said “No; we cannot afford to offend the Spaniards.” They would have sacrificed Captain Hardy, to their shame.

I say that if they persist in this policy of theirs, of propping up the tottering power of this enemy king, and sacrificing the great man who is representative of the people of Greece, they will not save themselves from ultimate defeat, and they will have associated it with eternal disgrace. Even if successful in that policy, they will have saved everything but honour. There is not merely one party in this House concerned in this matter; it is the affair of the whole of the Dominions whom you have asked to flock to your standard. What will the people of Australia, the great, strong, democratic people, with its visions of the future, think if you say to them, either in words or by implication, “No, your sacrifices may count for nothing, the blood of your best men in Australia may count for nothing, your deathless heroism may count for nothing, weighed in the scale against the safety of an enemy King. The tottering Throne in Greece counts for nothing against the democracy of Australia. Your blood may be shed in rivers, but all will not weigh against the preservation of the superstition of royalty.

My words are going to Australia and South Africa; and they will go to America, they will go all over the world, and unless by some means you show them to be misconceived how can you put forward before the world that banner of yours, that banner of ours, the great ideal of Western nations, fighting for civilisation, progress and liberty, against the crushing military despotism of the Germans. I say you are sacrificing Greece for the support of a military despotism. It is a course which I am certain the French Government and the French people do not desire to follow. You wish to preserve in Europe this dying myth of the “divinity which doth hedge a king.”

I hope that in Greece itself the men whom you have so treated will give you the lie and that soon the streets of Athens itself, alive once more with all the glorious traditions of the past, may resound with that eagle-cry: “Vive la République!”

Lord R. CECIL:

We have just listened to a speech which, I think, affords perhaps a stronger argument than I could put forward as to the great difficulty and undesirability of having a discussion of foreign relations between this country and other countries in this House. However temperately such questions may be raised, and it was raised with the greatest temperateness and the greatest moderation by the hon. and learned Member, it is possible for an hon. Member to rise and gratify his own feeling by delivering such a speech as that to which we have just listened. The hon. Member for Clare said, and I dare say rightly, that his words would extend far beyond this House, and that would, in most cases, point to the fact that there ought to be a certain sense of responsibility on the speaker.

Mr. LYNCH:

I spoke with full responsibility.

Lord R. CECIL:

But it did not impose the slightest sense of responsibility on the hon. Member here. With regard to the speech of my hon. and learned Friend (Mr. McNeill) I have no such remarks to make as those which I have just made. The hon. and learned Gentleman told us, and I think it was quite true, that the course of events in Greece has attracted widespread attention and some misgiving in this country, and he told us that they had culminated in the official statement which appeared in the Press this morning, that the official statement had been published in Greece, and that the effect of it was to encourage our enemies and discourage our friends. I am not aware of the terms of that publication made in Athens, to which my hon. and learned Friend referred. I think if he will allow me to say so we shall do well to treat with some caution reports that come from Athens. I am not saying anything offensive about the great Athenian people, but they are undoubtedly somewhat excitable, and the reports that reach us from that capital are not always so moderate as the speech of my hon. and learned Friend. As to the substance of the matter, I desire to protest in the strongest possible way against the allegation made by the hon. Member for Clare that we were propping up King Constantine to assist the German propaganda in Greece or the German

party there. I am quite sure that King Constantine would not take that view. That is not at all his view.

I say quite frankly that I believe that the reunion of all the Greeks would be desirable, very desirable. I hold the view very strongly, and we who have a very special position and this nation has a very special position with regard to Greece desire nothing more, and we do desire nothing more, than the greatness and prosperity of Greece. We believe that that greatness and prosperity can be achieved, and can be achieved only, by close association with the Western Powers. We believe that the old phrase of “Benevolent Neutrality” is one which conveyed a great deal of truth as to the proper attitude that Greece should assume, but we believe strongly whatever attitude, whatever the particular version of her attitude towards the Entente Powers should be, anything which separates her from them must end in disaster to Greece, and to a serious state of things which will last far beyond the end of the present War. My hon. Friend suggested that we were under a special obligation to M. Venizelos because we went there at his invitation. I suppose everybody who has followed the career of M. Venizelos has a profound admiration for that statesman. We all know his great capacity, his great courage, his unerring sagacity, and his fine public spirit and the single-mindedness which he has shown not only on this occasion, but on previous occasions. But I do not think that it is a true statement or a useful statement to say that we went there on the invitation of M. Venizelos. We were there on the invitation of the Greek Government, of which he was the head; but it was the Greek Government that invited us, and not an individual. The Government itself invited us, and we are there because they invited us.

There is another observation which I should like to make. The hon. Member for Clare expressed the view that the French people and the French Government thoroughly disagreed with our policy. I am in a position to assert in the strongest way that that is utterly untrue. We have acted throughout in the closest concert with all our Allies, and with the French among them. At the Boulogne Conference, held only the other day, I was assured by those who were there that there was absolute complete unanimity of opinion between the French Government and the English Government as to the policy that should be pursued in Greece. There is not a shadow of difference between them, and there is

not at the present day. Therefore any statement which is made, a statement which can do nothing but harm, that we in this respect are diverging from the policy of our Allies, is absolutely without the slightest foundation or basis, and is one which ought never to have been made. As to our attitude towards M. Venizelos, the House will recognise the extreme delicacy of saying anything about it. I only say this, that wherever we find a part of Greek Dominion, which is, in fact, under the Government of M. Venizelos or his Provisional Government, where the great majority of the people recognise him as their Government, we recognise him as the de facto ruler of that portion. More than that I do not think it will be right for me to say now, and I am sure my hon. Friend would not desire me to go beyond that.

Mr. McNEILL:

Has that been officially conveyed to M. Venizelos?

Lord R. CECIL:

I should not like to answer that without looking up the actual facts. I have said all I think that I can usefully say at the present time about M. Venizelos. I recognise the great desirability, in a democracy such as we have in this country, of the Government working in close union with the democracy, particularly at a time of great stress like the present. I think nothing is more difficult than to settle exactly how that union is to be brought about in the domain of foreign affairs. We have not only this Government to consider, but the Governments of our Allies, our French, our Russian, our Italian Allies, and the others. We cannot do anything, we cannot say anything, without considering the way in which that will appear to our Allies, and their peoples in foreign countries, and to our enemies and to neutrals, and to ask the Government to carry on negotiations, or to make a clean breast of it, and to take the House and the country fully into their confidence, is, I am satisfied, to ask what is really not in the public interest. I would gladly consider whether there is anything else we would do in order to increase the confidence of the country in the Government.

I must say, speaking off hand and speaking without any consultation with anyone else as to some of the suggestions made by my hon. and learned Friend, that I think they will have to be looked at very closely and very carefully. I do not think it would be a desirable thing to establish without very mature consideration a new form of directing foreign affairs in

this country. I have, I confess, some doubt whether it would be desirable in the public interest to share the responsibility of the Government in these matters with any Commission, however constituted. That does not mean that information should not be given, I quite agree; but any advice of a specially constituted Commission of this House would, I think, be one which ought to be very, very closely, and very carefully, considered before it was accepted. As to the question of a Secret Session, if my hon. Friend thinks, after listening to the speech of the Member for Clare, it really would be an illuminating process to have a discussion on foreign affairs, I will certainly convey his views to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. But I would venture very respectfully to appeal to the House in this matter and in all others.

No one is more conscious of the defects of the present Government than every member of it. We all know that to undertake to govern a country at a time like this is to undertake a task which is really beyond human powers. We all recognise that. We are perfectly conscious of the many mistakes we make, of the many deficiencies of which we are guilty, but I cannot believe that anything which waters down the responsibility of the Government is likely to improve it. We must do what we think right. We must carry on the Government of the country, badly I agree, but as well as we can do it; and we cannot share that responsibility with the House of Commons or with anybody else—not during the War. That seems to me the only position we can take up. If the House of Commons arrives at the conclusion that we are so bad that really we must be turned out and somebody else put in our places, be it so. That is a perfectly reasonable policy, and one which we shall be delighted to facilitate if the House of Commons has arrived at that conclusion. But until it arrives at that decision, though I am a very junior member of the Government, I appeal to the House to give us confidence and support, and not to try to take upon itself duties which, with all the respect I have for the House, I am satisfied it is incapable of discharging, namely, the administration of the affairs of this country in a time of great stress and strain, such as that through which we are now passing.

Mr Ellis Griffith:

I do not wish to say anything about the concluding and somewhat pessimistic remarks of the Noble Lord. I do not see why he should take such a

pessimistic view of the Government, because we know they are indispensable. But if they are indispensable and so bad as he says—

Lord R. CECIL made an observation which was inaudible in the Reporters' Gallery.

Mr. GRIFFITH:

It is very difficult to compare what has been and what might be. At any rate, the subject of the discussion tonight is far too serious for any personal considerations or any personal points. We shall all agree that the Debate has answered one very useful purpose. The Noble Lord told us, I think for the first time, that where as a matter of fact Venizelos exercises the functions of government the British Government so far recognise his authority.

Lord R. CECIL:

De facto.

Mr. GRIFFITH:

I am not sure what I understand by de facto. Do I understand by de facto that where Venizelos is in supreme command, where his forces are in control, where the King exercises no functions and has been deprived of them—as in the island of Crete—the position of the British Government is that Constantine is de jure king and Venizelos is de facto ruler? It is an extraordinary position. It really means, if anybody can hold these two inconsistent views simultaneously, that you recognise the authority of King Constantine and at the same time you recognise the authority of a traitor to King Constantine. That really is the position. It is a very serious one. What does throw a good deal of light upon this subject, and, I think, justifies the feeling of great anxiety and misgiving which there is in this country, is that the Noble Lord—he is no ordinary Under-Secretary; he not only answers in the House of Commons, but we know is in the confidence of his Chief—after some hours' notice of this Debate comes here and tells us upon the authority of the Foreign Office that, although that is the fact, he does not even not know whether Venizelos has been made cognisant of that fact. That appears a very serious admission. I hope, if it be so, that the Noble Lord will take the very earliest opportunity of conveying to Venizelos the fact that we do recognise his authority in places under his control.

The Noble Lord has, in words beyond praise, as far as I am concerned, passed an eulogy on the character and achievements of Venizelos. I really think that what Venizelos wants is not praise but recognition. Is it not a curious thing—it is common knowledge;

it has been published in the Press, and the Press is subject to the Press Bureau—that the Allies have made a grant of money to Venizelos. The Bum was mentioned, £400,000. We give him our praise, we give him our money, but we do not give him our recognition. A man who deserves the epithets which the Noble Lord applied to Venizelos to-night will, I think, come to the conclusion that, far better than our praise, far better than our money, is our recognition of him in the great step he has taken. He has not only sacrificed his reputation and his career—that is nothing; he has sacrificed his life—at any rate, he has risked his life—in order to prove his bona fides and his allegiance to the cause of the Allies.

We are the champion of small nations. We have not been exceedingly fortunate or successful up to now in our championship of small nations. Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro—their record shows—I do not say that it is blameworthy—a lack of success which we all deplore. Roumania is now in peril. Greece also is a small nation. She is struggling against her King. I know perfectly well that in a Debate of this kind one has to speak with considerable reticence; one cannot say what one would like to say. But just as there is a tradition of secrecy in the Foreign Office, so also there is really a support for a particular form of government for kings. It is idle to shut our eyes to it. There is a camaraderie amongst the ruling families of Europe.

It is a difficult thing to speak about, but when you have a Debate, either you say what is really in your mind or you do not take part in it at all. What I say is this—that you must choose between King Constantine and Venizelos, not because one is King and the other is statesman, but regarding them as two men, each of whom says that he represents Greece. That is all. The kingship of the one and the statesmanship of the other must not be taken for an advantage or otherwise. You must consider this question only: Which of these two men, the King or the statesman, represents the real opinion and feeling of the Greek people? If you come to the opinion that King Constantine represents the Greek people, have nothing to do with Venizelos. On the other hand, if you think that Venizelos represents the Greek people, I do not think you ought to negotiate longer with King Constantine, who has turned out to be a very poor friend to the Allies, and who has done all he could to support our enemies. In conclusion, I am concerned about public opinion in this country. That is a matter to be taken into account. There is a feeling of great disquietude that the Government are not doing the right thing by their

friend Venizelos. That is a very serious feeling to get abroad. Even tonight, when the Noble Lord has told us what he thinks it right to tell us, I hope that after this short Debate the country will be reassured, at any rate, to this extent, that the Government will give not only money and eulogy, but also actual and definite recognition to Venizelos. I do not think that anything else is worthy of us. First of all, it is only ordinary common gratitude to do so; and secondly, not only is it gratitude but it is policy as well.

Sir H. DALZIEL:

My right hon. Friend has stated ably and temperately the views which I am sure are entertained by a vast majority of Members of the House, and by a vast majority of the public outside. We all recognise the very difficult task of the Noble Lord, who had to state the views of the Government and at the same time to deal with what is still a very difficult situation. But he must not really make too big a claim upon the patience of the House in regard to this matter. This is no new subject. Month after month we have seen the prestige of the British Government severely damaged in these negotiations. You cannot get away from that. We as Members of this House have a responsibility as well as the Government. I must enter my caveat against the doctrine laid down by the Noble Lord that in matters of this kind, in foreign affairs, the Government must do as they please, independently of the House; that they will deny to the House any share of responsibility. That is a new doctrine which I suppose is one of the products of the Coalition Government. But I should like some of our once Liberal statesmen to get up in this House and say that they thoroughly endorse the statement of the Noble Lord that the House of Commons has no responsibility whatever for the action of its Government in regard to important foreign affairs. No, Sir; it will not do!

We have got to share the blunders of the Government, and for their few successes we deserve some credit. We have to judge what will be the result of this policy—this policy of secrecy, this policy of keeping to yourselves all that is going on in this important arena of the War. What is the result? We have seen hundreds of thousands—I suppose I am correct in that figure—fighting men held up. We have seen King Constantine holding us all at bay month after month. We have seen the whole foreign situation absolutely governed, as it were, from Athens, and all our efforts paralysed. Do you think the British public is going to stand that for ever? To look on, day after day, and see our Ambassadors going hat in hand to this King who has defied you at every point; who is, as my

right hon. Friend truly said, an agent of the German Government? Is there to be no end to this? What do we see to-day? To what position has this policy brought us? That to-night we see that the two opposing forces, the forces of the King and the forces of M. Venizelos, are actually firing shots at each other. That is the message of peace and good will that King Constantine has assisted us in bringing to Greece.

I say the situation is serious, and I say we have got a responsibility. We cannot go on day after day seeing British diplomacy slapped in the face, and the whole position of this country, in my opinion—and I am only speaking for myself—damaged throughout the world. There is a growing feeling that there is some secret explanation of all this, and that it has not been forthcoming. We cannot understand why we are suffering all this damage just because of the act of one man! I say that it is a good thing in diplomacy and international action to support your friends and very often to defy your enemies. There is a feeling that we are not supporting M. Venizelos as we ought to do. I do appeal to the Government to make the situation clear—that we are going to stand by him in the difficult situation in which he has been placed, and after he has shown his loyalty to this country. If we do not do that we will make the position intolerable, and we will not deserve to have any friends, and it will be a lasting disgrace to this country. I hope before it is not too late we will support our best friends in that arena of warfare.

Question put, and agreed to.

You can adopt one philosophy or the other. You can adopt the philosophy of laissez-faire, of the limitation of governmental power, and turn the industrial life of this country into a chaotic scramble of selfish interests, each bent on plundering the other and all bent on oppressing the wage-worker... Under such limitations of governmental power... every railroad must be left unchecked, every great industrial concern can do as it chooses with its employees and with the general public; women must be permitted to work as many hours a day as their taskmasters bid them; great corporations must be left unshackled to put down wages to a starvation limit and to raise the price of their products as high as monopolistic control will permit. The reverse policy means an extension, instead of a limitation, of governmental power; and for that extension, we Progressives stand.

Theodore Roosevelt

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



A new Labour Law

On 24th March a policeman was filmed punching a schoolboy in the face during a demonstration against a proposed reform of the Labour Code. Demonstrations in several French towns followed on from a million strong petition calling for the withdrawal of the proposals. The law was proposed by the minister for Labour and Social Dialogue, Myriam El Khomry and promptly renamed the El Connerie law [the stupid law]. It was rewritten mid March after protests and the new version is being discussed now.

The main aim of the law is to reduce workers rights and trade union power. This is done mainly by making company level agreements prime sector level agreements between unions and employers. Up to now sector level agreements provided a minimum agreed across say all textiles firms; individual companies could negotiate company level agreements but these local agreements could not be less advantageous to the employees than the global ones. Now a less advantageous agreement would prime over the minimum agreement previously agreed.

These are examples of less advantageous agreements that will become possible:

The weekly number of hours permissible in exceptional circumstances calculated over 12 weeks will be 46 (previously 44).

Overtime must be counted and paid no later than after 3 years (previously one year).

Dates of time off for holidays can be changed by the employer inside the month of start date (previously no change possible a month before

the start date).

Compulsory dates for union/ employer meetings: meetings must take place every 3 years (previously every year)

Employer can oppose publication of union/ employer agreement (new)

If there is a change of agreement e.g. after a company has changed owners or combined with another, employees keep the same level of pay (previously they kept all advantages that had been negotiated).

Company level agreements are only valid if the union or unions signing it received 50% of the vote at the last works council or other elections. (previously 30%).

All employees had the right to a medical examination by the company doctor at the start of employment; now there will be 'an information appointment' not conducted by a doctor.

A Solution to Unemployment?

This law assumes that the cost of wages and social security contributions is what drags the economy down and causes unemployment. This is the daily message of the media: workers and employees are dragging us down with their excessive wages and conditions. The solution is to reduce labour costs. This is what 19th century Manchester capitalists thought!

Is it still true?

How do other costs compare: rent, energy, cost of capital. Why are these costs not discussed? They are not invariable.

Cheapness is not the key to commercial success. Having sector wide agreements forced firms to agree on wages and conditions, so they could not compete via lowering wages and

conditions, but had to win on other factors, like quality, innovation, customer service etc.

Industry needs investment: too much money is handed now to shareholders and not enough to reinvestment. 50% of profits made by the Stock Exchange quoted firms in France are not reinvested. Why are shareholders not accused of dragging the economy down?

Firms increase their profits by having the work done abroad: they close a firm that was not necessarily unprofitable in France and have the work done in other EU countries where workers are cheaper. This is not inevitable; it's a choice, and the main choice that leads to mass unemployment. Will the El Khomry law penalise employers who create unemployment on purpose, with the aim of maximising the amount given to shareholders? Why are employers who delocalise jobs not accused of creating unemployment?

A case in England

An interview in the Evening Standard on 7 March discussed this very topic, with the title: '*How much money do you need? Take less, do something better.*' An entrepreneur in textiles Patrick Grant says:

"The reason the Cookson & Clegg factory was closing is a prime example of the shortcomings of austerity logic. The business was largely sustained by making army uniforms. But back in 2009, central government tried to save a few million from the defence budget by procuring uniforms and equipment from overseas. The consequence is that a whole series of factories have closed down, hundreds of people go

on the dole and whole towns lose their purpose.”

“You come to realise how many political decisions take no account of the wider consequences.”

“The source of pride in communities lay in their work. It was the factories that bound their society together. When we lost those manufacturing jobs we replaced them with a welfare system that provided the basics of food, water, heat—but what it didn’t do was provide anything to support pride, values, emotional well-being.”

“I look at the way a lot of businesses are run and I think: that’s pure greed! Why did you shut that factory and move your production to China? You live in a beautiful house and make a profit of 10 million per year. How much money do you need? Take less, do something better.”

“British fashion is littered with private equity buy-outs and management milking once loved brands.”

Patrick Grant is not anti-capitalist but he feels the British model suits profiteers: “We have a model of capitalism that’s largely based on shareholders removed from the

communities that make the clothes. Their emotional investment is much smaller than, say in Germany, where you find workers represented at board level, and Italy, where there’s a lot more family ownership and there is no way they would ever shift production from their hometown.”

He makes clothes in England, but his firm, he says, will never be a huge business.

A case in France

‘Merci Patron!’ [Thanks Boss] is a new film making a name for itself in France. It tells the true story of a couple made redundant by a Louis Vuitton firm in northern France; the couple got 40,000 euros compensation four years later, and

more besides, thanks to a series of coups by the film maker, François Ruffin. Le Monde’s review quoted Michael Moore, Frank Capra and other celebrities in the same breath as ‘Merci Patron’.

Along the way, we learn that a Kenzo suit, sold for 1000 euros, cost 90 euros to make in Poix du Nord; the profit margin being too small, the plant was delocated to Poland, leaving behind a mass of unemployed.

This is not inevitable, it’s a political decision, is Ruffin’s demonstration.

The poster for the film says: Thanks Boss! The Sting, Class Struggle Style.”



SOCIAL CLEANSING

Up with the drawbridge
down with the portcullis
close the fridge
screw back the top of the coke bottle
to keep in the fizz
they said an Englishman’s home
was his castle
it was something he was entitled to
without any hassle
then came the right-to-buy
and that property-owning
democracy
became the great lie
when speculators became the
autocracy
it’s out of good council areas

and down the road
to a less salubrious area
for your new abode
and maybe even further afield
far out of London to Birmingham
to which you must yield
away from friends and schools
a social pogrom
it’s the slow demise of council
housing
a Mrs Thatcher-Blair hermaphrodite
arousing
with premeditated apologies
at their government’s privatising
methodology.

Wilson John Haire.

Industrial Democracy and Social Partnership

Speech of Mark Langhammer (ATL) to the Seminar Series of the seminar “Communicating and Implementing Industrial Democracy and Social Partnership run by the PESGB (Philosophy of Education Society, GB) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in London on the 29th January 2016.

Today’s seminar, on industrial democracy, would be an important topic for the trade union movement at any time. It is more important that we reflect on the challenges facing ‘Partnership working’ in the midst of the current economic crisis – a crisis of financialised capitalism. With our productive economy in crisis, the generation of “laissez faire” in freefall, the State as an economic player could be back in fashion.

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I learnt about industrial democracy, in principle and in practice, whilst attending Methodist College, a prestigious grammar school in south Belfast. Our “A” level politics teacher was Methodist lay preacher, David Bleakley, [A] who was best known as a stalwart of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. He was elected to the old, Unionist run Stormont Parliament – winning the East Belfast seat in 1958 at the 3rd attempt. He stayed in Stormont until 1965. When the bubble went up in 1969, it became impossible for Labour people to get elected, although Bleakley still got around 40% of the vote in the 1970 Westminster elections and was appointed as Minister for Community Relations in the Faulkner government in 1971 – the last gasp of Stormont before direct rule in 1972.

In class, David took us “off piste” – off curriculum – in a way that couldn’t happen today. Industrial democracy and the Commission of Lord Bullock was one issue that animated him. And it animated us, too, because it was all around us. We learnt all about Bullock, the view of the trades unions, the influence of the CPGB, the Plowden Inquiry, the views of Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon, Chapple, Scargill... We knew all about Ken Coates, the opportunism of Neil Kinnock, all of it. It was our introduction to an orientation within British trade unionism – a blocking or negative instinct – to collaborative

economic partnership. Historically, as I will argue today, this instinct has not delivered for our movement.

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As well as through David Bleakley, I learnt about British industrial culture in work. Methodist College lay between the Malone Road (Belfast’s posh area) and the working class Lisburn Road, with its loyalist strongholds in the “Village” and Sandy Row areas. In those days, it was possible to get a job by just walking around and calling into the myriad of engineering businesses in those areas. I walked out of school in my blazer at the end of the 1977 lower sixth school term and walked straight into work in the Ulster Tin Box factory. They made biscuit tins for Jacobs and oil drums for Duckhams. It was an old fashioned production line factory.

Within five minutes of starting work, I joined the union, the T&GWU from memory. It wasn’t a choice, you were told! And, within that same plant, you had the two broad traditions within trade unionism. You had the “fuck the bosses” tradition – adversarial by instinct – that tradition that had, effectively, seen off Bullock. But you also had, less often, from time to time, a collaborative instinct, which kicked in when the bosses were under time pressure (and over a barrel) to complete an order.

At the Ulster Tin Box Factory, within half an hour, the shop steward handed me a Red Top paper and said “Take a shite break!” The factory shop steward, then, was a very powerful figure. I said “I don’t need a shite.” He looked me in the eyes and said “Are you fuckin stupid, kid, you’re on a shite break!!” It wasn’t a question. “And don’t come back for at least 15 minutes” My going to the toilet meant boxes backed up and production had to halt. The production line got a break which, handy enough, could be pinned on a

callow, naïve, 17 year old who didn’t know the score.

Another way to mess up things was to “stop” the machine. Again, the shop steward would demand “Stop your machine, kid” The drill then was to slide your box into the machine and then, just when you kick-started the machine, to skew the box leftwards – which had the effect of temporarily wrecking the machine. With demarcation agreements rigidly in place, the machine engineer had to be called. Again, 15 minutes respite, whilst the production line came to a halt. Out came the cigarettes, or the mail-order books which many of the women in the factory ran as side-lines.

Whenever the bosses were late with an order, or against time pressures or late delivery penalties, the union would negotiate either overtime or a “job and finish”. Another side came out then. The workers didn’t take shite breaks then, the time was theirs to lose – they were in control of the productive process, calling the shots, and they became co-operative, ingenious even, to get the order finished. You saw a step change in productivity.

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The only recent example of co-determination in English industrial relations was probably the Social Partnership in Education. Some you here will know – or have heard of – the late Eamonn O’Kane (he passed away at 58 in 2004). As many here will know, Eamonn O’Kane was both President and General Secretary of our sister union the NASUWT. In Northern Ireland, he was also known as an activist within the civil rights movement, involved with the Peoples Democracy in the late 60s, the Newtownabbey Labour party in North Belfast and, subsequently, with the British and Irish Communist Organisation – a political tendency and publishing house, with which I have had a long association.

I was campaigning for Eamon (as a Labour Representation candidate) in the 1989 European election when he secured a national role in the NASUWT. Effectively, he dropped out of the race and I was stuck as the replacement, sacrificial, candidate. For those that knew him, Eamonn was a political writer and thinker of some depth and flexibility. Eamonn was also central to the negotiation, with New Labour's David Miliband, of the 2003 "National Agreement" in England and Wales.[B] This established a rare form of social partnership in Education which was, for close to 10 years, unambiguously successful for all parties in Britain – unions, government, teachers and schools. Eamonn's grasp of the political and trade union context was vital in establishing and embedding the Social Partnership (neither was Miliband wedded to old Labour and trade union mores) .

At the time, the education partnership was the only substantively "corporate" arrangement in the British industrial relations landscape - outside of the industrial relations practices of some foreign owned firms. This Social Partnership, a fragile outbreak within our movement, was stamped out by Gove early in the Tories first term. Gove, of course, knew well what he was doing. Social Partnership, of course, is not just anathema to Tories, it can be a dirty word in our movement, too – and I'll come back to this in a second.

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ATL participated consciously in the education social partnership. Under Mary Bousted, the instinct towards involvement in the work process – a European instinct - is part of our union's philosophy, our "DNA" if you wish. "Done with", not "done to" is an ATL watchword.

ATL have long thought that the decline in trade union membership is not related to having more benign employment and union laws in place. Of course, the Trade Union bill will see further diminution, and won't help. However, the New Labour era from 1997-2010 saw moderately benign legislation in individual employment

law, but union membership continued to decline in Great Britain. It may have picked up a little since the Crash, but the point holds – that public policy is not the key factor in union decline or resurrection.[C]

The modern economy has changed - with some highly trumpeted, high autonomy, high skilled jobs – or "MacJobs", but with many more low-discretion, low-value added, service and care sector "McJobs". The labour market has polarized to a great degree, with fewer "middling" jobs – the 'blue collar' skilled trades, technical or white collar associate professional jobs which were the very backbone of craft trade unionism. This trend is evident in Northern Ireland too, where relatively skilled full-time (and largely male) manufacturing jobs are fast disappearing to be replaced with part-time, often low-skilled (and largely female) service and care sector jobs. The imperative for trade unions is that we adapt to these changed circumstances.

Within the teaching profession, we know that the terms of the debate are at least as much about the quality of work, involvement in the work, and the quality of life, as about pay. Long hours, high workload, ridiculous levels of accountability, scrutiny and measurement. Ceaseless examination, testing, reporting and recording – a high incidence of stress, and poor management cultures - these are top of any casework league tables that ATL deal with.

Now, we are seeing wider moves towards standardisation and de-professionalization not just of teaching but of other professions including law, opticians, pharmacists and medical profession is seeing a 'Taylorism' in previously rewarding, high-discretion jobs. We find that traditional trade union adversarial posturing, and the rhetoric of "struggle" and strife simply doesn't connect with the modernity of our members lives in today's world. Our members are however, resentful about widening inequality - that middle and low earners are bearing a disproportionate tax burden, with rich corporates and super wealthy individuals

ducking their tax responsibilities, with the tax gap estimated by some as close to £123 billion! [D]

Our members usually care more about "getting on" than "getting even" and have little appetite for fighting ideological battles. Our members want a union that is aspirational (a fraught word, I know) and modern, not stuck in the mud. Notwithstanding this desire to "get on", there is a general understanding that the relationship between individual and employer often remains an unequal one. And, whilst the public perception of trade unions is not overwhelmingly positive, there remains a strong, innate instinct to seek collective solutions to problems in the workplace.

*

Union membership, however, has gone up in societies, such as Belgium, Denmark and Sweden – societies in which unions are implicated directly in running important social welfare systems. Union membership remains highly valued in Germany where unions are a part of the intricate "co-determination" system of industrial and economic planning. And Union membership has stabilized in Ireland where a social pact, through successive National Agreements, has entrenched the role of unions in national life since the late 1980s.

Taking responsibility for running things – this has to be our direction of travel!

*

The founder of British Socialism as a mass ideology was Robert Blatchford. He began with the ideal of restoring an English way of life that was being destroyed (Merrie England). But he soon came to see that the standard of life of the English workers, poor though it was in many respects, would become much worse if the fruits of Empire were lost. He therefore became an Imperialist and a strong supporter of the dominance of the Royal Navy in the world. I think the slogan, "My country right or wrong" was attributed to Blatchford.

Blatchford understood the dangers of England moving away from production, being unable to feed itself,

for a start, and (on a “There is no Alternative” basis) set in place a course followed by the socialist and Labour movements since - which has relied on England’s role in the world, rather than self-sufficiency, as the best strategy to follow.

That strategy, I believe, has had fundamental and lasting impacts on the “stony ground” that we all feel today in trying to promote an industrial strategy, a productive economy and industrial democracy. It is within that context that I would like to look at some lost opportunities for the trade unions over the past 70 years.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES

In Britain, there have been significant opportunities in the post war period for the union movement to take a strategic role at the heart of running the state and the economy. After the 2nd World War, Ernest Bevin offered the TUC a central role in administering the National Insurance system.[E] I learned this from John Monks, formerly General Secretary to the TUC and then the ETUC. The minutes and records of this are in the TUC Library archive. [F] Incredibly, the TUC found itself to be too busy with other things – too busy, in effect, to take responsibility for running the country! Had it taken up Bevin’s offer, the TUC would have put practical trade unionism at the heart the British social and economic life – central to peoples’ lives – and “locked in” the Unions to an influential position for generations.

When, by the late 60s, the post war welfare and full-employment consensus was running out of steam, Barbara Castle sought to harness the enormous ‘negative’ or ‘blocking’ power of the trade union movement to positive effect. She wanted Unions to contribute to running the economy, but Castle’s “In Place of Strife” failed.[G]

Edward Heath also failed, in proposing a tripartite, partnership style corporatism in the early 70s. And in the late 70’s the Bullock Report on Industrial Democracy (which I learnt about under David Bleakley) sought to put trade unions in an indispensable position in every Board Room in the

country, private or public.[H]

In the late 70s, we rejected all of these possibilities – rejected Bevin, Castle, Heath, and Bullock. In doing so, we opened the door to the neo-liberal Thatcher experiment which has only just run out of steam itself. In the late 70s, we thought we could go on as a simple, negative, blocking force. We couldn’t! The failure of our union movement to take responsibility for the economic logjam of the 70s forced the electorate to clip our wings. And our movement has become peripheral in the interim.

Nor has the UK’s membership of the Common Market (EEC, now EU) helped the union movement. Britain’s orientation in Europe after Heath has been disruptive, focussed on what Churchill called the “unconscious tradition” of balancing powers. In particular, after the fall of Communism in 1988-90, Britain’s key role was to subvert the deepening of Europe, (the desired path of Kohl’s Germany and Mitterrand’s France) in favour of a loose, shallow, liberal free trade zone. Who, today, can say Delors “Social Europe” won out? It didn’t. To the current day, Britain’s role in Europe has successfully disabled movement towards the Fiscal Compact necessary to defend the Euro currency. The issue, however, is not that we should “beat ourselves up” about past failures – but that we learn from them to take advantage of the current flux.

THE IRISH UNION TRADITION

In finishing, perhaps the understanding that I can bring today is that the Irish trade union tradition is different. In Ireland, we are coming up to the various centenary celebrations – the Battle of the Somme, a key centenary for the Protestant community in particular. There is also the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. In a real sense, trade union orientation in Ireland, derives from the Easter Rising in a fundamental way.

Irish trade unionism, through Connolly’s Citizen Army, played a role in the setting up of the state – and it rightly feels proprietorial about it. Irish trade unionism sees no contradiction

in ensuring that the institutions of the Irish state work well. For instance, that the orientation of S.I.P.T.U. (the old Irish T&GWU) still consciously derives from its sense of itself as the trade union ‘wing’ of the national movement.

Charles Haughey is a discredited figure these days in Ireland – widely seen as a venal and corrupt figure. However, under Haughey, Albert Reynolds and Ray McSharry and Fianna Fail, the programmes for National reconstruction from the late 1980s onwards was a conscious and thoughtful partnership. Through Haughey, a generation of Irish civil servants went back and forth to Europe, particularly to see how the German system worked. The Irish Social Partnership derived from that (so, too, did the initial Northern Irish peace funding processes) Ireland’s orientation, briefly, departed from the shadow of the UK and plotted an independent course. Ireland became a partner in Europe, notably to Kohl and Mitterrand.

And, through all the years of Social Partnership – when National Partnership Agreements required a vote at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) - it was the British head-quartered unions who voted against, almost without fail. Part of our “British” problem is that inflexible, leftist, ideology plays a part in holding us back from practical ‘workaday’ solutions which put working people in the driving seat.

Equally, however, our view of the British State is different.

The British state pre-dates the trade union movement. Indeed, it pre-dates British democracy. In Britain, we – as unions - feel that the state is somehow “not our business” - it is about something else – about a wider role in the world - once an empire, latterly an unwise global adventurism - through financial speculation and foreign intervention. Either way, our trade union movement has not felt that our role was to second guess the State – and not to “run things”.

*

The relevance of today is that we don’t often discuss such things. But the time is now. In every crisis, there’s

an opportunity. The economic crisis wrought by the failure of “casino capitalism” gives us an opportunity. Despite the return of Cameron and Osborne, they don’t have the answers. Get the City back up and running, running the same scams, with inequality widening exponentially. It’s the same old tunes, and it won’t work. It may not seem so, but things are fluid now, in flux. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to make trade unionism relevant to the new world that we build. But we can only do so, if we understand the past, and can orientate clearly within a changed - utterly changed - environment.

Looking forward, for current solutions we could do worse than to look North, to Scotland. The Mather Report, “Working Better Together” in 2014 provides a template that will – given fair wind – move Scottish industrial relations away from the British adversarial tradition and towards to co-determination and social partnership of Scandinavia. Unlike Northern Ireland, Scotland doesn’t yet have control over employment law – but it will. And it’s answers are very encouraging.

We can, perhaps, pick that up in discussion later.
Thank you.

NOTES / References

[A] See more at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bleakley

[B] The 2003 National Agreement on “Raising Standards, Tackling Workload” introduced a new industrial relations framework for education in England and Wales. Ref DfES0172/2003 <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DfES+0172+2003>

[C] This argument was first set out by David Coats: Raising Lazarus, the future for organized labour: Fabian Society Pamphlet 618, 2005 ISBN 0 7163 0618 2

[D] See Richard Murphy in Director of Tax Research LLP www.taxresearch.org.uk

[E] Details of the Minutes of the meetings where Bevin’s offer was discussed are available from the TUC archive held at Imperial College London.

[F] <http://www.unionhistory.info/about.php>

[G] In Place of Strife: a Policy for Industrial Relations was the title of a government White Paper which appeared in January 1969. It was largely the work of Barbara Castle, the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity (although it was her husband Ted Castle that thought up the catchy title), which sought to establish a new legislative framework for trades unions and employers.

[H] The Bullock Report (1975): A Language for Life – Report of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the Chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock FBA. London HMSO 1975 ISBN 0 11 270326 7 Ironically, one of the members of Bullock’s Commission, Sir George Bain, has had a highly influential role in Northern Ireland Education since, within Queen University and as author of the 2007 Bain Report on sustainable schools.

Letter to The Editor - Ghurkhas

I am surprised at Peter Tobin’s sympathy for the Ghurkha (*Labour Affairs*, March, 2016) and his mentioning of Joanna Lumley who also campaigns on their behalf. Her father was a British Army officer during the suppression of the Chinese population in Malaya. Ghurkhas were used extensively in that British colonial campaign where they carried out many atrocities of mutilation. There is one notorious photograph of a Royal Marine holding up the severed heads of two Chinese teenagers, male and female. The photo also shows their missing teeth probably battered out before death. This has since been thought to be the work of Ghurkhas, rather than that done by the marine in the picture. This photograph was taken by a British soldier who promptly sent it to the *Daily*

Worker about 1950.

During my apprenticeship in the Belfast shipyard I worked with a former professional British Army soldier. He mentions the Ghurkha as being used for human shields for the average white soldier during WW2. (though he doesn’t say it in those words) He had seen German soldiers mutilated beyond recognition as a human being. This disgusted him and made him eventually loathe the British Army for allowing this to happen. Some Ghurkhas have since apologised to Germany and Japan for what their comrades did during WW2, beyond the call of duty.

Wilson John Haire



By 1952, however, the *Daily Worker*, the British communist paper, was able to devote an entire front page to a grisly picture of a Royal Marine commando fighting in the Malayan Emergency holding up two severed heads, a woman’s in his right hand and a man’s in his left. The woman’s front teeth had been bashed out.
The government’s reaction was to denounce the picture as a fake and a “communist trick”. The rest of Fleet Street ignored it. After two weeks the colonial secretary, responsible for Malaya, admitted to the House of Commons that the picture was genuine. The heads had been severed “for identification purposes”.
It was left to Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, the dominant military figure in the emergency, to say what is obvious to anyone who has ever taken part in combat: “War in the jungle is not a nice thing.”

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Triumph of the Trump

Lots of people are surprised at the rise of Donald Trump. Myself, I'm surprised that the rival elements in the current Republican Party held together for so long.

From Nixon onwards, the Republicans try to win the votes of voters who used to be solid Southern Democrats. Racist and socially conservative, but strongly for welfare and secure jobs. Mostly for people like themselves, but they did see that less types of humans should have something, if not the same. Talk of human equality offended them. The Democratic Party under Kennedy and Johnson undermining existing inequalities made them Republicans.

The trick was to keep them voting Republican, while taking away welfare and job security. To give them as little as possible in terms of racism and social conservatism. The Republican elite also had to please a wider non-Christian and non-white world. And immigrants, often non-white, were useful to the new Overclass. The poorer people who voted Republican were hostile to knowledge: increasingly unwanted.

The deep hostility and contempt that the Republican elite must have felt has now seen the light of day among the more ideological Neo-Cons. It's now open how the Republican elite hate many of their own voters:

"Now the reality is it's quite true that what Trump is selling is not going to do much to help the communities in question. Trump is not a responsible or sophisticated thinker about public policy.

"But these are essays making the case that suffering white working-class communities don't deserve help of any kind. That's a correct application of the strict principles of free market ideology, but it's also a signpost of how American political discourse

has changed since the end of the Cold War. If you said in 1966, or even 1986, 'Well, strict application of free market principles implies the death of a huge number of traditional American communities and massive suffering among their working-class residents,' then elites — including conservative elites — would say to themselves, 'Well, then, these people are going to stage a communist revolution.'

"It was taken for granted that the governing class had an obligation — a practical one, if not a moral one — to actually make the system work for average people. Over the past 20 years, that idea has been increasingly abandoned on the American right."¹

The US Republican elite always despised those people. Nixon harmed them with tax breaks for the rich. Reagan went further, playing the part of an ignorant redneck to get elected. Led to power an elite who were never genuine conservatives. Right-wing, but also busy taking an axe to their own roots, thinking this was clever. *'I am very superior and the inferior will see that I am best for them'*.

"The modern Republican Party is an awkward contraption that harnesses a politics of white ethno-nationalism to a policy agenda dominated by Ayn Rand-inflected anti-statism. Donald Trump has exploited the wedge between the party's voters and the ideologists of its master class, placing the latter in an awkward spot. In the face of this threat, there are many possible responses for an advocate of traditional Goldwater-Reagan conservatism to make. The most bracingly honest may come from *National Review's* Kevin Williamson, whose antipathy for Trump has expanded to include Trump's white working-class supporters."²

That it lasted so long was the surprise. Their best thinkers are former

leftists who now have a mindless admiration for the rich and powerful. They were no good at coping with awkward realities as leftists: they got worse as renegades. But they know enough to sound plausible, and rich people are usually mediocre thinkers outside of their own immediate area of business.

New Right policies have been anti-social: destroying the real basis of US power and wealth. Big corporations prosper by shipping jobs overseas. Vast fortunes are made from financial gambling and speculation. Since 'efficient markets' are a myth, speculators are *'about as useful as so many tapeworms'*.³

And now it may be falling apart. Right-wing parties cultivate resentment and ignorance; they are at risk from people who can cultivate it better.

Trump broke the rules by appealing much more openly and blatantly to such people. He may have to give them some of what they are after. He's also closest to the old norm for US presidents — white males, late middle-aged to elderly, of North-West European origin. The other major candidates are a woman, a Jewish socialist and a Latino of Cuban origin. The last survivor of a string of failed Republican-elite candidates, Rubio, is also a Latino of Cuban origin.

"The basic idea is that authority is justified by morality (the strict father version), and that, in a well-ordered world, there should be (and traditionally has been) a moral hierarchy in which those who have traditionally dominated should dominate. The hierarchy is: God above Man, Man above Nature, The Disciplined (Strong) above the Undisciplined (Weak), The Rich above the Poor, Employers above Employees, Adults above Children, Western culture above other cultures,

Our Country above other countries. The hierarchy extends to: Men above women, Whites above Nonwhites, Christians above nonChristians, Straights above Gays.”⁴

Was this a bad year for a Republican candidates? Hardly. Elections where the incumbent President has to step down and the Vice-President is not running are ideal for a rival party. The Republican elite offered their best, and their best was none too good. Had never been that good, but now the electorate are harder to fool. (But still unable to choose coherently.)

Interestingly, Trump is signalling a possible winding down of the US role. He says openly that the Iraq War was a mistake. He thinks he could do business with Putin. A Trump presidency may be the least bad way for the US hegemony to wind down without a world war.

Sanders Revives US Socialism

Ignorant and self-defeating populism that saw the Confederate States of America as ‘the people’ against government tyranny has messed up the USA. So too has similar nonsense from people who genuinely favour mutli-racialism, but swallow the other delusions of anti-state populism. The *Hunger Games* fantasy-films tap into this: central government is the villain.

All of this is a remnant of pre-socialist radicalism. Radicalism that did liberate, but exhausted its useful role in the 19th century. But the two main parties in the early 20th century USA were each a mix of progressive and conservative elements. Republicans favoured ideological Individualism. The USA saved itself from the Great Depression by socialist measures, but Roosevelt’s New Deal was dependent on Southern Democrats. In a hard-fought battle with those who were determined to strangle the society rather than change their thinking, it was best not to call the measures socialist. Racial and sexual equality has usually been part of Socialism, and Southern Democrats would not be associated with it. But they had the common-sense to see that the state must revive a system that had clearly stopped working.

If the USA had Proportional Representation, it would have a substantial socialist party. Likewise if one of the major parties had collapsed, as the Liberals did in Britain. As things were, the merits of

Moderate Socialism got forgotten about. Reagan tapped into deep beliefs when he told the people that the government was the problem and not a solution. Too many of the left shared this belief that the government was the problem rather than the solution, not understanding just what the government was doing for progressive causes.

Viewing the government as the problem rather than the solution allowed for a smooth demolition of traditional family values, without any elected politician appearing to favour this. This suited the loose-living hedonistic Republican elite, and many others found it acceptable. Liberation By Greed was the false promises of the Reagan /Thatcher era: yet it worked OK for those who weren’t either authentic conservatives or ideological socialists.

Worked for individuals, but not for society. The secret of Western capitalism is *private enterprise*, not some magic made by market forces. If a lot of people try things their own way, most will be wrong but a few will be brilliantly right. Science works that way, even though most major scientists are state employees. Literature works that way, even though most writers earn less per hour than a run-of-the-mill office worker. China works that way: Deng allowed private profit and greedy selfishness, but retained the government’s right to ignore or override market forces. Russia under Yeltsin trusted to market forces and it was a disaster.

After more than thirty-five years, it’s evident that Market Freedom does not improve economic growth, which is everywhere below the levels achieved from the 1940s to 1970s. Even the ‘disastrous’ 1970s were better overall than any decade since.⁵ And there has been an unhealthy accumulation of wealth among the richest 1%.

Now it seems that many young people in the USA have noticed that Moderate Socialism worked fine when the US tried it, and still works fine in much of Western Europe. At the time of writing (28th March), Sanders still has a chance of winning. He’d need to win New York and California, where Clinton currently leads, but he’s pulled off similar victories before now. And even if he’s not chosen, he’s still changed US politics.

China Plays Safe

At the time, the West viewed the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests as possibly the overthrow of the Chinese Communist Party. When it failed, the Western media

preferred to let the public believe that it was brutality that happened for no particular reason. Mostly. The *1990 Britannica Book of the Year*⁶, explicitly linked it to the 1989 overthrow of European Leninism outside the Soviet Union. Chris Patten also blabs about it in his 1998 book *East and West*,⁷ after trying and failing to use Hong Kong to make trouble for People’s China. (At least he failed at the time: some of his work has born fruit in the shape of protests that slightly weaken China while doing Hong Kong no good at all, since it is utterly dependent on its link with the mainland.) But these are rare exceptions: most Western books present it as something that happened for no particular reason: a piece of general malice. Not as China’s first strong and successful system since the Opium Wars fighting for survival.

Since China didn’t owe money to the outside world and since it produced vast amounts of cheap manufactures that the rest of the world needed, they rode out that crisis. And the poverty and degradation suffered by Russia after 1991 convinced many Chinese who were dissident in 1989 that China had a narrow escape. But a minority have learned nothing and forgotten nothing:

“A New York-based Chinese activist has said that China’s authorities have detained three members of his family in connection with an open letter calling for the resignation of president Xi Jinping.

“Speaking from New York, Wen Yunchao said his parents and younger brother were ‘taken away’ by the authorities on Tuesday and have disappeared, days after the government ‘harassed’ his family over his suspected involvement in distributing the letter.

“Wen denied writing the online letter, which was signed by ‘a loyal Communist Party Member’ and circulated widely at the beginning of China’s parliament session this month. Wen also said he did not help distribute the letter, and had only linked to it on his Twitter account after the letter had been published by a Chinese news website.”⁸

Twitter links can go viral: everyone knows that. And it was potentially dangerous. A revolt against Party power by the National People’s Congress is one of two ways in which the current system could be overturned. (The other would be a military coup, or threat of a coup to intimidate the Politbureau.) The National People’s Congress is in theory the supreme body, China’s parliament – but in practice it does little. It elects the President, but the

current norm is for it to elect the General Secretary of the Communist Party, who in turn is indicated five years earlier by being the leading new members of the Politbureau Standing Committee. That's how Xi Jinping became the designated successor to Hu Jintao in 2007, displacing Li Keqiang who was believed to be Hu Jintao's choice. A similar process will happen in 2017 that should indicate who will succeed Xi in 2022. But it remains unknown who: nor can we be sure that the sensible system of replacing the top leaders every ten years will continue to run smoothly.

In an inherently tense political system, the Chinese leadership have to worry about the National People's Congress trying to exercise its nominal authority, as happened when Leninism collapsed in the Warsaw Pact countries. Those countries were mostly able to fall into the strong and welcoming arms of the European Union. Others were left out and failed: notably Former Yugoslavia and unhappy fragmented Ukraine. China seems even less likely to transform peacefully if it were tried now, rather than in maybe 20 or 40 years.

China avoided most of the turmoil that hit the world in the 2008 financial crisis. But it has a tricky task in moving beyond the highly successful export-led system than Deng Xiaoping created. It depended on a healthy global economy that could purchase cheap Chinese goods. But contrary to expectations, the New Right survived the disaster to their system and in Britain, managed to switch the blame to supposed excessive spending by the Labour government. There has been some revival of left-wing politics, but also a strong and more widespread growth in aggressive right-wing nationalism.

China's problem is that it can't export as much as it used to. The potential buyers are being squeezed by austerity:

"Chinese exports have seen their sharpest drop in almost seven years, adding to concerns over the health of the world's second largest economy.

"Exports dropped sharply by 25.4% from a year earlier, while imports fell 13.8%."

China still managed growth of nearly 7% last year, and hopes for at least 6.5% this year. But the pressure is there. People under pressure often react foolishly and make things worse. And China has to worry about the next US president getting aggressive – Hillary Clinton is at least as dangerous as Trump; she's always been more aggressive in foreign policy than Obama. So in a time of danger, tolerance of dissent has narrowed.

The Civil War in Islam

Daesh (ISIS) has killed far more Muslims than Westerners, but Western deaths get the big publicity. This very easily spills over into hostility to Muslims in general. And in turn feeds back and more Muslims opt for extremism.

It could all have been avoided. Back in 1990, Saddam Hussein would never have invaded Kuwait if he hadn't been left with vast debts from the war he waged against Iran on the West's behalf. He was still open to a settlement, but the West was determined to destroy him. Destroy him as they did destroy former allies who were now 'surplus to requirements': Ceausescu in Romania, Mobutu in Zaire / Congo, Suharto in Indonesia and the entire delicately-balanced federal state in Yugoslavia.¹⁰ Meantime Israel was allowed to ignore the Oslo Accords and continue with their suicidal intent of taking over the bulk of the West Bank: it includes places with great emotional significance for Jews and Christians, but also for Muslims and currently inhabited by Muslims who are not going to be moved easily.

The media pay far too little attention to the large majority of

Muslims who criticise many aspects of Western policy, but also reject terrorism as un-Islamic. They completely ignored a recent anti-Daesh march.¹¹ Of course this makes perfect sense if the aim is to empty Islam of all meaning. (And then only if the USA's globalisation was adequate to the task, which it is not.)

It turned out to be impossible to get rid of Saddam and the Iraqi Baath without also raising up their main foes, the Iranian-oriented Shia, which was unacceptable to the USA. Saddam was allowed to crush their first rebellion, after they took Bush Senior's call to revolt at face value. The leaders of the West then acted in a way typical of second-rate minds – if it failed once, do the same again but with more force. Vast sufferings were inflicted on all Iraqis, and finally the 9/11 attack by Islamists was used as an excuse to destroy secular Iraq.

All of this has further alienated Muslims, losing many who would more naturally have been pioneers of globalisation among Muslims:

"Hassane had a promising future. He had grown up on a council estate, and through hard work, the love and support from his family, and his own determination, had been on the cusp of realising his dream to be a doctor.

"He threw it all away for Isis and its vision of a pan-national state ruled by murder and sadism.

"Isis, as al-Qaida before it, has proven its ability to reach into the streets and Muslim communities of Britain, and tear away the country's young."¹²

That's one side – those who had a promising future. Becoming disgusted with US-led globalisation is hardly confined to Muslims. For instance Mel Gibson 'had it all' as a major Hollywood star, but found it empty and returned to his father's hard-line Roman Catholicism, with some accusations of anti-Semitism.

Lots of people are returning to 'the God of their father', but with Arabs there is now no major functional secular power to contain it. Destroying them as 'surplus to requirements' was the clever little scheme of the New Right, with the enthusiastic support of Tony Blair and New Labour.

The other side is petty criminals suddenly deciding to rise above a squalid life of crime and become Islamic martyrs: the suicide bombers of Paris and Brussels. "The Islamic State has legitimized their violent street credo"¹³ we're told. With Europe squeezed by austerity, it offers Muslims an unacceptably lowly place. *Of course* some find life not worth living on that basis. They were little rats, and became part of a great dragon.¹⁴

Websites

Previous *Newsnotes* can be found at the Labour Affairs website, <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/>. And at my own website, <https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/newsnotes-historic/>.

(Endnotes)

1 <http://www.vox.com/2016/3/15/11236618/trump-conservatives-working-class>

2 <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/03/conservatives-to-white-working-class-drop-dead.html#>

3 This phrase was used by George Orwell about the remnants of Britain's landowning class. Who in fact did some useful work preserving natural beauty, an issue Orwell ignored. For speculators it is much closer to the truth.

4 <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/03/secret-donald-trumps-success/>

5 For more on this, read "Kicking Away the Ladder" and "23 Things They

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Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

Jeremy Corbyn replied to the Chancellor's budget statement of 16 March. The following day John McDonnell outlined Labour's programme for economic recovery. Both Corbyn and McDonnell were constantly interrupted by Conservative Members. Relevant comments/questions have been included.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):

The Budget the Chancellor has just delivered is actually the culmination of six years of his failures. It is a Budget—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):

Order. This corner of the Chamber by the Chair is not some kind of fair-ground attraction. We expect courtesy from both sides of the House whoever is speaking. I want to hear the Leader of the Opposition and, as I said before, I know that the public in this country want to hear what the Opposition have to say as well.

Jeremy Corbyn:

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a recovery built on sand and a Budget

of failure. The Chancellor has failed on the budget deficit, failed on debt, failed on investment, failed on productivity, failed on the trade deficit, failed on the welfare cap and failed to tackle inequality in this country. Today he has announced that growth is revised down last year, this year and every year he has forecast. Business investment is revised down and Government investment is revised down. It is a very good thing that the Chancellor is blaming the last Government—he was the Chancellor in the last Government.

This Budget has unfairness at its very core, paid for by those who can least afford it. The Chancellor could not have made his priorities clearer. While half a million people with disabilities are losing over £1 billion in personal independence payments, corporation tax is being cut and billions handed out in tax cuts to the very wealthy. The Chancellor has said that he has to be judged on his record and by the tests he set himself. Six years ago, he promised a balanced structural current budget by 2015. It is now 2016—there is still no balanced budget. In 2010, he and the Prime Minister claimed, "We're all in it together." The Chancellor promised

this House that the richest would "pay more than the poorest, not just in terms of cash but as a proportion of income as well."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 179.]

So let me tell him how that has turned out. The Institute for Fiscal Studies—an independent organisation—found that "the poorest have" suffered "the greatest proportionate losses." The Prime Minister told us recently that he was delivering "a strong economy" and "a sound plan"—but strong for who? Strong to support who, and sound for who, when 80% of the public spending cuts have fallen on women in our society? This Budget could have been a chance to demonstrate a real commitment to fairness and equality; yet again, the Chancellor has failed.

Five years ago—they were great words—the Chancellor promised "a Britain carried aloft by the march of the makers"—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 966.] Soaring rhetoric, yet despite the resilience, ingenuity and hard work of manufacturers, the manufacturing sector is now smaller that it was eight years ago. Last year, he told the Conservative conference, "We are the builders", but ever since then the construction industry has been stagnating. This is the record of a Conservative Chancellor who has failed to balance the books, failed to balance out the pain and failed to rebalance our economy. It is no wonder that his close friend, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), is complaining that "we were told for the next seven years things were looking great. Within one month of that forecast, we're now being told that things are difficult".

The gulf between what the Conservative Government expect from the wealthiest and what they demand from ordinary British taxpayers could not be

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4 <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/03/secret-donald-trumps-success/>

5 For more on this, read "*Kicking Away the Ladder*" and "*23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*" by South Korean economist Ha-Joon Chang

6 Article by Steven I. Levine, pages 438 & 440. Quoted in *Problems* 24.

7 Pages 16 to 18, paperback edition of 1999

8 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/26/chinese-activists-family-taken-away-over-letter-calling-for-xi-jinping-to-quit>

9 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-35751586>

10 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/confession-of-a-cia-agent-they-gave-us-millions-to-dismember-yugoslavia/5492008>

11 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslim-anti-isis-march-not-covered-by-mainstream-media-outlets-say-organisers-a6765976.html>

12 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/23/moped-plot-students-promising-future-jihad>

13 <http://www.vox.com/2016/3/22/11285254/brussels-attacks-isis-jihadism>

14 This is based on Hitler's insight into the appeal of socialism, one which he successfully adapted with Nazism

greater. The “mate’s rates” deals for big corporations on tax deals is something they will be for ever remembered for. This is a Chancellor who has produced a Budget for hedge fund managers more than for small businesses. This is a Government—*[Interruption.]* This is a Government who stood by as the steel industry bled. Skills, output and thousands of very skilled jobs have been lost, and communities ruined and damaged, by the inaction of the Government. The Chancellor set himself a £1 trillion export target; it is going to be missed by a lot more than a country mile. Instead of trade fuelling growth, as he promised, it is now holding back growth. He talked of the northern powerhouse. We now discover that 97% of the senior staff in the northern powerhouse have been outsourced to London—to the south. For all his talk of the northern powerhouse, the north-east accounts for less than 1% of Government infrastructure pipeline projects in construction. For all his rhetoric, there has been systematic under-investment in the north.

Across the country, local authorities—councils—are facing massive problems, with a 79% cut in their funding. Every library that has been closed, every elderly person left without proper care, and every swimming pool with reduced opening hours or closed altogether is a direct result of the Government underfunding our local authorities and councils. Far from presiding over good-quality employment, he is the Chancellor who has presided over under-employment and insecurity, with nearly—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker:

Order. Certain people are testing my patience, so just think what your constituents are thinking out there as well. I want to hear the Leader of the Opposition and I expect you to hear the Leader of the Opposition. If you do not want to hear him, I am sure the Tea Room awaits. Perhaps there will be a phone call for Mr Hoare if he keeps shouting.

Jeremy Corbyn:

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Security comes from knowing what your income is and knowing where

your job is. If you are one of those nearly 1 million people on a zero-hours contract, you do not know what your income is: you do not have that security. We have the highest levels of in-work poverty on record and the largest number of people without security. They need regular wages that can end poverty and can bring about real security in their lives. Logically, low-paid jobs do not bring in the tax revenues that the Chancellor tells us he needs to balance his books. Household borrowing is once again being relied on to drive growth. Risky unsecured lending is growing at its fastest rate for the past eight years, and that is clearly not sustainable.

The renewables industry is vital to the future of our economy and our planet—indeed, our whole existence. It has been targeted for cuts, with thousands of jobs lost in the solar panel production industry. The Prime Minister, as we discussed earlier at Prime Minister’s Question Time, promised “the greenest Government ever”—here again, an abject failure. Science spending is also down, by £1 billion compared with 2010.

Home ownership is down under this Conservative Government. A whole generation is locked out of any prospect of owning their own home. This is the Chancellor who believes that a starter home costing £450,000 is affordable. It might be for some of his friends and for some Conservative Members, but not for those people who are trying to save for a deposit because they cannot get any other kind of house.

We have heard promises of garden cities before. Two years ago, the Chancellor pledged a garden city of 15,000 homes in Ebbsfleet, and many cheered that. His Ministers have been very busy ever since then—they have made 30 Ebbsfleet announcements, and they have managed to build 368 homes in Ebbsfleet. That is 12 homes for every press release. We obviously need a vast increase in press releases in order to get any homes built in Ebbsfleet, or indeed anywhere else.

While we welcome the money that will be put forward to tackle

homelessness, it is the product of under-investment, underfunding of local authorities, not building enough council housing and not regulating the private rented sector. That is what has led to this crisis. We need to tackle the issue of homelessness by saying that everybody in our society deserves a safe roof over their head.

Child poverty is forecast to rise every year in this Parliament. What a damning indictment of this Government, and what a contrast to the last Labour Government, who managed to lift almost 1 million children out of poverty. Eighty-one per cent of the tax increases and benefit cuts are falling on women, and the 19% gender pay gap persists. Despite the Chancellor’s protestations, it is a serious indictment that women are generally paid less than men for doing broadly similar work. It will require a Labour Government to address that.

The Government’s own social mobility commissioner said that “there is a growing sense...that Britain’s best days are behind us rather than ahead”, as the next generation expects to be worse off than the last. The Chancellor might have said a great deal about young people, but he failed to say anything about the debt levels that so many former students have; the high rents that young people have to pay; the lower levels of wages that young people get; and the sense of injustice and insecurity that so many young people in this country face and feel every day. It will again require a Labour Government to harness the enthusiasms, talent and energy of the young people of this country.

Investing in public services is vital to people’s wellbeing—I think we are all agreed on that, or at least I hope we are—yet every time the Chancellor fails, he cuts services, cuts jobs, sells assets and further privatises. That was very clear when we looked at the effects of the floods last year. Flood defences were cut by 27%. People’s homes in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria were ruined because of his Government’s neglect of river basin management and the flood defences that are so necessary.

Obviously, we welcome any money that is now going into flood defences, but I hope that that money will also be accompanied by a reversal of the cuts in the fire service that make it so difficult for our brilliant firefighters to protect people in their homes, and a reversal of the cuts in the Environment Agency that make it so hard for those brilliant engineers to protect our towns and cities, and for those local government workers who performed so brilliantly during the crisis in December and January in those areas that were flooded.

Our education service invests in people. It is a vital motor for the future wealth of this country, so why has there been a 35% drop in the adult skills budget under this Government? People surely need the opportunity to learn, and they should not have to go into debt in order to develop skills from which we as a community entirely benefit.

On the Chancellor's announcement yesterday, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that turning schools into academies boosts performance. There is nothing in the Budget to deal with the real issues of teacher shortage, the school place crisis and ballooning class sizes.

The Chancellor spoke at length about the issue of ill health among young children and the way in which sugar is consumed at such grotesque levels in society. I agree with him and welcome what he said. I am sure he will join me in welcoming the work done by many Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), and by Jamie Oliver in helping to deal with the dreadful situation with children's health. If we as a society cannot protect our children from high levels of sugar and all that goes with that, including later health crises of cancer and diabetes, we as a House will have failed the nation. I support the Chancellor's proposals on sugar, and I hope all other Members do, too.

There is an issue, however, that faces the national health service: the deficit has widened to its highest level on record, waiting times are up and the NHS is in a critical condition. Hospital after hospital faces serious financial problems and is working out what to sell in order to balance its books. Our NHS should have the resources to concentrate on the health needs of the people; it should not have to get rid of resources in order to survive. The Public Accounts Committee reported only yesterday that NHS finances have "deteriorated at a severe and rapid pace".

I did not detect much in this Budget that is going to do much to resolve that crisis. The Chancellor has also cut public health budgets, mental health budgets and adult social care. Earlier this month the Government forced through a £30 per week cut to disabled employment and support allowance claimants—*[Interruption.]*.

Last week we learned that 500,000 people will lose up to £150 per week due to cuts to personal independence payments. I simply ask the Chancellor: if he can finance his Budget giveaways to different sectors, why can he not fund the need for dignity for the disabled people of this country? The Chancellor said in the autumn statement that he had protected police budgets, but Sir Andrew Dilnot confirms that there has been a decrease in the police grant, while 18,000 police officers have lost their jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) pointed out in her question to the Prime Minister earlier, in order to cut down on dangerous crime against vulnerable individuals we need community policing and community police officers. Eighteen thousand of them losing their jobs does not help. This Government have failed on the police, the national health service, social care, housing and education.

Public investment lays the foundations for future growth, as the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and the G20 all recognise. The CBI and the TUC are crying out for more infrastructure investment. It is Labour that will invest in the future—in a high-technology, high-skill, high-wage economy. The investment commitments that the Chancellor has made today are, of course, welcome, but they are belated and nowhere near the scale this country needs. People will rightly fear that this is just another press release on the road to the non-delivery of crucial projects. The chronic under-investment—both public and private—presided over by this Chancellor means that the productivity gap between Britain and the rest of the G7 is the widest it has been for a generation. Without productivity growth, which has been revised down further today, we cannot hope to improve living standards. The Labour party backs a strategic state that understands that businesses, public services, innovators and workers combine together to create wealth and drive sustainable growth.

The Chancellor adopted a counter-productive fiscal rule. The Treasury Committee responded by saying that it was "not convinced that the surplus rule

is credible", and it is right. The Chancellor is locking Britain into an even deeper cycle of low investment, low productivity and low ambition. We will be making the positive case for Britain to remain in the European Union and all the solidarity that can bring. Over the past six years, the Chancellor has set targets on the deficit, on debt, on productivity, on manufacturing and construction, and on exports. He has failed them all and he is failing Britain.

There are huge opportunities for this country to build on the talent and efforts of everyone, but the Chancellor is more concerned about protecting vested interests. The price of failure is being borne by some of the most vulnerable in our society. The disabled are being robbed of up to £150 a week. Those are not the actions of a responsible statesperson; they are the actions of a cruel and callous Government who side with the wrong people and punish the most vulnerable and the poorest in our society.

The Chancellor was defeated when he tried to make tax credit cuts from next month by the House opposing them, and by Labour Members and Cross Benchers in the Lords. The continuation of austerity that he has confirmed today, particularly in the area of local government spending, is a political choice, not an economic necessity. It locks us into a continued cycle of economic failure and personal misery. The Labour party will not stand by while more poverty and inequality blight this country. We will oppose those damaging choices and make the case for an economy in which prosperity is shared by all.

Let us harness the optimism, the enthusiasm, the hope and the energy of young people. Let us not burden them with debts and unaffordable housing, low-wage jobs and zero-hours contracts, but instead act in an intergenerational way to give young people the opportunities and the chances they want to build a better, freer, more equal and more content Britain. The Chancellor has proved that he is utterly incapable of doing so with his Budget today.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab):

It has now been the best part of 24 hours since the Chancellor delivered his Budget. There are some things in it that I would like to welcome. On the sugar tax, we look forward to seeing more detail about how it will be put into practice. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) who said yesterday that we needed a comprehensive strategy to tackle the growing problem of obesity.

I regret, therefore, that £200 million has been cut from public health budgets this year—those are the budgets that were to be used to develop that strategy.

We are also pleased that the Chancellor is looking at addressing savings overall, though we wonder whether the new lifetime individual savings accounts will do much to address the scandal of low retirement savings for the less well-off. On the rise in tax thresholds, we welcome anything that puts more money in the pockets of middle and low earners, but we wonder how that aim can sit alongside the Conservatives' plans to cut universal credit.

It is about time that we had some straight talking about what this Budget means. It is an admission of abject failure by the Chancellor. For the record, in the six years that he has been in charge of the nation's finances, he has missed every major target he has set himself. He said that he would balance the books by 2015, but the deficit this year is set to be more than £72 billion. He said that Britain would pay its way in the world, but he has overseen the biggest current account deficit since modern records began.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):

I want to help the Labour party in every way that I can. I want it to be credible at the next election, but the shadow Chancellor took to the airwaves this morning and talked about borrowing more money. Will he give us an absolute commitment that, if he were to become Chancellor, he would not borrow more money than the present Chancellor? He can just say yes.

John McDonnell:

The present Chancellor has borrowed £200 billion extra than what he promised. Let us be absolutely clear that like any company, UK plc under us will invest—it will invest in plant and machinery to create the growth that we need if we are to afford our public services.

Let me go back. The Chancellor promised us a “march of the makers”, but manufacturing still lags behind its 2008 levels. He said he would build his way out of our housing crisis, but we have seen new house building fall to its lowest level since the 1920s. He said that he had moved the economy away from reliance on household debt, but, yesterday, the Office for Budget Responsibility said that his entire plan relied on household debt rising “to unprecedented levels.” He said that he would aim for £1 trillion of exports by 2020. Yesterday's figures suggest that he will miss that target by the small matter

of £357 billion.

When it comes to the Chancellor's failures, he is barely off the starting blocks. The fiscal rule he brought before Parliament last year had three tests. We already knew that he was likely to fail one of them, with the welfare cap forecast to be breached. Yesterday, it emerged that he will fail the second of his tests. Having already raised the debt burden to 83.3% of GDP, it is set to rise now to 83.7% this year. Therefore, since the new fiscal rule was introduced, it is nought out of two for the Chancellor's targets.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridge-shire) (Con):

The hon. Gentleman started by saying that we needed some straight talking. In order to be fiscally credible, one needs to have concrete figures. The Chancellor has said in his Budget that he will borrow £1 in every £14 in 2016-17. Will the shadow Chancellor tell us what his borrowing figure will be?

John McDonnell:

Unlike the current Chancellor, we will not set ourselves targets that can never be realised, and we will create an economy based on consultation with the wealth creators themselves—the businesses, the entrepreneurs and the workers. In that way, we will have a credible fiscal responsibility rule. Yesterday, the OBR revised down its forecast for growth for this year, and for every year in this Parliament—in some cases by significant margins. That is reflected in lower forecasts for earnings growth. The Resolution Foundation says that typical wages will not recover to their pre-crash levels before the end of this decade. It is not just forecasts for economic growth and wages that are down. Those are driven by productivity, which has also been revised down for every year of this Parliament. Any productivity improvements last year have disappeared. As the OBR said, it was, “Another false dawn”. Perhaps that is not surprising. After all, productivity is linked to business investment, which should be driving the recovery, but which plunged sharply last quarter.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con):

I have noticed that the hon. Gentleman does not like answering the question on how much he would be willing to borrow were he Chancellor. Is there any limit to the amount that he would be willing to borrow and to the debt that he would be willing to pass on to future generations?

John McDonnell:

I find it extraordinary that this

Government want to talk about debt. Under this Government, the debt that our children will inherit will be £1.7 trillion. Under their watch, the debt has risen significantly—it has almost doubled. When we go forward, we will ensure that our borrowing will be based on sound economic advice from the wealth creators. Unlike this Government, we will create economic growth. This Chancellor is borrowing to fund cuts in public services, not to invest in growth or productivity.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):

Order. Members may think that this noise is not loud, but it is very loud when you are in the Chair trying to listen to the shadow Chancellor. The problem is that it does not do this Chamber any good in the eyes of the public when they cannot hear either.

John McDonnell:

Let me assure Members that I will give way, but let me proceed a bit further. As I have said, perhaps the fall in productivity is unsurprising, because productivity is linked to business investment, which should be driving the recovery, but which plunged in the last quarter. I can tell the House what happened to business investment forecasts—they were revised down again in this Parliament. None of this should be a surprise for the Chancellor, but it seems that it is. At the autumn statement, he said that he wanted a plan “that actually produces better results than were forecast.”.—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1385.]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said this last week about the autumn statement: “If you can't forecast more than two months, how in heaven's name can you forecast the next four or five years.” That is what we all want to know.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con):

Productivity, to which the shadow Chancellor is referring, is also linked to employment. Does he welcome the extra 2.3 million people in work since 2010?

John McDonnell:

Of course we welcome that employment growth, but we are concerned about the insecurity of that employment. The number of zero-hours contracts has gone up by another 100,000 over the past month, and the insecurity of that employment, unfortunately, is affecting people's long-term investment plans as well. Yesterday the Chancellor pointed repeatedly to global economic headwinds as an explanation for his failure. His problem is that we have

known about them for a while. Many of us were warning him last summer about the challenges facing the global economy. I spoke about them in this place, as did others on the Labour Benches, but rather than adapting his proposals to deal with the global reality, the Chancellor has charged headlong into another failure of his own making. He has failed to heed our warnings and the warnings of others, he has failed to invest in the key infrastructure that our economy needs, and as a result he has failed to boost Britain's productivity figures.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):

Is it not the case that our Chancellor is being very adaptable, as we heard yesterday? Is it not the case that the Opposition have an economic credibility strategy which essentially reverts to exactly what they did before—more borrowing, more spending, and higher taxes? It did not work then, so why would it work now?

John McDonnell:

The hon. Lady might describe the Chancellor as adaptable. Most of the media and most independent analysts described him today as failing—failing on virtually every target he set himself under his own fiscal rule. On productivity, it is the Chancellor's failure to boost Britain's productivity that is at issue. The Office for Budget Responsibility is very clear on this point. British productivity, not global factors, is the reason the Chancellor is in trouble. Robert Chote, the head of the OBR, confirmed in an interview last night that "most of the downward growth revisions were not driven by global uncertainty, but by weaker than thought domestic productivity." As a result of that, we now see drastically reduced economic forecasts and disappointing tax revenues.

The Chancellor has been in the job six years now. It is about time he took some responsibility for what has happened on his watch. It is not just on basic economic competence that the Chancellor has let this country down. Unfairness is at the very core of this Budget and of his whole approach. The Chancellor said in 2010 that this country would not make the mistakes of the past in making the poor carry the burden of fiscal consolidation. The facts prove that that is just not accurate. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the long-run effect of all tax and benefit changes in last year's autumn statement would mean percentage losses around 25 times larger for those in the bottom decile than for those in the top decile.

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con):

The hon. Gentleman and the Opposition are suffering from some form of collective amnesia. Does he not remember that the British economy was on life support in 2010 when the Chancellor took over? The body of the economy was barely twitching. Why does he not acknowledge the fact that since 2010 growth is up, wages are up, employment is up and the deficit is down? He should be praising the Chancellor, not saying the economy is going down.

John McDonnell:

Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the objective statements of the past 48 hours have demonstrated that all the factors that he mentions are falling back, and that we now face a serious problem that should be addressed by a responsible Government when they see their own fiscal rule and economic policies failing? Let me repeat what the IFS said so that everyone is clear: the percentage losses were about 25 times larger for those at the bottom than for those at the top. So much for the Government's statement about the broadest shoulders taking the strain. Furthermore, time and again, it is women who have borne the brunt of the Chancellor's cuts. Recent analysis by the Women's Budget Group showed that 81% of tax and welfare changes since 2010 have fallen on women.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):

Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just women who have borne the brunt, but disabled people? Half a million disabled people are losing between them £1 billion. Surely not even Conservative Members can stand this anymore.

John McDonnell:

I fully concur with my hon. Friend. I will come back to that point. The distributional analysis by the Women's Budget Group shows that by 2020 female lone parents and single female pensioners will experience the greatest drop in living standards—by 20% on average. In the case of older ladies, the single female pensioners, the cuts in care are falling upon their shoulders. I find that scandalous in this society. It is disappointing, too, that the Budget offered no progress on scrapping the tampon tax. The Chancellor is hoping for a deal from the EU on the tax. If there is no deal, we will continue to fight for it to be scrapped.

Lucy Frazer:

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that productivity was down for domestic reasons, not for international reasons.

Can he therefore explain to me why the Congressional Budget Office in the US has reduced its forecast for potential productivity growth by 8.9 percentage points, which is lower than that for this country?

John McDonnell:

That relates to the US economy. The figures that I quoted were not mine. They were from the Office for Budget Responsibility, which referred to domestic productivity falls. Young people have also paid a heavy price during the Chancellor's tenure. It is not just the education maintenance cuts in the last Parliament, or the enormous hikes in tuition fees; it is the dream of home ownership receding into the distance for young people on average incomes. The new Lifetime ISA will not resolve that. With pay falling so sharply for the young, there can be very few who can afford to save £4,000 a year.

We know that so far on the Chancellor's watch, people with severe disabilities have been hit 19 times harder than those without disabilities. If that were not enough, the Government are now taking over £100 a week out of the pockets of disabled people. Even for a Chancellor who has repeatedly cut public spending on the backs of those least likely or least able to fight back, this represents a new low. I believe it is morally reprehensible.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):

The shadow Chancellor is being very generous with his time. With respect to owning one's own home, will he not take into account that the Help to Buy scheme has helped thousands of first-time buyers, 82% of whom would not have been able to buy their home without that scheme?

John McDonnell:

The problem, as the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, is housing supply. Because of the failure to build homes under this Budget, I fear that the interventions that the Government may make, which I often welcome, may force up prices, rather than allowing access to homes. The hon. Gentleman shares with me the desire that young people should be able to afford a home, and with me he should campaign now for more housing construction. That means investment, and sometimes you have to borrow to invest. On disability, I am appealing to the Chancellor to think again. We will support him in reversing the cuts in personal independence payments for disabled people. If he can fund capital gains tax giveaways for the richest 5%, he can find the money to reverse this cruel and unnecessary cut.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough Lab):

Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Chancellor is not going to listen to the Opposition on the draconian cuts to these benefits, he will perhaps listen to Graeme Ellis, the chair of the Conservative Disability Group, who, as a result of these pernicious cuts, is cutting all links with the Conservative party?

John McDonnell:

I just say this across the House: this is a very important issue—we will not make party politics of this. As someone who has campaigned on disability issues in the House for 18 years, I sincerely urge all Members to press the Chancellor to think again. This cut is cruel, and it is, unfortunately, dangerous for the wellbeing of disabled people. If corporation tax—already the lowest in the G7—can be reduced yet further, money can be found so the Government can think again about making yet more cuts to people with disabilities.

Finally, I want to talk about the future. Yesterday's Budget does not meet the needs and aspirations of our society. It fails to equip us for the challenges ahead. It fails to lay the foundations for a stronger economy that could deliver prosperity shared by all. The Chancellor has repeatedly told us we are the builders, and yesterday we heard more of it. On infrastructure, we are back to press-release politics: projects announced with no certainty of funding to complete them—projects that should have started six years ago. It is always tarmac tomorrow. If stories about garden suburbs sound familiar, it might be because we have heard them before. Announcements about garden suburbs have become a hardy perennial of the Chancellor's announcements.

However, despite all the rhetoric, all the re-announcements and all the photo opportunities in high-vis jackets, one statistic is in black and white in the OBR's documents: public sector investment as a share of GDP is scheduled to fall from 1.9% last year to 1.5% by the end of this Parliament—a lack of investment in our infrastructure that will hold back the growth of our economy. On education, it seems that we are back to the politics of spin and stunts. Forcing schools to become academies will do nothing to address the shortage of teachers, the shortage of school places and increasing class sizes. Forcing schools to compete for the extra-hour funding places more bureaucratic burdens on headteachers, with only a one-in-four chance of gaining

that additional funding.

We have learned this morning that there is a half-a-billion-pound black hole in the funding needed for the Chancellor's plans for schools. I would welcome the Secretary of State for Education confirming whether she will find the money to ensure that, if academisation is funded, schools are fully funded for that process. As for long-term financial planning, it is increasingly clear that the Chancellor is determined to flog off anything that is not nailed down, in a desperate attempt to meet his self-imposed targets. Last year, we noted that the Chancellor could meet the conditions of his fiscal rule only by selling off profitable state assets, even at a loss to the taxpayer. Official figures yesterday suggested that taxpayers will face a loss of more than £20 billion pounds as a result of the Chancellor's decisions on RBS share sales.

Yesterday, again, we learned that the Government are considering the privatisation of the Land Registry. That is despite their deciding against it as recently as 2014. That is despite the Land Registry returning millions of pounds in profits to taxpayers. That is despite a 98% customer satisfaction rate. It makes no difference to this Chancellor: everything must go, everything is up for sale. When will he learn that you cannot keep paying the rent by selling the furniture? The Chancellor has consistently put his political career ahead of the interests of this country. Yesterday he tried to do the same, and he failed. His disastrous economic failures are the result of putting personal ambition ahead of sound economics.

The Chancellor is clinging to the tattered remains of his fiscal charter, using it to justify brutal cuts to vulnerable people. In contrast to his rule—widely savaged by economists, and now on the point of being torn up by Government statisticians—Labour has a real alternative. Labour will build a society based on a fair tax system, where the wealthy and powerful pay their fair share. In line with recommendations from the OECD, the IMF, the G20, the CBI and the TUC, Labour will invest to grow opportunity and output. Labour will eliminate the deficit by growing our economy. Labour will invest in skills for a high-wage, high-tech economy.

In contrast to the Chancellor's broken promises, we will balance Government spending, using a fiscal credibility rule developed, and recommended to us, by the world's leading economists—our economic advisory council. We will balance

Government spending, but not, like the Chancellor, by bullying those who will not fight back. We will invest to deliver shared prosperity, with people able to fulfil their potential, and a country meeting its potential.

Let me make this clear: Labour does not want to see the Chancellor drive the economy over a cliff, blinded by his adherence to a fiscal rule that everyone now knows cannot work. In the interests of this country, we are making him an offer: let us work together to design a fiscal framework that balances the books without destroying the economy. However, let me also make this clear: if he refuses our offer of co-operation, Labour will fight every inch of the way against the counter-productive, vindictive and needless measures the Chancellor has set out in this Budget. Britain deserves better than this.

GONE WEST

The suicide bomber and a
button
around him people turn to
mutton
for death is a glutton
Je suis Charlie
and on a good day
Machiavelli
Je suis Bruxelles
I can also be
Hell.
a pilot high above the rest
sends people
West
Je suis Syrie
pray for me
Je suis Irak
destroyed and on the
rack
Je suis Afghanistan
floating on blood
where will I
land

Wilson John Haire.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

POLITICIANS – LOOK AFTER YOUR VOTERS!

On 22 March *La Repubblica* ran an article about a 22 year old Italian female graduate who had tried to travel to Turkish Kurdistan to show her solidarity with the Kurds. She used an Istanbul internet cafe and her Facebook photo was noticed while she was there. It showed a young pigtailed woman with an enthusiastic smile waving the PKK (Kurdish) flag like a holiday beach towel. She was swiftly rounded up and deported. One of her friends was quoted as saying: “they hit someone who came to show solidarity, she was incapable of doing anything bad”. Such naivety hardly deserved such a lucky escape.

Italian Giulio Regeni was not as fortunate. On the day of writing (29 March) *La Repubblica* ran a video of part of his family’s press conference in Italy. His Mother could be seen saying that her son had been tortured and killed in Egypt and that she would publish photos of his mutilated body if she didn’t get the truth. She continued to say that only his nose could be recognised. Regeni was a researcher who was actually working towards a doctorate at the University of Cambridge. He was in Cairo to research and also to develop his Arabic. He was kidnapped by five men on 25 January and his mutilated and obviously tortured body was found nine days later. One report said that there were signs of electric shock treatment.

The Egyptian Government said that they would investigate and cooperate with the Italian police. As little real information has been forthcoming the Regeni family have chosen to make a very public protest. Significantly, *La Repubblica* ran a two part interview with Egypt’s General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 17 and 18 March. He expressed his sadness at Regeni’s death and suggested that his own (al-Sisi’s) political enemies could have been responsible. Other reports blamed a criminal gang or ordinary police working independently.

La Repubblica’s website has a link to a Guardian article, in English, by their Rome correspondent Stephanie Kirchgassner. She picked up several points, including making reference to the recent

European parliament condemnation of Egypt over the Regeni affair. This was countered neatly by al-Sisi who threatened that his regime must have Europe’s cooperation and support. Failure to get that would hamper his ability to contain and stop the millions of his youthful countrymen from radicalisation.

Two months on, and there is no clear information about Regeni’s killing. There are various theories and suggestions in the press and internet. Included are suggestions that the Egyptian government were responsible, seeing him as a knowledgeable threat to the regime. Or, to be really Machiavellian, as the Italian Prime Minister has close links with al-Sisi, perhaps there is something there? Or, as the West has a great deal invested in the stability of al Sisi’s regime perhaps there is a clue there? Who knows.

Within Europe one of the few ideas that unite the majority is an increasing cynicism of the political class, or *la casta*, as it is disparagingly called in Italian. The lack of trust questions the credibility of contemporary politicians. European countries who were accustomed to the traditional right/left swings have recently had inconclusive election results and new groups are forming to contest these long-standing power bases - Spain, Portugal, Ireland and the UK come quickly to mind. The Italian papers saw significance in the recent German elections in three Lander and gave very detailed coverage. On 14 March *La Repubblica* ran a double page detailed analysis with charts. It also ran a large photo of a rather dishevelled Angela Merkel wiping away a tear, countered by a regimentally neat and jubilant Frauke Petry of the AFD anti-migrant party.

And so to Belgium - a country that recently had no constituted government for over a year. It appeared to govern itself without politicians. As it is the country that hosts the headquarters of the European Parliament, it questions the whole effectiveness of the national and European political class. What are they doing? Why are they not focussed on improving our lot? If they are not helping

us, are they just working for their own benefit – material or emotional? Why do people want to be politicians?

On 22 March the *Huffington Post* published an article by its Editorial Director, Lucia Annunziata. She looked at the case of Belgium and said: This is “a failed state”. The bombings in Brussels just “confirm what people have said under their breaths since the Paris bombings”. That is, as she continues: “(can it be a coincidence?) that only 24 hrs before the Belgian bombings, the *New York Times* (NYT) had published a report of 55 pages drawn up by the French police on the facts of the Bataclan.” The French had their own detailed grasp of what appeared to be happening within Belgium. She reported that the French deplored the slowness and inability of the Belgians to pick up on many clues that should have been obvious. And, effective police forces should have understood and exchanged information well before the NYT publication.

There were, she says, 90 foreign fighters who returned to Belgium and they were obviously accommodated by supporters in their own locality. They were protected, helped and financed to develop and enact what was an extremely complex incident. A competent state would have known this was developing and would have attempted to stop it. She saw the Belgian law that forbids a raid on a private house between 21.00 – 05.00h as a glaring symbol of Belgian laxity or incompetence.

She goes on to make several interesting points. How is it possible with the commitment of all the European intelligence systems that a plot as complex as the Bataclan was not picked up? It follows that effective cross-European cooperation is vital. Also Europe must identify and deal effectively with the countries that are funding these anti-western activities. She says that “*They are our allies, officially.*” But although the stakes are high, we must pursue this. She notes that “*the dangers are a global downfall*” or rift, but Europe and its politicians must, and I paraphrase here, do what they should be doing with courage, rather than posturing, or acting selfishly. “*The politics of the ostrich won’t remove the danger*”