

Labour Affairs

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Corbyn's re-election: There will be trouble ahead

Jeremy Corbyn's re-election as Labour leader with an increased majority would in normal times lay the leadership issue to rest. But we don't live in normal times. Even though Corbyn won a majority of votes in all three categories—full members, affiliated supporters and registered supporters—there are those within the parliamentary party who refuse to accept the result. They have publicly hinted, in spite of Corbyn's call for unity, that they will continue to make life difficult for the leader. It's clear therefore that the overriding message of the result is that there is a wide disconnect between ordinary members and supporters and the parliamentary party. Unless this disconnection is unravelled the future for Labour looks exceedingly grim.

A start on this could be made by asking the question, "Why did Corbyn win?" A plausible answer to this was given shortly after his first victory twelve months ago. Writing in the *London Evening Standard* of 15 September 2015, City Columnist Anthony Hilton said: "People did not vote for new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn at the weekend because they suddenly turned socialist. They voted again because they are fed up with austerity and the way bankers and big business bosses give the impression that the entire economic system

exists for their benefit."

At the time this was, and indeed still is, an accurate description of those Corbyn supporters who make up Momentum. Owen Smith described it as "a party within the party." But Momentum is not another Militant. It is not a dogmatic, rigid faction within Labour. It is not even affiliated to Labour. It is a movement made up of people of all ages who hold diverse opinions on a range of issues but who are united in their desire to change the political and economic landscape to improve the lives of the great majority. They want a different kind of politics and see in Jeremy Corbyn a politician who will deliver their desire.

The election campaign itself did little to stir the bones. The differences between Corbyn and Smith on economic and industrial policy were non-existent, with Smith dotting every i and crossing every t of Corbyn's programme. And yet Smith repeatedly said that Corbyn was unfit to be leader and that he would not serve in his shadow cabinet should he win. Corbyn has now offered an olive branch to Smith and others who resigned from the shadow cabinet, inviting them to help him unite the party and fight the Tories. A few have indicated they will accept the offer, but most are undecided or have refused the offer.

Corbyn will choose his new shadow cabinet within a few weeks, but there is a call from most of his parliamentary colleagues for the present system to be ditched. They are demanding that the parliamentary party elects the shadow cabinet from a list of willing candidates. This is the system that existed until it was scrapped by Ed Miliband in 2011. Where was the roar of disapproval at the time from those now calling for its return? Did they not see that handing sole power to party members and supporters could result in the election of a more left leader? A recent vote in the parliamentary party resulted in 169 to 34 in favour of the parliamentary party electing the shadow cabinet. But Corbyn wants the members to have a greater role, which presumably includes elections to the shadow cabinet. Discussions on this are ongoing on this but a compromise of sorts may be necessary if the party is to end the squabbling that is doing so much damage to Labour. Corbyn is said to be in favour of compromise but are his parliamentary opponents? If Corbyn is prepared to compromise he should expect something positive in return from MPs. If this is not forthcoming and given the power to elect the shadow cabinet, Labour MPs in their present mood would probably exclude all Corbyn supporters from the Front Bench. They would thus frustrate the will of more than 300,000 members and supporters who continue to trust Corbyn.

Rumours continue of the threat

of deselection by Corbyn supporters, as if deselection, or reselection as it is more accurately known, had just been invented by a group of vindictive members. Constituency parties have had the right to select and reselect for generations. All Labour MPs know this. What is not on the agenda is mandatory reselection. But boundary changes before 2020 will in any case mean reselection for many Labour MPs, including Corbyn himself. The House of Commons is to be reduced from 650 to 600 members. Labour has described the boundary changes as "gerrymandering", with Labour losing more seats than the Tories on an outdated electoral register. Contrast this with the unelected 810 members of the House of Lords.

Corbyn's opponents cite an apparent escalation in the online abuse of Labour members as further evidence of his unfitness to lead. He is deemed to be responsible for this, even though he has consistently condemned all forms of abuse. But apparently this is not enough; he is urged to act upon it, as if he ought to be judge and jury of all behaviour by members and non-members alike. Yvette Cooper and Ruth Smeeth are the latest to draw attention to this, with the latter claiming 25,000 incidents of abuse, much of it racial. In an interview she gave in the London Evening Standard it was reported that two people are being investigated by counter-terrorism police. Their political affiliation was not stated. At conference Corbyn again condemned the

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abuse of and threats to MPs stressing that it will not be tolerated in the party. Some of the abuse and threats may be criminal and those affected will no doubt co-operate with the police to apprehend those responsible.

Labour's National Executive Committee, not the party leader, is the body responsible for the conduct of party members. On 20 September, the day that Ruth Smeeth's interview appeared in the London Evening Standard, the NEC unanimously agreed to a new statement on social media behaviour that will be included in the terms and conditions of membership. Among other pledges, party members will have to promise "to act within the spirit and rules of the Labour party in my conduct both on and offline, with members and non-members." The statement condemns all forms of abuse and says it "will take action against those who commit it" Ruth Smeeth described the statement as "a great step forward" and said "MPs have been subject to a tsunami of abuse. It is unfortunate that we have got to this place but, given the changing nature of social media, I welcome the proposal."

The divisions between Corbyn and his parliamentary colleagues have captured the media headlines, but control of the NEC is crucial for those who want to guide the direction of the party. Recent elections to the 33 strong body resulted in Corbyn supporters winning all 6 constituency labour party seats. However, at the moment the political balance

on the NEC is unclear. Corbyn supporters may have a very thin majority. But the appointed addition of one member each from Scotland and Wales, agreed at party conference and known to be Corbyn opponents, could swing the balance the other way. If Corbyn has lost his majority on the NEC it could have serious implications for future policy development and the political direction of the party.

In spite of media cynicism and sniping by Corbyn opponents, Labour had a good conference. Corbyn's and McDonnell's speeches were enthusiastically received, with both laying out a blueprint for a future Labour government. The positive policy proposals outlined will be discussed further in detail in the NEC and at National Labour's Policy Forum, with significant input from party members.

Inevitably, however, there has to be a party pooper or, more accurately, a party wrecker. According to a *Guardian* report of 27 September, Peter Mandelson, speaking at a Royal Television Society conference in London, called for an early general election "so we can deal with the awful situation in the Labour party earlier than 2020." Here we have a senior Labour politician, a former minister in the Blair government, praying for a Tory victory earlier than 2020 in order to remove Jeremy Corbyn

as party leader. There can be no other interpretation of his words. An ordinary member, publicly stating that they want Labour to be defeated at the next general election, would be thrown out of the party. Over to the NEC.

And more prophets of doom abound in Labour. One such prophet who failed to lead the party to victory in two general elections is 74 year old Neil (Lord) Kinnock. He has stated that he will not live to see another Labour government. But prophets occasionally get things wrong. Nostradamus failed to forecast the time of his own death. And Neil (Lord) Kinnock is not in that class of prophets.

This island is made mainly of coal and is surrounded by fish. Only an organising genius could produce a shortage of coal and fish at the same time.

Aneurin Bevan

These great corporations rarely want anything from the government except to be let alone and to be permitted to work their will unchecked by the government. All that they really want is that governmental action shall be limited. In every great corporation suit the corporation lawyer will be found protesting against extension of governmental power. Every court decision favoring a corporation takes the form of declaring unconstitutional some extension of governmental power. Every corporation magnate in the country who is not dealing honestly and fairly by his fellows asks nothing better than that ... there be stringent limitations of governmental power.

Theodore Roosevelt

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This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

WAR POLICY.

On 20 February 1917, the House of Commons continued with the debate on the progress of the War and the policy of the Lloyd George government. (see Labour Affairs September 2016 for George Wardle's speech of 14 February on Labour's War Policy). Arthur Ponsonby opened the debate on 20 February.

Arthur Augustus William Harry Ponsonby, 1st Baron Ponsonby of Shulbrede (16 February 1871-23 March 1946) was a politician, writer, and social activist. He was the third son of Sir Henry Ponsonby, Private Secretary to Queen Victoria. Ponsonby was a Page of Honour to Queen Victoria from 1882 to 1887. He was educated at Eton College and Balliol College, Oxford before joining the Diplomatic Service and taking assignments in Constantinople and Copenhagen. At the 1906 general election, he stood unsuccessfully as Liberal candidate for Taunton. He was elected as a Liberal MP for Stirling Burghs at a by-election of 1908.

In Parliament, Ponsonby opposed the British involvement in the First World War, and with George Cadbury, Ramsay MacDonald, E. D. Morel, Arnold Rowntree, and Charles Trevelyan, he was a member of the Union of Democratic Control, which became a prominent anti-war organisation. Ponsonby was defeated at the 1918 general election, as an "Independent Democrat" in the new Dunfermline Burghs constituency. He joined the Labour Party and returned to the House of Commons at the 1922 general election for the Brightside division of Sheffield.

In 1927-1928, Ponsonby ran a Peace Letter campaign against British preparations for a new war, and from 1936 he was an active member of the Peace Pledge Union, contributing regularly to *Peace News*. In May 1940 Ponsonby resigned from the Labour Party, opposing its decision to join the coalition

government of Winston Churchill. He wrote a biography of his father which won the James Tait Memorial Prize in 1942: *Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's Private Secretary: His Life and Letters*.

Mr. PONSONBY:

The Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill affords an opportunity for a survey of the whole field, not only of the organisation and multifold activities connected with the War, but also of the policy which governs the further progress of the War. We have had some interesting Debates during the last few days on this Bill and the Vote of Credit, and the House has considered many aspects of the various activities connected with the War. But I think it is also the duty, more especially of this House, to give very careful consideration to the governing factor, which is the policy that is being pursued, that being the mainspring of all our activities. We have voted colossal sums of money, sums that are so large that even the greatest financial experts cannot realise what their true significance is—sums so large that to most of us they really only appear as figures, figures to which during the last two-and-a-half years we have grown accustomed. But we are about to spend also the nation's greatest wealth; when I say the nation's greatest wealth, I mean the young manhood of the nation; for the future of this nation, our welfare and our prosperity, depend on the young manhood which is about to be expended in a very costly way. We are entering upon a new phase of the War, perhaps a more dangerous and a more critical phase than any of those that have preceded it, and I think it is very necessary that this House should give careful consideration to this point, namely, the governing policy which is directing all our action.

Before I come to any sort of criticism of that policy, I should like to say just a few words with regard to the form of government under which we are now

fighting. This, of all other moments, is one in which it is necessary that the whole country should feel general confidence in 1178 the Government. Obviously it would be very unfair to criticise any of the performances of the Government, seeing that they have not yet had time to carry out any of their projects for the prosecution of the War. But I, for one, cannot help having some misgiving at the tendency which has been growing now for some years past—it began before the commencement of this War—and that is the growing tendency to the divorce of the Executive from the Legislature, and more especially from the House of Commons. There were signs of it before this War began—but now it has gone further—and we have the House of Commons with the main Executive, the chief Executive, entirely removed from its control. I think this is a dangerous innovation. The Government in form is very different from any Government that has ever preceded it. There are over eighty-one members of the Government, and there are various Controllers that are being continually appointed. I saw this morning that a new Controller has been appointed, the Controller of Timber, and yesterday the appointment of a Controller of Food Production was announced. You may multiply your Controllers as much as you like, but that does not get the essential control, which is, the control of the House of Commons over the Executive. In fact, this very large form of bureaucracy rather prevents the House of Commons from exercising its control as it did in former days.

But we have not only this vast bureaucracy, we have this War Cabinet, which consists of five members, but to all intents and purposes of three, two, or one. There are people who believe a benevolent autocracy is the best form of government, but the difficulty is to find the benevolent autocrat. As to whether he has been discovered I do not know; it is too early to say. But I felt

from the very first that the withdrawal of the Prime Minister, chief of the Executive, and two other members of the War Cabinet, from our deliberations here, is likely to lead to a great deal of confusion, and, more than that, to a want of confidence in the Executive. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, I think, I may say very respectfully, has earned the gratitude of the House for the courteous way in which he pays attention to all sections of it, has got a very heavy burden 1179 on his shoulders as head of his Department, Leader of the House, and a member of the War Cabinet. It is not, however, a matter of individuals, but the matter of a new system, and I must say that I regard with some misgiving the inauguration of a new system just at the moment when the country is about to pass through one of the most critical stages of its whole existence.

I want to pass on to a review of the situation in regard to the War as we find it now. This new period has been inaugurated by a German Note, and that German Note has plunged the warfare deeper down into the depths of barbarism. I regard with the greatest loathing the fresh steps taken by Germany in prosecuting the War with such savage methods. But when I read the terms of the German Note it appeared to me that Germany was driven to desperation, and I then turned to the Note of the Allies to President Wilson and analysed it more carefully. Before I examined the terms which the Allies set out in the Note to President Wilson—and I for one am very glad that at last the terms were definitely stated—I should like to call the attention of the House to the professions which have been made from time to time by leading Ministers in this country with regard to the aims of Great Britain in this War. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House (Mr. Bonar Law), in his speech on the Second Reading of the Vote of Credit, said that this country bail no selfish motives in going into this War. On 22nd December last the same right hon. Gentleman said even more emphatically: We are not fighting for territory, we are not fighting for the greater strength of those who are

fighting. The Prime Minister, in an interview which was recently published by some American newspaper—the now recognised method of expressing views to the world—said we are not fighting a war of conquest. And the late Prime Minister, at the beginning of the War, said at Cardiff We have no desire to add to our Imperial burdens either in area or in responsibility.

I am perfectly sure that these emphatic statements, that this is not a War entered on for selfish motives, that it is not a War of aggression, and that it is not a War of conquest, express the sentiments of the 1180 people of this country when we entered on this War, and most emphatically described the feeling of the country at the outbreak of War in 1914. But I go further than that, and I will say that they really describe the motives and feelings of the people of this country at this moment. The people of this country do not wish this War to be a war of aggression, of aggrandisement, of supremacy, or of selfish motives. They were disinterested when they entered on it; they are disinterested now, and my complaint is that our general professions in this country not merely do not correspond with, but are in direct contradiction of our actual proposals. Let me just examine what some of those proposals are, because, after all, the terms we laid down in the Note to President Wilson are matters of the very highest moment and of the very greatest importance, and the War is continuing, it is being waged because those are the terms of the Allies, and the Germans have refused them and have taken desperate measures because they cannot accept them. Therefore it is the business of this House, if it is going to have any control over the policy being pursued, to examine the terms with some care.

We have made clear, not only in the Note to President Wilson, but by comments from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and further comments from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and from the Solicitor-General, what we actually mean. By our Note we declare that Constantinople is to be taken from the

Turks, and we know that an agreement has been made with Russia by which Constantinople and the Straits are to go to Russia. We know further, by the Note and by interpretations that have been put upon it in high quarters, that the German Colonies are not to be returned to Germany. We know also that the continued endeavour which is being made with such gallantry and at such great sacrifice in Mesopotamia means that that region will fall to the British Crown. Egypt and Cyprus, in the course of events, have fallen to us, and, therefore, it means, when you sum up the whole territory, that something like 1,500,000 square miles will be added to the British Empire. That may be good policy, or it may be bad policy. I, for one, when I see the map on which the British Empire is painted red, feel no sort of pride at all—none whatever. I only feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility that this 1181 vast Empire which is placed under us should be well and properly and justly administered. I agree, too, with the late Prime Minister who said We have no desire to add to our Imperial burdens, either in area or in responsibility.

But whatever divergence of view there may be between myself and hon. Members opposite with regard to adding territory to the British Empire, I want to know how it is to be made clear that this is in conformity with the declaration that we have not entered on a war of conquest, aggression, or selfish motives. There is, in my opinion, a direct contradiction, and when that goes out to the world it is not surprising that interpretations have been put upon it meaning that we are indeed out for a war of aggression. In addition to this, it has been made clear that we do not desire in this War to dismember enemy countries. But again look at our terms. Constantinople is to be taken from Turkey. Armenia is to be taken from Turkey. Very likely that is an extremely good policy, but I am not now dealing with merits, I am only trying to show that there is a direct contradiction between our professions and our terms. A very prominent Russian statesman, a leader of the Liberals of Russia, a man of great responsibility, has also given his

interpretation of the terms of the Allies. He goes further and gives Syria to France, Arabia to Great Britain, and Western Asia Minor and the territory round Smyrna to Italy. I am not quite sure where he expects the Turks to live, but anyhow proposals of that sort, put forward in high quarters by responsible statesmen, must be interpreted as meaning the dismemberment of Turkey. It may be a good policy, but do not let us say we are not out for the dismemberment of enemy countries. Then we have heard recently a great deal about the Czecho-Slovacs, and very few people, I find, have the remotest notion who they are, and I cannot help feeling that those responsible for foreign affairs in this country are also a little doubtful as to the territory occupied by the Czecho-Slovacs and the aspirations of the Czecho-Slovacs. Behind this, to many in this country an incomprehensible item in the terms of the Allies, there lies a very deep meaning, and that is that this, taken with other proposals in the Allies' Note, means the break-up of Austria-Hungary. The break-up of the Austria-Hungarian 1882 Empire may be a good policy, or it may be a bad one, but do not let us say that we are not out for the dismemberment of enemy countries when in our own Note it is clearly shown that the break-up of Austria-Hungary and the break-up of Turkey are objects for which we are fighting.

I do not know to what extent the particular items that are placed in the Allies' Note were drafted by the British Government, but it has seemed to me all along, and more especially in this last pronouncement, that when we have conferences and councils with the Allies we play a second fiddle, a minor part, and that our Allies are able to insert various proposals which have not been considered by our Government and which may greatly add to our embarrassments as time goes on. The Leader of the House made reference in his speech on the Second Reading of the Vote of Credit to the enormous advantage that conferences had been during the prosecution of the War. He said that a great many difficulties had been overcome by the personal relations that had been set up between the various leading Ministers in the Allied countries. I am very glad to hear it. I must say that I have some misgiving as to the part that our Ministers play. It does not seem to me to be always a leading part, but I hope this method of conferences will not only be a

practice adopted in time of war, but that the old ridiculous idea that our Foreign Secretary must remain locked up in the Foreign Office and never travel in foreign countries and never communicate with foreign Ministers will be broken down, and that conferences between individuals meeting in various capitals may in future be one of the methods by which difficulties and misunderstandings may be overcome. I hope the Leader of the House may find an opportunity during to-day's Debate to reply to some of the points which I am making, and which were made by two hon. Friends of mine last week. I do think it is very important that this should be cleared up, and that this contradiction which undoubtedly exists between our proposals and our terms should be disposed of.

We entered this War most undoubtedly for the protection of small nationalities, and we seem to be prosecuting the War now for the extension of large empires, and that does not add to our prestige, nor 1883 does it add to the favour with which we can be regarded by foreign nations, and even by our own Allies. We have often been accused of being a nation of hypocrites. It is most untrue. The people of this country are not hypocrites. They are perfectly clear as to what they want. The splendid spirit that has been shown from the very beginning, and the sacrifices that have been made, have been made most emphatically with a disinterested motive, and I think the Government ought not to degrade that motive by turning it into a desire for domination and supremacy. But it is often objected that even if we laid down terms which could lead to negotiations, a negotiated peace would not be satisfactory, but that we must have a dictated peace, and the two chief arguments for that have been mentioned in this House. The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Wardle) in his speech the other day laid great emphasis on a point which is often made, I notice, in the Press, and that is, that Germany must be punished. He laid great emphasis on the chastisement of Germany. May I say that Germany is being punished. But who in Germany is being punished? The people of Germany are being punished—the workers of Germany. You are not touching the Government, you are not touching the Junkers, the militarists, or Tirpitz, or the Kaiser. As the War continues, you are punishing the people, not only of Germany, but of France, of Russia, of Italy, and of

this country also. Therefore, this idea of punishment is a very misleading one, and, if I may say so, I think this vindictive idea, the desire for punishment, which can only be fanned up by hatred, is a very low motive for continuing a War.

A further argument is brought forward that if the War were to end by negotiation, you would leave Prussian militarism triumphant. I think my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Commander Wedgwood) said that the other night. In so far as militarism is an aggressive policy, it seems to me that the aggressive policy of Germany has been done for already; but I, for one, I have never believed that you can kill militarism by force of arms. Militarism can only be killed in the country by the people themselves, by the growth of an independent and free democracy, and 1884 what are we doing by this War? Instead of crushing Prussian militarism, we are destroying the one weapon that can crush Prussian militarism, and that is German Liberalism, because our extreme demands, like all extreme expressions that have been used since the beginning of this War, have had only one effect in Germany, and that is to crush the moderate party, to prevent them from being heard, to unite the whole nation together, because they are told that a war of aggression and dismemberment is being waged against them. I feel that it is of the utmost importance, considering what is before us, that we should make clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding that those are not our objects, but that these general professions that we make are genuine, and that our terms should be made to fit in with them. I feel that it is important that some declaration of this kind should be made. I know that Great Britain entered this War with clean hands, and a country that enters a war with clean hands should come out of the war with empty hands. That is what I believe, so far as possible. Otherwise a suspicion will attach to their motives. I do not want to see my country come out of this War a mere winner in a struggle for supremacy. I want to see my country the chief agent in the establishment of a new order founded on international justice and framed to promote a durable international peace.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



The Orange Trial

Last month Froggy mentioned the trial of Orange/France Telecom managers. They are accused of ‘moral harassment’, following the suicides of dozens of employees during the years when the company was ‘slimming down’ the ‘human resources’ with modern managerial methods.

The firm Orange sells telephone and internet services in Europe, including Britain (it’s known now as EE), Africa, Vietnam, etc. It used to be called France Telecom, which used to be the state monopoly Poste et Telecommunications. It was privatised in 2004. It has changed completely, due to technology and the EU Commission compulsory opening to competition. In the 1980s and 90s it was a successful state enterprise supplying landline telephones to the French, but also creating and running Minitel, the first internet service in the world. Its employees, engineers and managers, passed a competitive examination to enter the firm, and were sure of a lifelong career as civil servants.

France Telecom/Orange became a private firm, and a world wide supplier of mobile phone services, buying and selling dozens of foreign firms in the process. The privatisation was done according to the EU Commission legislation. In 2006, France Telecom had to ‘open itself to competition’ and other telecommunication firms came on the market in France: Bouygues

(specialised in construction and public works) and SFR.

Bouygues and SFR did not have to build their own infrastructure however. They got the use of the existing telephone and internet infrastructure, built by the State and until then the property of the public service. The public service had to offer its network of landlines and mobile connections at a cheap price. The law ensured that France Telecom was not favoured financially by its erstwhile position as a state monopoly, in other words it could not rent the use of its infrastructure at a price that would make its rivals ‘non competitive’. That means, at a price that reflected the sums spent by the state to create this infrastructure. Not only that, but France Telecom had a large workforce, which it was supposed to keep (apparently the government refused a plan for redundancies) whereas the competitors were free to recruit just the right number of young newly trained specialists.

France Telecom was in debt and, according to the CEO at the time, its survival was at stake.

He said in 2012: ‘We had to train our employees to understand and use the new technologies, recruit young talent born in the digital world, and prepare the mass departure of employees recruited in the 1980s, who had ensured a vast improvement of the telephone service at the time.’

An executive meeting was called on 20th October 2006 to set out the

targets. Of the 110,000 employees, one in five had to go. The restructuring plan, called ‘NEXT’ aimed at 22,000 fewer jobs, and a programme called ACT was to move 10,000 more from their job to other jobs. 6,000 younger people were to be recruited. The problem was that 75% of employees were civil servants, and could not be sacked or made redundant.

The situation called for the involvement of the whole workforce, represented by unions, and negotiations conducted with great skill. Instead the skill was deployed in dividing the workforce and applying psychological pressure to force people to leave.

A school was set up in 2005 entirely devoted to teach managers how to reduce the workforce. Then managers were given targets, and figures were compared at weekly meetings, and bonuses given accordingly.

Employees over 55 were offered early retirement, as were mothers of three children who had worked for France Telecom for 15 years. Those who were not contemplating retirement, or those younger than 55, had to be made to leave by other methods.

Mainly they were made to feel that they were no longer valued. Managers imposed unrealisable targets, or withheld work, imposed work below qualifications and experience, offered posts hundreds of miles away, forced employees to reapply for their jobs. They

took away people's company cars, even their desk. All employees were called for 'appraisal' meetings each month (instead of each year), during which leaving was suggested. Superiors kept diaries of employees' behaviour, lateness, performance, in order to build cases for dismissal. A general climate of instability was instituted; managers given bonuses for each departure, and remaining employees kept their heads down.

Firms in France have '*docteurs du travail*', doctors they employ for their employees. Until the new 2016 Labour Law, each employee was entitled to a yearly medical consultation. France Telecom doctors had spoken out about levels of despair among the employees and not been heard. Some resigned in protest. Labour inspectors and union representatives complained. Suicides were reported in the press, leading the CEO to say; "This fashion for suicide, which is very upsetting for everybody, has got to stop."

The role of the unions.

The role of the unions in this seems to be less than brilliant. For a start, they were divided. CFDT was the traditional and strong union in the post office and telecommunications. In 1988 there was a split and SUD (Solidaires Unitaires Democratiques) came about. Then unions were further divided between executive and employee unions. Moreover employees were targeted for removal one by one, which made strike or other action problematic.

Each member of the workforce was terrified of losing their post, or being transferred hundreds of miles away, or made to do demeaning work. And managers had to get rid of staff in order to get their bonus. It seems that the climate was far from solidarity. 'If someone burst into tears at his desk, his neighbour just moved away', in the words of one of the witnesses in the pre-trial investigation.

In response to the number of suicides, SUD and another union created an 'Observatory of stress and forced relocations' 'Observatoire du stress et

des mobilités forcées'. This office accumulated files of cases of harassment, which made a contribution to the legal case against the CEO.

The trial

Labour inspectors can investigate suicides linked to work and in some cases refer the case to the public prosecutor [*le procureur de la République*]. This is what happened in the case of France Telecom. The unions joined in making a complaint. A four year investigation by a judge leading to an 193 page file concluded that there was a case to answer. The then CEO and director of Human Resources have been examined by a judge, and there will be a trial.

Conclusion

The EU Commission bears much

more responsibility than the individual manager of the company in these suicides. It is the Commission which imposed this sharing of the wealth, in terms of money, experience and infrastructure, of an old established firm. It gave the managers very little choice. In fact it was an impossible situation, created by the drive to privatisation and 'fair and unhindered competition' demanded by the EU. The unions had a difficult job and did not contribute much. The public accepted the situation. They were appalled by the suicides, and the photos of marks left by a suicide on the wall of a France Telecom building upset everyone. But there was no boycott of France Telecom or even talk of it.

DARK DEEDS BY THE RIVER OF JANUARY

Corticosteroid Triamcinolone
re-colours the fading flag
Prednisolone
stiffens it before it sags
Salbutamol
accusations
cages the Russian bear
(TUEs) Therapeutic-Use-Exceptions
only
for those with the right to win
in the Rio glare
Paralympics fit as fleas
an able-bodied Olympian
and the morphine drip
for a stiff knee
the manic medium
odium
war-cries from the triumphalist
podium
sport as war
war as sport
always for export

Wilson John Haire.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Free Abuse By Free Markets

Britain's Hardest Workers was a recent BBC program. In it, 20 volunteers test their skills in a series of low-wage jobs. In game-show style, the least effective would be eliminated after each job. The last survivor got a large cash prize. The others were shown just as getting their low-pay wages, though I'm sure they got extra for having been on television.

They were a mixed bag, often people who would anyway have been looking for the sort of jobs they were doing in the program. A few looked like they might be 'upwardly mobile'. At least one was 'downwardly mobile': a middle-aged woman who'd been a Mortgage Advisor on £40,000 a year and now seemed unemployable.

All of the jobs we saw needed skills, despite most of them paying only the minimum wages. New people learning the job were much slower than those with a few weeks experience, and they made many errors. But it's no wonder that they were still paying a minimum wage. With hotels, for instance, there is a tiny price advantage reflected in very low and irregular wages for hotel cleaners. Tiny price advantages can make the difference between having most of the hotel rooms full or most of them empty, with a vast difference in profit or loss. Such workers are hard to organise and very easy to replace, particularly with contracting out. When businesses move most of their work to agencies, they can replace the workers instantly. There is a strong economic pressure for

the lowest possible wage.

An informative program, and quite entertaining with many human stories. If you missed it, you can still download it.¹

The Doom of the Baby Boomers

"Did we baby boomers bring about a revolution in the 60s or just usher in neoliberalism?", asked Polly Toynbee in a recent *Guardian* article.² The truth is, we did both.

The Wiki defines Baby Boomers as Westerners born between 1946 and 1964. But the radical rebellion of the 1960s was carried through by the eldest of them, and often inspired by the slightly older 'War Babies'. John Lennon was born in 1940, Paul McCartney in 1942, Mick Jagger in 1943. Polly Toynbee herself was born in 1946. I was born in 1950, and found student radicalism in sharp decline by the time I was part of it.

It was a scrappy radicalism that distrusted the state. Distrusted all authority and organisation. You could call it *The Very Popular Front for the Liberation of Wonderful Me*. It actually did liberate 'Wonderful Me': it established freedoms that are now taken for granted. I remember in the 1990s hearing two people some 15 years younger than me, finding it hard to believe that it was ever viewed as unusual or wrong for young people to try living together to see if they got on before marrying. I'm old enough to remember when it was called 'living in sin', and only a small minority dared do it openly.

That was the positive side – it was a revolution of sorts, though not violent and maybe better called a radical reform. But weaknesses and a lack of realism left it wide open to replacement by Neo-Liberalism. People who talked the language of liberty, but got a tight grip on the state machine out of the public gaze. But it wasn't a failure: there were gigantic changes in social life. A family order that had stood since the Neolithic age was first challenged and then overthrown.

The biggest change is that women made vast strides in social equality and work equality. They also got the freedom to do what they liked with their own bodies. The most surprising change, and one which the conventional Left and Far Left were initially doubtful about, was the acceptance and increasing normalisation of both lesbianism and male homosexuality. I must admit, I myself was doubtful about it. I accepted the decriminalisation of male homosexuality: nor was I bothered by lesbianism existing somewhere out of sight – by the oddities of English law, it had never actually been illegal. But as far as I recall, I felt that this was quite enough and that gays should keep it all private. I ignored the widespread discrimination against them. Only gradually did my attitudes change. It took a lot of work, risk and effort to change the whole society.

Suppose someone in 1965 had predicted that 'gay rights' would win through almost everywhere in the next 50 years. That even the Republic of Ireland would accept not just 'living in sin' and legal

and open homosexuality, but also gay marriage. They actually voted for it by almost 2 to 1 in 2015, but this would not have seemed possible in 1965. In that year a conservative MP called Humphry Berkeley brought in a Private Members bill, which failed. He lost his seat in the 1966 election, and said that his support for homosexual rights was the cause. Yet because he and others dared push various aspects of a radical agenda, it won out.

On economic matters, distrusting the state and distrusting organisation was sometimes liberating, but more often damaging. And hard-line radicalism was often self-defeating. When Trotskyist, it was *always* self-defeating. Baby Boomers were irrationally fond of a failed branch of Leninism that has had zero positive achievements since its emergence in the 1920s.³

It was once normal for the post-1945 economic system to be called the Mixed Economy. 1960s radicals, whether socialist or anarchist or mystical, insisted on calling it capitalism. The Hard Left also congratulated themselves on defeating moderate leftist reforms like Incomes Policy and Workers Control, which would delay the immanent collapse of the wicked capitalist system. This left them wide open to Thatcherism, which said that Capitalism was Virtue and would do wonderful things if freed from pointless state restrictions.

None of this was true. From the 1980s down to the present day, a more-than-millionaire class (also known as the richest 1%) have enjoyed an economic miracle *for themselves*, and only for themselves. The Mixed Economy remains the reality, adapted to benefit the rich and squeeze ordinary people. Britain and the USA had slightly lower growth-rates than in the 1950-1975 era. France, West Germany, Italy and Japan lost the subtle balance that had given each of them an Economic Miracle that won the Cold War.

Socially, there have been vast shifts that fitted the left agenda, as I've detailed before.⁴ Thatcher didn't like it and did what she could to obstruct it. She promoted no other women in the Tory Party while she dominated it.

She introduced 'Section 28' against gays.⁵ But she also did nothing about the swarms of libertarians in her party, keeping a low profile but climbing the hierarchy. Under David Cameron, they finished off what was left of traditional England.

Cameron was born in 1966: just too young to be a baby boomer. But Brexit and the death of traditional England are his legacy.

China: Leninism With a Mixed Economy

The West has done badly since people started believing that the Mixed Economy was an aberration that must be urgently replaced. It's not actually been replaced. But as I said, the official ideology of Free Markets has let a more-than-millionaire class enjoy an economic miracle *for themselves alone*.

In China, Deng and his heirs have in practice copied the successful Western pattern of a Mixed Economy. From what I've read of the open discussions of their policies, the understanding is unclear. It may have been corruption more than wisdom that led the party to keep its grip on the whole economy. But British public life was gigantically corrupt during the Industrial Revolution, normally dated from 1760 to 1830. The respectable clean-up under the Victorians coincided with the decline of British dominance of manufacturing, and arguably caused it. For certain, there was also enormous corruption in the USA when it became a manufacturing giant during its 'Gilded Age'. 'Patriotic corruption' – corruption among people who expect to stay part of a society and enjoy a common prosperity – often does grease the wheels of radical change.

Under Xi Jinping, China is increasingly understanding how the wider world works. Sees that Neo-Liberal ideas do not in fact work well. That China badly needs a clean-up of corruption, but need not copy the West. A recent article called *China's socialist model outperforms capitalism* says:

"The top four fastest growing economies since the neo-liberal 'Washington Consensus' was put

forward, all follow, or are highly influenced by, China's development model. These countries are China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In contrast, capitalist development models, including the Washington Consensus, have been a failure. Pro-capitalists in China would clearly prefer these facts to be generally unknown since they damage the idea that China should abandon its socialist path of development and adopt a capitalist one.

"These facts also have international political implications. The socialist development model followed by China is the creation of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC).

"The Washington Consensus is the dominant economic strategy put forward by international economic institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, and is taught in Western universities. Yet, the overwhelming economic superiority of countries following a socialist development policy, more in line with the Chinese model, shows that it not only outperforms capitalist alternatives but that the CPC has a better grasp on the situation than Western economists.

"A factual comparison in the international results of the two economic development approaches - the neo-liberal Washington Consensus versus the Chinese socialist development strategy - clearly shows how the latter outperforms the former.

"We will consider China itself as well as three other countries. These are Vietnam, which defines itself as socialist and drew heavily from China's socialist market economy approach, and Cambodia and Laos, both of which were highly influenced by China's development model...

"From 1993-2015, China, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos ranked, respectively, No.1, No.2, No.3 and No.4 in world per capita GDP growth - peripheral cases of countries with populations of less than 5 million or dominated by oil production are not included...

"Since 1981 China has lifted 728 million people out of World Bank-defined poverty. Vietnam lifted over 30 million

people from poverty by the same criteria. In the rest of the world, in which the dominant model advocated by the IMF was the Washington Consensus, only roughly 120 million people rose above poverty. During this time, 83 percent of all poverty reduction was in China, 85 percent was in socialist countries and only 15 percent was in capitalist countries.”⁶

China also may be stabilising after the loss of export markets, caused by a world slowdown in which poorer people who buy cheap Chinese goods have borne the brunt:

“China’s imports rose for the first time in nearly two years last month, sending a strong signal that the world’s second-biggest economy is slowly building up steam.

“China’s exports, however, fell again in August, but by a smaller margin, indicating that demand overseas for Chinese products is also stabilising.”⁷

How Corbyn Can Now Win

Labour is supposed to be ‘democratic socialist’. But when a free vote delivers the ‘wrong’ outcome, respect for democracy is shallow. 172 out of 232 Labour MPs thought that Brexit gave them a good excuse to dump Jeremy Corbyn and replace him with someone bland, timid and safe. Stop seriously opposing the Tories: be a nice wishy-washy alternative.

As we all know, it failed. It was quickly claimed that a majority of those who were Labour Party members when Corbyn was first elected had voted for Owen Smith. I’d want to see several independent polls on the matter before I accepted this as truth. But it may be that many who originally voted for Corbyn out of hope were spooked by a hostile press and hostile Labour MPs.

I called those MPs the Timid Tendency. People certain that Labour could not win with Corbyn leading it, even though the polls were close before the bulk of the Labour MPs used Brexit as an excuse to rebel. The activism and enthusiasm of Corbyn supporters was discounted, even though it includes vast number of individuals who ought to be able to get possible Labour voters

to actually vote.

What happens next? Peace within the Labour Party, I hope. So I’m making a suggestion that should improve Labour’s chances of winning the next election. Corbyn is against nuclear weapons, but many potential Labour voters might be put off if electing him meant functional disarmament. So he could pledge:

- * the job of holding the nuclear trigger would be transferred to someone willing to use them (maybe the Minister of Defence).
- * the manifesto should promise a referendum on nuclear disarmament, and also if Trident is the best option if we stay nuclear-armed.
- * an *absolute* promise of no-first-use, which neither Britain nor the USA have ever done.⁸ (And Russia no longer makes this promise.)

Russia Dares To Believe In Itself

As I said earlier, when a free vote delivers the ‘wrong’ outcome, respect for democracy is shallow. The Western media use a series of sneers to cover up the awkward fact that pro-Western and liberal parties in Russia are now as unpopular as the Far Right in Britain: maybe more so. It wasn’t a perfect election: but had there been serious discontent, it could have been expressed.

Turnout was low – but to me that means that most voters thought the government was doing its best in a tough situation. More than half the votes were for Putin’s party. Everyone had expected them to win easily.

Second, but much reduced, were the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, maybe fading as their older members die off. Their vote fell from one-fifth to between one-seventh and one-eighth; 13.34%. The hard-right ‘Liberal Democrats’ rose slightly to nearly the same level, 13.14%. The moderate-socialist ‘Just Russia’ lost half their votes and got 6.23%.

Some 13% voted for a scattering of minor parties that got three seats between them, there being a 5% cut-off for the party lists. Biggest (though without seats at a national level) was a rival ‘Communists of Russia’ with

2.27%.

As for the pets of the Anglosphere: Yabloko, the largest surviving pro-Western party, lost heavily. They fell from 3.43% to 1.99%. Their best-ever result was 7.86% in 1993, before pro-Western policies had truly screwed up. It must help that they were not involved in the actual implementation of Yeltsin’s bungled privatisations.

A much smaller pro-Western party, Civic Platform, actually won a constituency seat, though overall its vote was no more than 0.22%. It is new for this election. It belongs to Mikhail Prokhorov, one of the people who became mysteriously rich while Russia grew poorer in the Yeltsin years.

Russia looks surprisingly solid, after all it has been through.

Global Equality

In the West, we hear a lot about the richest 1% prospering at the expense of the 99%. It’s actually more complex. The 9% just below the richest 1% have done about as well as they’d have done if the older Mixed-Economy viewpoint had held. This is worth emphasising, because this middling 9% have probably got more talent and hard work per head than the richest 1%. They manage to be useful to society without the gigantic rewards that the richest 1% claim they need and deserve. Many ordinary people see the limited privileges of this 9% as a just reward for skills. Since we’re definitely not going to be moving to a society of complete equality in the foreseeable future, left-wingers should be emphasising this.

We must also point out that the 99% or 90% who have lost out in the West are themselves a privileged middling group from a global viewpoint:

“The era of globalisation seemed to offer little for the people in between: households in the 75th to 85th percentile of the income distribution (who were poorer than the top 15% but richer than everyone else) seemed scarcely better off in 2008 than they had been 20 years before. They constituted a decile of discontent, squeezed between their own countries’ plutocrats and Asia’s middle class. This dramatic dip in the

chart seemed to explain a lot. ‘Cue Donald Trump. Cue nationalism. Cue Brexit,’ wrote Mr Milanovic’s publisher.”⁹

Branko Milanovic wrote a book arguing that globally, the poorest 75% had made a lot of gains. As had the richest 15%, but especially the richest 1%. I plan to review it for the next issue.

Snippets

Sport and Therapeutic Use Exemption

Performance-enhancing drugs can be used quite legally when there is a genuine medical need. This is fair enough, but also wide open to abuse.

A lot of Western athletes have Therapeutic Use Exemptions for things they would not otherwise be allowed to take.¹⁰ This was the main point of the recent leak of personal medical data by the ‘Fancy Bear’ hackers, who are presumed to be Russian.¹¹

The West is also suffering a lot of deaths from abuse of legally prescribed opioids made by regular drugs companies. These are chemically close to heroin, and it’s been claimed to be an easy pathway to them.¹²

You’ve not seen nothing like the mighty Finns

“Finland has one of the world’s best education systems, with no tuition fees and also giving free meals to their students. The literacy rate in Finland is 100 percent. Finland has one of the highest standards of living in the world. Like Denmark and other European countries, equality is considered one of the most important values in society. Whereas in the Netherlands, government control over the economy remains at a minimum, but a socialist welfare system remains. The lifestyle in the Netherlands is very egalitarian and organized, where even bosses do not discipline or treat their subordinates rudely.”¹³

Britain could usefully copy Finland in most things. (Though not the weather.)

Websites

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

(Endnotes)

- 1 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07qrk9y>
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/08/revolution-victoria-albert-museum-sixties-usher-neoliberalism>
- 3 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/why-trotsky-politics-achieved-nothing-solid/>
- 4 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/the-left-redefined-the-normal/>
- 5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_28
- 6 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1002098.shtml>
- 7 <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2017569/chinas-exports-fall-again-amid-lacklustre-demand-goods-overseas>
- 8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_first_use
- 9 <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21707219-charting-globalisations-discontents-shooting-elephant>
- 10 <https://sputniknews.com/science/20160917/1045395426/fancy-bears-third-wada-batch.html>
- 11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sofacy_Group
- 12 <http://www.vox.com/2016/2/5/10919360/opioid-epidemic-chart>
- 13 <http://blog.peerform.com/top-ten-most-socialist-countries-in-the-world/>

There’s the idea that people should be able to control how the information that they’re giving to websites is used and monetized in a more clear and powerful way. That’s something that probably will need government action.

Eli Pariser

There never will be enough for everything while the world goes on. The more that is given the more there will be needed.

Churchill

There never was a Churchill from John of Marlborough down that had either morals or principles

William Gladstone On Lord Randolph Churchill (Winston's father)

There is only one thing certain about war, that it is full of disappointments and also full of mistakes.

Churchill

There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full

Henry Kissinger

Their disappearance from the human family would be no great loss to the world

US politician Henry Clay on Native Americans

The worst thing I can say about democracy is that it has tolerated the right honourable gentleman for four and half years

Aneurin Bevan On Neville Chamberlain

The whole of the global economy is based on supplying the cravings of two per cent of the world’s population.

Bill Bryson

The Tories and Grammar Schools

By Chris Winch

Grammar schools are selective secondary schools with a strong emphasis on academic achievement. Prior to their near-abolition in the 1970s they typically took on 20% of secondary school pupils, although in some areas, such as Wales, they took 33%. The 1944 Education Act established three tiers of schools: Grammars, Technical Schools and Secondary Modern Schools (the Tripartite System). Selection was determined by a one-off intelligence test, the 11+. The Technical schools failed to establish themselves properly and the Secondary Modern Schools educated around 70% of young people in England and Wales in the 1950s and 60s. Despite underfunding and a poor reputation, some pupils at Secondary Modern schools were able to excel academically, but they acquired a reputation as a route to dead end jobs.

How and why they were abolished

Not surprisingly the Tripartite System proved unpopular with parents (i.e. voters). The Technical Schools had little public support and parents resented their children going to schools perceived as second, if not third rate. These included many middle class parents. In the end, Grammar Schools had too little support within the electorate for them to survive. However, the way in which they were abolished, particularly by Tony

Crosland when Secretary of State, left much to be desired.

Crosland simply wanted to abolish grammar schools without considering whether the Tripartite System could be reformed or how school performance could be raised. For example, the method of selection could have been made fairer and more uniform across the country, more resources could have been put into Technical and Secondary Modern Schools and a high quality system of vocational education could have been developed. The Industrial Training Act of 1964 would have been a great opportunity for the Wilson government to have done this. One suspects that Crosland was an ideological egalitarian who was simply determined to destroy Grammar Schools without a serious consideration of what the alternatives might be. This attitude produced a lingering resentment that continues to this day. Currently, about 160 Grammar Schools remain in various parts of Britain.

Initially, comprehensive schools were not a great success. Many continued to function, in effect, as secondary moderns. Only with the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 and with the development of methods for tracking the progress of pupils in detail did improvement start to happen. Reforms in primary education which bore down on illiteracy and innumeracy also helped. Gradually more diversity

was introduced into the system to cater for different abilities and talents. However, comprehensive schools have never quite shaken off the poor reputation that they acquired as a result of the careless way in which they were introduced.

The current system – academisation

The fifty years since the near-abolition of Grammar Schools have thus resulted in a very varied system with more opportunities to gain qualifications and to go to university than the Tripartite System ever allowed. Nearly 50% of young people go to university, far more than the labour market can absorb. Opportunities for high quality vocational education remain very poor. In Germany about 62% of young people aged 15-25 do a Dual System apprenticeship, which sets them up with a valuable occupation for life, as well as a respected and established place in society. The comparable figure for apprenticeships of similar quality is below 3%. The compulsory levy on firms due to start in 2017 may change this, but the history of vocational education in Britain gives good grounds for scepticism. The big challenge for Britain's young people remains the shortage of good jobs and a corresponding lack of training opportunities.

In this context, bringing back Grammar Schools, proposed this month by Theresa May, cannot

address this problem. So what problem is the proposal supposed to address? It seems like it is a very particular problem. Academically able children from poor families will, it is claimed, do better in Grammars than they would in a Local Authority, Academy or Free School.

This is an odd way of making policy. Electorally, it still has to face the problem of making most children losers in an educational race. Politically, it is risky since many Conservative MPs oppose the policy. In policy terms it is odd, since one would have thought that the aim of an education policy would have been to benefit all children, rather than just a small minority, let alone disadvantage a large majority as a by-product. Intellectually, it lacks substance, since all policies have advantages rather than disadvantages and a good policymaker chooses policies where the balance of advantages outweigh the disadvantages. There is no evidence that Theresa May has made this calculation. In all, the recent policy announcement is not a promising start for Theresa May as Prime Minister.

What is the evidence?

By coincidence, a detailed report on Grammar School performance has just been published by the Education Policy Institute (EPI). There are its principal findings:

Dealing specifically with Theresa May's main claim concerning poorer pupils, that is those on Free School Meals (FSM), they write:

“Superficially, grammar schools appear to do well in closing gaps – with a small 4.3 percentage point gap between the proportion of FSM and non-FSM children securing the 5 good GCSE standard, compared with a 25.5 percentage point gap in all non-selective schools. The Prime

Minister appeared to claim that this constitutes a social mobility argument for more grammar schools. But this is a weak argument - the gap is narrow because grammar schools only select pupils who have high attainment on entry. Adjusting for prior attainment eliminates much of the difference.”

In other words, when one genuinely compares like with like, the performance of grammar schools for poorer pupils is little better than that of non-selective schools. The report finds that, although grammar schools appear to secure a higher rate of achievement than non-selective schools for pupils of similar characteristics, this positive difference declines as the proportion of grammar school places rises while the negative effects on pupils who are not in grammar schools increases. While it is true that the performance of FSM pupils at grammar schools is better than that of non-FSM pupils, data is based on only 500 pupils whose characteristics are different from those of FSM pupils who do not attend grammar schools. In other words, we really need to compare FSM pupils with the same relevant characteristics in both selective and non-selective areas. When this is done, the performance of grammar schools is only marginally better than it is for non-selective schools. Overall, performance in selective school areas is no better and no worse than the performance of non-selective areas.

There thus appear to be small gains for poor pupils in selective schools compared with similar pupils in non-selective areas, but at the expense of a wider gap between the best and the worst performing students. This is an interesting point in relation to May's stated intention to attend to the needs of the neglected in Britain. Her schools

policy appears to favour the strong at the expense of the weak. Perhaps this is defensible in economic terms (although we doubt it), but we would like to hear the defence.

These issues were not addressed by the Conservatives in the parliamentary debate on the re-introduction of grammar schools, the details of which the government refused to divulge. In PMQs, Jeremy Corbyn focused on the theme of a good education for all and questioned the lack of evidence for the proposed new policy. What he got in reply was a rant from Theresa May about Labour not caring about catering for children with high ability. She did not address the points made by Corbyn. It is a pity that the EPI report did not appear before this episode of PMQs as it would have made May look even more uncomfortable.

What is likely to happen?

There is little doubt that May and most of the Tory Party are committed to the reintroduction of grammar schools, but everyone else and a small number of Tories which include George Osborne, Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan, are not. The Chief Inspector for Schools has denounced the policy. This looks like something to which May has a passionate personal commitment which is leading her to adopt a risky policy on a wafer thin parliamentary majority, when she has plenty of other difficulties on her plate. This is an area where Labour can develop a really effective attack if it can swallow Jeremy Corbyn's leadership on this issue.

The wealth creators of neoliberal mythology are some of the most effective wealth destroyers the world has ever seen.

George Monbiot

Blair Inc - The Power, The Money, The Scandals

A review by Mark Cowling¹

In 1997 the first Labour government for 17 years was elected in a landslide victory. I was absolutely delighted. I had some traumatic memories, particularly from the Thatcher years. The miners' strike of 1984-5 was a horrible episode. Arthur Scargill led the National Union of Mineworkers into a strike without a national ballot, and when stocks of coal were at a record high. The miners and their families suffered terribly in a battle which was obviously unwinnable. If you said this to other people on the left you were seen as a traitor. The defeat of the miners made it much easier for pits to be closed. This left mining villages in the north-east devastated, and many of them have not really recovered to this day. The defeat of the miners, together with that of other unions, such as the print workers, led to a general demoralisation of working people, and a decline in union membership and influence.

In Middlesbrough where I live the recession caused by Mrs Thatcher's monetarist policies had a devastating effect on many small manufacturing and garment businesses. Under her henchman Ian MacGregor the steel industry, which was a large local employer, was prepared for denationalisation by cutting back drastically on the labour force. My daughter now teaches in a primary school in an area of the town which was affected by these changes. From having fairly full employment prior to Mrs Thatcher, still in 2016 the area is marked by very substantial long-term unemployment. Of some 250 children at my daughter's school only 18 pay for school lunches. My daughter found that the children in her class had no real idea of what is meant by work outside the home. As will be imagined, the area also has bad problems with drugs and general anti-social behaviour.

With all this as a background, the relief when Blair was elected was overwhelming. However, he then squandered the opportunity to put

through any radical measures during his first term. His succession of governments certainly had some achievements, notably putting more money into the NHS and education, better provision for nursery-aged children or the Human Rights Act, but were disappointing compared with what could have been achieved. And then, of course, Blair seriously damaged his own reputation and the prospects of his party by supporting the US invasion of Iraq in spite of there being no real evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. This magazine's predecessor provided very good evidence, available publicly, which showed that it was very unlikely that Iraq possessed chemical weapons. Iraq was held to be supporting Al Qaeda, which also seemed most unlikely, as Saddam Hussein had a Christian as his Foreign Minister, and could be seen in propaganda videos promoting university education for women, sitting around a table with a group of women who did not wear veils.

Mainly as a consequence of the invasion of Iraq and the devastation left in its wake, Blair left office under a cloud. Prior to Blair, retiring prime ministers would typically make reasonable amounts of money by writing their memoirs, charging for lectures, and probably taking on three or four company directorships.

However, as this book demonstrates, in only too devastating detail, Blair has spent his time between making mischief, notably in the Middle East, and making obscene amounts of money. Blair has also taken on a series of commitments, some of which very much contradict the others, apparently without realising that this is a problem.

Here are some of the highlights (low lights?!) of the book.

Quartet Peace Representative in the Middle East.

It starts with his role as a mediator in the Middle East. It was pretty

obvious, given the disastrous outcome of the invasion of Iraq and statements he had made which evinced hostility to Muslims, that he needed to demonstrate, at minimum, neutrality between Israel and the Palestinians. On the contrary, he completely flunked his first opportunity. The background is that following the Hamas victory in the 2006 elections in Gaza the Israelis imposed a blockade and economic sanctions. In 2010 the Israeli defence forces killed nine Turkish activists on the Marmara, which in turn led to huge international pressure to lift the blockade. Instead of adding to the pressure he simply accepted the view of the Israeli premier Ehud Barak that there should be some voluntary Israeli easing of the siege. Blair simply managed to get the Israelis to allow a few previously banned items into Gaza, and trumpeted this as a major victory in the world's media. Not surprisingly, the Palestinians concluded that there was nothing to be gained from Blair (location 440). Another example of conflicting interests and lack of sensitivity was his appointment in 2012 of a woman who had previously worked as an Israeli intelligence officer and adviser to Benjamin Netanyahu to Tony Blair Associates. Although she was not working on the Middle East, it can readily be imagined that this did not go down well with the Palestinians (location 455).

Following the Israeli assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014 in which some 2200 Gazans were killed, he commented that the Palestinians should restrict themselves to peaceful means, without any counterbalancing comment about the Israelis (location 463). This lack of neutrality continues his approach as Prime Minister when he saw Israel as a democratic state threatened by extremists, at the same time as making deprecating remarks about British Muslims and rejecting the idea that British foreign policy had anything to do with the radicalisation of Muslims (location 491). One of

Blair's other activities was the setting up of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. This failed to include any prominent Muslims, but did include Haim Saban, an American Israeli billionaire and supporter of Israel (location 503). At the time of the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013, Muslim leaders condemned this act of extremists, Blair blamed a strain within the Muslim faith which was not just the province of a few (location 528).

Blair's activities as the representative of the Quartet in the Middle East were not cheap. Whereas his predecessor had managed with seven or eight staff and was neutral, Blair's staff occupied a whole floor of a luxury hotel at £1 million per year (location 536). His major achievements for the Palestinians were two large-scale economic projects to do with natural gas and telecommunications, both of which coincidentally benefited the JPMorgan bank with which Blair happened to be associated as a "strategic adviser" at £2 million per year (location 553). In any case, substantial economic development from Gaza could only be expected as the result of a peace deal with Israel. It is not realistic to expect economic development to lead to peace (location 755).

Blair's wealth.

The book clearly demonstrates a dramatic Blair interest in making money. The book estimates that he is worth about £60 million, but: "[the] Tony Blair financial empire [is] the most impenetrable financial body that is legally possible in the United Kingdom" (location 886). The Blair moneymaking enterprises centre on Tony Blair Associates. One goal of the structure is tax avoidance (location 1047). Important clients for advice include JP Morgan (£2 million per year), the Emir of Kuwait (£27 million) and the government of Kazakhstan (£8 million per year) (location 1065).

Blair the adviser.

There is no sign of Blair being distressed by the Emir of Kuwait's lack of democratic credentials and lamentable human rights record (location 1505).

This association with the Emir and Blair's role as Quartet Representative do not sit easily together (location 1519). Kazakhstan's president Nazarbayev is notionally a democratic statesman, but in one election his main opponent shot himself twice in the chest before shooting himself in the head. More recently Nazarbayev has been re-elected by plebiscite, with suspiciously high percentages in his favour (location 1696). Under him strikers have been massacred (location 1756) and opponents subject to show trials (location 1857); minority religious groups face persecution (location 1945). Nonetheless, Blair simply praises Nazarbayev and, for substantial sums, the president of Azerbaijan (location 2036). He seemed happy to help the Burmese generals to improve their image (location 2155). He maintained the friendship with Gaddafi that started when he was prime minister (location 2452). Peter Mandelson, a fellow founder of the New Labour project, distances himself from this support for dictatorships. (location 2596). Mandelson, the book alleges, has been involved in similar activities to Tony Blair's, but less blatantly and dramatically (location 2914).

The book does eventually praise Blair for his role in the response to the Ebola crisis (location 3359). This help was provided through Blair's Africa Governance Initiative (AGI) charity. Blair works for this gratis, but the book suggests that this work facilitates potentially lucrative consultancy contracts (location 3328).

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

Set up in 2008, the Tony Blair Faith Foundation aims to strengthen inter-faith collaboration, but also to strengthen the influence of religion or, in Foundations speak "We inform, educate and inspire how religion motivates the world today" (location 3663). The authors comment that this is meaningless: how do you inspire how religion motivates the world today? One major problem of the Foundation is its failure to recruit a Muslim of any prominence to its advisory board, whereas there

is no such problem with other faiths (location 3937). This links on the one hand to the comments mentioned above linking Islam to terrorism, and his closeness to the Israeli position in his work as Quartet Representative. As mentioned above, one of the major donors to the Faith Foundation is a prominent supporter of Israel, which doubtless makes recruiting a Muslim of repute difficult, and also undermined his position as a neutral honest broker in the Middle East. More generally, donors sought by the Faith Foundation are seriously rich (location 4381).

The Blairs' real estate.

The Blairs now own no less than 36 properties including five abroad and two blocks of flats. One is a country mansion reminiscent of Chequers with an estimated value of £8 million; another is their five-storey London house at Connaught Square, also valued at around £8 million (location 4993).

Progress.

In Britain the Blairite political interest is represented within the Labour Party by Progress. The authors comment that this is a singularly well-heeled organisation with an annual income of around £360,000, apparently gained from a few wealthy donors, notably Lord Sainsbury (location 5189). The organisation has an opaque decision-making structure and is difficult to contact (location 5205). It provides training and support for suitable Parliamentary candidates. It was plainly disturbed by the election of Ed Miliband, and stepped up its activities in response. The book does not cover the election of Corbyn, but links between the rebellion of Labour MPs and Progress would doubtless be a worthwhile study.

This most interesting book pairs well with *The Establishment* by Owen Jones. Jones's book does not have a clear theoretical framework, but is a really excellent compendium of the evils of the neo-liberal legacy of Mrs Thatcher, including its continuing

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Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier (No 5)

A dictionary definition of “foot soldier...*a dedicated low level follower...*”

By Michael Murray

In this month's Diary: Wiping the Slate Clean.

The September Diary starts at the end: with the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool. This was the first Labour Party conference I have attended, not as a delegate, but as an observer. And what an occasion it was. For the first time in the history of the Party, as far as I know, overflow facilities had to be organised to accommodate the crowd, with a giant screen relaying the conference proceedings. Jeremy, true to character, having just given the traditional hour-long Party Leader's Speech, spent a further twenty minutes addressing the overflow.

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology a good chunk of conference proceedings, showing the contributions to the policy debates of a cross section of the Party, from Shadow Cabinet to

Constituency level, is available on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Working back from his closing speech, all the contributions seemed to fill in, and lead up to, Jeremy's hour-long comprehensive and widely acclaimed summary of where we are and what the vision is for the future. Many of the contributions were from Shadow Ministers there, expounding on their briefs, with clear signs of inexperience and not having come to terms yet with sudden “field promotions” within the last year. It was nice to see Jeremy in his address to conference recognize their courage in coming forward when, due to the organized, even synchronized resignations almost bringing Corbyn – and the Party – crashing down, they stepped forward into the breach. But it was Corbyn's decisive victory in the leadership election that

set the tone of the Conference and not the last ditch bureaucratic manoeuvre by the NEC Chair crashing through the Party Rules - again - to dilute the post-Conference National Executive Committee composition against Corbyn.

Not only was all that happening in the large, modern conference centre in Liverpool's spectacularly rejuvenated docklands area. In the inner city another conference was going on, called *The World Transformed*. This was in every way a complementary event – not the “alternative” Labour Party Conference the hostile right wing media strived to portray as being Momentum's purpose.

Organised by Momentum, and a broad range of grassroots groups, TWT, as it became known, put on a thoroughly well organized, informative, buzzy four day programme of politics, art, music, culture and community. The venue was a massive, deconsecrated, local community-owned and controlled Church decked out with flags and banners, staffed by efficient, helpful, welcoming and predominantly young TWT volunteers in distinctive, matching tee-shirts.

Again, most of the TWT's 50-odd events are now available on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com). The content ranged over Brexit, the Chakrabati Inquiry, Whither the Labour

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influence in the Labour Party. One area he charts is an increasing tendency for Labour politicians to be career politicians with middle-class and quite possibly privately educated backgrounds. This in turn is prone to link with treating politics as a money-making enterprise, and he gives some examples of Blair associates who have also amassed property, although none on the scale of Tony Blair himself.

The career of Blair since leaving office is frankly disgusting. Next year there will be an extensive reselection of Labour MPs and candidates as a result of boundary changes. I shall be very pleased if people with the Blair approach to politics depart as a result. The book can be recommended as an important but thoroughly depressing read.

Note 1: *Blair Inc - The Power, The Money, The Scandals*, by Francis Beckett, David Henke and Nick Kochan. John Blake Publishing, London.

Kindle edition, £4.29. Paperback, £7.99.

Party now – and Momentum itself, Anti-Austerity, Debt, Trade, TTIP, the Media – established MSM and the emerging radical media. Then there were sessions on the future of work, of unions, of work organization (in the latter session, Hilary Wainwright, a familiar name from the Workers' Control Movement, popped up).

What was interesting was the Skills programme: sessions on the Structures of the Labour Party, Citizens' journalist skills, Phone Banking and Public Speaking skills. Two other sessions, which take us beyond "protest politics" to the crucial challenge of making a change, as Labour Party members, were: How to Be a Councillor - and "Pints and Politics": how to argue the case for Labour's Economic programme in the community.

I should mention here the session addressed by John McDonnell, and others, on "Prepare for Power." When you have the privilege of getting close to political leaders like McDonnell and Corbyn you realize the power of the quote in **Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach"**: "*The point is not to philosophise about the world, but to change it.*" And these two are serious change agents.

There was no iron curtain between the two events. A succession of Shadow Cabinet people, and other MPs, presented at one or more of the 50 odd programmed sessions at the TWT venue and vice versa: people made their way between the two venues. But the difference in security arrangements was

striking. The security at the Party Conference was formidable: just think the most secure airport you've been through in recent times, particularly if there's been a major alert. The mainly Momentum-organised TWT, on the other hand, was relaxed and welcoming without a policeman or a security heavy to be seen. Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were not deterred by that "laxness," nor were the many other leading radical broadcasters, journalists, academics or cultural icons, like Ken Loach.

The World Transformed was a big feather in Momentum's cap. It's easy to see it going from strength to strength if it can succeed in getting that size and quality of an event together in its first year.

The foot soldier's impression of the whole thing? I believe we saw history in the making. The leadership election victory was a just reward for Corbyn and his supporters and a vital consolidation of what was achieved in the first year, against all the formidable odds.

In footballer parlance, if we'd been offered this prospect back in June, when the coup was unleashed in the aftermath of the EU Referendum, who wouldn't have taken it? But it's far short of where the Labour Party needs to be at this time. The old, discredited, politics of "New Labour" is dying. The new, assertive anti-austerity politics are struggling to be born. A turning point has surely been reached with Corbyn's second decisive victory and the rapturous reception

accorded him at the 2016 Conference. We'll all have a better idea of the future when the dust raised by Jeremy's leadership election victory has settled and we see the shape – and size – of the incoming Shadow Cabinet over the next few weeks.

But we can't ignore the continuing threat posed by those who have managed to sabotage Corbyn's first year in office so successfully. Lord Peter Mandelson, within days of Corbyn's victory wrote in the Guardian (27th September) that he wants the Tories to call a snap election. Not for Labour to win it, but to lose. His logic being, that, if Labour loses Corbyn would, in turn, lose the Labour leadership. Now what sort of a mind would come up with that? What kind of politics does it express? The name Nicholo di Bernardo dei Machiavellie comes to mind - though Mandelson is a feckin' useless Machiavellian (to paraphrase John McDonnell). But he is one of those who can, sadly for the Labour Party, still do damage to it.

Jeremy, in his selflessness and magnanimity, has called for "the slate to be cleaned." Will that be reciprocated by those with whom Mandelson has influence?

My next local party meeting is next week; we haven't met since last June – because of the "atmosphere" of intimidation in the party membership, as the NEC perceived it. There are motions in on behalf of one expelled and one suspended member. They are asking for re-admission. Will the slate be wiped clean for them?

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

On 5 September David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, brought MPs up to date with the work of his Department following the 23 June referendum. Emily Thornberry replied for the Labour Party.

David Davis:

I thought it would be useful for the House to be brought up to date on the working of my Department after the referendum of 23 June. Our instructions from the British people are clear. Britain is leaving the European Union. The mandate for that course is overwhelming. The referendum of 23 June delivered a bigger vote for Brexit than that won by any UK Government in history. It is a national mandate, and this Government are determined to deliver it in the national interest.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that there will be no attempt to stay in the EU by the back door; no attempt to delay, frustrate or thwart the will of the British people; and no attempt to engineer a second referendum because some people did not like the first answer. The people have spoken in a referendum offered to them by this Government and confirmed by Parliament —by all of us, on both sides of the argument—and we must all respect it. That is a simple matter of democratic politics.

Naturally, people want to know what Brexit will mean. Simply, it means leaving the European Union, so we will decide on our borders, our laws and the taxpayer's money. It means getting the best deal for Britain: one that is unique to Britain and not an off-the-shelf solution. This must mean controls on the numbers of people who come to Britain from Europe, but also a positive outcome for those who wish to trade in goods and services. This is an historic and positive moment for our nation. Brexit is not about making

the best of a bad job; it is about seizing a huge and exciting opportunity that will flow from a new place for Britain in the world. There will be new freedoms, new opportunities and new horizons for our country. We can get the right trade policy for the UK. We can create a more dynamic economy, a beacon for free trade across the world. We want to make sure our regulatory environment helps, rather than hinders, businesses and workers. We can create an immigration system that allows us to control numbers and encourage the brightest and best to come to this country.

I want to be clear to our European friends and allies that we do not see Brexit as ending our relationship with Europe; it is about starting a new one. We want to maintain or even strengthen our co-operation on security and defence. It is in the interests of both the UK and the European Union that we have the freest possible trading relationship. We want a strong European Union, succeeding economically and politically, working with Britain in many areas of common interest, so we should all approach the negotiations to come about our exit with a sense of mutual respect and co-operation.

I know the House will want to be updated about the work of the Department. It is a privilege to have been asked to lead it by the Prime Minister. The challenge we face is exciting and considerable. It will require significant expertise and a consistent approach. Negotiating with the EU has to be got right, and we are going to take the time to get it right. We will strive to build national consensus around our approach.

We start from a position of economic strength. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, there will be challenges ahead, but our economy is robust,

thanks in no small part to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne). The latest data suggest our manufacturing and service industries and consumer confidence are all strong, contrary to some of the earlier predictions. Businesses are putting their faith and their money into this country. Over the summer, Soft-Bank, GlaxoSmithKline and Siemens all confirmed that they will make major investments in the UK. Countries, including Australia, have already made clear their desire to proceed quickly with a new trade deal for the UK. As other nations see advantages to them, I am confident that they will want to prioritise deals with the UK, too. But we are not complacent. Our task is to build on this success and strength and to negotiate a deal for exiting the European Union that is in the interests of the entire nation.

As I have already indicated, securing a deal that is in our national interest does not and must not mean turning our back on Europe. To do so would not be in our interests, nor Europe's, so we will work hard to help to establish a future relationship between the EU and the UK that is dynamic, constructive and healthy. We want a steadfast and successful European Union after we depart.

As we proceed, we will be guided by some clear principles. First, as I have said, we wish to build national consensus around our position. Secondly, we will always put the national interest first. We will always act in good faith towards our European partners. Thirdly, wherever possible, we will try to minimise any uncertainty that change will inevitably bring. Fourthly, and crucially, by the end of this process we will have left the European Union and put the sovereignty and supremacy of this Parliament beyond doubt.

The first formal step in the process of leaving the European Union is to invoke article 50, which will start two years of negotiations. Let me briefly update the House on how the machinery of government will support our efforts and on the next steps we will take. First, on responsibilities, the Prime Minister will lead the UK's exit negotiations and be supported on a day-to-day basis by my Department. We will work closely with all Government Departments to develop our objectives and to negotiate new relationships with the EU and the rest of the world. Supporting me is a first-class ministerial team and some of the brightest and best in Whitehall, who want to engage in this national endeavour. The Department now has over 180 staff in London, plus the expertise of over 120 officials in Brussels. We are still growing rapidly, with first-class support from other Departments.

As to the next steps, the Department's task is clear. We are undertaking two broad areas of work. First, given that we are determined to build national consensus, we will listen and talk to as many organisations, companies and institutions as possible—from large plc's to small businesses, and from the devolved Administrations to councils, local government associations and major metropolitan bodies.

We are already fully engaged with the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure a UK-wide approach to our negotiations. The Prime Minister met the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland in July. Last week, I visited Northern Ireland for meetings with its political leaders, where I reiterated our determination that there will be no return to the hard borders of the past. I will visit Scotland and Wales soon.

My ministerial colleagues and I have also discussed the next steps with a range of organisations. My first meeting was with the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, followed by key business groups, representatives of the universities and the charitable sector, and farming and fisheries

organisations. But that is just the start. In the weeks ahead, we will speak to as many other firms, organisations and bodies as possible—research institutes, regional and national groups, and businesses up and down the country—to establish their priorities and the opportunities for the whole of the UK. As part of that exercise I can announce that we will be holding roundtables with stakeholders in a series of sectors, to ensure that all views are reflected in our analysis of the options for the UK. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker:

Order. Will the right hon. Gentleman resume his seat for just a moment? There is quite a lot of unseemly and, dare I say it, somewhat unstatesman-like noise from a sedentary position. Someone was muttering, "Too long!" It is not too long at all. The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly in order. Let me remind the House that it has always been my practice to facilitate the fullest and most extensive interrogation of the relevant Minister, and that will happen today. Everyone will have his or her opportunity. But it would be a good thing if people would listen respectfully. If they can manage a beaming countenance reminiscent of that of the Foreign Secretary that will be a bonus, but it is not obligatory.

Mr Davis:

Those will include stakeholders from the broadcast, aviation, energy, financial services and automotive sectors, and others. I will also engage with EU member states. I am beginning with a visit to Dublin this week. I am working particularly closely with the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Trade, who have been meeting counterparts in Washington, Brussels and Delhi, and in the capitals of other EU states. While we do that, my officials, supported by officials across Government, are carrying out programme of sectoral analysis and regulatory analysis, which will identify the key factors for some 50 sectors of British business. It is extremely important that the House understands that. We are building a detailed understanding of how the withdrawal from the EU will affect domestic policies, to seize

opportunities and ensure a smooth process of exit. The referendum result was a clear sign that the majority of the British people want to see Parliament's sovereignty strengthened, and so throughout the process Parliament will be regularly informed, updated and engaged.

Finally, we are determined to ensure that people have as much stability and certainty as possible in the period leading up to our departure from the EU. Until we leave the European Union, we must respect the laws and the obligations that membership requires of us. We also want to ensure certainty when it comes to public funding. The Chancellor has confirmed that structural and investment fund projects signed before the autumn statement and research and innovation projects financed by the European Commission by money granted before we leave the EU will be underwritten by the Treasury after we leave. Agriculture is a vital part of the economy and the Government will match the current level of annual payments that the sector receives through the direct payments scheme until 2020, again providing certainty.

The Prime Minister has been clear that she is determined to protect the status of EU nationals already living in the UK. The only circumstances in which that would not be possible would be if the rights of British citizens in EU member states were not protected in return, something that I frankly find very hard to imagine.

I am confident that together we will be able to deliver on what the country asked us to do through the referendum. I am greatly encouraged by the national mood. Most of those I have met who wanted to remain have accepted the result and now want to make a success of the course Britain has chosen. Indeed, organisations and individuals I have met already who had backed the remain campaign now want to be engaged in the process of exit and in identifying the positive changes that will flow from it as well as the challenges. I want us all to come together as one nation to get the best deal for Britain.

In conclusion, we are confident of

negotiating a new position that will mean this country flourishing outside the European Union while keeping EU members as friends, allies and trading partners. We leave the European Union but we will not—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker:

Order. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is an aspiring statesman. His aspiration may be a little way from fulfilment. I want to hear the Secretary of State's peroration.

Mr Davis:

It is an aspiration of very long-standing, Mr Speaker. In conclusion, we are confident of negotiating a position that will mean this country flourishing outside the EU, keeping its members as our friends, our allies and our trading partners. We will leave the European Union but will not turn our back on Europe. We will embrace the opportunities and freedoms that will open up for Britain. We will deliver on the national mandate for Brexit, and we will deliver it in the national interest.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):

I welcome the Secretary of State to his new role. It is eight years since his last appearance at the Dispatch Box. Back then, I believe his last words were: "You have to answer." Let us hope that he gives us some answers today.

I welcome the attitude he has expressed today that he will be talking and listening to everyone. May I give him some advice? Perhaps he should start by putting a telephone number on his website. It has been a little difficult tracking his Department down, so it would be nice if he could begin by giving that out later, along with some of the answers that we would expect. The spin before today's statement was so much promise. We heard that we would hear what the Government's strategy for Brexit is, but instead we have not heard a strategy or a thought-out plan. It has been more empty platitudes from a Government who continue to make it up as they go along.

Last night, the Prime Minister, who was on a plane, seemingly told

us what she was not going to do—it seems that we will not have a points-based immigration system, any extra money for the NHS or a reduction in VAT on fuel—but we have not been told what the Government will do. When will they tell us how they will deliver, for example, free trade for British businesses while imposing immigration controls, let alone how they will address the red lines that Labour has demanded on the protection of workers' rights and guarantees for EU citizens?

The Secretary of State says that he wants to present a positive vision of Britain post-Brexit, but unless he can tell us what deal the Government are working towards, how they plan to achieve it and whether other member states will accept it, his positive vision is just a pipe dream. It is just rhetoric. May I remind the Secretary of State of what he said two months ago? He said:

"The negotiating strategy has to be properly designed, and there is some serious consultation to be done first... This is one of the reasons for taking a little time before triggering Article 50."

We absolutely should take a little time before triggering article 50, but where is the negotiating strategy and what serious consultation has taken place with other member states? In the absence of either, why are the Government pushing ahead with article 50? What has happened since July? What is the plan? May I remind the House what the Foreign Affairs Committee said in July about the previous Government? It said:

"The previous Government's considered view not to instruct key Departments...to plan for the possibility" of a leave vote "amounted to gross negligence." What do we say about the current Government when, two months later, we are no further forward? Surely all we can say is this: when it comes to planning for Brexit, they have gone from gross negligence to rank incompetence. We see the warnings to Britain from Japan and others at the G20, and we see investment from companies like Nissan put under threat. It is British

workers who will pay the price for the Government's incompetence.

This morning, the Japanese ambassador, speaking on the "Today" programme, said something that was as honest as it was deadly. He said: "The problem that we see is not to have a very well thought through consideration before you start negotiation." He is absolutely right. Are the Government rushing to start negotiation? Yes. Do they have a well thought-out plan for that negotiation? No.

The Secretary of State has won plaudits in the past for his principled stand on issues such as parliamentary sovereignty—indeed, he talked about the importance of parliamentary sovereignty today—democratic rights and the rule of law, so surely he cannot think it right that article 50 should be triggered by royal prerogative. As his friend and mine, the former Attorney General the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), said:

"The idea that a government could take a decision of such massive importance...without parliamentary approval seems to me to be extremely far-fetched."

Well, I do not think it is far-fetched; I think it is just plain wrong. And I think that if the Secretary of State was still on the Back Benches, he would agree with me. When there is no evidence of sound planning by the Government, no detail on the deal they want to strike, no strategy for achieving that deal or the reasons for pushing it through, Parliament must have more of a say. We must have more than simply a say: we must have a vote.

Mr Davis:

I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome. As I suspect is very common when people enter the Cabinet, I have received a very large number of congratulatory emails and telegrams. The best one was the shortest. It said, "Many congratulations, I now believe in the resurrection." Let me deal with the measures she has raised.

The hon. Lady and the Labour party accuse us of rank incompetence—the Labour party! The Prime Minister, on her trip to China, described her

approach to complex problems — this is certainly a complex problem. Her approach is to collect the data, analyse it, make a judgment, make a decision and implement it. The Labour party clearly does it the other way around. The Americans have a phrase for the way the Labour party approaches these things — not looking at the problem, not looking at the issue, not looking at the data. They call it “load, fire, aim”. That may be very appropriate for the circular firing squad that is the Labour party, but it is not appropriate to running things in the national interest.

The hon. Lady mentioned the points-based immigration system. What the Prime Minister said in China was very clear. She wants a results-based immigration system that delivers an outcome the British people voted for. That is what she will be delivering at the end of this.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Japanese ambassador. From memory, the Japanese ambassador this morning said something to the effect that he had not met a company that did not think Britain was the best place in Europe to have its business — not one. He also said that he admired the Prime Minister’s approach to the negotiation. The hon. Lady should pick her quotes a little more carefully.

Let me come to the hon. Lady’s central point, if there was a point in what she had to say. She talked about article 50. Before we entered on to this course, the referendum Bill went through this House. It was voted for 6:1 in this House, and she voted for it. What did the Bill say? It was presented by the then Foreign Secretary, who said that we were giving the British people the right to make the decision — it was not advice or consultation. What she is trying to wrap up in a pseudo-democratic masquerade is the most anti-democratic proposal I have heard for some time. She wants to deny the will of the British people and up with that we will not put.

Workers’ Rights Outside The EU

On 7 September, Labour’s Melanie Onn introduced a motion to bring in a

bill, ‘Workers’ Rights (Maintenance of EU Standards)’ to safeguard workers’ rights following the UK’s exit from the European Union.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab):

I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a bill to make provision about the safeguarding of workers’ rights derived from European Union legislation after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU; and for connected purposes.

I am delighted to have secured this timely opportunity to highlight some of my concerns about the future of workers’ rights in Britain post-Brexit.

This Bill was brought about by necessity. Despite the warnings from the TUC and others about the potential for workers’ rights to be significantly undermined if we left Europe, the Government have, to date, failed to explain just how they will ensure that that does not happen. I now call on them to take proactive steps to protect employment rights that are not contained in primary legislation and that therefore risk falling away post-Brexit. It is no use adopting a wait-and-see attitude; people in this country deserve to know that their rights at work will not suffer detriment.

Research conducted by the Library has highlighted several areas of legislation that derive either partly or wholly from European directives. They include rights for agency workers, the European Works Council, information and consultation of employees, health and safety, TUPE, the working time directive and the protection of young people at work. Those are the broad areas that could disappear if the Government opted to repeal the European Communities Act 1972, in which case there would be no legislative framework relating to, for example, collective consultations on restructures, redundancies, shift pattern changes or pay. Those are not small, inconsequential or obscure areas of employment law; they are up front and centre for many working people today who, in an increasingly unstable labour market, rely more than ever on the certainty of protections that can be afforded to

them under that legislation.

For more than 40 years, the EU has devised laws designed to protect working people from exploitation and discrimination. Trade unions have operated together at a European level to secure agreements across all nations to better protect workers. The rules have ensured that, regardless of any Government’s ideology, hard-fought-for minimum standards have been protected. They have kept those rights a non-negotiable distance away from the potential deregulatory whims of Ministers who may take the view that such rights are no more than cumbersome red tape. After all, we know that the Secretary of State for International Trade — the very Minister who is responsible for negotiating our trade agreements as we exit the European Union — is on record as having said that it is “too difficult” to fire staff. Members of Parliament must not allow the downgrading of workers’ rights to be an unfortunate side-effect of the Government’s negotiations.

In July, on the steps of Downing Street, the Prime Minister referred to those who have a job but do not always have job security. For millions of agency workers in the care sector, retail, security or factory work, the agency workers legislation ensures that they have access to the same wages and holiday entitlements as permanent workers and have equal access to facilities, vacancies and amenities. That is progressive legislation, which recognises the changing needs of an increasingly so-called flexible workforce, and we should not hesitate to secure our own domestic laws to support those workers.

In recent days, we have been reassured by the Government that Brexit will not undermine workers’ rights. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union wrote in his July article for the “ConservativeHome” website that, in his view, it is “not employment regulation that stultifies economic growth”.

If that is the case, there should be no barriers to the Government positively reviewing which elements of UK employment law will be without

any foundations after leaving Europe unless appropriate alternatives are implemented, and then implementing them. Given that the UK has one of the most lightly regulated workforces in the OECD, it is right the Government should seek to uphold these minimum standards.

Further, much UK employment law originating from the EU has become a basic expectation of reasonable employers. The protection afforded to workers is woven into the fabric of the employment relationship—for example, no discrimination against part-time or fixed-term workers and the right to rest breaks, paid holiday and leave for working parents. All those things are now standard; we should not be going backwards.

If we take a closer look at TUPE—the transfer of undertakings, protection of employees—it is clear the intention is to benefit workers. It means that if someone's employer contracts out their job role to another organisation, or there is a company takeover, they can expect certain minimum guarantees in relation to these changes. They can expect that there will be a period of consultation. They can expect that there will be reasonable sharing of information. They can expect that any proposed changes to structures, salaries or redundancies will be discussed within the consultation. If they are transferred to the new employer, their salary, holiday and sick leave will all be protected, as will their pension, unless another agreement has been made during the negotiations.

Importantly, rights to representation and recognition of trade unions also transfer, providing certainty and reassurance to affected employees. After transfer, employees continue to be protected unless the receiving employer can provide evidence of operational, technical or economic purposes that make it impossible for them to continue with certain terms and conditions. Even then, they must undertake sufficient consultation before they can make those changes. This is only possible because of the European legislation that provided the TUPE framework.

We should accept a reality here. TUPE and other EU-derived legislation is not perfect. As we have seen with other legislation such as maternity and paternity leave, our Parliament—us, here—can make the choice to go further and offer more than the minimum requirements of legislation. But in this instance, it has not, choosing the least burdensome interpretation of the legislation.

Having taken numerous groups of employees through TUPE transfers as a Unison officer, I recognise the weaknesses within the law, but that is all the more reason to be concerned about what would happen if TUPE were not there to act as a check and balance.

Before TUPE, employers were able to make the staff of a transferring unit redundant regardless of whether their job would exist within the new undertaking. Very often, those same staff would have to go through a recruitment process to secure their previous jobs, but often on lower wages, with worse pensions, fewer holidays and increased responsibilities. These were workers such as school meals assistants and refuse collectors who were not even given the chance to participate in any consultation. We surely would not want to place that kind of disruption and uncertainty on workers again by rolling back to the bad old days, but roll back we might. Without there being any recourse to previous European Court of Justice rulings, we may find ourselves sleepwalking into a situation where recent positive outcomes for workers, such as carers who do sleep-in shifts receiving a full wage for their time, are no longer adhered to as employers seek to cut their costs.

We should not allow the potential for European case law to simply be discarded, as it risks dumping swathes of precedent in favour of re-litigation of settled principles. For example, relatively recent ECJ case law around the calculation of normal remuneration for holiday pay under the working time regulations must factor in non-guaranteed overtime, which is not explicitly stated in the wording of the regulations. If future decisions were no

longer bound by that case law, workers would pay the price.

Given the changes in employment-related legislation over the past six years—including reduced consultation periods for redundancy, the extension of qualifying periods of employment for unfair dismissal claims, the introduction of fees for employment tribunals and the attempted undermining of trades unions through the Trade Union Act 2016—there is little to give the British public faith that the Government's warm words will translate into action.

And what of current proposals in Europe that would bring further protections to UK workers? A right to a written statement of terms and conditions, improved work-life balance and improved rights for posted workers: will workers in Britain ever feel the benefits of such changes?

I have been asked why I have not asked for more in this Bill—extended its reach, filled the gaps in the current system and sought to extend workers' rights further—but this is not about grandiose positioning. It is based in the reality of the situation we face today. It is right that, first and foremost, stability is provided and the Government do everything in their power to protect what we already have.

Despite being on the other side of the debate, I accept that the British public voted for Brexit, but they did not vote for more insecure contracts, less safe workplaces or anything less than they currently have by way of protection in their jobs.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That Melanie Onn, Louise Haigh, Chris Elmore, Ruth Smeeth, Wes Streeting, Jess Phillips, Chris Stephens, Christian Matheson, Jo Stevens, Justin Madders, Carolyn Harris and Matthew Pennycook present the Bill. Melanie Onn accordingly presented the Bill. Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be presented (Bill 62).

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

IDEALS v HUMAN NATURE

During the summer Orecchiette was artist in residence at an Art and Food Festival in Farindola, a small town in the Abruzzo region. While she was there she chatted with one of the locals about the town's energetic and impressive young mayor. The mayor is on the political left but is not strongly allied to any of Italy's political parties. The local explained that their mayor worked hard for the town and its interests and was very popular. "It is so difficult for us in Italy," she said, (in politics) "who can we trust?"

On 16 September Carlo Ciampi died at the age of 95. He was a phenomenon, serving Italy both as a prime minister and then as the 10th president of the Republic. The extraordinary aspect to him was that he came into politics after having been the Governor of the Bank of Italy. This is a body that has stood aside from the general Italian political shenanigans. Denis Mack Smith in his *Modern Italy* sums him up: *Quite unusually, twelve other ministers were chosen from outside parliament (by Ciampi), and it was a pungent criticism of Italian politics that their presence made the most competent and respected government ...* Ciampi went on to be President. That he was succeeded in the Premiership by Silvio Berlusconi says much about the workings of democratic politics.

In 2009 the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) was established in Italy by Gianroberto Casaleggio and Beppe Grillo. It was started as an alternative to main-stream political parties and was anti-establishment in the sense of wanting to offer something new and set-apart from the established corrupt parties. The Movimento saw that it could avoid the self-interest

that stains politics by having collective agreements. So directorates were established at all levels. There is one at the top, there are others where a M5S politician holds a position of office. All Movimento members can vote on the internet and this method is used to make decisions and also to expel people who don't follow the line. Final decisions are made at the top. The inherent contradictions behind having what they believe is a genuinely democratic party and the structure are interesting. Gianroberto believed that eventually Italy could be governed by popular votes via the internet and was working towards this when he died earlier this year.

Currently the Movimento is led by Beppe Grillo and the strategist son of Gianroberto, Davide. Luigi Di Maio and Alessandro Di Battista are the two most prominent members of the central directorate. They both try hard to be considered as more important than each other, with Di Maio making extremely strenuous efforts. Immediately after Casaleggio's death Di Maio made a tour of the leaders of Europe. Pictured next to those that he was able to see, he looked like a junior intern.

Virginia Raggi, new mayor of Rome is the most prominent elected M5S figure and she must succeed for the credibility of the Movimento. Her first few months have been controversial and she has been fully tested and mauled by the press. But Grillo is backing her at the moment and indeed has to for the credibility of the Movimento. Three prominent women who are on the Roman M5S directorate do not and they have spoken out against her. That they are long established members and Raggi is an arriviste might be relevant. Plus, she is a lawyer, bright

and highly personable.

Raggi's background seems odd. She was a legal trainee and worked with Silvio Berlusconi's favoured lawyer. Two of her appointments appear unwise. Paola Muraro, the cabinet minister in charge of remediating Rome's totally ineffective rubbish collection, is under investigation for conflicts of interest. The refuse industry of Rome is part of a wide mafia web of influence and this may or may not be relevant. No charges have been made against Muraro. Raggi said that she first heard about the investigation a month after her own election and after her appointment of Muraro.

Then the plot becomes interesting. Raggi was asked why she didn't pass on the information about the investigations up the chain of command. But Raggi did apparently, to Di Maio. Di Maio said that he didn't understand it and so didn't pass it on. With this comment Luigi Di Maio immediately condemned himself. Grillo's money is on Raggi and Alessandro Di Battista is having his credibility groomed. A recent video clip showed a suited and groomed Di Maio standing near to Grillo on an outdoor platform. There was little contact between the two. Then Di Battista arrived in full motorbike gear, jumped athletically onto the stage and into a warm welcome from Grillo.

M5S are struggling to resolve their difficulties. The tensions between ideals and personal self-interest is something that all political groups confront, wherever they may be, in Europe, USA and the UK. It is relevant and throws into focus Jeremy Corbyn's recent resounding victory in Labour's leadership election.