

# Labour Affairs

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## May's Fantasy Brexit

The government will invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty at the end of March, confirming the voters' narrow decision to leave the European Union. If Parliament supports this, and they probably will, the UK will leave the EU at the end of March 2019. There will thus be a two year period during which agreement will need to be reached over a multitude of trade and other associated deals. During the two year period, however, these deals can only occur within the EU. Technically, the UK is not allowed to negotiate any deals outside the EU until exit takes place. From then on, no deal or bad deal, the UK will be on its own.

Over the six months since the UK voted to leave, Teresa May has been constantly accused of vagueness about the government's plans for the UK's future outside of the EU. In setting out a 12 point post Brexit plan at Lancaster House on 17 January she went some way to answer her critics. Yet in spite of her firm delivery, couched with threats to turn the UK into a low tax haven unless her demands are met, there is still a lot of vagueness and flights of fantasy about her aspirations.

Central to the plan is a determination to leave the single market and the customs union and for the UK to become a global trading nation. At the same time however May wants the UK to have the greatest possible access to both, without being encumbered with their rules and regulations. She claims to want "tariff-free trade with Europe and cross-border trade there to be as frictionless as possible." Full access to the single market means accepting and abiding by its core principles of the free movement of capital, goods, services and people. May understands this, but is deeply aware that the free movement of people is anathema to those who voted to leave the EU.

May wants to get control of the number of people coming from Europe but is unclear how this is to be achieved. Overseas students, including from Europe, account for a substantial number of the total and she indicates that they will continue to be welcomed. She also says that the UK will always want immigration, especially highly-skilled migrants. Does this mean she accepts that there will never be a sustainable level of home grown skilled workers? A highly skilled UK labour force should be a priority aim of the government's industrial strategy. May recognises this but there is incoherence in her aim to make the UK a high-skill economy while threatening a race down the value

chain by becoming a tax haven.

It seems, however, that low-skilled migrants who take on seasonal employment are to be discouraged. This doesn't augur well for the agriculture industry in particular, which depends on willing workers from the EU. Does the government intend to direct employers to use local labour rather than migrants? This will lead to higher costs and thus prices as employers are forced to pay higher wages to attract local labour, but higher wages are to be welcomed as they will benefit the local economy and workers.

May wants the common travel area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland to continue. But controlling immigration from Europe will be more difficult if there is a 'soft' border between the two parts of Ireland. A 'soft' border will enable EU migrants to access Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, a member of the single market allowing free movement of people. Passage to England or Scotland will then be possible. A heavily guarded 'hard' border will help to prevent this, but the security services fear that customs posts could become a target for terrorists.

May is unclear how the UK is to have the best possible trade deal with the EU outside of the single market and the customs union. This could be achieved through membership of the European Economic Area, like Norway for example. But this would mean accepting rulings of the European Court of Justice and mobility of labour and May has ruled these out. Brexit Secretary David Davis has said that the UK could pay for targeted access to certain markets; a cost currently included in the UK's financial contribution.

The Brexit Secretary's is one, albeit limited, opening, but if May is really serious about the UK becoming a global player then it will have to look to the World Trade Organisation. That is clearly her intention. She wants the UK "to be free to establish our own tariff schedules at the World Trade Organisation, meaning we can reach new trade agreements not just with the European Union but with old friends and new allies from outside Europe too." Her ambition gives a whole new meaning to having one's cake and eating it.

Leaving the single market and the customs union, and with the UK no longer subject to the European Court of Justice, will return sovereignty to Parliament. That being so and given that the referendum result was merely advisory, although that was not made clear during the campaign, Parliament

will be the final arbiter of the result. The majority of MPs will not block the people's decision to leave. Furthermore, May has agreed that Parliament will judge whether the final outcome of the negotiations is in the best interests of the country.

May promises "not only" to "protect the rights of workers set out in European legislation" but also to "build on them." Furthermore she says that "the voices of workers will be heard by the boards of publicly-listed companies for the first time." The best way to protect the rights of workers is through membership of strong trade unions. But May's government has made it more difficult to join and organise within a trade union. And her commitment that the "voices of workers will be heard by the boards of publicly-listed companies" is a step back from her earlier promise to ensure worker representation on company boards. Having the voices of workers heard by boards is far removed from actual worker representation. Once again, May is being deliberately vague.

This is also a difficult issue for Jeremy Corbyn. The TUC has set out a clear programme for worker representation, but it seems that no trade union has taken this on board. And some would no doubt be hostile to the idea. Corbyn has a good relationship with the unions, supporting them through difficult times when like previous Labour leaders he could have kept his head down. Labour Affairs supports the TUC's programme and urges Corbyn to encourage unions such as Unite to adopt worker representation as a priority issue.

Corbyn is once again under fire from his backbenchers. He is accused of not having a clear message on Brexit and of being "weak" on immigration. His insistence that Labour MPs do not block Article 50 is bizarrely seen as a lack of leadership. There are, however, reports that as many as 30 Labour members, mostly in constituencies that voted to remain, may defy Corbyn on this. This will further damage Labour and could result in the loss of dozens of seats in 2020, ensuring the re-election of a Tory government.

But as a previous Labour Prime Minister once said: "A week is a long time in politics." 2020 is three years away. In the meantime, Corbyn's aim is to unite Labour. He is not going to resign so his colleagues will have to come to terms with his leadership style and his refusal to compromise on his principles. An admirable trait in a politician. It is his principled stand on immigration that makes it difficult for him to fall in behind the anti-immigration views of many Labour voters.

Unlike Teresa May, Corbyn doesn't blame immigrants for the crisis in public services. In her Lancaster House speech

she referred to the record levels of net migration in the last decade, omitting to mention that as Home Secretary for six of those years she was ultimately responsible for this. She went on to say that the high volume of immigration has put pressure on public services. This serves as a convenient deflection from the massive cuts in public service funding by her government. Immigrants are blamed for the pressures on the NHS, Social Care and other services, not the government's parsimony.

May's Brexit plan was inevitably welcomed by the Europhobe press. Over-shadowing it was a barely disguised anti-immigrant rhetoric, aimed at the Leavers. She has an eye on Labour's heartlands in the North and Midlands. Hence her "looking after the just managing" and the "shared society" clichés. But UKIP rather than the Tories could gain from Labour. Their opportunity will come on 23 February in the Labour-held seats of Copeland and Stoke Central.

The by-elections in Copeland and Stoke, caused by the resignations of Jamie Reed and Tristram Hunt to take up more lucrative employment, will be seen as testing grounds for Corbyn's leadership. Hunt was imposed on Stoke, with which he had few shared values. His politics were at odds with Corbyn's and he was one of his most vocal critics. He obviously saw no future for himself in a Corbyn-led party. Following boundary changes, his seat will in any case disappear at the next election. But he may at least have the honour of facilitating a UKIP breakthrough into Parliament. If so, that will be his sole legacy. He will not be missed.

Corbyn has said that in Copeland and Stoke Labour will focus on the crisis in the NHS, job insecurity and widening inequality, but it will also need to send a clear, unambiguous message to voters on immigration if it is to hold on to its seats, which are in danger of being lost. Not because of Corbyn's policies, but because of the Blairite legacy. Blair's aim was to rid Labour of its history and reshape the party into a kinder, softer version of the Tories.

Immigration is undoubtedly a tricky issue for Corbyn and Labour. However, his and Labour's message should recognise the concerns of voters about the high levels of immigration over the past decade or so. It could guarantee that a future Labour government will manage immigration in a balanced and fair way, to ensure that it does not adversely affect the delivery of public services, or reduce the working conditions and job prospects of UK citizens.

# Labour Affairs

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### Labour Affairs

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### Editorial Board

Dick Barry Christopher Winch  
Jack Lane Madawc Williams

labouraffairs@btinternet.com

Website: <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/>

### Distribution

Dave Fennell

### Editorial Address

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

# Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

On 22 March 1917, the House of Commons debated a motion moved by Bonar Law on the establishment of the Duma in Russia.

Laurence Ginnell (c9/4/1852 *baptismal date*-17/4/1923) Independent Nationalist MP (Westmeath North) spoke against the motion and offered an alternative wording.

Ginnell was imprisoned on 3 November 1917 for non-payment of a fine of £100 imposed on 30 July 1917 for having entered Knutsford (Cheshire) prison under a false name in order to interview some Sinn Feiners imprisoned there.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO DUMA.

**The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER (Mr. Bonar Law)** I beg to move the Resolution which stands in the name of the Prime Minister:

“That this House sends to the Duma its fraternal greetings and tenders to the Russian people its heartiest congratulations upon the establishment among them of free institutions in full confidence that they will lead not only to the rapid and happy progress of the Russian nation but to the prosecution with renewed steadfastness and vigour of the war against the stronghold of an autocratic militarism which threatens the liberty of Europe.”

The events in Russia, which have followed each other with such startling rapidity during the last thirteen days, have arrested the attention of the world even in the midst of the greatest convulsion that has ever been wrought upon earth by man. What has happened in Russia reminds us of the earlier days of the French Revolution. We recall with what a glow of hope the fall of the Bastille was received by liberal-minded men throughout the world, a feeling which was thus expressed by our own poet: Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be voting was very Heaven. We recall, too, how quickly

and how sadly that bright dawn was overcast. It is too soon to say that all danger is over in Russia. It is too soon to feel confident that the new Government has already laid the foundation on which, in the words of Burke, liberty will have wisdom and justice for her companions, and will lead prosperity and plenty in her train. But it is not too soon for the Mother of Parliaments to send a friendly greeting to the Parliament of an Allied country, and it is not too soon for us to send a message of good will to the new Government, a Government which has been formed with the declared intention of carrying this War to a successful conclusion, and a Government which has undertaken a task as arduous as has ever fallen to the lot of any Administration—the task at once of driving out a foreign aggressor and of establishing freedom and order at home.

It is not, I think, for us to judge, much less to condemn, those who have taken part in the government of an Allied country, but I hope I may be permitted to express a feeling which I believe will be shared by the vast majority of the Members of this House, and which I, at least, hold strongly, a feeling of compassion for the late Czar, who was for three years, or nearly three years, as I believe, our loyal Ally, and who had laid upon him by his birth a burden which has proved too heavy for him. But we cannot forget that one of the issues, and the greatest of all the issues of this War, is whether or not free institutions can survive against the onslaught of military despotism, and we cannot but rejoice in the hope that in the final stages of this world conflict all the Allied Powers will be under the direction of Governments which represent their peoples. The

Government, in putting down this Motion for the consideration of the House of Commons, were well aware that it might be considered premature, but we have submitted it to the House in the hope and in the belief that if sent now it may strengthen the hands of the Russian Government in their difficult task. I venture earnestly to express the hope that no Debate may be found necessary, from the fear that such a discussion may diminish the value of our message as an encouragement to the Russian Government and the Russian people.

**Mr. ASQUITH** The Resolution which my right hon. Friend has proposed expresses, in my belief, the opinion not only of the House of Commons, but of all the peoples of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom and of the whole British Empire. It is not our practice to interfere in the domestic concerns or the internal controversies of other nations, however closely their interests may be bound up with ours by kinship, by industrial relations, or even by the closer and more sacred ties which bind together Allies who are unitedly making sacrifices for a common cause. This rule we have steadily observed, and, in my view, it is no violation if we feel, as we all do, that the momentous events which are taking place in Russia are of such a kind as to deserve, and even to demand, from us special and—I agree with my right hon. Friend—immediate recognition. An autocracy which, notwithstanding the strange mutations in its history in the personal fortunes of the occupants of the throne, seemed to have become an integral part of Russian life, and beyond the reach of possible attack, has, in the course of a few days, without effective resistance, or even defence,

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This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

been blotted out of existence. The form of Russia's future government is to be submitted, as we are glad to know, to the free judgment of an enfranchised people. Whatever their ultimate decision may be, at this moment, by that very fact, Russia takes her place by the side of the great democracies of the world. We, here, as my right hon. Friend has reminded us, the first home, the original home, of Parliamentary institutions and of popular election, feel that it is not only our privilege, but that we have a special claim of our own to be the first to rejoice in her emancipation, and to welcome her into the fellowship of free peoples.

There is no lesson which history teaches more clearly than that freedom is justified by her children. Power and responsibility go hand in hand. The wider you make the basis of your power the more you infuse and stimulate the sense of responsibility. We may predict with confidence that that will be found to be as true in Russia as it has been proved to be true in every other part of the world. In the meantime, and until the moment comes when the great Russian people become constitutionally articulate, we here watch with the keenest solicitude and sympathy the efforts and labours of her Provisional Government. To carry through a revolution so deep and so far-reaching in its effects upon the social and political fabric of a vast and varied community, to carry it through with foresight, with self-restraint, with only a slight dislocation of the framework of life, and as little hardship to innocent victims of the change as is consistent with the due and complete achievement of the governing purpose—that is a task which under any conditions would tax the sagacity of the wisest statesmanship. But, in fact, it has had to be done, as my right hon. Friend has said, at a time when Russia was under the strain and stress of the greatest War in history.

We have confidence that the distinguished men who formed the new Government. will be found to be endowed with the patience and the prudence which such a situation demands; but, above all, we feel sure that neither they nor the Russian people will abate by a jot the tenacity of their resolve or the concentration of their resources to bring the War to such an end as will justify all the sacrifice of all the Allies.

We read with pleasure to-day—but, of course, with no surprise—the declaration of the new Russian Government that they will sacredly observe—I am quoting the words—the alliances uniting them to other Powers, and will resolutely carry out all the agreements concluded with the Allies. The cause of the Allies, whatever may be the number and variety of the theatres of war, is one and indivisible. Russia has from the first played her part, not only loyally, but lavishly as well. We are assured, now that the people see their own freedom within their grasp, they will continue in that course with, if possible, an intensified fervour of purpose and of will. Every blow that is struck effectively by the Allies in this War is aimed against the design of our enemies to set up an international autocracy, and it is aimed equally on behalf of the freedom of the peoples, be they great or be they small.

**Mr. DEVLIN** On a great and historic occasion of this character I think that the House will agree that the voice of Ireland ought not to be silent, and, in the absence through illness of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Waterford, I have been invited by my colleagues to associate myself on their behalf with the Resolution which has been proposed by the Leader of the House. If I may be permitted to offer one criticism before I briefly support this Motion, I should express my deep regret at the fact, that there was not a more triumphant note in the speech of the right hon. Gentleman, because we are in the presence of a great and epoch-making event. In the midst of the horrors of war—we ought to rejoice at it—there springs into life a free and enfranchised Russian nation, and this mighty people, now in the enjoyment of genuine liberty themselves, will be all the more determined and the better equipped to battle successfully for the liberty of Europe, and particularly for all small nations rightly struggling to be free. We on these benches regard the Russian Revolution—striking, dramatic, and almost bloodless, as it has been—as a message of hope to all oppressed peoples and to all freedom-loving nations. But it is something more than that. It is a warning and a portent of doom to autocracies and tyrannies everywhere. I might be tempted on this occasion—for it affords me a splendid opportunity—to

draw a moral from the great events of the last two weeks, but I do not desire to avail myself of it. I want to let the voice of Ireland join in, in united harmony, and my right hon. Friend knows now, after his experience of Leader of the House, that when we have opportunities to draw a moral at other times, we will avail ourselves of them. My desire now is, on behalf of my colleagues representing Ireland, to express the profound sympathy which we feel with the Russian people, and to say how deeply we rejoice at their emancipation.

**Mr. WARDLE** I feel that it is impossible to let this occasion pass without adding a word on behalf of the Labour movement of this country. There is one point on which I agree with the hon. Member who has just sat down. The right hon. Gentleman in introducing the Resolution, I do not think, was quite so happy as the Resolution itself. I venture to submit to the House that the Resolution, in its wording, is all that any one of us could possibly desire. At a Labour Conference held this week, although we met to consider the conference over which you presided, our first thought was Russia and the revolution which had taken place there; and although we were considering in regard to this country some kind of franchise which should take the place of the present franchise, yet universal suffrage was the message that we heard, and it was rather difficult to persuade our people to take anything less. But our first thought was Russia, and we sent on our behalf a congratulatory telegram to that country on its successful emergence from the throes of revolution. I think we all desire to join with the whole of the nation, as represented in this House of Commons, in sending a message from the democracy of Great Britain to the democracy of Russia, and to extend to her the hand of fellowship.

I would just like to say one or two words more. With myself and those with whom I am associated there is no reservation in our greetings to the Russian people. There are no doubts or hesitations in our welcome to the giving of liberal institutions to a great people. It is often asserted that wars breed reaction, and reaction alone. It has not been so in the case of Russia. The Russian people for some time have won fresh liberty in every war

in which they have been engaged. The emancipation of the Serfs followed the Crimean War. The establishment of the Duma was the immediate consequence of the Japanese War. Civilisation itself sometimes gets forward on a powder-cask. There is something inspiring about liberty when it is accompanied by a free and resolute acceptance of law and of order. Two facts stand out with regard to this revolution—it is parliamentary, and it is constitutional. It betokens no weakening of Russia's will in regard to the War. May I add this one word—it is the sign and the signal that representative government is not dead. It receives fresh inspiration from this revolution so dramatic, so clear, and, as my hon. Friend pointed out, so almost bloodless. But let us hope that it may not have been achieved too easily. I hope there will be no dissension amongst any classes of the Russian people, but that they will accept this revolution, that they will accept this new system of government, and that they will all combine, along with our Allies, to break wherever they can, and on every occasion, the bonds of tyranny, and to set up free and liberal institutions throughout the world.

**Mr. PONSONBY** I do not think it is inappropriate on a great occasion of this sort that an unofficial private Member should be allowed to add his voice to the congratulations which are being tendered to the Russian Government. I welcome the overthrow of the late Government in Russia, and the establishment of a constitutional system and free institutions. I congratulate the members of the Duma on the skill and determination that they have shown in bringing about this very remarkable result. I for one have always had a most profound admiration for the Russian people. I have for long watched their struggles against misgovernment and against oppression with sympathy and with interest. They are a very great people, capable of great achievements in all branches of human activity. But they have been thwarted, oppressed, persecuted, and arrested in their development by a reactionary Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Agreed!"]

Through the instrumentality of their elected representatives the Russian people have at last cast off the yoke which has been weighing down on them for so many years. It is, indeed, an occasion for warmest congratulation.

These sentiments may be applauded here to-day, but not long ago they were criticised, and even blamed. But I think that the House will look back with appreciation on the words of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman at the Inter-Parliamentary meeting which was held in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords, in 1907, who said, "La Douma est mort, vive la Douma!" That was regarded at the time as an indiscretion, but indiscretions are sometimes the better part of wisdom. In 1908, soon after I entered this House, I was severely reproved for protesting against the greatest compliment that could be paid being paid to the Russian Government which has now fallen. But events have proved that some of us had, perhaps, foresight even in those days. But the task which lies before the chief agents in this great event is no light one. They have before them problems which at this distance, and with the meagre information allowed to filter through, we cannot appreciate.

Our Press, no doubt under instructions, emphasises the keen desire of the new Government in Russia to prosecute the War with increasing vigour. Many in the country may be led to think that the revolution was in order that the War might be continued indefinitely, and that there should be no falling off in zeal for conquest and victory, and that this is the chief concern of those responsible for the remarkable change in the government of Russia. The Prime Minister a few days ago said: But it is satisfactory to know that the new Government has been founded with the express purpose of carrying on the War with vigour. That is not my reading of the event. [HON. MEMBERS: "Agreed, agreed!"] The chief concern, the great ideal, of the eminent statesmen who are now at the head of affairs in Russia, is, and indeed must be, the consideration of good government, the redressing of evils, the alleviation of distress caused by hunger and starvation, the safeguarding of their initial efforts from the forces of reaction, and the establishment of stable and just government, which will lead to a freer and fuller development, not only of the resources of the Russian Empire, but of the qualities and talent and the well-being of the Russian people. [HON. MEMBERS: "Agreed, agreed!"]

This must be the one aim and object

of these statesmen, who have accomplished so great an achievement; and it remains to be seen whether the sufferings which her people are now undergoing, and the losses which the European War is inflicting upon them, are compatible with the attainment of these high aims. Anyhow, I trust they will be allowed to pursue their great and noble work without discord in their own country, and without interference from outside. Let us remember that our Russian Allies have achieved a far greater victory than the conquest of Constantinople—[An HON. MEMBER: "Stop your whining!"]—or any other territory. Let us not contribute to the undoing of their labours, let us not divert them from their march towards freedom, but do all in our power to help them in every way we can in the great task which they have before them.

**Mr. GINNELL** As there is an Irish Debate coming on this afternoon, and I know that, as usual, the occupant of the Chair will be unable to see me, I thought that this would be an appropriate subject for me to intervene upon, and as I know I will only be allowed to do it on this question, I think it better to say a few words on this occasion with reference to a subject about which I do not care a jot. The leaders of the day on the Front Benches were good enough to intimate to the House that they desired to speak, and they desired that nobody but themselves should speak on this subject. Do they think that this was a good object lesson to Russia? Do hon. Members who can do nothing better on this historical occasion than interrupt their colleagues, think that a good object lesson to Russia? Do they think they are maintaining the dignity of what is called this Mother of Parliaments by making themselves ridiculous. War produces reaction. Who can deny that war produces reaction? This Mother of Parliaments has been brought by war to destroy her own offspring—personal liberty. Can any of the inarticulate hon. Members deny that fact? I find fault with this Motion before the House on quite a number of grounds. The leaders on the Front Benches congratulate whom? Successful rebels. Within the last ten months they have been hanging and shooting unsuccessful rebels. They

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## Peak Kinnock by Craig Murray

The following comment on how the political class benefit from charities appeared on Craig Murray's blog on 21 September 2016. 'Murder In Samarkand', (sub titled 'A British Ambassador's Controversial Defiance of Tyranny in the War on Terror') is Murray's account of his time as UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan from 2002 to 2004. In the book he describes how Foreign Secretary Jack Straw refused to accept that widespread rape and torture was carried out by the regime of President Karimov.

Neil Kinnock appeared on both Dispatches and Panorama this evening bemoaning the presence of socialists in the Labour Party. Neither programme succeeded in finding anything sinister happening, but they did succeed in playing a great deal of sinister music. This must have been a great boost to the sinister music writing industry, for which we should be grateful. I think they have definitively proved that some people are left wing, and would like to have left wing MPs.

But seeing Kinnock reminded me of another bit of TV I saw today, a heartbreaking advert for Save the Children featuring a dying little baby, unable to ask for help. The advert

urged you to give just £2 a month to help save her.

If 11,000 people responded with £2 a month, that would not save the little baby, but it would exactly pay the £264,000 per year salary of Neil Kinnock's daughter-in-law Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Chief Executive of Save the Children and wife of MP Stephen Kinnock. Indeed if 20,000 people gave £2 per month, that would probably cover Mrs Stephen Kinnock's salary, her other employment costs and the money paid to Sky for the advert. When you toss in Stephen's salary and expenses, the Stephen Kinnock household are bringing in just shy of a cool half a million pounds a year from public service and charity work.

The salary of Ms Thorning-Schmidt is approximately twice that of her predecessor, Justin Forsyth, who was on an already unconscionable £140,000. I exposed their massive salaries at the time the Save the Children awarded a "Global Legacy" award to Tony Blair. Indeed to meet the salaries and other employment costs of just the top executives at Save the Children would take 80,000 people paying £2 a month. They would be funding executives with an average salary of over £140,000. For

those in work paying the £2 a month, the average UK salary is £26,000 a year, and many retired and unemployed people scrimp to find money to give to try to help the needy.

The use of charities as a massive cash cow for the political classes is a real concern. David Miliband is on over £300,000 for heading the International Rescue Committee. When I listed the Save the Children executives, they included Brendan Cox, on over £100,000. He was the husband of Jo Cox, the murdered Labour MP. Brendan Cox and Justin Forsyth were both advisers to Gordon Brown and both moved to Save the Children when they lost their jobs on Brown losing power, sliding in on 6 figure salaries. Jo Cox was an adviser to Glenys Kinnock and left that job to be an executive at Oxfam before she too worked as a highly paid Save the Children executive.

Brendan Cox left Save the Children due to allegations from several women that he sexually harassed female staff and volunteers. Justin Forsyth left at the same time amid allegations he had not effectively acted to have his friend Cox investigated. This has not stopped Forsyth from now popping up as Deputy Chief Executive of UNICEF. Misery for some is a goldmine for others.

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have sent Lord Milner to Petrograd to foment this rebellion. They have not uttered a word of thanks to his Lordship. Free institutions indeed! This country was a country of free institutions. It is so no longer, and still less is Ireland. You recommend to everybody free institutions anywhere but at home at your doors. The Parliament that proposes to congratulate the Duma has destroyed the free institutions of this country, and it has always denied free institutions to my country.

**Sir S. COLLINS** On a point of Order. Is the hon. Member in order in discussing the general question of Ireland on this Motion?

**Mr. SPEAKER** I cannot stop a passing reference, but the hon. Member certainly would not be in order in discussing on this Motion the affairs of Ireland.

**Mr. GINNELL** I am discussing the qualifications of this House for congratulating anybody on setting up free institutions, which are destroyed in your own country. What do you know about free institutions, except what a

murderer knows of his victim. I beg to move to leave out from the word "That" to the end of the Question, and to insert instead thereof, the words,

"this House, while appreciating Lord Milner's action in fomenting the Revolution which has dethroned our Imperial Russian Ally, whose fidelity to the Allied cause we have invariably applauded, and having betrayed its own promise of full self-government to Ireland, suspends its judgment on the new institutions alleged to have been founded in Russia until time has revealed their character."

**Mr. SPEAKER** The hon. Member's Amendment is an irrelevant negative.

Question put, and agreed to.

**Resolved**, "That this House sends to the Duma, its fraternal greetings and tenders to the Russian people its heartfelt congratulations upon the establishment among them of free institutions in full confidence that they will lead not only to the rapid and happy progress of the Russian nation but to the prosecution with renewed steadfastness and rigour of the war against the stronghold of an autocratic militarism which threatens the liberty of Europe." —[**MR. BONAR LAW**]

# Froggy

## News From Across The Channel



### The National Front

Marine Le Pen is much encouraged by Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, seen as regaining sovereignty. Like France, the US and the UK suffer unemployment, deindustrialisation and cuts in social services, and consequent discontent. In the three countries the media are appalled. The discontented who voted for more sovereignty were dubbed 'Deplorables' (US) and xenophobic racists (UK), in the same way that French supporters of the National Front are beyond the pale. But the differences are greater than the similarities. There are differences in political weight and in the content of the policies.

In political weight, Trump was nominated by the Republicans, one of the two parties alternately in power; and Brexit occurred by the fortuitous event of the then prime minister deciding to call a referendum. Marine Le Pen makes a lot of noise, but she is not part of the two party system, and her access to power is blocked. Her party is short of money; banks won't lend to her, and she has to look abroad for loans. Her party has hardly any elected representatives (2 MPs, 2 senators, 14 mayors), no expertise in government and almost no links to people with government expertise. Her second in command, Florian Philippot, a higher civil servant educated in the most prestigious establishments of France, is the exception. Generally the National Front has supporters but no powerful backers.

Its record in local government is dominated by controversy; for example they shut down the premises of the long established communist charity '*le Secours Populaire*', cut subsidies to local associations and aggressively

promoted things like nativity scenes in town halls at Christmas; controversies also include the content of school dinners, banning halal meat or offering no alternative to pork. National Front run or supported town halls are also noted for attempts to implement 'national preference' at the local level, e.g. give money to French families for the birth of a child, excluding foreign families unless European; the FN mayor of Frejus attempted to stop the building and then the opening of a new mosque. In Beaucaire, the FN mayor tried to force Arab shopkeepers to close in the evening during Ramadan, citing noise nuisance.

In content, the National Front stresses the role of the state to guarantee the wellbeing of entrepreneurs and workers, necessary to reindustrialise France. The state must protect the one source of prosperity and employment, the entrepreneur. It will do that by reducing taxes and regulations, by making banks lend to small firms, by punishing bad payers, by making local authorities purchase goods and services from firms established in France, by promoting 'made in France' goods, by putting tariffs on goods produced abroad. Life insurance companies will have to devote 2% of their funds to finance French businesses. The state will finance private research, on condition that new technology will not be sold abroad for ten years. Unless the European Union starts to allow member states to do these things, France will have to leave the Union. The Euro, being over priced, making French goods too expensive, will also have to be abandoned.

Today the Front is up in arms when the state does not step in to save French firms threatened by foreign

competition; it views shareholders as unpatriotic and motivated by short term gain; they must be reined in by the state in order to promote the continuity of French industry.

The unions do not figure in the programme, because according to the FN there can be no conflict of interest between workers and employers. Defending entrepreneurs against unfair competition, against unjust regulation, against short termist finance etc is the same as defending wages and employment, according to the Front. For the FN sovereignty is also necessary in order to have an independent foreign policy, and stop being dependent on the United States. France will stop following the US in its hostility to Russia. The FN says that France will have an African policy, based on cooperation with French speaking countries in Africa.

The National Front actually seems to have a philosophy underpinning its nationalism. It is anti-individualist. Individualism is the credo of both left and right, heirs of the French Revolution and believers in the universal nature of man. All men are equal, all men are the same, wherever they come from. Men can be free from the determinism of their origins, and can therefore live anywhere, where they will be accepted as human beings. The person is first and foremost an individual.

Marine Le Pen thinks, against the Enlightened, that 'the integrity of the human person is always tied to a national community, a language, a culture.' Consequently she does not share the left and right imperious will to export 'universal values', as was done in Iraq, Libya and attempted in Syria. She does not excommunicate Russia for not being up to date on the

legislation concerning homosexuals. She accepts that there is not just one way to live. Her slogan is 'yes to multiculturalism at the level of the planet, no to multiculturalism within one country.' This absence of cultural imperialism is one of her good points.

The National Front is working hard to make itself and its voters respectable. In the last year it held a number of 'conventions' or working groups on health, education, agriculture (favouring organic farming), animal welfare, old age. It invokes as intellectual models André Malraux, Victor Hugo, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jean Jaurès (all generally admired figures; Jean Jaurès is the founder of l'Humanité); the elite school Science Po has a National Front group, which adopted the name of Jean Moulin, the great Resistant envoy of De Gaulle killed by the Gestapo in 1943.

It had a sensible reaction to the presidential candidate François Fillon calling himself a 'Gaullist and a Christian'. Marine Le Pen said that this was contrary to the principle that religion and politics should be kept separate; that it was opportunism, since Fillon had never before mentioned his religion; and that his policies were contrary to Christianity, being a brutal programme aimed at reducing social protection.

The *banlieues* are the housing estates round the large cities which suffer from a very high level of unemployment, lack of services such as shops and transport and a level of lawlessness such that the fire brigade must go in under police protection. The National Front says that something must be done, and that the local inhabitants are the first victims of this situation. Its programme for the *banlieues* is first, clean up criminals, second, remove salafist mosques and preachers, third, provide employment by favouring entrepreneurs. Spend money by lending to people who want to start a business, instead of spending money on sporting and other facilities. It is the part of the programme aimed at reducing immigration which will draw perhaps the greatest applause from supporters, but certainly the greatest condemnation from opponents.

The National Front aims at making France less attractive to immigrants. For example, children of foreigners will not have access to free schooling. This is a punitive measure designed to satisfy the resentful part of the population, but it is problematic not least because the number of children involved is very great. It is part of an attitude that says that immigrant families who are French are part of the French population (Marine Le Pen has said that Islam is compatible with the Republic) and must be treated like any other French person, but that foreigners must not. In practical terms, this is near impossible. If foreign families must pay for their children to go to school, the likely result is that they won't be able to afford it; what will happen then? In the same way, since all public services will be subject to a number of years when they won't be accessible until foreigners have paid contributions, many people will be deprived of health care etc.

The popular success of the National Front has another thing in common with Brexit and the election of Trump:

no one knows what will happen next. At the moment the National Front is one thing in the South (nearer to Jean-Marie Le Pen, nostalgic of French Algeria) and a different thing in the North (nearer to the working class). The mayor of Henin-Beaumont in the north kept in his town hall office the bust of Jean Jaurès left there by his socialist predecessor, something you can't imagine happening in the South.

The National Front seems to have plenty of contact with the discontent of the population, but little contact with realistic solutions. Its economic model is nostalgic; its 'national preference' a likely source of violence. Its slogan '*une France apaisée*' [France at peace with itself] is a joke. Marine Le Pen said that National Front municipalities would not implement the policy of 'national preference' until she had gained power and changed the law. That means that she will implement laws that will make life even more difficult for people who do not have French nationality. Since they will be in the main Arab or Black, there will be endless discrimination if not violence against Arabs or Blacks, since it is not written on their faces whether they have French papers or not.

The question remains also whether supporters of Marine Le Pen discount what she says at the moment as a tactic to sound respectable, with the idea that, once she is in power, she will set an even harder line against non white French people. The question is, Why don't we hear from the left a message of reindustrialisation and independence in foreign policy? Why do we have to hear it from a party based on racism?

### IMMUNISATION

Who brought death to France  
after London had seen it dance  
did Superman knock over the  
twin-towers  
who laughs while Gaddafi cowers  
Bin Laden knew his history  
now his whereabouts is a mystery  
good government is blown to bits  
Obama approves Thursday's drone list  
when Saddam died his soul arose as  
ISIS  
the feral cat becomes a tiger in a  
crisis  
three witches stir the brew  
one is the EU  
the others you already knew  
it's the Porton Down of thought  
some viruses you made  
a few you caught  
it's outrage on the small screen  
when the antidote works and justice has  
been

Wilson John Haire.

# Leaders in the heyday of Britain's unions: Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin (Part 1)

by Dr James Moher

## Introduction

Walter Citrine (1887-1983) is largely forgotten today, apart from for his indispensable guide to the conduct of meetings, the ABC of Chairmanship. Yet, along with Ernest Bevin, he was a towering figure in the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party at the height of their twentieth century power and influence in British society. The contrast with the position of today's TUC and Labour Party is stark, so it may be useful to learn how they did it.

Bevin is remembered as a giant but Citrine has gone completely out of favour. There are a number of reasons for this but the main one seems to be that he was caricatured by opponents as a 'grey, predictable, apparatchik figure', 'the super-bureaucrat'. Aneurin Bevan's sneer about Citrine, 'poor man, he suffers from files', was typical of the way in which he and others, like Michael Foot, sought to belittle someone whose vision and role was different from theirs.<sup>1</sup>

After the war, Citrine retired from the TUC, whereas Bevin held high Cabinet office as Foreign Secretary from 1945 until 1951. Bevin's achievements were deservedly but uncritically lauded by no less than three biographers soon after his death.<sup>2</sup> His close relationship with Clement Attlee ensured that he was given most of the credit for the unions' sterling role in the war effort. Though more 'right-wing' than Citrine, Bevin's prominence and achievements made him simply too big a target for 'the Left' to take on.

Citrine's equally major contribution to government during the war as TUC General Secretary, Privy Counsellor and world-wide Plenipotentiary (which we will see), soon faded in the public mind and he had no one to sing his praises once he left the Labour scene. Worse still<sup>7</sup>, when the unions shifted leftwards from the late

1950s, it was Citrine who became 'fair game' for those who thought they knew much better.

There have been recent attempts to redress the balance with valuable reassessments of Citrine's life and times.<sup>3</sup> In revisiting Citrine's achievement in a chapter of a forthcoming book,<sup>4</sup> the writer recalls his and Bevin's significant achievement in taking the trade unions (and the Labour Party) 'from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street'.

## Early lives

**Walter McLennan Citrine (1887-1983)** was born in Wallasey, on Wirral, into a seafaring family. He left school aged twelve in 1899 for dusty and heavy work in a local flourmill. In 1901, his father, a ship's rigger and pilot on the River Mersey, got him an apprenticeship as an electrician. He qualified in 1906 working round the Mersey and south Lancashire. An autodidact from his early days, he acquired 'the dictionary habit' early on by studying and memorising the meaning of words.

He took night classes in economics and accounting, and taught himself shorthand – a skill that would stand him in good stead throughout his life. He also became deeply interested in electrical theory' (the cutting edge of technology then). This ability to reason in such abstract matters and to write lucidly, marked Citrine out as a new type of professional when he got involved in union affairs.<sup>5</sup>

When Beatrice Webb visited him in 1927 she told him, 'you are the first intellectual who has held such a responsible position in the trade union movement'. Though he didn't take the 'intellectual' tag as a compliment, having a poor opinion of many of those in and around the labour movement at the time.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, it was his analytical and very rational mind which

marked him out throughout his union life and it may well explain why Bevin and he were never close, though hugely complementary in their partnership at the head of the unions.

## Formative influences

Although his father was an active Merseyside Conservative Unionist, the young Walter was more influenced by his socialist workmates and he imbibed the classic Marxist texts, including Value Price and Profit, and Capital at an early age. These seem to have had some impact, though he was never a communist. It was the 'street socialism' of the time, especially Robert Blatchford's 'Merrie England' and 'the Clarion' that got him involved in the left-wing, Independent Labour Party from the early 1900s. He was soon giving talks to fellow union and ILP members in Wallasey, where he stood unsuccessfully for Labour in the 1918 general election.

However, Citrine's ambitions were soon channelled into more occupational pursuits. He joined the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) in 1911 and soon became a leading local official. Although that union had a distinctly craft bias, Citrine, with his strong socialist outlook, developed a much broader industrial philosophy. He was attracted to some of the ideas of the popular syndicalism (industrial unionism and 'direct action') of the time. By 1914, as chair of the District Committee, he had led the entire Merseyside membership in a nationwide ETU strike. He was elected as their first full-time district official soon after, and was exempted from war service. Although he doesn't say much about it, he was probably opposed to the war, like most of the ILP. Although not his and other industrial unions.

## The 'A.B.C. of Chairmanship'

His famous handbook grew from

notes he produced as a guide to procedures at meetings for his Merseyside activists. In 1914 the ETU adopted it nationally in their rule-book. An expanded version for all other unions called 'The Labour Chairman' would later become the ABC of Chairmanship. Many generations of union activists and leaders owe a lot to that little Citrine 'bible', as Alan Johnson MP has recently confirmed.<sup>7</sup>

The ETU grew significantly during the First World War, (from 3,000 to almost 60,000 by 1920), through organizing the semi-skilled grades flooding into the war-time factories. Before the war the union had a tough time in being recognized for bargaining purposes. Citrine, who was re-elected District Secretary unopposed in 1917, was part of this advance, both as an organizer and negotiator with many of the electrical contracting employers around the Mersey. He also became Secretary and President of the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades (FEST), and so was a well-known figure in the wider trade union movement.

He says that he learned a lot from negotiating with some of the large Merseyside employers, such as Cammel Laird and Port Sunlight, developing a less aggressive approach than the traditional 'platform style of delivery' then common. He found that developing 'continuing relationships' was the best means of extending the process of collective bargaining, 'based on good faith on both sides'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1920, he was elected Assistant General Secretary of the ETU, then based in Manchester and held this post until 1923, both as a negotiator and administrator. One of his key achievements was to reform the notoriously inefficient, and occasionally corrupt, lay branch officer administration and financial system, by centralizing the collection and disbursement of contributions and expenses.

The ETU President, at the time, Jack Ball, said that with his system of centralized finance, Citrine 'saved the union'. He was encouraged to apply for the vacant position of Assistant General Secretary of the TUC in 1923 and from hundreds of applicants he emerged successful, to start in 1924.

This solid union background outline is important to counter the sneer that Citrine was merely some backroom

TUC bureaucrat. He was a 'civil servant' of the General Council, but because of his all-round 'brilliant' skills was given considerable responsibility for a wide range of policy as well as administrative matters. This was the secret of the authority he came to command.

**Ernest Bevin (1881-1951)**, was born in a Somerset village, father unknown. His mother died when he was eight. His formal education was also elementary. Moving to Bristol, 'a stronghold of Non-Conformity', his formative development was along theological lines as a fervent Baptist preacher until his early twenties. He switched to politics from 1906, becoming active in the Bristol Socialist Society, an affiliate of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation. Nonetheless, Bevin's socialism was said to be more 'more than economic', carrying over 'much that Nonconformity had taught him into his socialism and trade unionism'.<sup>9</sup> These eclectic ideological influences were to mark an individualistic outlook. He was never hidebound by a party line and often struck out in imaginative directions. Interestingly, 'he did not like the ILP too well', which Citrine was drawn to about the same time.<sup>10</sup>

He was at first drawn to unemployment 'Right to Work' campaigns and municipal politics. He stood for Bristol Council in 1909, unsuccessfully, on a programme of 'common ownership of the means of life'. He had a variety of unskilled jobs – even opened his own Café - until he fixed on being a carter to join the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union Dockers' union in 1910, at the quite mature age of twenty-nine.

He was immediately elected as chairman of the cabmen's branch, directing his already formidable organizing skill to the casually employed carters and dockers, with great effect. In 1911 he became one of its full-time officials on £2 a week. And in 1914 became one of three National Organisers, stepping onto the national union and Labour scene, from his Bristol base.

By 1920, six years Citrine's senior, Bevin had become Assistant General Secretary of the Dockers Union and moved to London. He soon started to make a name for himself with his leadership of the Councils of Action

movement which prevented the government exporting arms to Poland on the Jolly George to assist the anti-Soviet Union forces there.<sup>11</sup>

Here was direct industrial action for political ends in classic syndicalist style. Yet Bevin was no syndicalist. More characteristic was his forensic presentation and advocacy of the dockers' wage claim to the Shaw Inquiry into dock labour that same year, which earned him massive publicity and the title Dockers KC.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time he became the butt of communist-inspired attacks in his union over their failure to call out the dockers and road transport workers in support of the miners on Black Friday, 15th April 1921.

As a result, the Triple Industrial Alliance and the syndicalist-led Transport Workers Federation, of which he was an Executive member, fell apart. No slouch about pursuing 'the industrial class war', Bevin had come to regard such poorly organized and uncoordinated attempts to drag his members into serious battles with Capital and the State, as poor generalship.

He was already turning his attention to the more realizable task of building the 'One Big Union' which would more effectively deliver for his members. In 1922, the fourteen unions were merged to form the Transport & General Workers Union, with over 350,000 members.

Its structure of regional and trade group autonomy under a strong central General Executive Council proved effective in holding together this massive and disparate formation. Citrine admired this 'original and flexible' creation<sup>13</sup> and Bevin easily emerged as the strongest candidate to lead it. His leadership style, though described as 'popular bossdom' by some, put him and his union on the wider map of the labour movement.<sup>14</sup>

He would go on to grow this union throughout the 1920s to becoming the largest TUC affiliate, with aggressive recruiting drives and astute mergers.

So Citrine and Bevin were very different types. One sought to devote his skills to making the TUC 'the general staff' of an effectively coordinated union 'army', while the other sought to build a position of power by organizing a large new battalion in that TUC 'army'. Bevin didn't help to make the General Council a more

powerful body so that it could lord it over the large regiments that he and others - Miners, Engineers, Rail and General & Municipal workers - led. Those tensions would come to the surface periodically between the two men, but they were never allowed to distract from their common purpose until the war years.

### The Trades Union Congress

Well before he became a TUC official, Citrine was pushing ideas for the reform of its Parliamentary Committee. The role of that committee had been primarily to lobby Parliament for legislative change, a function they were quite good at - Trade Disputes Act 1906, Trade Union Act 1913, political funding and reform of the amalgamation law- but it was coming under widespread pressure to take on an industrial coordinating role. In 1919 as an ETU delegate to the Glasgow TUC Conference, Citrine had intervened in the debate on the conduct of the prison officer and police strikes, critical of the Parliamentary Committee's failure to support them.

In 1920, he put a proposal to the Daily Herald 'for endowing the TUC with greater powers' and wanted it to evolve into 'a general staff for labour'. It wasn't published, but he was later 'staggered' when 'proposals not very different from my own were featured in the Herald over the name of Ernest Bevin.'<sup>15</sup> Bevin was a leading member of the Daily Herald Board, but Citrine did not accuse him of plagiarizing his ideas.

They had met at the Glasgow Conference, when Bevin was complimentary about his speech. Interestingly, they were both thinking along the same lines. The difference was that it was Bevin who had the clout to bring about change.

The Parliamentary Committee was replaced in 1921 by a General Council of thirty, elected annually by the affiliated unions in seventeen industrial groups, and from there until the General Strike in 1926 they were pressing for, and getting, more power from the jealously autonomous unions. The General Secretary's position was made full-time and MPs were barred from taking it on as a casual responsibility, as had been the case.

When he came to be interviewed for the AGS position in 1923, Citrine's

pitch fitted well with the radical mood and ambition of the new left-led General Council of union leaders.<sup>16</sup> Bevin didn't actually take his union's place there until October 1925, which coincided with Citrine's promotion to Acting General Secretary on the death of Fred Bramley.

As a 'new boy' in London 'from the provinces' Citrine was immediately thrown into the world of tough union leaders, 'most of them had come up the hard way' and so 'carried their directness of speech and tenacity of purpose with them'.

As Citrine put it: "Ernest Bevin was one of these. He was not at the time a member of the General Council, but, early on, Fred Bramley described him as Napoleon Bevin. The description was not far out, whether it related to his features or character. Bevin's approach to a subject was always constructive and yet, side by side with this, he was the finest drawer of 'red herrings' that I ever met. It was fascinating to listen to him in argument. When he felt he had a weak case he could divert a discussion so adroitly that no one could detect where the switch had taken place... I regarded him from the first as one of the strongest, if not the strongest, personal forces in the trade union movement."<sup>17</sup>

However, they did not immediately get off 'on the right foot'. They clashed openly on the General Council in 1926 when Bevin attacked Citrine's Research Officer Walter Milne Bailey, for publishing an article in an American journal about the General Strike. The staff threatened to 'down tools' until he apologized. Some chance, from Bevin! However, Citrine came into the meeting and tore into Bevin, saying he wanted to be associated with the staff's protest.

Bevin reacted characteristically by storming out claiming 'I always knew the secretary had his knife in for me'. Citrine was worried that that spat had lost him the T&GWU's support when he came to be elected as substantive General Secretary the following September at Congress. In fact, it did not.

On reflection Bevin respected the courage and quality of the Council's new senior officer who was able and prepared to stand up to him.<sup>18</sup> This incident reveals a key feature of their productive relationship over the

following two decades, though they would never become close 'mates'.

### The 'Labour Movement'

This was a vibrant but by no means coherent or fully integrated 'movement', but they had settled with a stronger TUC rather than the failed Triple Alliance of Black Friday. At its heart was a heavily unionised industrial working class, spearheaded by the miners (MFGB) with over a million members, the rail workers (NUR/ASLEF) around 1 million, the road transport, dock, general and municipal workers (T&GWU and NUGMW) in the high hundreds of thousands; and hundreds of thousands of skilled engineering, electrical and shipbuilding workers (AEU, ETU and Boilermakers). Although predominantly male and 'blue-collar', there were also sizeable female and white-collar sections - textile workers, shop assistants, clerks and others. In all, about 6 million up to 1926 in over 200 unions affiliated to the TUC. With many other small unions not in the TUC.<sup>19</sup>

The unions and socialist societies had also created an increasingly successful political Labour party from 1900 onwards to campaign for liberal laws which gave maximum freedom to organize and strike.

As it developed, they secured the right to use a part of their considerable funds to bankroll the party for their political purposes and to support it in many other ways, using their organizational skills and the political drive of their activists at all levels.

The Labour Party achieved astonishing electoral success in a relatively short time. It grew from just hundreds of thousands of votes in its breakthrough year of the 1906 general election with 29 MPs, to over four and a half million and 191 MPs in the 1923 election. Coinciding with Citrine's arrival in 1924, the Parliamentary leadership formed the first, albeit minority, Labour government.

Yet this Labour 'movement' was not at all clear, except in programmatic terms, where it was going. It had plenty of policies to change society but no detailed idea of what it wanted to do when it found itself in government, as became increasingly possible by the end of 1923. A divided Tory government fell and the Liberals were split, enabling a minority Labour Party to

take office in February 1924.

The Parliamentary leadership, led by Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) – a former ILP left-winger who had ‘been there at the creation’ - just wanted to establish their credentials to govern. Despite their fragile position, the left-led TUC and union leaders such as Bevin, expected ‘their’ party to deliver substantial gains for their members. If not the socialist dream immediately. Their differences and social distance were to prove irreconcilable, and MacDonald kept the TUC ‘at arms length’.

Citrine, who had just joined the TUC in January 1924 as the new Assistant General Secretary (AGS), was invited to address the Parliamentary Labour Party at a House of Commons dinner in place of his boss, Fred Bramley, who was ill again.

He struck a critical note by openly referring to the lack of close collaboration between the government and the TUC. He went on to say that the TUC, which had a different membership and function from the Labour Party, would ‘occasionally express a different view’.

This declaration of independence did not go down at all well with MacDonald or his PLP colleagues, but it reflected his General Council’s attitude.<sup>20</sup> Up to then, the Parliamentary Committee had left politics to the Labour leadership, but a different mood was now prevalent at the TUC.

The following year they would separate offices formally, as Bramley and Citrine set up their own Research, Publicity and International departments to develop and promote an independent line. Whilst this was borne out of left-wing dissatisfaction on the General Council with current Labour policy, Citrine would cement the distance now established as a principle for the future. That would have enormous future significance.

Immediately and more seriously, Bevin, as T&GWU General Secretary, riled MacDonald and his Ministers when he authorized two major strikes - the dockers nationwide and London tram workers - soon after the Labour Government had taken office. Bevin was not prepared to defer what he described as the ‘economic war’ or compromise his members’ claims.

This may have been on account of internal unofficial militant pressures on his T&GWU leadership, but it also reflected Bevin’s philosophic outlook. He had no sympathy with those, like MacDonald, who sought ‘to broaden the Labour Party’s role of political agent of the trade unions into that of an independent national party’.<sup>21</sup>

MacDonald invoked the Emergency Powers Act with the intention of bringing in troops to run the trams, a move which naturally outraged Bevin and the TUC.

The dispute was settled on the union’s terms, before it came to actual deployment of troops, but it hugely embarrassed the infant Labour government and started an enduring bitterness between Bevin and MacDonald, who accused him of disloyalty.<sup>22</sup>

Surprisingly, Citrine had little to say about that important episode of the first Labour Government and the unions, apart from his talk to the PLP, which may have reflected some unease about the unions’ role in the downfall of the Labour government. The minority government fell after only eight months, triggered by the Daily Mail’s publication of the fabricated Zinoviev Letter, which purported to incite disaffection amongst British soldiers. The return of a majority Tory government in the ensuing general election, also owed much to the unions’ disaffection.

### The General Strike

While his initial brief was mainly administrative, the indisposition of his boss, Fred Bramley, meant Walter Citrine was increasingly called on to deputize in wider matters. He impressed the senior General Council members such as the left-wing President, Alf Purcell MP, who he relied on for advice in Bramley’s absence.

An indication of his standing and outlook was a personal invitation to visit the Soviet Union by the powerful leader of the Russian unions, and Politburo member, Mikhail Tomsky (1880-1936). Tomsky was in London for critical Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations and was invited to address the TUC Congress at Hull in September 1924. It was from this visit that Citrine was suddenly recalled in October 1925 to become Acting GS when Bramley died from a heart attack. He had hardly time ‘to draw his breath’ when the left-led TUC was thrust into the thick of the biggest and most dramatic industrial and political confrontation of the twentieth century.

Citrine was present throughout the meetings of the General Council and of the TUC negotiations with the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, on behalf of the miners and coal-owners, though only in an official capacity. The strike lasted nine days in glorious May weather involving over four million workers throughout the country. Although enthusiastic in pursuit of the action, Citrine was not impressed by the lack of preparation by the TUC leaders in charge.

He had advised this in committee beforehand, but was ignored. In fact, they had never intended that it would come to a strike, expecting the government to pressurize the coal-owners into a compromise by the threat of such action. As they had done in 1925, ‘Red Friday’, with Bevin’s T&G actively prepared to halt the movement of coal.<sup>23</sup> This was again a form of

extra-parliamentary action by the Miners Federation, the T&G, NUR and TUC, signalling the trade unions’ attempt to pressurize the government directly.

But this time they gravely miscalculated. As the strongest union with a deeply empathetic cause and a messianic-type leader in Arthur (A.J.) Cook, the Miners Federation were able to push an excited London conference of all union Executives to demand, and an unresisting General Council to call, a general strike. It would start on Tuesday May 4th 1926.

The government’s initial stance was to continue discussions with the TUC for a negotiated settlement, but their mood hardened as the solid nature of the stoppages throughout the country dispelled any notion of a compromise settlement, with both the miners’ leaders and the coal-owners ‘digging in’ for a long and most disruptive confrontation.

An increasingly hawkish Tory Cabinet, with Churchill to the fore, began treating the strike as a constitutional challenge and prepared to use military force unless the TUC called it off. The General Council, including Bevin, felt that they had no alternative in those circumstances. It was left for Citrine and the TUC President to deliver their capitulation.

Despite Citrine’s emphasis on the positives, there was no escaping the scale of the defeat and humiliation for the TUC and later the miners. It is an indication of Citrine’s support for the strike that he was not blamed by the miners’ leaders and he was elected General Secretary at the annual Congress in September 1926, with their support. Bevin’s view of the strike was more bleak saying, ‘we have committed suicide.’<sup>24</sup>

We have dwelt on this titanic event at length as it was a watershed in the fortunes of the Labour movement and in the careers of Citrine and Bevin. Despite the undoubted fiasco of ‘the Great Strike’, it had been an amazing display of solidarity and protest by the British working class, which had sent a ripple down the spines of all other classes in Britain.

When Citrine brought the news to the Cabinet that they were going to call it off, Baldwin expressed genuine relief - ‘I thank God for your decision’. In his 1927 New Year message, George V appealed for reconciliation and this was endorsed by all the political leaders and many employers. But this didn’t stop the Conservative Party and their angry employer supporters in the country, MPs and Ministers, seeking revenge.

However, the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act of 1927, which they passed, did not include much of their atavistic desires to roll back union rights beyond the landmark 1906 Trade Disputes Act. Perhaps due to Baldwin’s moderating

influence. Nevertheless, the TUC acted as if the government had reverted to the Combination laws. It gave Citrine and the TUC a useful rallying point to restore morale from the depression induced by the defeat of the strike itself.

Nevertheless, the 'Great Strike' had changed the outlook of Walter Citrine, Ernest Bevin and of many more on the union and Labour side. All illusions about bringing down the 'Walls of Jericho' through syndicalist action, which had had a strong purchase on the minds of union activists like them since the turn of the century, were dispelled.<sup>25</sup> Things would never be the same again.

### The Comintern assault

Britain's trade union leaders were put on the defensive after the defeat of the General Strike, getting most of the blame for the TUC's alleged 'betrayal'. The Communist International (The Comintern, founded in 1919 by Lenin) was then a serious force globally, especially in the national trade unions, through the 'Red International of Labour Unions' (RILU). In Britain it operated through a CPGB front organization known as the National Minority Movement (or NMM).

Excited by the prospect of revolution in Britain in the run up to the General Strike, the Comintern leaders sought to exploit discontent among the defeated miners and Left-led sections of other unions. They attacked the TUC frontally and union leaders generally. This was not measured criticism either. The union leaders, Bevin included, were reviled 'as traitors, renegades and capitalist lackeys'.

The NMM's slogan was, 'Don't Trust Your Leaders' and that was the tenor of their dirty campaign.<sup>26</sup> Even those General Council union leaders on the Left, such as Alonzo Swales (AEU), Alf Purcell (Furniture Trades) and George Hicks (Construction), were disgusted and angry. But the communists met their match when the new TUC General Secretary and his Council fought back vigorously.

When he became President of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) in 1927, Citrine learned from the other countries' union leaders how such tactics had split and mortally weakened the Labour movement in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Bevin experienced it at first hand in his own T&GWU. Communist-led activists again exploited tensions between militant 'rank-and-file' groups, for example in the London bus section, and the union leadership, as they had done in 1921.<sup>28</sup>

Characteristically, Citrine did his homework and put together the evidence of 'a deliberately organised attempt .. made to capture the Trade Union Movement and to exploit it for a revolutionary subversive purpose'. He published this as a personal

view. Initially in a series of articles for the *Labour Magazine*, but they were soon taken up and issued by the General Council as an official TUC pamphlet.<sup>29</sup>

It was a pretty compelling case and contributed to the marginalisation of communists in most of the British unions for a decade. Citrine thought that many individual communists, such as Harry Pollitt and Arthur Horner, were genuine in their beliefs, but by slavishly following the Comintern's line, he felt that they had greatly 'overplayed their hand'.<sup>30</sup>

Confirmation of this Comintern design is now admitted even by scholars sympathetic to the British communists' side of things.<sup>31</sup> Between 1926 and 1937, about 150 British 'alumni' of the Lenin School in Moscow, became 'the most extreme of the intrusions by the Third International, the Comintern ... of a trained, responsive and carefully vetted cohort of revolutionary activists'.<sup>32</sup>

Citrine's anti-communism was therefore not primarily ideological, but a reaction to what he saw as an underhand campaign to undermine union leaders' position with their members, which he saw as both divisive and disruptive. A strong supporter of the Russian Revolution for nearly a decade after they had taken power, 'I had been enthused by Lenin's picture of an electric republic...[which] would ensure to every citizen... the advantages of a planned economy and the blessings of a modern civilisation'.<sup>33</sup>

He had eagerly accepted Tomsky's invitation to visit the Soviet Union in 1925. He had been actively involved with IFTU President Purcell's efforts to establish a link between the Russian unions and the IFTU until 'a torrent of abuse' (in a 1,000 word telegram to the 1926 Congress and a RILU pamphlet), over the TUC conduct of the General Strike, ended those close relations. [*Men and Work*, 88-94].

He would go to the Soviet Union again in 1935, 1941, 1946 and 1956. He retained a keen interest, warm feeling but outspokenly critical attitude for what he saw as the first socialist experiment in a workers' state, whilst being in no doubt about the increasingly totalitarian nature of the Communist regime.

1 Michael Foot's adulatory two volume biography of *Aneurin Bevan* (1962), especially volume 1, 178, 287 and 298-306, is full of such jibes.

2 Trevor Evans, *Ernest Bevin*, (1946), *Francis Williams, Ernest Bevin, Portrait of a Great Englishman*, (1952) and Lord Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, vol.1 Trade Union Leader 1881-1940*, (1960).

3 Robert Taylor's *The TUC: From the General Strike to New Unionism* (2000), 20- 91 and N.Riddell, *Walter Citrine and the British Labour Movement 1925-1935*, History journal,

April 2000, 298-306 .

4 *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain – Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century* (edited by Peter Ackers & Alastair J. Reid), 2017, Palgrave.

5 Although there is no biography of Citrine, he has left us a marvelous two- volume memoir based on his contemporary short-hand notes - *Men and Work* (1964) and 'Two Careers' (1967).

6 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 270.

7 Alan Johnson, *Please Mr Postman*, (2014), 152-3, 245-6 and again in *The Long and Wind-ing Road*, (2016), 193-4.

8 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 51.

9 Bullock, *Ernest Bevin, Trade Union Leader*, 9 & 14.

10 *ibid.*, 1-23.

11 Bullock, *Ernest Bevin, Trade Union Leader*, 130-8.

12 *ibid.*, 116-130.

13 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 71.

14 Andrew Murray, *The T&G Story*, (2008), 44.

15 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 67.

16 *ibid.*, 74-5.

17 *ibid.*, 78. Praise indeed, written with fondness in 1964.

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29 W. Citrine, *Democracy or Disruption – An Examination of Communist Influences in the Trade Unions*, (1928 –TUC Library HX 695).

30 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 253 and 257. Pollitt's Reply to Citrine was published by the N.M.M.

31 Our late colleague, Professor Nina Fishman's *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions* (1995), though focused on the later 1933-45 period, in the introductory chapter stressed how Pollitt and Campbell sought to move the CPGB away from its earlier adventurism (pages 4-9).

32 K.Morgan & G.Cohen, *Stalin's Sausage Machine – British Students at the International Lenin School 1926-1937*, (University of Manchester CPGB Biographical Project).

33 Citrine, *Men and Work*, 88.

# Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

## Russia's Aggressive Support for Self-Determination

Post-Soviet Russia has shown no wish to re-create the Soviet Union. What they've done is help some (but not all) of those who still feel pro-Russian.

In Crimea, the elected Regional Government had long wished to reverse Khrushchev's foolish decision to lump them with Ukraine. Ukraine has a self-harming pattern of violently rejecting whatever they chose last time. Their most recent elected President is almost as unpopular as the one they chased out in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

The Russo-Georgian War<sup>2</sup> of 2008 was a response to a Georgian attempt to take back the whole of South Ossetia. South Ossetia and also Abkhazia had been contented autonomous regions within the Soviet Republic of Georgia. But with multi-party democracy, the easiest way to win an election was to go banging the drum for your own nationality and shouting about how unfairly you were being treated. Such things caused the wars of Former Yugoslavia, and even broke up Czechoslovakia.

Clashes between Georgians and Ossetians and between Georgians and Abkhazians began in the early 1990s, and steadily got worse. The Russians intervened to stop the Georgians doing a probable ethnic cleansing of minorities who looked to Russia for protection.

So what rules did Russia break? How did this become 'Russian aggression' that Europe needs to be protected against? The United Nations Charter mentions both 'self-determination' and 'national integrity' as guiding principles. It does not say what to do when part of an existing state wants to break away, but very seldom supports it.

The United Nations Charter made no promise to end Imperialism. The British Empire and French Empire were

founder members, with the French fighting and in the end losing a war to keep control of Indochina, and later Algeria. Britain fighting a vicious war to keep Kenya.<sup>3</sup> Early UN members included Belgium with the Congo. Also the Netherlands, which fought a war to hold what became Indonesia. Portugal joined in 1955 without giving up its African colonies.

In the longer run, the balance tilted towards Anti-Imperialism. The method used was the *United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories*,<sup>4</sup> an arbitrary list intended to free populations from rule by outsiders. It was imperfect: the United Nations was keen to give Gibraltar to Spain and the Falkland Islands to Argentina, in defiance of the people actually living there. Other peoples never got on the list, though they maybe should have. Never the less, it helped end Imperialism. Ended it against the wishes of the USA, Britain and France, all of which abstained on the crucial 1960 *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*.

The Soviet Union was a champion of decolonisation, while asserting that its own Empire was a voluntary association of equal peoples. It was the case that all Soviet citizens were roughly equal, which was never remotely the case with the British, Dutch, French, or Portuguese empires. Only later in the 1960s did Afro-Americans take the first steps towards real equality in the USA. The white population of the US South never really accepted this, switching from Democrat to Republican and playing a key role in the election of every Republican President from Nixon onwards. Donald Trump is hopefully the tail-end of this process, though he also needed discontented former Democrats in the declining industrial North.

The Soviet Union wrecked itself,

by not moving on when many of the original aims of the Bolsheviks had been unexpectedly achieved by conventional politics. Alexandra Kollontai was the first woman since the Bronze Age to be a major leader without having powerful male relatives: but from 1969 this became increasingly common everywhere. Golda Meir became Israeli Prime Minister in that year: the first of many to get the top job without powerful male relatives, living or dead.

The Soviet Union in 1968 had crushed the attempt by the mostly-Slovak leadership of Czechoslovakia to do serious reforms of the sort that later succeeded in China. Had things gone otherwise, the Thatcher-Reagan development would probably never have happened. But it did, and the Soviet Union fell, and wars between nationalities is one result.

And what alternative is the USA offering? Brutality and political incompetence. They fought a war to replace Iraq's secular pro-Western nationalism by docile servants of US interests. Expected them to be peacefully returned in Western-style elections by a grateful liberated population. And were astonished to get yet another set of elections in which the easiest way to win was to go banging the drum for your own nationality and shouting about how unfairly you were being treated.

In Iraq, nationality is mostly defined by religion. Tough for Christians in Former Iraq, who had been there since the days of the first apostles and are now fleeing. Also tough for various minor religions that traditional Islam had mostly tolerated. Religions which the new aggressive national-religious creeds are driving out.

None of this made sense to the Neo-Liberals: they learn nothing and forget nothing. They put enormous efforts into

doing almost exactly the same thing in Syria. They were outraged when Russia saved functional secularism there.

Then there is the matter of North Kosovo. Kosovo, unlike the other distinct regions of Former Yugoslavia, had no constitutional right to secede. But the USA decided that Serbia had somehow broken the rules by taking very typical repressive measures against armed and violent separatists. They demanded that *all* Kosovo be separated, including regions in North Kosovo with a Serb majority.

Post-Soviet Russia is no more honest than the USA, but has been much more modest in its aims. Ending the pointless confrontation with Russia may be one of the few good things that President Trump will do. (Though he has also killed the appalling TPP trade agreement. <sup>5</sup>)

China meantime remains modest in its aims. It is quietly accumulating power while the USA declines. How things play out between China and Trump remains to be seen.

### **Neo-Liberalism: Biting Off More of the Bed Than They Can Lie On**

Donald Trump is hopefully a Trump of Doom for Neo-Liberalism. That disgusting little creed rose in the 1980s, defying the 'common sense' that had been painfully established in the 1940s. Having had things too easy for too long, the 'Keynesians' lacked coherent popular arguments to defend their very great achievements.

Neo-Liberalism had its High Noon in the 1990s, with New Labour, the Clinton Democrats, and many others making a moderate-left adjustment in the belief that Neo-Liberalism was an unpleasant truth they had to swallow. Meantime Neo-Liberalism made a complete mess of its period of dominance, offending Russia and making blundering interventions in the Middle East. Since the year 2000, they have been in decline.

Neo-Liberalism would have declined faster, had it not been for so many people sticking to the moderate-left adjustment to Neo-Liberalism and acting as if that creed were true. When George Osborne blamed the 2008 economic crisis on foolish government spending, Ed Miliband should have said that it was nonsense and that Osborne was either a liar or an incompetent fantasist. Instead he barely argued the matter. He let the Tories get an absolute majority in 2015, an election they should have lost. Yet the same Labour Party 'Timid Tendency' are convinced that Jeremy Corbyn is a disaster: that only a return to timidity towards Neo-Liberalism offers hope of another Labour government and nice jobs for all of them.

What Obama did was worse. The probable wrecking of many of his achievements by Trump is a result of his errors. He bailed

out the banks with 'Qualitative Easing', rather than helping suffering ordinary people. He was somehow persuaded that if the money went to banks rather than real people, it would magically multiply itself.

This rubbish is based on a real phenomenon called *fractional-reserve banking*. Conventional banking has a bank accepting money from savers and lending out that same money to borrowers. This runs the risk of bad debts, but borrowers pay higher interests than savers get. Loans should also have *collateral*, something solid that means bank losses are small even if the borrower cannot repay.

Fractional-reserve banking is riskier, assuming that bad loans will be very few and that not much real money will be needed to cover them. But that was just what was untrue in the 2008 crisis: vast amounts of speculative games had siphoned off the real assets. Too many banks had debts they could not cover and 'collateral' that might be worthless. So when the government helpfully gave them cut-price real assets, they kept these to ensure their own survival. They gave very little to small businesses that needed a loan in the bad times. There was anyway money to be made from breaking up small businesses: the long term cost was someone else's problem.

Nationalising the gambling banks and letting hedge funds collapse would have damaged the wealth of the rich overclass that has since the 1980s been moving way ahead of the societies they sit on top of. Societies they now refuse to take responsibility for, blaming the victims. Neo-Liberalism praises speculators and gamblers as a vital part of capitalism, not an aberration within it. Obama accepted this.

Bernie Saunders offered an alternative. Obama and Hilary Clinton did not. Trump doesn't either, but he tapped into the justified anger of people who knew that something had gone wrong.

### **Trump Versus Washington**

"We are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the people..."

"For too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge; and the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealised potential."<sup>6</sup>

Thus spoke Trump at his inauguration. But the problems for Middle America began with Ronald Reagan. He sounded

like a conservative, but was actually a right-wing nihilist. He let power be moved from the government to rich people, in the belief this would help the economy. It didn't, but the Soviet collapse let him seem like a success. So the US government went on supporting the anti-social habits of the rich. Trump will do more of the same, meaning that he will not fix the USA's decline.

Trump will however axe the failed global interventionist policies that Bill Clinton and Obama sponsored just as much as Bush Junior. Which Hillary Clinton was even keener on than Obama. Trump may know better:

"We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world - but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first.

"We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example - we will shine - for everyone to follow."<sup>7</sup>

He did not say 'we will stop this ineffective meddling', but it amounts to that. He probably does believe that foreigners want to follow the USA's 'shining example' of high gun crime, high prison population and broad decline. But such delusions may not matter much.

### **Blame It On The Boomers**

When you've messed up the economy, find a scapegoat. Or get someone else to start a quarrel between two sections of the voters who may both be persuaded to vote for right-wing policies:

"Baby boomers, people born between 1945 and 1965, will on average earn £740,000 during their lives, according to the Resolution Foundation.

"Generation X, those now aged between 35 and 50, are projected to earn 21% more than that - £835,000 on average.

"But the figure for millennials, the under-35s, is lower - they're forecast to earn £825,000 over their working lives..."

"Prof Sir John Hills of the London School of Economics found that baby boomers were, on average, net beneficiaries of the welfare state - they will get more in benefits than they have paid in tax. They have enjoyed tax cuts and a boom in welfare spending. Subsequent generations, by contrast, are likely to be net contributors over their lifetimes and get back less than they have paid in, thanks to austerity cuts to state benefits."<sup>8</sup>

Now this is nonsense. It was the richest 1%, the more-than-millionaire class that now dominates, that benefited from tax cuts and increasing tax avoidance. The Baby Boomers mostly benefit from the excellent occupational pension schemes set up by the previous generation. Generation X and the millennials let these be taken away

from them without much fuss.

The Labour Party needs to target this rubbish. It is a widespread view, and might stop young people voting. Or persuade them to vote Tory. Labour must emphasise that it was the rich who took the money. That only Labour is serious about restoring the balance.

### Green China?

“Almost three years ago, China declared their intentions to wage a war against pollution... with China’s National Energy Administration cancelling a significant number of its planned coal-fired projects, it looks like China is going to make significant strides toward winning this war... China is the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, and shutting down 104 coal-fired projects across 13 provinces – which are expected to deliver a total of 120 gigawatts of power – will have a significant impact on their total volume of carbon emissions.”<sup>9</sup>

Smog is a problem. But China may also be out to boost its international prestige at the same time as Trump has the USA deny that greenhouse gases are a problem.

President Xi is stepping up state control, while also fighting for ‘trade freedom’ where it suits China. There is currently a continuing fight about whether China is truly a market economy.<sup>10</sup> It depends on whether you define a ‘market economy’ as a society where the government allows and even encourages the rich to profit at the expense of the rest of us.

This year will also see the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. On past form, it will designate President Xi’s successor for 2022. This will be the highest-ranking new member of the Politburo Standing Committee.

Since their 1911 Revolution, no Mainland Chinese leader has successfully controlled the succession. None apart from Deng, who threw out and disgraced his first two choices. Xi must hope to do better. Since he’s on broadly the right lines, it may be best if he succeeds.

A global fight with Trump would do wonders for Xi’s chances. There’s nothing like an external threat to make most people rally round whichever leader is in power.

### Snippets

#### The Death of Ordinary Banking

“HSBC has closed more than a quarter of its UK branches over the last two years, as part of 1,000 bank closures in total.”<sup>11</sup>

Like library closures, this hits the old, the poor and the sick. Far too many of whom go on accepting it as a Law of Nature and vote Tory, or fail to vote. Society does not exist or, if it does, we will soon finish it off. And utter shocked shrieks about outbreaks

of evil when misbehaviour increases.

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#### Die Hard as a Dangerous Driver

“Over the past 45 years, we [the USA] have virtually stood still while our peers have zoomed ahead in the realm of traffic safety. Many of these countries have taken the long view and have tackled the hard, ingrained cultural, political and engineering issues that must be addressed to bring about sustained reductions in traffic fatalities. As a result, we now have traffic fatality rates per person that are three to four times greater than those in the best-performing peer countries — including Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands.”<sup>12</sup>

The undoubted genius of the USA produces Hollywood thrillers where dangerous driving is routine, but hardly ever kills an innocent. Feeds the aggressive ignorance that helped All-American Losers vote for Reagan, Bush, Bush and Trump

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#### Or Just Die

“Recent data ... shows progress on mortality rates and life expectancy is stalling; between 2014 and 2015, life expectancy in the US dropped for the first time since 1993. And despite an overall lower national mortality rate, there are pockets of the country where a person is far more likely to die.”<sup>13</sup>

They show a map. A map which looks remarkably like the areas that voted for Trump.

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#### Sorrows of South Sudan

Secession creates further misery, more often than it creates good government. I felt ahead of time that carving South Sudan out of badly-governed Sudan would make things worse. Tragically, it has:

“Widespread ethnic cleansing, burning villages, looming starvation, and gang rape ‘so prevalent that it’s become ‘normal.’” This is what UN experts found when they took a 10-day trip to the African country of South Sudan in late November.

“Since civil war broke out there in December 2013, as many as 50,000 people have been killed. More than 2.3 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Around 6 million people are currently at risk of going hungry, and 70 percent of schools have been closed due to the fighting.”<sup>14</sup>

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#### Sod Your Silly Oaths

“Civil servants and other holders of public office should swear an oath to British values, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has said.”<sup>15</sup>

Another piece of harassment from a party that has degraded British life. Squeezed ordinary people for the sake of a rich stratum with little real commitment to Britain. But if they do impose this Oath,

why not add the following:

*I will also swear to abstain from cannibalism, Satanism, incest, genocide and I will not be joining the Tory Party. And if you like, I will make all sorts of other verbal promises that harass the honest and can be shrugged off by the dishonest and self-deceiving.*

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#### Websites

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

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# Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier (No 8)

By Michael Murray

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

In this issue:

“Pity the land”

“The Sound of Silence”

Business as usual

## (1) “Pity the land”

Bertolt Brecht’s “Galileo” is one of my all-time favourite plays. Most readers will know the historical context: the Catholic Church’s “*Compliance Unit*,” out to force Galileo, under pain of death, to recant his scientific views held to be in direct conflict with the Church’s teachings. There is a scene where Galileo’s “Momentum” supporters are gathered outside the Court in a Rome square to witness an historic victory of reason over faith, of science over received scriptural teachings, of the individual intellect and conscience over the Institution of the Holy Roman Church. A column of white smoke, at a given hour, will signal that Galileo has recanted. The hour arrives and no smoke issues. They begin to celebrate, in a hesitant, restrained way at first, but, as time passes gradually reaching a frenzy. And then comes the white smoke. Galileo, their hero, to save his own life, has recanted. In the silence that follows one character emerges from the silent assembly and says: “*Pity the land that has no heroes.*” Then, after a long, charged pause another character is heard to say: “*Pity the land that needs heroes.*”

So it feels in the Labour Party at this juncture. Owen Smith’s constant refrain in the second leadership contest was, I’m paraphrasing: “*It’s not that I disagree with Jeremy’s socialism. I just don’t think he’s the person to lead us to*

*achieving it.*” In this dissembling way he, and other Corbyn challengers and critics attempt to evade spelling out a political vision as comprehensive and coherent as the one Corbyn, with the helping hand of John McDonnell – let’s give due credit – put before us in the hustings. And let me say again here: all the elaboration of a new anti-austerity policy are still up on Facebook for those to see who have been led to believe Corbyn hasn’t two coherent thoughts to rub together.

But for me the epitome of the dearth of an alternative political vision in the Labour Party was the late, un-lamented Tristram Hunt’s verdict on Labour’s loss in the 2015 General Election. He said, in a radio interview, the party had failed to appeal to the Waitrose and John Lewis customer, and the *aspiring* customer, making his attempted populist “analysis” sound even more pathetic. I thought: this from the man, who, as an historian, wrote so eloquently of the politics of the English Civil War and the Levellers – a high point in English radicalism and its achievements still relevant – as we saw in the Supreme Court judgement on the Article 50 appeal last week.

## (2) “The Sound of Silence”

The foot soldier’s experience of warfare has been described as long boring periods of nothing happening – and then all hell breaks out. From the announcement of Corbyn’s second, even more conclusive, Labour Party leadership election victory there was the discernible “Sound of Silence,” as the Guardian depicted the two month-long apparent media truce in internal

party infighting that followed that result and the subsequent Annual Conference. But the Guardian advised its readers not to be misled. Under cover of this faux ceasefire a quiet reorganization and rethink was taking place. The old guard concentrating on what it does better than the new, more in-experienced left – securing positions at the shop floor level of the Party across the organization.

Next, was a refocusing on developing party policy – but from an individual backbench position, which, thus, would not reflect favourably on the Shadow Frontbench, or Corbyn. The decision was also taken not to openly criticize or confront Corbyn, no matter the temptation to put the boot in and no matter how bad the opinion polls became – for which the divisiveness of the Parliamentary Labour Party was getting blamed (unfairly in its view, rightly, in mine).

The “attrition” strategy of openly challenging Corbyn was dropped after the miserable failure of the moderates’ champion, Owen Smith. Smith’s constant refrain was “support” for Corbyn’s socialist politics but doubts about his leadership “qualities.” His supporters talked about Corbyn’s “cult of the personality” – and then went on to argue the case for a more “charismatic” leader with greater media appeal and presence, not, apparently, seeing the contradiction.

Instead a different strategy, part of a new so-called “lifeboat” strategy was to be tried. To quote a Guardian (unidentified) MP: “*The ownership of failure has to be hung around the necks of Corbyn and*

*McDonnell.*” The individual PLP members hope to be able to disassociate themselves from the leadership in this way, and avoid, they think, the opprobrium of their constituents. The huge assumption here is that the Labour Party members, who elected Corbyn to the leadership, not once but twice, will be available as election fodder for them. I don’t think so. Foot soldiers are only as good as their Officers, it’s said. And Officers are judged, and followed, by the foot soldiers, when they lead from the front, not from behind.

Richard Seymour, in his Corbyn biography: *“Corbyn, The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics,”* concludes that *“...unless the wider social and economic terrain changes dramatically ... before 2020 it is unlikely to recoup enough of Labour’s electoral losses to carry a general election. He goes on: “Even if it does, there is little in the way of a wider international climate ... or the surrounding institutional framework, let alone in the business status quo, that would support and sustain an experimental radical-left form of government.”* (p218, Verso, 2016) And that was before the supreme game-changer: Brexit – and Trump. Taking the latter two factors into account makes his final point even more depressingly portentous: *“Corbyn, backed by a few allies, but otherwise surrounded by a surprisingly resilient and bellicose old guard, can’t keep the right wing attack dogs on the back foot for too long. The political space for left wing activists to operate effectively is likely to be closed before too long. There will be backlashes and disappointments, election setbacks and even in the event of government, continual energy-sapping crises. In the final analysis, Corbynism will struggle to outrun the limits of Labourism. And it is those limits above all which have brought us to this impasse.”* (*ibid*, p218)

The tragedy of Corbyn - tragedy in the political not the theatrical sense- is that Seymour may have got it spot on. This realization is not good for the morale of the foot soldier – certainly not this one.

### (3) Business as usual

I have to say the Branch, or Ward monthly meetings have improved markedly over the past three months in process and content. They’ve been more purposeful and better attended, with new faces showing up and immediately engaging. The numbers remain small in proportion to the paid-up membership, however, and that continues to exercise our organizational development minds. In the run-up to the selection of candidates for next year’s council elections the councillors have been explaining their role and organization and we are reminded of the mass of invisible nitty gritty work that’s done by Councillors. We’re involved in weekend canvassing to consolidate, and raise labour support, also campaigning on centrally decided national issues like the defence of the NHS, the development of Housing and Education. But, again, the numbers involved are smaller than we’d like, which, it must be acknowledged, may be a reflection of the morale of the Labour Party generally.

I remember. I’ve got the first Hackney North constituency

party meeting of the new year tonight. One of the emergency motions is that this constituency calls on Diane Abbot, our MP, Shadow Home Secretary, to vote against triggering Article 50, despite and/or because of Jeremy Corbyn’s stated intention to apply a “three line” whip (they love their whips, the political classes). So, I head off to the venue, the historic “Unitarian Church,” on Newington Green, home to one of the many radical 17<sup>th</sup> century “Dissenting Academies,” also linked to Cromwell, John Stuart Mill – and Mary Wollstonecraft, to name but a few.

Another line from Brecht’s “Galileo,” is forming in my already troubled little head: “Galileo,” a character says, “I see you embarking on a frightful road.” I find it hard to banish the defeatist thought. But the Brecht character in my head insists: “What kind of person is said to go into things with his eyes open?” The character answers his own question: “One who is going to his doom.”

### WHEN WE THINK OF VICTORY

It takes an air-raid to  
 upbraid  
 while locked in your  
 emotional cell  
 a time of atonement  
 indiscretions remembered  
 reparations sort of meant  
 in an atmosphere  
 of dismemberment  
 waiting for it to be over  
 over  
 while all around  
 hovers  
 the surgeon’s knife  
 cutting through concrete  
 taking life  
 not always precise  
 Guernica still burns  
 sometimes in lieu  
 it burns for  
 you.

Wilson John Haire.

# Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

## **NHS and Social Care Funding 11 January 2017**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel)** I advise the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendment (a) in the name of the Prime Minister.

**Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)** I beg to move,

That this House supports NHS England's four-hour standard, which sets out that a minimum of 95 per cent of all patients to A&E will be treated within four hours; notes the widespread public and medical professional support for this standard; further notes that £4.6 billion has been cut from the social care budget since 2010 and that NHS funding will fall per head of population in 2018-19 and 2019-20; and calls on the Government to bring forward extra funding now for social care to help hospitals cope this winter, and to pledge a new improved funding settlement for the NHS and social care in the March 2017 Budget.

I begin by paying tribute to the staff working in the NHS. To nurses, midwives, GPs, consultants, junior doctors, paramedics—all staff—we say thank you for your hard work, goodwill, commitment and dedication though this winter crisis. I had the pleasure of meeting some of those hard-working staff with my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) at St George's hospital on Monday, and they told me of the pressures they face. Last night, I convened a summit of representatives of various royal colleges and trade unions working in the health service to meet staff and hear directly from the frontline of the pressures we now see in hospitals every day. Many royal colleges have spoken out today, warning of underfunding and understaffing. Over the past few days, I have received

messages from doctors and clinicians from across the country who tell of the immense pressure, strain and, yes, crisis that we face this winter.

Let me share with the House some of the stories that I have been told, and I deliberately exclude the names of hospitals and trusts so as not to cause undue stress and alarm. This is a flavour of what I have heard. One doctor told me: "There was a point when A&E was completely full and we had no space for a major trauma call that was coming in. The trauma case was going to have to be put into a corridor because the resuscitation area was full."

Another story: "In my A&E 'Corridor Care' isn't unusual, it's now the norm. Patient buzzers have actually been installed on the walls in said corridor." How about this: "We're... trying our best to keep patients safe but there aren't enough of us and we're on our knees. Doctor and nurses in tears"? Another story: "Over the weekend my bosses repeatedly asked for ambulances to be diverted away from our hospital because we had no beds, but we had multiple requests denied." Finally, another one: "The A&E is perpetually rammed with the corridor full of ambulance trolleys and paramedics." I have many more examples, but I am sure the House understands the broader point that I am trying to make.

**Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)** There is unprecedented pressure in Wirral, too. As recently as last week A&E attendances and GP referrals were massively up. Unprecedentedly, 84 additional beds are being laid on, and they are now full. Last week, all elective in-patient appointments were cancelled and ambulance turnarounds reached up to five hours. At Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister

did not seem to think that there is a crisis in the NHS. If this is not a crisis, can my hon. Friend tell us what is?

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend makes her point eloquently and represents her constituents powerfully, as she always does in this place. I hope the Secretary of State will respond to some of those points.

**Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab)** The Royal Stoke in my city is under intense pressure. No doubt we will hear shortly from the Secretary of State that that is winter pressure. Winter has not really started. We have not really had a winter, yet we have been under this pressure not for a few weeks but for months. The whole NHS system is broken. That is the problem that we really face.

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend makes an eloquent point about the particular situation that has been facing Stoke for some time, of which many of us are aware. I hope the Secretary of State will touch on the situation in Stoke, because sadly it is one that we have had to raise previously. I assure the Secretary of State that I will pass on the names of the trusts and hospitals that I highlighted, so perhaps he can look into them. Let us be absolutely clear that these desperate stories are not the words of politicians trying to score political points but are the honest, heartfelt, considered testimonies of doctors and clinicians on the frontline in our hospitals. They simply want to do the very best for their patients. Indeed, many clinicians want to speak out but feel that they cannot, which is why the remarks were made anonymously.

According to reports on the BBC's "You and Yours", the Prime Minister has sent instructions to hospital trust chief executives telling them not to speak out. I would be grateful if the

Secretary of State could verify those reports.

**Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con)** I worked in the NHS over the Christmas period. Although it has been a very tough winter so far, this is nothing new. I have worked in the NHS for more than 20 years, and under previous Governments we had ambulances queuing around the block to get into A&E. Major incidents were declared in A&Es because they were too full. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that this is not a new problem?

**Jonathan Ashworth** I entirely respect the hon. Lady's work as a nurse before she came into this place— [Hon. Members: "She still is."] I beg her pardon. She is still a nurse, and I genuinely respect her, but if we are not raising these matters on behalf of our constituents, we are failing in our responsibility as Members of Parliament. We must never forget that this is not just about the staff in our NHS; it is about patients and their safety, which must always be our absolute priority.

**Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op)** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for kindly giving way and for his important remarks. I echo his point that this is about patients across the country. My constituent's mother, Angela, has been waiting for an acute mental health bed for more than a week. She was taken in an ambulance to A&E, but she could not be treated locally in Liverpool because it was full. She was treated for the physical effects of her mental health condition in an ambulance and sent home. Her family are devastated and are concerned about her condition. Her story is one of countless stories across the country, and we need to recollect and focus on those stories today.

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend speaks passionately, as she always does, on behalf of her constituents and, more broadly, on mental health provision. Again, I hope the Secretary of State will respond to her on the specifics of that case.

My hon. Friend talks about patient care, and she is absolutely right. All of us, or at least many of us, in this

House will have been getting stories from constituents telling us of their recent experiences in hospitals. I have been given a few, and I will share some heart-breaking examples with the House. Again, I will not reveal the names of trusts and hospitals, but I will pass them on to the Secretary of State after the debate.

Example No. 1 is of a mum of four children under 10 years old who has a secondary tumour in her liver. She was due to go into hospital this Thursday to have the tumour removed. Her surgery has been delayed for at least two weeks so that the hospital could cope with the winter crisis and because no beds are available. She has not yet been given a new date.

Someone else got in touch with me this morning. Their wife has been on the waiting list for a knee replacement since April last year. An appointment for early December was cancelled owing to the hospital being on black alert. A few weeks later, the hospital phoned with an appointment for today, which was cancelled yesterday.

Again, these patients are not trying to score political points or to politicise matters. They are decent, hard-working people who are simply desperate for something to be done.

**Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)** Conservative Members care deeply about patients. I personally follow up on the individual stories and challenges experienced by my constituents, but the hon. Gentleman has surely seen the guidance this week from NHS Providers, which is not always a friend of the Government, that said that we need to be careful when extrapolating from individual incidents in hospitals that are under particular pressure and implying that they constitute a wider trend. Yes, times are tough in the NHS, and there are winter pressures, but he should not make inappropriate use of individual stories.

**Jonathan Ashworth** The hon. Lady should be careful. I will be charitable, but she would not want to give the impression that she is dismissing the stories and examples that I am highlighting. NHS Providers has

continually warned of the chronic underfunding of the NHS under this Government, and it has continually warned that, head for head, spending in this country will fall next year. If she wants to quote NHS Providers, she should quote all the facts from NHS Providers.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op)** My hon. Friend is telling some shocking stories. Was he as shocked as I was to hear Government Members shouting at and heckling the Leader of the Opposition during Prime Minister's questions? They shouted, "What about Wales?" Does my hon. Friend agree that there is actually a stark contrast in Wales? Welsh Labour is delivering 6% more funding than in England for the NHS and social care. We have brand new hospitals, including in my constituency, and an £80 million new treatment fund was announced yesterday to allow better access to treatments.

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about Wales. As a Member for Cardiff, he understands what is happening in the Welsh health service. I wish Conservative Members understood that better.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con)** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that every winter, for as long as I can recall, we have had a winter crisis in the NHS? It usually happens after Christmas. In winter the demands on the service become unpredictable, infections spread and the NHS starts losing staff. There are bound to be parts of the system that come under very real strain, and no one is trying to minimise the fact that they do. Apart from just producing this year's crop of stories of very unfortunate incidents in various places, does he have any policy proposal at all, apart from simply spending more money wherever the reports are coming from?

**Jonathan Ashworth** I am very grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is a very experienced parliamentarian, for his intervention, but he will know that this is one of the worst winters for probably 20 years. He casually suggests that this happens every year, but I remember the years

of a Labour Government when it did not happen. I remember the years of a Labour Government when we went further than the financial settlements he delivered as Chancellor of the Exchequer and were more than doubling the money going into the NHS—and tripling it in cash terms.

We are all becoming familiar—far too familiar perhaps—with the grim statistics: in December, 50 of the 152 English hospital trusts called for urgent action to cope with demand; the number of patients being turned away from A&E and sent to other hospitals is at a record high; A&E departments have turned patients away more than 140 times; and 15 hospitals ran out of beds in one day in December. Last night, the BBC revealed that leaked documents from NHS Improvement showed that there were more than 18,000 “trolley waits” of four hours or more; that almost a quarter of patients waited longer than four hours in A&E last week, with just one hospital—just one—hitting its target; and that since the start of December, hospitals have seen only 82.3% of patients who attended A&E within the four-hour target. We will return to the issue of the four-hour target in a few moments.

Ministers can try to deny what is going on but they cannot deny these facts about what is happening this winter in the NHS on their watch. We know that what happens in the NHS in the winter is a signifier of a wider crisis, because across the piece bed occupancy levels now routinely exceed the recommended maximum levels of 85%—often to levels higher than 95%. As I have said, the NHS is going through the largest financial squeeze in its history. Indeed the former Secretary of State, Lord Lansley, said that five years of NHS austerity had been planned for, but having 10 years of it was never expected. We have seen £4.6 billion cut from social care budgets—As the King’s Fund said, the reason there is a problem is quite simply because there is a “mismatch between funding and activity” affecting our hospitals. The response of Ministers, from the Prime Minister downwards, has been one of utter complacency. The Secretary of

State told “Sky News” on Monday that things had only been “falling over in a couple of places”.

When he came to the House on Monday to make his statement, he did not commit to extra emergency funding for social care and he did not promise that the financial settlements would be reassessed in the March Budget. It is worse than that, because while he was making his statement, his spin doctors were telling the Health Service Journal—this on the day when the winter crisis is leading the news and he is making a statement in the House—and letting it be known that there is “no prospect” of “additional funding to support emergency care any time before the next election.”

So there is nothing for social care, nothing for emergency care, nothing to tackle understaffing and nothing to tackle underfunding—well thank you very much. What did we get as a response? We got a downgrade of the four-hour A&E target.

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt)** indicated dissent.

**Jonathan Ashworth** The Secretary of State shakes his head and says, “Nonsense”, but let me remind him of what he said in the House on Monday: “we need to have an honest discussion with the public about the purpose of A&E departments.” He began by saying he wanted to provoke a discussion. He has certainly provoked a backlash, not least by blaming the public, it seems, for turning up at A&E departments. He went on to say that the four-hour target “is a promise to sort out all urgent health problems within four hours”, but he added a little clarification, continuing: “but not all health problems, however minor.”— [Official Report, 9 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 38.]

That is what he said in the House, and now we have seen the letter from NHS Improvement to trusts a few weeks ago, which talks of “broadening our oversight of A&E”. On the four-hour standard, it said that it believed “there is merit in broadening our oversight approach, beyond a single metric”.

So in the interests of that discussion

the Secretary of State wants to engage in, perhaps he can answer our questions, although I know he avoided the questions on Sky yesterday. Does he recall that in 2015 when he asked Sir Bruce Keogh to review these matters on waiting times, Sir Bruce said: “The A&E standard has been an important means of ensuring people who need it get rapid access to urgent and emergency care and we must not lose this focus”? Sir Bruce continued: “I do not consider that there is a case for changing the 4 hour standard at this time.” Does the Secretary of State still agree with Bruce Keogh? If he does, why did he make his remarks on Monday about needing to have a discussion about the future of the A&E standard?

If the Secretary of State wants to lead a discussion about the future of the four-hour A&E standard, will he tell us what discussions he has had with the Royal College of Emergency Medicine? It argues that the four-hour standard is a vital measure of performance and safety, and believes the standard should apply to at least 95% of all patients attending emergency departments. If he says he is still committed to that four-hour standard, is he still committed to maintaining it at 95%?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the four-hour standard is a reasonable proxy for patient safety? Does he agree that every breach of the four-hour standard can be regarded as a potentially elevated risk?

**Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con)** If the hon. Gentleman were to read the Government amendment, he would see that the Secretary of State says he “supports and endorses” the 95% target for A&E waiting times.

**Jonathan Ashworth** I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work she is doing on tackling loneliness. I know that all Labour Members very much appreciate the work she is doing on that, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). The Government amendment is conspicuous in not referring to all patients.

The Secretary of State did distinguish between “urgent” and

“minor” — [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) says I should get a haircut. Did he say that? No? I beg his pardon, but he heckles so much it is sometimes difficult to hear what he is saying.

Can the Secretary of State tell us how he would define the difference between “urgent” and “minor” care for instances relating to this four-hour standard? Can he tell us what will be the minimum severity of physical injury or other medical problem which will be needed for a patient to qualify for access to an A&E? How will we determine these new access standards? How quickly will they be available? Will patients with visible injuries be exempt from a new triage system? If so, which injuries will qualify? If the Secretary of State is not moving away from this four-hour standard, he needs to clarify matters urgently, because the impression has been given that he is doing so. [Interruption.] Not by me, but by his own remarks in the House on Monday. If he is not moving away from that standard, will he guarantee that he will not shift away at all from it throughout this Parliament and that it will remain at its current rate?

**Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)** I, too, was in the Chamber on Monday and I listened carefully to the Secretary of State then. He was challenged by the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on the target and was asked whether he was watering it down. He said explicitly that “far from watering down” he was recommitting the Government to it. He was generous to the Labour party in saying that it was one of the best things the NHS did. I think that was very clear.

**Jonathan Ashworth** Let me say to the former Chief Whip that the Secretary of State said that “we need to be clear that it is a promise to sort out all urgent health problems within four hours, but not all health problems, however minor.” — [Official Report, 9 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 38.]

The Secretary of State did not need to come to the House to make those remarks and set these various hares running, so the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) should make his objections not to me, but to the Secretary of State.

If the Secretary of State is not abandoning the four-hour standard, as he insists he is not, we look forward to hearing him make that absolutely clear. He also said and has implied that we need to educate the public better so that they do not turn up at A&E departments. That was the implication of his remarks on Monday. Will he tell us how he is going to do that? What will be the cost implications of explaining

to the public that they must not turn up at A&E departments? Are we expecting to see a large advertising campaign? Will the cost fall on local authorities’ public health budgets, which have already been cut? Will local authorities be given more resources for this new public education campaign?

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)** My hon. Friend is making an important point. The key similarity is that back in 1997, when Labour took over, the health service was in crisis, and it is again today. Is not part of the problem that people are having to go to A&E because they cannot get in to see their GP?

**Jonathan Ashworth** Absolutely. It is so difficult to get to a GP, which is why there are all these pressures on our A&Es. Of course, it is only going to get worse, because this year we are going to see cuts to community pharmacies — 3,000 will be lost from our towns and streets because of the cuts that are being pursued. Let us not forget that the figure of 3,000 community pharmacies being lost was what the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), told MPs.

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con)** I led a debate in Westminster Hall this morning on pharmacies and integrated services in the NHS, and not one single Back-Bench Labour MP could be bothered to take part — not one!

**Jonathan Ashworth** Labour MPs have been raising these matters in this House for weeks, including at urgent questions and in Opposition day debates.

**Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)** I presume what the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) meant to say was that two Back-Bench Labour Members took part in the debate — I was one of them. Does my hon. Friend agree that the point about community pharmacies, GPs and investment in social care is that they save the Government money? That is why they should invest in them now to take pressure off A&Es.

**Jonathan Ashworth** I thank my hon. Friend for correcting the record about that debate in Westminster Hall. The Secretary of State denies that he is going to water down the A&E target; we welcome that, but we will watch carefully to ensure that he does not sneakily water it down throughout the remaining years of the Parliament. Will he tell us what he expects to happen next as we go through the winter? Weather warnings have been issued, and we could be heading for a cold snap. Will he update us on what urgent preparations he is putting in place to ensure that the NHS can cope? Is the NHS prepared for a flu outbreak, and what is his assessment

of whether overstretched hospitals will be able to cope if there is one? It appears that, so far, Ministers have been burying their heads in the sand, but that will no longer do.

**Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridge-shire) (Con)** My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) both made the point that the issues in the NHS are historical. On Radio 4 this morning the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) said he accepted that the previous Labour Government had not spent the right amount of money on social care. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that these issues are historical — they are not new — and that Labour does not have all the answers?

**Jonathan Ashworth** The hon. Lady refers to history; under this Government the NHS is going through the largest financial squeeze in its history. When we had a Labour Government we more than doubled investment into the NHS.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con)** I agree with the shadow Secretary of State that we need to have an honest debate, so does he accept that he stood on a general election manifesto that would have seen Labour spend billions less on our national health service? Will he set out for the House exactly what NHS services he would be spending less on now?

**Jonathan Ashworth** We stood on a manifesto that would have delivered more doctors and nurses for our NHS; the hon. Gentleman stood on a manifesto that said the Conservatives would cut the deficit and not the NHS. They are cutting the NHS and failing on the deficit.

I have a few direct questions for the Secretary of State about Royal Worcestershire hospital. I was grateful for his remarks on Monday, but I want to press him a little further. It has been reported that NHS England was warned of a bed crisis as early as 22 December. Will he update the House on what urgent meetings he is having on Royal Worcestershire? When will we be closer to knowing the outcome of an inquiry? In that context, there is a proposal in the sustainability and transformation plan for the Worcestershire area for a significant reduction in the number of acute beds. The Secretary of State will say that these are local plans and so on, but in the context of the issues in Worcestershire, will he comment on whether he thinks that is the right proposal to follow?

On STPs more generally, the NHS is going through a winter crisis, and it is about to go through another top-down reorganisation — [Interruption.] Someone says it is bottom-up, but it is not; we know

it is coming from the top. Those making the STPs are being told that they have to fill a financial gap of £21.764 billion—that is the reality that STPs throughout the country now have to face. We have seen the plans, so we know that that is going to mean a number of community hospitals being closed, a number of A&Es being downgraded, and acute beds being lost.

In places such as Devon, where the STP talks of an over-reliance on hospital beds, the implication is that beds will be lost. Closures and downgrades are being considered throughout Somerset, with their priority list of vulnerable services including maternity and paediatrics. In London, a city with the very worst health inequalities, the STPs are expected to deliver better health outcomes for the city's growing 10 million residents with £4.3 billion less to spend. Will the Secretary of State explain to the House how he expects the NHS to perform in future winters, when we have a growing elderly population and STPs are pursuing multibillion-pound cuts to beds, A&Es and wider services?

**James Heappey (Wells) (Con)** I was recently briefed by an excellent and well-respected local GP and a clinical psychiatrist, who were the authors of our county's STP. Will the shadow Secretary of State explain how on earth they are responsible for a top-down reorganisation?

**Jonathan Ashworth** Because they were being told by NHS England, which was in turn told by the Secretary of State.

**Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)** The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) mentioned infections spreading in the NHS. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the infection that is spreading on the Government Benches? It is the infection of arrogance, complacency and being completely out of touch with the patients and their families who are suffering under the current crisis. We are witnessing inaction on an epic scale.

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend makes his point extremely well, although I would not want to be so mean about the Secretary of State—[Hon. Members: "Go on!"] No, I am not going to be mean about the Secretary of State.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)** In the past few moments, we have heard the ludicrous suggestion that Labour did not deliver on either spending or performance, but in fact our track record was excellent. That is not just my opinion; the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, said in 2011: "I refuse to go back to the days when people had to wait for hours on end to be seen in A&E, or months and months to have surgery done. So let me be absolutely

clear: we won't."

He knew that Labour had a good record and that the NHS used to be good; why will these Tories not admit it?

**Jonathan Ashworth** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Indeed, I remember, when we were in government, shadow Health Secretaries standing at this Dispatch Box opposing every penny piece of money that Labour was putting into the NHS. I remember a shadow Health Secretary, who now sits in the Cabinet as the Secretary of State for International Trade, standing at this Dispatch Box and saying that the A&E target was "indecent." That was the Tories' attitude when we were in government, so it is no wonder that we are sceptical about the Government's intentions for the A&E target when we look at their history.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)** The shadow Secretary of State is talking about the Labour record on the NHS; does he recall Labour closing not only maternity at Crawley hospital, but accident and emergency in 2005?

**Jonathan Ashworth** I do not have the details of the Sussex STP to hand, but presumably if it contains any suggested closures the hon. Gentleman will be campaigning against them and knocking on the door of the Secretary of State, if those remarks are an indication of his point of view on these matters.

**James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)** The hon. Gentleman is saying that everything was rosy under Labour, but he should remember that it was 10 years ago when the scandal at Mid Staffs broke, in which hundreds more elderly patients died than was projected. It was a terrible scandal and he should remember that. What our shadow team was doing at the time was holding the Labour Government to account.

**Jonathan Ashworth** I take all deaths in hospitals seriously. My commitment to patient safety is unswerving. I will continue to raise matters, whether it is at Royal Worcestershire or elsewhere, but not in a partisan way with the Secretary of State—[Interruption.] I was not being partisan when I was asking questions about the Royal Worcestershire. The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), really needs to calm down. I will raise these matters, because that is the responsible thing to do. It is unbecoming to play politics with patients in that way.

Culpability for the state that the NHS is in today lies at the door of Downing Street. The Government promised to protect the NHS and to cut the deficit, and they have not done so. The Government give away

billion-pound tax cuts to corporations—[Interruption.] Yes, this Government. The Government waste billions, pushing the NHS in the direction of fragmentation and greater outsourcing while ignoring the ever-lengthening queues of the sick and the elderly in all of our constituencies.

Yesterday, we saw the Secretary of State on Sky losing his ministerial car and being chased down the street. It was his whole approach laid bare: not a clue where he is going; nothing to say; and not facing up to the problems. Last year, he blamed the junior doctors. On Monday, he blamed the patients. Today, he blames Simon Stevens. Tomorrow, he will blame the weather. It is time that the Health Secretary started pointing the finger at himself and not at everybody else. The NHS is in crisis, and Ministers are in denial. I say to the Government, on behalf of patients, their families and NHS staff, please get a grip. I commend our motion to the House.

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt)** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" in line 1 to the end and add: "commends NHS staff for their hard work in ensuring record numbers of patients are being seen in A&E; supports and endorses the target for 95 per cent of patients using A&E to be seen and discharged or admitted within four hours; welcomes the Government's support for the Five Year Forward View, the NHS's own plan to reduce pressure on hospitals by expanding community provision; notes that improvements to 111 and ensuring evening and weekend access to GPs, already covering 17 million people, will further help to relieve that pressure; and believes that funding for the NHS and social care is underpinned by the maintenance of a strong economy, which under this administration is now the fastest growing in the G7."

Labour's motion was defeated by 295 votes to 209.

## Continued From Page 24

rudeness caused political uproar; notably, he (allegedly) called Angela Merkel an "un\*\*\*\*able lardarse".

The day after the election *Corriere della Sera* summarised Tajani's leadership style thus: he "will not be a charismatic President. He is not able to be, neither would he want to be". Whose purposes does this Presidency serve?

# Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

## LEADERSHIP

Italy now has an interim government headed by Paolo Gentiloni. Following Renzi's resignation, he was selected by President Mattarella to complete pending legislation. Crucially this includes the electoral changes necessary to make the forthcoming election fully-constitutional. They must be in place by 2018 at the latest. Gentiloni was a member of Renzi's majority *Partito Democratico (Pd)* government. As a temporary Prime Minister he has the handicap (or is this viewed as being an advantage?) of being un confrontational and obviously not the forceful, charismatic personality of his predecessor.

Gentiloni's tenure faces enormous challenges. Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, the largest of Italy's small regionally based banks, was saved from bankruptcy by being capitalised by Renzi's government. It would have been political suicide if small investors had lost their savings. Other banks still have identical problems. This transfer effectively boosted the national debt. At exactly the same time the European Commission warned Italy that it must reduce its deficit.

Italy also has to confront the recent natural disasters, the avalanche, the earthquakes and the subsequent homelessness. There is also the financial and cultural impact of dealing with and supporting the flood (to use Cameron's words) of migrants that other European countries neither want to take or help fund.

Renzi, still *Pd* leader, is trying to relaunch his party. Membership has plummeted and Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement (*M5S*) has been ahead in the polls for some time. Symbolically, just after New Year, Renzi gave a long interview to *La Repubblica's* Editor in Chief Ezio Mauro. He admitted that he had made mistakes but the lack of pressure had allowed him a period of reflection; he had even been out on his bike. Unwisely he referred to *M5S* as an "algorithm". This resulted in a lot of publicity and rage, which was unhelpful to him.

Meanwhile Beppe Grillo's *M5S* aims to build its reputation on the outcomes of their elected local mayors - a faith as yet unrealised. The Mayor of Turin, Chiara Appendino, has increased her popularity. But Grillo's biggest mayoral hope, Rome's Virginia Raggi has had to contend with two of her top appointments being accused of corruption. Currently (27 Jan) Raggi is alleged to have lied about her knowledge of the background to this and is viewed

as struggling to perform.

One of the fundamental tenets of *M5S* is to defeat corruption and to be anti-establishment in office. But the mayor of a complex, dysfunctional, corrupt city such as Rome needs considerable insight, coupled with a strongly Machiavellian personality if they are to operate with and against that city's powerful players. Raggi is always pictured smiling serenely in the press. But she obviously lacks the guile and Trumpian decisiveness to be a winner for Rome.

Alongside all of this is Silvio Berlusconi, who has become eternal; his *Forza Italia* party (*Fi*) is still able to be a significant political player. There are few in Italian politics who match Berlusconi's charisma and credibility, which he uses to minimise and brush off his empty promises and miscalculations while in government. Another legal case, relevant to the famous "bunga-bunga" accusations, is currently just coming to the attention of the press.

Last year Martin Schultz resigned as President of the European Parliament and the practice of balance meant that a candidate from the right was seen as being the favourite to succeed him. This was however a contested post and Euro-parliamentarians voted in mid-January. Before this, at the start of January, something happened that only later could be seen to have been related to the election. Beppe Grillo announced that he was leaving the *EFDD* (*Europe of Freedom & Direct Democracy*) EU group, that he shared with Nigel Farage. Grillo apparently wanted to join the *ALDE* (*Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe*), maintaining that Farage and *UKIP* had become irrelevant since the UK voted to leave the European Union.

*ALDE* is led by the strongly euro-federalist Belgian, Guy Verhofstadt, and Grillo's anti-establishment, anti-EU beliefs are completely contradictory. This immediately questioned the motivations behind this unsuitable alliance. Both men were on record as disliking what the other stood for and Grillo had even said that Verhofstadt was "unpresentable". The deal didn't go through, Grillo returned to Farage and importantly, the numerical and national balance within *EFDD* was retained - and with it their funding. (A group must have a minimum of 25 members from at least 7 national states)

Verhofstadt saw himself as the ideal candidate for the European Presidency. He said that Brexit was an opportunity to pull

Europe together and he viewed himself as the visionary bridge builder who would be instrumental to this. Adding Grillo's votes would also have increased the likelihood of his election. But the other leaders within his own *ALDE* group were totally opposed to the Grillo liaison, seeing it as a cynical power bid on Verhofstadt's part - as were the rank and file, who were profoundly irritated that they first heard about it from the press. Grillo's aides consulted their membership and received approval from over 75% of those who voted. The response was low however and that approval amounted to only around 25% of the total membership of 130,000.

Verhofstadt rationalised the tie-up as a way of bringing *M5S* into a political context, while Grillo said that it was a technical rather than a political move. Verhofstadt's authority was diminished by the failure of his miscalculations. His covert machinations contradicted the openness that he appeared to espouse and he stood down as a Presidential candidate. Seven candidates then remained. The two strongest were Italian: Gianni Pitella, President of the *S&D* group (Socialists and Democrats) and a member of Renzi's *Pd* party and Antonio Tajani, one of 14 Parliamentary Vice-Presidents and Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship. Tajani won the almost unprecedented 4<sup>th</sup> and final ballot against Pitella, after concerted backroom deals ensured Pitella's defeat - one headline referred to an old boys network having won. The European Council, Commission and Parliament are now all under the control of the right.

Sixty three year old Tajani's qualifications for the potentially important post of European President are surprisingly limited. When he was young he was a member of the *Fmg* (Youth Monarchist Front). He was a co-founder with Silvio Berlusconi of *Forza Italia*. He was first elected to the European Parliament in 1994. He stood unsuccessfully as Mayor of Rome in 2001. As a Commissioner he did nothing when he was informed about the Volkswagen emissions scandal, preferring later to claim that he hadn't been informed at the time. His most significant achievement was to introduce a system of compensation for delayed air passengers. Also, Tajani's conciliatory skills helped Silvio Berlusconi out of situations where Berlusconi's enthusiasm for

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