

Labour Affairs

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They're All Corbynites Now!

During the election campaign, Theresa May warned voters of the danger of a “coalition of chaos” involving Labour and the SNP. She wanted a landside win to strengthen her hand at the Brexit negotiations. But also to wipe out Labour as a force in Parliament. She failed abysmally, falling eight seats short of an overall majority.

Jeremy Corbyn has been accused of claiming that Labour won the election, not the Tories. He didn't actually say that. But why let the truth get in the way of a good story? He claimed that Theresa May and the Tories didn't have a mandate to govern, being dependent on the support of the ten DUP members from Northern Ireland. The “coalition of chaos” of Labour and the SNP has mutated into a Faustian pact between the Tories and the DUP.

The election was a personal triumph for Corbyn. Labour MPs who had poured scorn on him as leader and undermined him at every opportunity, have undergone a Pauline conversion. Many of their seats which were forecast to fall to the Tories, were retained with increased majorities. So they now praise him for a brilliant campaign and his ability to reach out to people of all ages and backgrounds. The majority of elderly voters continued to support the Tories. But this was more than compensated for with a huge surge in support for Labour from relatively young voters. Corbyn's popularity with youth was shown at the recent Glastonbury festival where he received a rousing reception. People have claimed that the key was the promise to abolish Tuition Fees. But most of the new voters were too old to benefit, and too young to be worrying about

it for their children.

Corbyn and Labour focused on the economy, jobs and public services, drawing attention away from Brexit. This tactic was both pragmatic and productive. It didn't alienate Labour leave voters entirely or unduly concern those who voted to remain. Meanwhile, May's need for a strong hand in the Brexit negotiations fell on deaf ears. They clearly believed the referendum was behind them and were now focused on austerity and the economy. She badly misjudged the mood of the electorate.

Theresa May fought a personalised campaign; a clear choice between her and Jeremy Corbyn. She and the Tory supporting press demonised Corbyn throughout, with half-truths and lies. But the voters liked what they saw about Corbyn as he walked and talked among them. Whereas May is ridiculed. Her “strong and stable” slogan has now entered the lexicon of satire.

Voters were also persuaded by Labour's manifesto which, unlike the Tories', had answers to their problems. To scare the voters the Tories described it as “Marxist”, when it was broadly similar to the manifesto of Attlee's post-war Labour party. With its emphasis on a key economic and social role for public spending Corbyn's Labour party, like Attlee's, is firmly within the European left social democratic tradition.

The Tory manifesto offered little to voters. It even managed to scare the elderly with its threats of abandoning the triple-lock on pensions, scrapping the winter fuel allowance for higher income

pensioners, and the prospect of a “dementia tax.” These were deeply unpopular policies across the voting spectrum, and not just with the over 65s. But most significantly, the Tories failed to fight the election on the economy. In spite of their constant boasting that they were delivering an economy that was strong and stable. Many senior Tories now believe this was a huge mistake.

Labour’s manifesto was criticised for its promises to increase spending across the public services and to borrow to invest in Britain’s infrastructure. “There isn’t a magic money tree” echoed the Tories and their supporters in the press. But there appears to be a magic mattress, under which money is found to fund wars in the middle east and astronomically expensive nuclear weapons. Not to mention the £1 billion handed to the DUP for Northern Ireland. As well as tax cuts to business and high earners. And, let’s not forget, gigantic sums were spent bailing out the banks, saving the bad investments of millionaires and billionaires.

The paucity of the Tory manifesto is reflected in the Queen’s Speech. A number of the more unpopular policies have been ditched. These include abandoning the pensions triple lock, means testing the winter fuel allowance, kicking the “dementia tax” into the long grass, and not reintroducing grammar schools. There is also a vague feeling that austerity may be rolled back, but we have yet to see that in government statements. The Queen’s

Speech is silent on this. So we will have to assume that at this stage the £12 billion in cuts in public spending will go ahead.

Prior to the election May spoke incessantly about her determination to help people who were “just about managing.” Little was heard about this during the election campaign and there is nothing in the Queen’s Speech to suggest she is still committed to it. It may have slipped her memory, focused as she is on getting the “best possible deal” from the Brexit negotiations. A large chunk of the Queen’s Speech relates to Brexit, eight bills in total, including one on immigration. The target reduction of net migration to the tens of thousands is now simply an aspiration. It will take years to achieve, or may never be reached.

What of Labour’s future? Corbyn has selected his shadow cabinet. Most positions are filled by previous occupants. Those who remained loyal to Corbyn. Owen Smith, who stood against Corbyn in the last leadership election, has been brought in as shadow Northern Ireland Secretary. His is the only new face. But loyalty is a two way street. Corbyn’s critics within the parliamentary party must now unite behind him. Show loyalty to a leader who achieved a remarkable result in an election expected to deliver a Tory landslide. In doing so they will strengthen Labour’s opposition and at the same time unite the party in preparation for another election, which Corbyn believes may come within six months.

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

IRISH CONVENTION.

06 July 1917

Mr. JAMES HOPE (Lord of the Treasury) I beg to move, "That this House do now adjourn."

The PRIME MINISTER (Mr. Lloyd George) I think perhaps that the House would like to hear a statement about the steps which have been taken in reference to the Irish Convention and the stage at which we have arrived. The nominations by the various bodies which were invited to make nominations are not yet quite complete. The last of the nominations of the urban councils which will send representatives reached me on Monday of this week. One important group of nominations was sent in two days ago. Nominations from two other bodies were received this morning, and there are now only a few nominations which have not yet been returned. There has been no avoidable delay in the issue of the invitations by the Government. Until we see who is nominated by the various parties and interests, we are, of course, not in a position to name definitely the fifteen gentlemen whom the Government will ask to serve. Provisionally, their names have been determined upon, and, as the general body of members is nearly now complete, we are, I think, entitled to proceed.

We propose to invite the Convention to assemble on 25th July to deal with preliminary business, such as the appointment of its chairman and the constitution of its secretariat. I said to the House on a previous occasion that if the Convention were not able to agree upon a chairman, the Government would make the nomination. It is obviously better that the choice should be that of the members of the Convention themselves. The constitution of the secretariat is a matter on which the chairman and the Convention ought to be able to make their own proposals. We may be asked how this numerous body is to be expected to

come promptly to business without, at any rate, some temporary president. In answer to that, I may state that we have decided to request the Chief Secretary to undertake the duties of a provisional or temporary chairman at the first coming together of the Convention, in order to obtain the decision of the members upon these questions of working machinery, which, of course, must be decided before they enter upon the great undertaking for which they are convened. We hope this task will not impose upon the Chief Secretary long absence from his official duties.

As to the place of meeting, the first group of sittings, at any rate, ought to be held in Dublin. Whether there should subsequently be sittings elsewhere is a matter on which the Convention need not be fettered by any decision taken by us at this time. The Government have had offers from Dublin of various meeting-places for the Convention. The Provost and Fellows of Trinity College offered a well-known hall of theirs—the Regent's Hall. The College of Physicians offered their buildings. The College of Surgeons offered theirs. I should like, on behalf of the Government, to acknowledge the admirable public spirit which has prompted their offers. The question, of the place of meeting is of importance, and we propose to make the definite announcement on this matter when we issue the formal summonses to the Convention, in the course of a few days. Whatever is necessary to be done to ensure the smooth working of this assembly or to facilitate its inquiries or its decisions will be done by the Government. Eminent and representative Irishmen from all parts of Ireland will come together in a spirit of conciliation

and good will. They are determined, I feel sure, to do all they can to secure a settlement of the old discords which have afflicted their country. We shall do all we can to give them such help as is at our command.

Question put, and agreed to.

The House rose on 13 July and returned on 12 November.

GREECE 22 November 1917

Whereupon Mr. SPEAKER, pursuant to the Order of the House, of the 12th February, proposed the Question, "That this House do now Adjourn."

Mr. LYNCH The great international Bolos are the members of the Court of Athens. The protectors of those Bolos are the men who sit on the Treasury Bench as members of the Government. Those words I wish to go out from this House till they sink into the minds of the public and produce there a salutary reaction. I advance them thus early, because if I am counted out tonight the public will know that the Government does not dare face that accusation.

Mr. WATT Except one of them.

Mr. LYNCH If I am not counted out, I will proceed to develop my theme and establish the truth of what I say. On the 21st January, 1916, a compact was entered into between the Kaiser on the one hand and King Constantine of Greece on the other. It was a solemn compact, drawn up in set terms, by which on his part the King of Greece agreed that the armies of Greece would not at any time be used to support the cause of the Allies, and that he himself would remain faithful to his friendship for the Kaiser; and, on the other side, that the Kaiser would support him by force of arms when necessary. On the 5th May, 1916, matters had so far

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progressed that General Mackensen, the great general of the Germans, who is now the leading spirit of this immense drive in Italy, was, at the instigation of the Kaiser and with the connivance and support of the King of Greece, examining minutely the whole of the military situation in the Balkans, and especially in Greece, to know in what way the Grecian forces could co-operate with the forces of Germany for the destruction of the Allies.

On the 23rd June of the same year Prince Nicholas and Prince Andrew of Greece came on a mission to this country—a mission embracing Russia and this country. That was no ordinary visit of distinguished strangers. That was a visit which had been arranged minutely, carefully, in the Court of Berlin by the Kaiser himself, and with the exultant approval of the German Chancellor. In speaking thus, I might quote—I will produce all the documents, if necessary—from two Parisian papers, both of a warlike tendency, one the “Echo de Paris,” and the other “L’Homme Euchainé,” the organ of no less a man than the present Prime Minister of France. According to these organs, the Greek Minister at Berlin, M. Thiotokis, who was entirely friendly to the German nation even as against his own country, communicated to King Constantine this message, that the mission had been carefully prepared, that the German Chancellor was highly delighted, and gave his warmest approval to the mission. The object of this mission was to explain to the sovereigns of Russia and England the policy of King Constantine, and to make them understand that the policy pursued by their Governments tended to the undermining of the dynasty and would accomplish no useful purpose.

We have heard a great deal during these days of the mischievous activities of

Boloism. I ask seriously whether, in the whole round of recent history, you could find one example more dangerous or more perfidious than the activities of these two Princes, coming direct as emissaries from the German Court, knowing the secrets of the German

Court, but preserving those secrets, and giving counsel to the Allied countries of Russia and England, not in any friendly or neutral way, but with the determination to press home on the Courts of these countries the views of the German Kaiser and his Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. The Bolos were not regarded with suspicion or harried or persecuted; they were received in this country with open arms; their mission was facilitated, and having left this country when they had access to many secrets denied to citizens of this country.

Mr. OUTHWAITE To Members of this, House—

Mr. LYNCH These emissaries of the enemy went straight to Berlin, were received with Royal honours, and were no doubt responsible for the defeat of the designs of the Allies. That brings us down to the 23rd June, 1916. On the 2nd December, in the same year, the Consort of King Constantine, who is, I believe, a sister of the German Kaiser, was screaming for an attack on the Allies, with the co-operation of the Greek Forces. There is something about this lady which really compels my admiration. She reminds me of what Napoleon said of the Duchesse d’Angoulême—that she was the only man, in the family. She was a woman of action; she knew the time had come to strike, and therefore from her palace she was screaming for action to be taken. On the 2nd December, Theotokis, the infidel representative of Greece at the Court of Berlin, was—three weeks later—calling out for an attack, but the time was evidently thought to be inopportune. On the 5th January this year we have the demand for the destruction of all the Greek guns that could be used on the side of the Allies. On the 10th January of this year we find Queen Sophia again screaming with rage and despair at the opportunity missed to strike, and crying about the state of Greece, which had been brought about by the blockade on the part of the Allies, and using this phrase, which deserves to become historic, in the description of the Allies, when she called them “infamous swine.”

Perhaps the words, severe as they

are, had been suggested to her by the manner in which the representatives of the Allies had grovelled at her feet. Here, again, is a pleasant touch which gives me a certain sympathy with the lady. Not being a frequenter of Courts, I had, in my own imagination, placed these people so high that I was disinclined to think that they used words that were familiar here; I had believed that they spoke in the high diplomatic terms that we are accustomed to read in Blue Books and diplomatic papers. There is that “touch of Nature that makes the whole world kin” in this description where she designated the Allies as “infamous swine.”

Remember that in this brief narration I have taken you over twelve months of recent Grecian history. Remember that many of these facts which have now been divulged were patent to Members of this House, and that some Members of this House endeavoured to force them upon the attention of the representatives of the Government who held the very destiny of this country in their hands. They, however, remained deaf to the warnings or insolent to the demand that they should hear. What was their reply; and what was the communication of their representative in Athens during all this time? There was a Minister there. Was he alone in all the world blind to the machinations of Constantine, or did he report them to his Government? He did report them, somewhat tardily, to his Government, and even then that Government was blind and deaf.

I want to say this, and I want that it should go forth, not only in this country but throughout all the Dominions, that this terrible disaster to Italy had its roots in this inaction, an inaction so extraordinary, and of which the evil effects could not be paralleled by the worst example of perfidy. I will say to this House; I will say to the men of this country, and I will say to the women of this country who have sent their sons and husbands to fight the battle of freedom, that the chances of this country have been jeopardised, and in part thrown away, because in the Balkans the Allies were not fighting the battle of freedom which they

blazon on their banners. They were using their force and their diplomacy not to fight and win, but to conserve this enemy dynasty which has dealt to their cause the deepest and perhaps the most irreparable blow during these whole three years of war.

There is no representative of the Government to answer. Why? Because no answer can be given, and they know it. In any other country in the world if such an act of negligence were brought home to the representative of the Government that representative would go. Or if the Government showed any inclination to defend him that Government would go. It is a wrong and a mischievous system that a man on whose shoulders rests the responsibility for this terrible blunder, worse than many crimes, should still sit there perhaps to blunder again in the same way—to throw away what chances still remain of the victory of the Allies in this terrible War. We have become accustomed to the terrible toll of death. I am not speaking of the waste of treasure. Let me picture one individual soldier, a young man as the world may call him, the hope and pride of his father and mother, of his brothers and his sisters. He goes forth like a hero, willing to give all that a man can give; his life itself, for the cause of his country, for the whole ideal which the Allies have set upon their flags.

That man is stricken down by an enemy bullet in Serbia. His blood is ebbing fast away, his lips are growing pale, his eyes are glaring. He thinks of his home, he thinks of the misery his death will cause. He knows that his people will be uplifted by the thought that he died for a great cause. If in the dying moments of that hero it could be whispered in his ear, "No, you have not died for a great cause, you have not died in defence of your country, you have not died for democracy, you have died to save a dynasty, that dynasty the representative of the worst enemies of your country." The responsibility of having to hear those words, and know that they are true rests with the men who are still guiding the destinies of this country, and having thrown away

its chances can say, "We have lost the War in the Balkans, but we have saved the dynasty of an enemy."

Mr. KING I hoped someone else would have risen from the opposite benches. There are two members of the Government here, both admirably qualified to speak on this or any other subject. In fact, I would consider them both as to ability, to honesty, and to eloquence superior to the great majority of their colleagues. But they have thought it well tonight to hide their talents under a bushel, and they have not replied to the eloquent and moving speech that, we heard. The House ought to congratulate my hon. Friend that at the third time of asking the Government has not put someone up to count him out. We may also congratulate him that they have not attempted to reply, because no adequate defence of the Government on Greek diplomacy and this Greek fiasco could have been attempted with success. Where no defence was possible I am sure that it was the wisest course to leave the matter where it was. I should like to pay my tribute to the most powerful indictment and the very moving appeal to which we have just listened. But that is not the whole story of the incapacity and weakness of our diplomacy in the Balkans, or even of our diplomacy in Greece.

Let it be remembered—and I am sure that my hon. Friend will excuse my reminding him—that he began his story in January, 1916. Let him go back to a year earlier. In January, 1915, we could have had Constantine on our side. If you have got a man who is unreliable and treacherous by nature, let us have him on our side rather than leave him to do what he likes against us as a neutral. If our policy at the beginning of 1915 had been straightforward, sensible, consistent, and courageous, and had not been dominated by Russian diplomacy and by that false line of foreign policy for which we have greatly, perhaps chiefly, to blame Lord Hardinge, this miserable story of Constantine's treachery, and of his collapse, followed by the appointment of his son as successor, would not have occurred. I will not develop the story

at this late hour, but I would like to say how much we who love the truth, and who are upholders of consistent policy, and who desire to get from the Government more information than they naturally care to give, have to thank the hon. Member for his consistency in this matter and his eloquent words to-night.

Adjourned accordingly at Twenty-three minutes after Eleven o'clock till Tomorrow, pursuant to the Resolution of the House of this day.

Note: In 1917 Arthur Lynch was the Irish Parliamentary Party Member for West Clare. He supported the British war effort in 1914 and towards the end of the war raised his own battalion in Munster. Joseph King was Liberal MP for North Somerset.

POLICE RAIDS (ENEMY PROPAGANDA).

26 November 1917

Mr. R. LAMBERT asked the Home Secretary whether any specific charges were placed before him against the Council for Civil Liberties to justify a raid upon its offices; and whether he will state why this raid was undertaken?

Sir G. CAVE These premises were raided because it was suspected that they were being used for carrying on a propaganda in the interests of the enemy.

Mr. R. LAMBERT asked the Home Secretary (1) why detectives for whose conduct he is responsible took from the offices of the National Council for Civil Liberties Copies of Mill's "Liberty," the official reports of this House, and similar literature; whether he will state if the Government now proposes to prohibit the circulation and the ownership of such books; (2) whether he is aware that in the course of the recent raid at 28, Victoria Street, S.W., the only leaflets seized were copies of "A Reasonable Man's Peace," by H. G. Wells; that Mr. Wells wrote this after being allowed to visit the Italian, French, and British Fronts, that the leaflet is a reprint of an article in the "Daily News," and had been passed by the Censor for transmission abroad; whether he will explain the delay of

over a week in returning this authorised leaflet to the owners; (3) whether he is aware that on or about 7th September, 1917, the secretary of the International Free Trade League submitted to the Censor at Strand House, Portugal Street, the only two publications hitherto issued by this league and that they were passed by the Censor and allowed to be sent to America; will he say why these leaflets have now been seized and detained; why the Censor's written permission has been taken away and not returned; and whether it is intended to prosecute in this case while destroying or detaining the written evidence relied on for a defence?

Mr. KING asked whether the right hon. Gentleman is aware that copies of Lord Shaw of Dunfermline's judgment in the case of A. Zadig were seized and taken away during the police raid on the premises of the National Council for Civil Liberties on 21st November; and whether it is proposed to make it impossible to reprint and circulate judgements given in the Courts when those judgements are against the Government?

Mr. OUTHWAITE asked (1) whether he is aware that in a raid recently effected on a private house at Redhill a number of leaflets advocating taxation of land values, and without any reference to the War, were taken away and have not been returned; whether it is the intention to suppress all advocacy of a method of taxation which could raise vast sums for national purposes and enable those who have fought for their country to have access to it; (2) whether his attention has been called to the fact that, on the occasion of the raid on the offices of the "Women's Crusade," an officer seized copies of a service of prayer because he saw the word peace in one of the prayers; and can he state whether any further steps have been taken in the matter of this document?

Sir G. CAVE The large quantity of documents seized on the occasion of these raids may have included some not connected with enemy propaganda. These will be sorted out and returned to their owners as quickly as possible.

Mr. KING Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that "A Reasonable Man's Peace" has already been passed by the Censor, and will he immediately have this leaflet returned?

Sir G. CAVE I am not aware that it has been passed by the Censor.

Mr. KING Will the right hon. Gentleman make inquiries, because I have seen the Censor's signed copy?

Mr. OUTHWAITE In view of the seizure of the service of prayer referred to in question 74, is he aware that the attention of the police authorities was drawn to the fact that it was a supplication for peace in the service of prayer addressed to this House, and will any action be taken?

Sir G. CAVE No, Sir; I believe there was a leaflet containing a prayer and other matters.

Mr. OUTHWAITE Will the right hon. Gentleman make further inquiries as to whether, When this document was seized, it was pointed out to the officer that it was a service of prayer, and that he was not going to take it until he saw the word peace mentioned in it?

Mr. OUTHWAITE asked the Home Secretary whether,

on the occasion of the recent police raids in search of seditious literature, the offices of an organisation at 146, Queen Victoria Street, E.C., were visited; and, if so, can he state with what result?

Sir G. CAVE No, Sir.

Mr. OUTHWAITE In view of the fact that in these recent raids religious literature has been seized in other offices, why has immunity been granted as regards this office, which is the headquarters of the British and Foreign Bible Society?

Mr. OUTHWAITE asked the Home Secretary whether a pamphlet or leaflet which consists solely of biblical quotations in support of peace and denouncing the methods of war has to be submitted to the Censor before publication?

Sir G. CAVE This question is purely hypothetical, and I do not think I should give a reply to it until I see a leaflet which is of the character described.

Mr. OUTHWAITE In such a case of the leaflet being submitted to the Censor, how is the Regulation about the name and present address of the author being attached to be complied with—for instance, in the case of the Sermon on the Mount?

Sir G. CAVE The person who puts a leaflet together is to be regarded as the author.

Note: In 1917 Sir George Cave, Conservative member for Kingston, was Home Secretary in Lloyd George's coalition government. Richard Lambert was MP for Cricklade. He was a pacifist during the War. In 1918 he joined the Labour Party. Robert Outhwaite was Liberal MP for Hanley.

GRENFELL TOWER

Twenty-four storeys and a dozen different stories
 a blackened skeleton without eyes or ears
 the Tory goes gory
 profit at any price
 privatise all
 it's not that they don't feel
 for those flies that beat against the window pane
 and dying from exhaustion
 for they are upgraded to human beings
 on appeal
 or those screaming fledglings
 in their burning nest
 who once were but second best
 and are now on the wing
 in Parliamentary rafters
 such is genetically modified good
 in the hands of the grafters

Wilson John Haire.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



The end of parties?

Napoleon deplored the existence of parties. Citizens should be unanimously with the leader of the nation, not divided into warring groups. When De Gaulle took power in 1958, launching the 5th Republic, he did not do so as the head of a party.

Macron is *de facto* in this line. He is above parties. He has a party, but it's a party, only just born, that has no existence apart from him. His government is made up of members of all previously existing parties and members of no party. His manoeuvring has brought about the collapse of previous existing parties. Members of the old parties defected to him en masse, the Socialist Prime minister first among them (he wasn't accepted). He chose his new prime minister among the Republicans, his Home Office minister among the Socialists, he kept Hollande's minister for Foreign Affairs in post. His other ministers belonged to other parties or none.

This disabled the parties for the elections. Voters had been asked to vote for Macron in the presidential elections (to avoid Marine Le Pen). Then for the general elections they were asked this time not to vote for Macron, by the traditional

parties, some of whose leaders had joined Macron!

No wonder the winner was abstention: 57% in the second round; plus 6.93% blank votes and 2.94% spoiled votes, amounting to 67% of people on the electoral register who supported none of the candidates on offer. This is without counting all those who are not on the electoral register.

The Macron-supporters party won 49% of votes, the Republicans 27, the National Front 8.75, the Socialist Party 7.49, Melanchon's party (plus the Communist Party) 6%.

The first two parties and the Socialist party's figures are compounded with those of parties allied to them. This means that of 577 seats in the *Chambre des Députés* Macron's group has 308, the Republicans 112, the National Front 8, the Socialists 30, Melanchon 17 and the CP 10.

Melanchon's party

Macron is not the only one to distance himself from the party system. Marine Le Pen, on the eve of the presidential elections, made a point of relinquishing the leadership of the National Front, to present herself as above parties. Jean-Luc Melanchon tried a similar coup to Macron. He

founded a new 'party' in 2016, open to all; 60% of members of his '*La France Insoumise*' had not previously belonged to a party. He put up 50% women candidates, like Macron. Like Macron he appealed to the young and called for renewal. Popular figures collaborated with him, such as the journalist and film maker Francois Ruffin. His candidates came from a much more varied background than Macron's and included many from the non-privileged. He did not have the support of business or of the media. Some eccentricities of his did not help: the name of his party with revolutionary and sexual overtones ('unsubmissive France') together with his emblem, the Greek letter phi, seem like juvenal fancies.

What next?

Macron has an absolute majority and a free hand. What will he do with it? On the home front his priority is the reform of the Labour code. The two main aims are making it easier to sack employees, and to amend pay and conditions at local level on an ad hoc basis. This means a cap on amounts paid out for unfair dismissal, and the inclusion of the greatest possible number of domains that can be negotiated at firm level.

Macron has decided not to have a Parliamentary debate followed by a vote on these measures. Instead he will ask Parliament to give him powers to do this by decree, this is the so-called ‘habilitation’ law, which will authorise the executive ‘to take measures for social renovation’.

These measures will also be negotiated by ‘the executive’ with the unions; these discussions will take place in the summer, the traditionally dormant period for political and industrial action.

Even if these reforms are adopted, the result is questionable. The hope is that it will make France more attractive to investors and entrepreneurs, both French and foreign. The risk is destabilisation. When things work well, a secure workforce is more likely to be productive; and employers are more likely to train a workforce that will stay with them. The danger is a destabilised workforce that is less productive while still not being cheap enough to compete with cheap labour overseas.

In foreign policy, things seem more hopeful. Macron said in an interview with eight European newspapers on 21 June:

“The new perspective that I have had on this subject is that I have not stated that Bashar al-Assad’s departure is a pre-condition for everything because nobody has shown me a legitimate successor.” French policy towards Syria is now *more aligned with Russian objectives in the country* according to Macron. *“My lines are clear: Firstly, a complete fight against all the terrorist groups. They are our enemies,”* he said. *“We need everybody’s cooperation, especially Russia, to eradicate them.”*

Macron said he will not allow US “neo-conservatism” to seep into France, and that the focus of French policy will be aimed at achieving “stability” in Syria, rather than getting dragged into a Libya-style conflict. *“What was the outcome of these interventions? Failed states in which terrorist groups flourished. I do not want that in Syria,”* the French leader said.

Macron here departs from Hollande’s policy of demanding Assad step down; he is however careful to insist that he supports the United States. *‘If it is proven that chemical weapons are used on the ground and we can trace their provenance,’* Macron said France will conduct unilateral strikes “to

destroy the stocks of identified chemical weapons.” *“France will, therefore, be completely aligned with the United States on this.”*

Macron did state his support for Putin, but he was careful to throw in a remark about Ukraine. *“I respect Vladimir Putin. I had a constructive exchange with him. We have real disagreements, on Ukraine in particular, but he has seen my position,”*

These remarks about the US and about Ukraine are remarks he must make to keep his own position strong. Time will tell how Macron’s schemes work out. Introducing his main policies with a trick behind the back of holidaymakers is not very statesmanlike. Napoleon and De Gaulle wouldn’t have resorted to that.

RED BUTTON

Somewhere in Whitehall
or maybe Yorkshire
lives Red Button
a gangster’s moll
(late of Kings Bay Georgia
where they also teach torture)
press her for a favour
and she can cause a universal
funeral pyre
the UK no more
great tracts of the world
in ashes
radiation galore
yet at BBC Question Time
in beautiful York
some shout seduce her seduce her
seduce her
angrily the tongues clash
kiss her kiss her kiss her kiss her
that will work
they imply the bearded man at the dais
has no balls
not like these sturdy tykes
who with war are enthralled
hoping under the oceans
out of satellite sight
the avenging US-made Trident
impregnates death
Red Button Red Button
don’t heed the commotion
be less strident
for you too can draw
the last breath

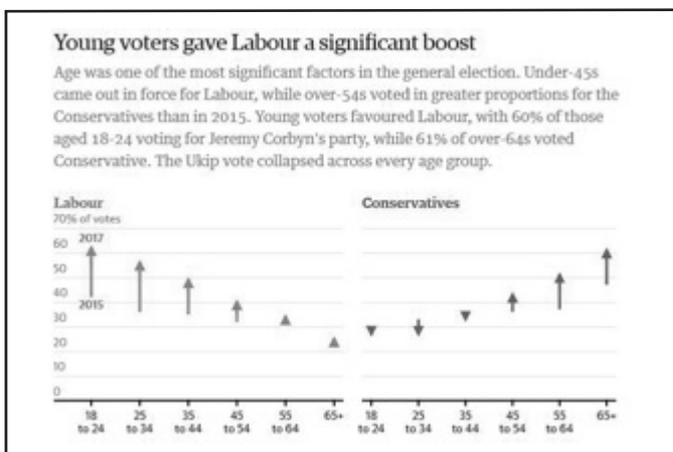
Wilson John Haire.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

New Right End-Game

I'd see the election's outcome as almost perfect for Labour's future. Had the Grenfell Tower Fire occurred a week earlier, Labour might have ended up the largest party. But would have had the looming disaster of Brexit to manage. Now Mrs May still has the 'poison chalice'. And Labour can dare to purge itself of most remnants of New Labour.



May's problem is that as the War Baby and Baby Boomer generation gained power, they backed some foolish right-wing tinkering with the system that had created them. Mostly liked Thatcherism, or at least tolerated it. But hardly anyone likes the actual outcome of Thatcherite 'reforms'.

The old voted for Brexit, thinking it would restore the 'good times' they vaguely remembered. Then voted Tory, discounting pension threats. Scared of the future, they seek someone to keep the show on the road for the rest of their lives.

The young were bolder. Labour won a clear majority of people under 45. With mixed results in the 45 to 55 age-band. The aged Baby Boomers are almost all Tory; the logical end point of the selfish and asocial attitudes that a passive majority had always showed:¹

The old are also much more likely to vote. 84% of those aged at least 70 did so. 77% of 60 to 70. In the 20 to 24 age-band, only 59% bothered. Still, the young are learning that votes *do* count and can change things. Polls taken since the election show Labour well ahead.

I had worried that the loss of Scotland would doom England to a permanent Tory government. But

remarkably, one estimate said that England voted 41% Labour to 43% Tory, not a hopeless gap.² A Wiki analysis shows a wider gap, 45.6 to 41.9; still possible.³ And Scottish separation seems less likely with Labour no longer Tory-Lite.

Labour lost 9% of its 2015 vote to the Tories and 5% to Liberals. Gained 10% of 2015 Tories and 50% of Liberals. Some Scottish Nationalist voters returned to Labour; very few to the Tories.

57% of UKIP voters went Tory and only 18% Labour: more than three times as many. It had seemed more equal based on constituency results, but the real picture was complex.

Class and wealth count for less, except among the More-Than-Millionaire class that has flourished since Thatcher. The standard AB, C1, C2 and DE groups were similar. Tories stronger among the AB types (higher professional and managerial) and C2s (skilled manual workers): but not enormously so.⁴ The poorest have always been more likely to vote Labour.

Compared with 2015, Labour gained more from the three higher groups. The Tories recovered many C2 and DE votes from UKIP. But age counted for a lot more.

So did education. For those with GCSE or below, 55% voted Tory and 33% Labour. For those with a degree, 32% voted Tory and 49% Labour. Those between were about even.⁵

Women preferred Tories when Tories were a genuinely conservative party, before Thatcher. Now they split 43% to 43%. Men were 45% to 39% pro-Tory.

Men are slower to learn that tough talk costs lives. That it hardly ever solves anything.

The End of Labour's Timid Tendency?

Haven't the young always preferred Labour? Actually no. In 2015, those in the 18-29 age-band who voted, voted 32/34 Tory/Labour. 36/34 in the 30-39 age band.⁶ Labour were just as unpopular among the over-60s, but in 2015 many of them voted UKIP.

Tories were slightly ahead at all levels of education.

In 2010: Labour was ahead among the young, but not hugely so. But at that time, the Tories had not yet promised a Brexit Referendum. UKIP were ahead of

the Tories among voters aged 50 or over, and among those with GCSE or below.⁷

Old fools fail to learn, but are also a dying breed. Labour now has most of the young, and most of the sincere people among the old.

Corbyn showed that it pays for leaders to *lead*, and not timidly follow wherever the opinion polls might point. When Theresa May called the election, the polls did indeed point to a solid victory. Most Labour MPs also expected it. But Corbyn and his people felt the public could be convinced. And the young and well-educated *were* convinced.

I'm also glad that Corbyn has not taken back the famous MPs who quit his Front Bench after he was elected. Took back just Owen Smith, the most serious leadership challenger. For the rest, he may expect them to work for it. Show back-bench support now the Tories are vulnerable: most were silent when he needed them.

It is anyway clear that New Labour is dead:

"It began with the election of Bill Clinton in 1992. Clinton, then Blair, proposed a 'third way' politics, neither right nor left. It maintained the core Thatcherite commitment to privatisation, low taxes, high profits, weak unions, competition, individualism and a deregulated financial sector. But it jettisoned the Victorian social morality and lightly coded racism of Thatcher, Reagan and the rest of the 'new right'.

"The third way embraced feminism, anti-racism and gay rights, provided they didn't challenge the economic status quo. Instead of socialism and democracy, it offered everyone the chance to compete in the labour market. Above all, the third way celebrated globalisation as the great engine of economic growth and progress towards a truly cosmopolitan culture.

"Cosmopolitan culture is not a bad idea. It implies a liberal, tolerant, non-exclusive attitude. Historically, this is a mindset typical of merchants, financiers, artists and intellectuals. But cosmopolitanism has also been embraced by radical workers, infused with the

internationalist spirit of communism, and by the urban poor in places where multiculturalism has been a fact of daily life for generations.

"I think cosmopolitanism was a key reason why the New Labour coalition held together for as long as it did. There were always Labour voters in cities, in the more militant unions, in university towns and in the public sector, who would have preferred a more radical programme. But we knew from the bitter experience of the 1980s that there were not enough of us to win an election, at least in a country whose media was so skewed to the right. And after 18 years of Tory rule, we were relieved to have a government that at least encouraged an open, tolerant, sexually liberal and multi-ethnic culture to thrive."⁸

And it's been weeks since we heard from Tony Blair.

A Very Odd Election

In 2017, the Tories got their 6th highest vote since 1945, out of 21 General Elections.⁹ Labour got their 5th highest vote, ahead of Blair's 2nd and 3rd wins.¹⁰

2017 resembles 1951, in that both parties scored very high. In 1951, Labour got 13,948,883, their highest total ever and exceeded only by John Major's 1992 victory. But Labour had allowed MP's constituencies to be redrawn in a way that might seem fairer at a local level, but biased the national result against them.

In our own era, the Tories had plans for a 'reform' that would reduce the number of MPs and 'accidentally' produce a vast bias. To let the Tories win more seats with fewer votes than Labour in some future election. But it would work out otherwise in Northern Ireland:

"The redrawing of the electoral map would leave republicans with nine MPs to the DUP's seven, Electoral Calculus has predicted. Any boundary changes must be approved by a vote in Parliament...

"Those proposals, if approved, will come into effect next year. The number of seats in Northern Ireland will fall from 18 to 17 as part of a UK-wide

shake-up to reduce House of Commons numbers from 650 to 600."¹¹

I'd be astonished if the DUP has not got that idea killed.

Sinn Fein would not of course take those seats. They are not taking the seven they won this time. For them, the outcome is almost perfect. While Protestants are still a majority, among the young they are now a minority.¹² And they can hope that the DUP collects a lot of odium for keeping the Tories in power during a messy Brexit. Or just as much if they force a new election.

What else? Back in 1951, the Tories deserved to be called Conservative. They kept things calm after a period of radical change. They were not in the grip of a Radical Right ideology that thinks society does not exist, and is out to erase everything that suggests they might be wrong. They seemed to be reverting to this under John Major. But then along came Tony Blair with New Labour and inflicted needless suffering on us.

There is good reason to think the high Tory vote is based just on fears over Brexit. That it will not stick. And it would be almost impossible to complete Brexit negotiations without enraging someone. Regrettably, UKIP will probably bounce back. Positively, it will mostly take Tory votes.

Labour should start taking that line – that there are few genuine conservatives left in national politics. That the Tories retain their anti-state obsession. The DUP may limit this, being a communal party and authentic conservatives tending to reactionary. They might also be bought off by a future Labour government by concessions for Northern Ireland only.

A scandal over a wood-burning subsidy is the most damaging thing that can be thrown at the DUP. I've only seen one mainstream mention of it:

"While the scheme was designed to encourage businesses to move from using fossil fuels to renewable heating systems, it backfired by offering subsidies greater than the cost of fuel.

"For every £1 spent on renewable heating systems, businesses received £1.60 in subsidies, leading to the

scandal being dubbed 'cash for ash' or 'the more you burn the more you earn'."¹³

Terrorism:

The Encouragement of Evil

Daesh (ISIS) are Islamic, only in the sense that the Klu Klux Klan are Christian. They stem from one small branch of a diverse tradition: Wahhabism for both Daesh and al-Qaeda. Most Muslims reject this entire tradition, and are the best hope of winning over the young and angry.

Labour should be stressing this, every time there is a new incident. Corbyn has shown noble and admirable sentiments, but there is a lot more that he could do.

The mainstream media have been disgraceful, repeatedly failing to stress that the terror groups are small groups. That they have killed far more Muslims than non-Muslims. But the mainstream media maybe do not want clarity. They mostly support Israel's current unwise policies, which I expect to end badly for everyone and worst of all for Israel.¹⁴ Most Muslims aren't tolerant of Israel taking more and more land on the West Bank. Foolish people think it smart to target them.

The whole Western approach since 1991 was ignorant incompetence. A failure now of smart glib shallow minds to learn or move on from a generally agreed failure of their efforts to reshape Iraq.

Calling terrorism evil is superficial. Yes, some people are bad. But there must be a lot of potentially evil people who remain normal because they never get stressed. Also people who start off normal and get turned evil by abnormal events. And even believers in Supernatural Evil also believe that people can choose for themselves, and influence others towards or away from evil.

The net result of the West's aggression from 1991 onwards has been to close the fading possibility of a World Order based strongly on the particular and parochial values of the West.

Tories and Saudis have fed bigotry, as a cover for corrupt economics. But the beasts of bigotry are now out of

control.

What We Need – Abundant Council Housing

There's not a lot I need to add to what's already well known about Grenville Towers. Inflammable cladding, dangerous gas pipes, residents advised to stay put during a fire, London fire services cut by Boris Johnson, when he was London's Mayor – it's all out there.

So let's talk about principles.

An unregulated market allows the whims of the rich to override the desperate needs of the ordinary. Even the actual lives of the poor. This is a very old pattern:

"While in Victorian Manchester, Friedrich Engels struggled to name the crime visited on children whose limbs were mangled by factory machines, or whose parents were killed in unsafe homes. Murder and manslaughter were committed by individuals, but these atrocities were something else: what he called social murder. 'When society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual,' he wrote in 1845, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

"Over 170 years later, Britain remains a country that murders its poor. When four separate government ministers are warned that Grenfell and other high rises are a serious fire risk, then an inferno isn't unfortunate. It is inevitable...

"Those local politicians who gave council taxpayers a sizeable rebate even while starving local services of funds have evidently chosen whose side they are on."¹⁵

Council housing in Britain from the 1940s to 1970s was a big success. Only a few hopeless drunks were homeless. But the Tories from the 1980s have attacked Council Housing. Used new laws to forbid councils to do anything with invoking the Sacred Principles of market forces. It has been a disaster.

Meantime the government has

easily found £3.6 million for a dull old stately house called Wentworth Woodhouse.¹⁶ It goes via something called the National Heritage Memorial Fund, but this gets government grants for things the rich fancy but don't want to pay for personally.

The place is also linked to the family of noted Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, though I don't think he himself benefits. But it is all a class interest, for the rich and scorning ordinary people.

Qatar

"The Saudis accuse Qatar of supporting terrorists. That is like Britain accusing the U.S. of imperialism, or the mafia cutting ties with the mob over gangsterism... Both Wahhabi countries, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have been funding and fuelling terrorism in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. But the Saudi view is that the more 'liberal' Qatar is simply supporting the 'wrong' kind of terrorists.

"The Qatari government and its mouthpiece *Al-Jazeera* installed and supported the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. The Saudis put that government down by financing a military coup against it. Qatar is supporting the Muslim Brotherhood government of Turkey. It is supporting the Palestinian Hamas, also a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate. Qatar is financing various al-Qaeda aligned groups in Libya, Syria and Afghanistan. The Taliban have their only diplomatic mission in Doha. Until recently the Saudis have been financing ISIS. They are now mainly back at financing various other Jihadi groups in Syria under CIA control. The UAE is sponsoring the Libyan general Hiftar who is fighting Qatari supported al-Qaeda aligned groups. The Saudis are making nice with Israel and have no interest in the Palestinian cause which Qatar supports.

"There are diverting interests in hydrocarbons. Qatar is the world's biggest exporter of natural gas - a serious competition to Saudi oil exports. It has recently intensified its relations with other producers and customers in the Gulf region and beyond."¹⁷

Donald Trump gave the Saudis the green light to apply sanctions to Qatar,

with no clear idea of what he was doing.

And by an *amazing* coincidence, “four former Barclays executives could face lengthy jail sentences after the Serious Fraud Office charged them and the bank with fraud over the way Barclays raised billions of pounds from Qatar at the height of the financial crisis... This is the first time criminal action has been taken against any senior bankers for events dating to the 2008 financial crisis.”¹⁸

Snippets

Too Rich To Pay Tax

“The richest 0.01% of households, involving those with more than £31m assets, evade paying 30% of their taxes on average... ‘the probability to hide assets rises very sharply with wealth’.

“The paper found that the super-rich evaded more than 10 times as much of their due taxes as the wider population, which on average evaded 2%.

“Most of the tax was evaded by hiding wealth in offshore accounts ... only the very wealthy, who could afford accountants, lawyers and bankers to advise them on setting up such holdings.”¹⁹

Dying of the spice

“The actor Carrie Fisher had cocaine, morphine and ecstasy in her system when she died, her autopsy has revealed, but investigators are still unclear whether the drugs contributed to her death.”²⁰

Best known as Princess Leia in *Star Wars*, which was full of anti-state views and a very relaxed attitude to things outside the law. The heroic Han Solo starts out as a smuggler of ‘spice’, in the context obviously some dangerous illegal drug.

Carrie Fisher was also noted for her fact-based novel *Postcards from the Edge*, about her struggle with drugs. Which sadly she lost in the end.

Reportedly her part in the forthcoming *Star Wars* film was already complete. (Rumour has it that it will kill Luke Skywalker.) But we have apparently lost what might have been an amazing final fling in the third film of the new trilogy.

Dogs With Morals Fit for Tories

“The sense of fair play is an important human trait, but new research suggests that it’s a key behaviour for dogs and wolves as well.

“In tests, if one animal was given a more substantial reward when performing a task, the other one downed tools completely.”²¹

But what about the inverse – refusing to see someone else treated unfairly? I don’t think that any creature other than a human ever does that.

But not all humans.

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/>.

<https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/newsnotes-historic/>.

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Grenfell Tower

by Eamon Dyas

Sadiq Khan had an article in the Observer of 18 June. It's just full of homilies and fine-sounding phrases. The substance of what we are supposed to learn from the Grenfell Tower tragedy amounts to this in his view:

"The greatest legacy of this tragedy may well end up being the skyline of our towns and cities. In the postwar rush to reconstruct our country, towers went up in large numbers, most of which are still here today. Nowadays, we would not dream of building towers to the standards of the 1970s, but their inhabitants still have to live with that legacy. It may well be the defining outcome of this tragedy that the worst mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s are systematically torn down." - Sadiq Khan in the Observer today.¹

His article has been posted on the Labour Party Facebook page and I've responded on that page as follows:

If this is the best Sadiq Khan can offer as an example of his thinking on this tragedy then there's little hope for London. It's not as if he's not an intelligent man incapable of seeing things in their wider context. The problem is not the tower blocks built in the 1960s and 1970s. It's what was done to them over the past couple of decades. We surely know enough by now to be able to state with some confidence that, left alone and un-renovated, a fire in Grenfell

Tower would not have resulted in a catastrophe on this scale. So the issue is not the building of these tower blocks but the way they have been managed in recent years.

That brings us to the plight of those charged with managing them - and this applies to both Labour and Tory local governments. The systematic reduction of the Central Government Grant, which is a feature of the legacy of both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair's obsession with "balancing the books" economics has placed tremendous pressure on local governments to find economies to make up the shortfall. The obvious "low hanging fruit" provided the first line of potential cost savings so we saw the privatisation of previously direct labour council services like refuse collection, maintenance, some welfare services etc. This was followed by cuts to things like library services and other local amenities like swimming pools. It should also be added that all of this took place in the context of the first swathes of council house selling at discount prices - something that was the result of Thatcher and then Blair government policies. Central government also denied local councils the option of using the revenue accrued from the sale of council homes to build replacement homes.

By the time this restriction was relaxed some years ago and local

councils were permitted to use such revenue to build new homes the burgeoning property market (fuelled by the original swath of council home sales it should be added) made it difficult for councils to purchase land on which to build new council homes. On top of that the local council regulations made it difficult for them to borrow the necessary money. But the absence of money did not mean that things like capital projects were no longer necessary. Just because one generation of council tenants were encouraged to purchase their council homes did not mean (as was implied by the "people's capitalism" of Thatcher and Blair) that the next generation would not need council homes.

Every generation produces its quota of people who will rely on the ability of the wider society to provide a safety net. In London, where a central tenet of government policy for decades has been to nourish the finance sector, the result has been the emergence of a property market which only benefits the rich and has been disastrous for the poor. In the midst of the anarchy created by the economic philosophy of "the market will provide" local councils still had the responsibility to provide housing for those in need. Unable to build council homes the only option was to "get into bed" with the speculators who were capitalising on the buoyant London property market

and who had access to the necessary finance to construct new homes. Planning rules were relaxed and regulations softened to facilitate the new private developments on condition that a small proportion of the housing “units” be allocated for social housing. But aside from the creation of new social housing each local government had the ongoing challenge of maintaining the surviving and diminished local government housing stock in their areas. In situations where it was deemed too expensive to renovate such properties they were handed over lock, stock and barrel, to developers who wished to completely demolish them and replace them with modern tower blocks. Something like this was done in Lewisham where a small estate of perfectly habitable local government maisonettes has been demolished to make space for a number of tower blocks. Again, the idea was that the developers would be permitted to sell the majority of the “units” to private purchasers on condition that a proportion be allocated for social housing.

The situation with regards to Grenfell Tower seems to be a variation on this kind of arrangement. The local government, unable (and probably unwilling in any case in this instance) to raise the necessary funding for the renovation of the block facilitated the handing over of the management of the building to a group that represented the tenants and leaseholders of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in the early 1990s. In 1996 the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) was established. Under these arrangements “responsibility for managing 9,760 properties passed from The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to the Tenant Management Organisation.” (see: KCTMO website). As to the ongoing relationship of that body to the local council the website states:

“The relationship between KCTMO and the Council is governed by a Management Agreement, which covers all areas of the landlord business. Whilst KCTMO still enjoys a close working relationship with the Council, it is a completely separate company.” Then in 2002 “KCTMO took over major capital works from the Council to access extra resources and funding to enable KCTMO to bring the properties up to the Decent

Homes Standard.”

Because KCTMO represents leaseholders and tenants it is bound to have mixed loyalties. On the one hand the owners (leaseholders) have a vested interest in ensuring that the value of their properties increase. On the other hand, tenants don’t necessarily share that interest - in fact it could be said that tenants don’t gain anything by an improving property market, rather they lose as an improving property market will tend to create an increase in rental costs. One of the basic tenets of the property market is encapsulated by the well-known catchphrase “location, location, location” and undoubtedly the owners of the surrounding properties to Grenfell Tower would feel that the value of their property would increase if the surrounding location was improved. If a 1970s council tower block was to be in their line of vision then far better that it be “renovated” in a way that improved its appearance.

What happened as a result is now an ongoing nightmare for hundreds of relatives and friends of those who lost their lives. What Sadiq Khan needs to acknowledge is that those lives were lost not because those who were killed lived in a 1970s council tower block but rather they died because of what was done to that tower block as a result of policies that emerged logically and inevitably from the operation of an economic philosophy that London has been subjected to since the 1980s. If he is to be part of the movement that stops this process he needs to acknowledge the actual chain of events that led us from such policies to where we are at present.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/18/sadiq-khan-grenfell-tower-tragedy-establish-full-truth>

The Immaculate Misconception

Norman St John-Stevas on Margaret Thatcher

The illegitimate child of Karl Marx and Catherine the Great
Clement Atlee on Russian Communism

The illegal we do immediately. The unconstitutional takes a little longer.
Henry Kissinger

The General has dedicated himself so many times, he must feel like the cornerstone of a public building
Adlai Stevenson on Dwight Eisenhower

Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier (No 12)

By Michael Murray murraymicha@gmail.com

Facebook: Michael Murray London - a commentary/digest of political news for busy people.

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

In this issue:

(1) “Here we go again?”

(2) “The Little Red Book”

(1) “Here we go again?”

It’s been like carnival time in Labour Party circles since the General Election. At Ward (Branch) level we had an informal get-together to celebrate the results. It was a joyous occasion. I was pleasantly surprised to hear previously ardent anti-Corbynists singing Jeremy’s praises. As erstwhile “senior” Labour Party “glass-half-full” begrudgers went into denial about the significance of the result, the foot soldiers celebrated. The same atmosphere prevailed at the Constituency (Delegate) General Meeting: a rousing standing ovation for the result and, more significantly, for Diane Abbott, Shadow Home Secretary, and Corbyn supporter, our MP. In his House of Commons’ first appearance after the election Jeremy got a standing ovation, capped by a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting doing likewise: unbelievable even a few short months ago. Happy days, indeed.

During the General Election campaign the feeling in Hackney North and Stoke Newington was that the constituency, being a “relatively safe” Labour seat, could afford to send volunteer canvassers to outlying constituencies considered “marginal” and under threat from the government party. I helped out

in four altogether, leafleting and canvassing. Hackney North and Stoke Newington, my home base, re-elected Diane Abbott with an increased majority of 12.2% over her 2015 vote. Hampstead and Kilburn’s Tulip Siddiq won with an increased Labour majority of 14.6%. Croydon Central’s Sarah Jones achieved a 9.7% increase in the Labour vote, while Garret Thomas in Harrow West increased the Labour & Cooperative Party vote by 13.9%. (Stats: BBC election results).

Less than three weeks later, during which time the sense of Labour being the “government in waiting” did not at all seem farfetched, we’re bombarded once again by news of 50 Labour MPs “defying” Jeremy Corbyn, and a resignation and three sackings from the Shadow Labour front bench. The “rebellion” was led by Chuka Umunna, who was heard to say, if memory serves, in the aftermath to the General Election result, that he was ready to accept a role, if asked, in a Corbyn Shadow Cabinet.

For this foot soldier this new turn of events is particularly disappointing. Three of the four MPs I helped to get elected were amongst the 50 “rebels”: namely, Gareth Thomas, Tulip Siddiq and Sarah Jones. This could point to a lack of judgement on my part, it could be said. I volunteered to help get them elected. But, like the majority of foot soldiers I worked with, I knew the politics of the people I was helping to get a Westminster seat.

I knew Gareth Thomas, politically not personally, best of all (apart from my own MP, Diane Abbott). Gareth is Chair of the Cooperative Party, which I joined soon after

returning to London four years ago. I’d joined the Coop Party because I’ve always had an interest in cooperatives, and a marginal involvement in them from when they were an important part of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ Unemployed Centres. This interest was substantially enhanced by a study of Mondragon Cooperatives in Spanish Basque, about which I’ve written in this magazine and elsewhere. An interest in coops was one reason I joined the Coop Party. The other was more visceral.

I couldn’t see my way rejoining the Labour Party, in which I’d been an active Branch Officer including PEO – Political Education Officer – back in God’s time – when such positions existed throughout the Party. But Corbyn’s emergence from Labour’s back benches changed that. And the excitement he’s generated left little time for parallel Cooperative Party involvement in truth, although I kept up my membership. Having attended the fantastic Cooperative Party’s 100th Anniversary Economic Conference earlier this year (written up in this magazine) and last weekend’s inspirational conference, primarily aimed at City and County Council level cooperative activity, I hope to get a bit more involved this year – “events” permitting.

So, I don’t regret helping Gareth get elected. Or the other MPs mentioned. We all have more in common than we disagree on, as members of a democratic socialist party – and now with a claim to being the first major European democratic socialist party to seriously challenge austerity economics.

Of all of them, for me, Gareth stood out as the MP most rooted in

his constituency. “*Oh, yes. Gareth went to school with my children,*” I was told on the doorstep, more than once. He was born and bred there. He’s known to people as a neighbour, friend, schoolmate. That is important in a political representative – or, maybe that’s my Irish background coming through.

Ireland might have invented modern populism – and “clientelism,” the other side of that coin. Clientelism is a term coined by Michael D O’Higgins, Labour Party President of Ireland. It explains how the member of parliament may neglect the sometimes more important “leadership” function in order to hold on to the seat, becoming in the process a glorified, well paid messenger.

Gavin Barwell, the Tory Housing Minister, ex-MP for Croydon Central, unseated by Labour’s Sarah Jones, may well have lost his seat because of his perceived aloofness and distance, according to the feedback I got canvassing in his constituency. But that reputation doesn’t seem to have done him any harm in Theresa May’s Tory Party where he was instantly installed in a big job. You will have seen him on the telly recently, arrogantly turning his arse to journalists when questioned about the Grenfell Tower disaster.

“The Little Red Book”

“*The Labour Party Manifesto for a Better, Fairer Britain,*” quite rightly, gets much of the credit for the dramatic change in the Party’s electoral fortunes. It is a document designed and written to be accessible to the potential voter as well as Labour Party members and activists at all levels. Available free at *Labour.org* it is organized under the following 12 headings: *Creating an Economy that Works for All; Negotiating Brexit; Towards a National Education Service; A Fair Deal at Work; Social Security; Secure Homes for All; Healthcare for All; Safer Communities; Leading Richer Lives;*

Extending Democracy; A More Equal Society; A Global Britain.

The strength of the Manifesto is that it was the outcome of an inclusive, consultative process involving all levels of the Party and, thus, aiming at maximum, consensual buy-in, in a party that had, hitherto, been seen as riven with internal conflict and, thus, “unelectable.” The Local elections preceding the General Election seemed to confirm that – which is one reason Theresa May felt emboldened to call her ill-fated “snap” election.

The Section “*Negotiating Brexit*” states categorically: “***Labour accepts the Referendum result.***” To coin a phrase: “*Accepting the Referendum result means accepting the Referendum result.*” To continue: the Manifesto says the emphasis will be on: “*negotiating priorities that have a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union – which are important for maintaining industries, jobs and businesses in Britain.*”

As I understand it: if we accept the Referendum result we accept we’re out of the Single Market and should concentrate on retaining its benefits as far as possible. I confess I have a problem with that. Why would the EU allow the UK enjoy the benefits of the Single Market, after choosing to opt out? I know the workplace negotiating “WIFM” factor is relevant here: identifying “*what’s in it for the EU?*” and proceeding to negotiate a mutually beneficial deal based on that approach. But I accept it’s the only way forward – the only principled and defensible way to get out of the mess in which the Brexit Referendum result landed the UK.

On the more sensitive issue of immigration the Manifesto says: “*Labour offers fair rules and reasonable management of migration. In trade negotiations our priorities favour growth, jobs and prosperity. We make no apologies for putting*

these aims before bogus immigration targets.” That was a brave statement. And, also, a principled one. Because in the demoralized, neglected post-industrial regions of Britain what can be misunderstood regarding Labour Party policy on immigration will be misunderstood, and what can be misrepresented, will be misrepresented – to the detriment of the Labour core vote. And, therein, lies a challenge, as was seen in other results in what had been “safe” Labour seats and are now Tory.

On the other hand, Chuka’s amendment had no chance of getting through. It could only do damage at a critical point in the Labour Party’s re-configuration of its oppositional role in Parliament. And, let’s not forget that the second stage of the Blairite led coup of the Parliamentary Labour Party began on the pretext of the Brexit Referendum results. The nonsense of Chuka’s amendment is demonstrated in his “tweet”: “*As I said to constituents during the election I’ll keep fighting to keep us in the Single Market and the Customs Union – the best deal for the UK.*” That is *not* in line with the Labour Party Manifesto he supposedly fought on: attempting to *retain* the benefits of the Single Market and *staying in* the Single Market are two different stances. *Staying in* the Single Market is no longer an option – as things stand. Gareth Thomas also tweeted he would vote “*to maintain access to single market as I told constituents I would do.*”

A consolation, I suppose, is that only 50 of the 262 MPs voted against the Party whip. And the media coverage the next day hesitated to put the boot in on Corbyn as heavily as it had previously done. For such small mercies we should be thankful.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Queen's Speech
21 June 2017

Mr Speaker I have to acquaint the House, that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a most gracious speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy. I shall direct that the terms of the speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government's priority is to secure the best possible deal as the country leaves the European Union. My Ministers are committed to working with Parliament, the devolved administrations, business and others to build the widest possible consensus on the country's future outside the European Union.

A bill will be introduced to repeal the European Communities Act and provide certainty for individuals and businesses. This will be complemented by legislation to ensure that the United Kingdom makes a success of Brexit, establishing new national policies on immigration, international sanctions, nuclear safeguards, agriculture, and fisheries.

My Government will seek to maintain a deep and special partnership with European allies and to forge new trading relationships across the globe. New bills on trade and customs will help to implement an independent trade policy, and support will be given to help British businesses export to markets around the world.

My Ministers will strengthen the economy so that it supports the creation of jobs and generates the tax revenues

needed to invest in the National Health Service, schools, and other public services.

My Government will continue to improve the public finances, while keeping taxes low. It will spread prosperity and opportunity across the country through a new modern, industrial strategy.

My Government will work to attract investment in infrastructure to support economic growth. Legislation will be introduced to ensure the United Kingdom remains a world leader in new industries, including electric cars and commercial satellites. A new bill will also be brought forward to deliver the next phase of high-speed rail.

My Government will continue to work to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a good school and that all schools are fairly funded. My Ministers will work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education.

The National Living Wage will be increased so that people who are on the lowest pay benefit from the same improvements in earnings as higher paid workers. My Ministers will seek to enhance rights and protections in the modern workplace.

My Government will make further progress to tackle the gender pay gap and discrimination against people on the basis of their race, faith, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

Legislation will be brought forward to protect the victims of domestic violence and abuse.

My Government will reform mental health legislation and ensure that mental health is prioritised in the National Health Service in England.

Proposals will be brought forward to ban unfair tenant fees, promote

fairness and transparency in the housing market, and help ensure more homes are built.

My Ministers will work to improve social care and will bring forward proposals for consultation.

My Government will ensure fairer markets for consumers, this will include bringing forward measures to help tackle unfair practices in the energy market to help reduce energy bills.

A priority will be to build a more united country, strengthening the social, economic and cultural bonds between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

My Government will work in cooperation with the devolved administrations, and it will work with all of the parties in Northern Ireland to support the return of devolved government.

A new law will ensure that the United Kingdom retains its world-class regime protecting personal data, and proposals for a new digital charter will be brought forward to ensure that the United Kingdom is the safest place to be online.

Legislation will also be introduced to modernise the courts system and to help reduce motor insurance premiums.

My Government will initiate a full public inquiry into the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower to ascertain the causes, and ensure that the appropriate lessons are learnt.

To support victims, my Government will take forward measures to introduce an independent public advocate, who will act for bereaved families after a public disaster and support them at public inquests.

My Ministers will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces, meeting the NATO commitment to spend at least two per cent of national income

on defence, and delivering on the Armed Forces Covenant across the United Kingdom.

My Government will bring forward proposals to ensure that critical national infrastructure is protected to safeguard national security.

A commission for countering extremism will be established to support the Government in stamping out extremist ideology in all its forms, both across society and on the internet, so it is denied a safe space to spread.

In the light of the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London, my Government's counter-terrorism strategy will be reviewed to ensure that the police and security services have all the powers they need, and that the length of custodial sentences for terrorism-related offences are sufficient to keep the population safe.

My Ministers will ensure that the United Kingdom's leading role on the world stage is maintained and enhanced as it leaves the European Union.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, committed to spending zero point seven per cent of national income on international development, my Government will continue to drive international efforts that increase global security and project British values around the world.

My Government will work to find sustainable political solutions to conflicts across the Middle East. It will work to tackle the threat of terrorism at source by continuing the United Kingdom's leading role in international military action to destroy Daesh in Iraq and Syria. It will also lead efforts to reform the international system to improve the United Kingdom's ability to tackle mass migration, alleviate poverty, and end modern slavery.

My Government will continue to support international action against climate change, including the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Prince Philip and I look forward to welcoming Their Majesties King Felipe and Queen Letizia of Spain on a State Visit in July.

My Government will host the

Commonwealth Summit in April of next year to cement its relevance to this, and future generations.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Other measures will be laid before you.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)

(Lab) By tradition, at the beginning of each parliamentary Session we commemorate the Members we have lost in the previous year. Sadly, this year must also mark the passing of those we have lost in horrific events in recent days and weeks. The fire at Grenfell Tower in west London has killed at least 79 people. What makes it both a tragedy and an outrage is that every single one of those deaths could have been avoided. Something has gone horrifically wrong. The north Kensington community is demanding answers, and it is entitled to those answers. Thousands of people living in tower blocks around the country need urgent reassurance, and the emergency services—especially, in this case, the fire and rescue services—deserve our deepest respect and support.

I also want to pay a very warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), who in recent days has demonstrated so clearly why her local community put their faith in her. Her determination to ensure that every family is rehoused locally is an exemplary work of a dedicated Member of Parliament, and we welcome her to this House. Lessons must be learned in the public inquiry, and a disaster that never should have happened must never happen again.

The terrorist attacks in Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park took innocent lives, causing dozens of injuries, and traumatised hundreds of people, with wilful and callous disregard for human life. The attack in the early hours of Monday morning

in my own constituency is a reminder to us all that hate has no creed, that violence has no religion, and that we must stand up to hatred—whoever the target—and stand together against those who would drive us apart. Last night, hundreds of people assembled alongside Finsbury Park mosque to give just that message—from all communities and all faiths.

Our communities and our country are strongest when we are united. As our late colleague Jo Cox said, “we...have far more in common than that which divides us.”—[Official Report, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 675.]

It is just over a year ago that Jo was taken from us by someone driven by hatred. Jo was driven by love and by an infectious energy. It was in the spirit of that energy and passion for people, life and justice that so many events were held in her memory around the country last weekend, including one in Muslim Welfare House in my constituency, near the site of the vile attack that happened a day later. They held a great get-together at the weekend. We should remember Jo and thank her, and make sure these great get-together events do continue year in, year out to unite our local communities.

Earlier this year, we also lost the Father of the House, Sir Gerald Kaufman, who had served his constituents for nearly 47 years, and previously worked for Harold Wilson in Downing Street. Gerald was an iconic and irascible figure in the Labour party. He came from a proud Jewish background and campaigned to bring peace to the middle east throughout his life. It was my pleasure to travel with him in that quest to many countries in the region, and I loved the very many lengthy conversations I had with him—in fact, nobody ever had a short conversation with Sir Gerald. Gerald and Jo will be fondly remembered by all who knew them and worked with them.

I want to congratulate the mover and the seconder of the Queen's Speech. First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) on his speech. My mother told me of the joy of Greenham common—she was there, and I went

to visit her—and I hope that he will understand the deep love of humanity that motivated all those women and others to go to Greenham common during those days. I would like to thank the right hon. Gentleman for taking time out from his considerable responsibilities—looking after his extensive property portfolio and tending to his directorship of UK Water Partnership. I hope a Labour Government may soon be able to come to the aid of his Newbury constituents by taking water back into public ownership, and to the aid of his tenants by ensuring there is a responsibility on landlords to ensure that all homes are fit for human habitation.

I know the right hon. Gentleman will also continue diligently to pursue his other interests in Parliament—his interests in defence, Africa and rural affairs. I do agree with part of what he said, when he spoke of the need for us as a country to adhere to all the agreements on climate change issues around the world, and I thank him for that part of his speech.

I turn now to the seconder of today's Loyal Address, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), whose speech was typically articulate and very erudite—after all, he is a former winner of “University Challenge”, so he would be able to make such a speech. He mentioned Benjamin Disraeli, and I welcome that, because Benjamin Disraeli once said, “If I want to read a book, I write one.” It seems that the hon. Gentleman has taken that maxim to new levels, writing or co-writing six books during the seven years he has been a Member of this House. I have been looking through the back catalogue of his books, and one book absolutely stands out—it is a must-read. It is absolutely apposite to our times, and I hope it is reprinted. It came out in 2011, and it was called “After the Coalition”. I do not want to cut across any of his present literary representations, but perhaps a sequel may be in the offing—although I understand that the latest coalition may already be in some chaos.

Nothing could emphasise that chaos more than the Queen's Speech we have

just heard: a threadbare legislative programme from a Government who have lost their majority and apparently run out of ideas altogether. This would be a thin legislative programme even if it was for one year, but for two years—two years? There is not enough in it to fill up one year.

It is therefore appropriate to start by welcoming what is not in the speech. First, there is no mention of scrapping the winter fuel allowance for millions of pensioners through means-testing. Can the Prime Minister assure us that that Conservative plan has now been withdrawn? Mercifully, neither is there any mention of ditching the triple lock. Pensioners across Britain will be grateful to know whether the Tory election commitment on that has also been binned.

Older people and their families might also be keen for some clarity around the Government's policy on social care—whether it is still what was originally set out in the Conservative manifesto, whether it is what it was later amended to, or whether it is now something else entirely. I am sure it is just a matter of historical record, but on looking at the Conservative website today, the manifesto has been taken down in its entirety. It apparently no longer exists. The Prime Minister might also like to confirm that food is not, after all, going to be taken from the mouths of infants and that younger primary school children will continue to receive universal free school meals. On the subject of schools, there was nothing about grammar schools in the Gracious Speech. Does the Prime Minister now agree with her predecessor that “it is delusional to think that a policy of expanding” the “number of grammar schools is either a good idea, a sellable idea or even the right idea”? The good news may even extend to our furry friends, if the Prime Minister can guarantee that the barbaric practice of foxhunting will remain banned in this country.

The Government have recently embarked on what are likely to be very difficult negotiations concerning Brexit, which the whole House will want to scrutinise. Unfortunately, there

have been some leaks, with the other side in the process expressing dismay at the weakness of the Government's negotiating skills—but that is enough about coalitions of chaos with the Democratic Unionist party; we must get on to the even more crucial issue of Brexit. Labour accepted from the beginning that the decision of the referendum has been taken—we are leaving the European Union. The question is how and on what terms. The Government could have begun negotiations on a far better footing had Ministers accepted the will of the House in July last year and granted full rights to European Union nationals living in this country. I hope now that this minority Government will indeed listen to the wisdom of this House a bit more and work in partnership with our European neighbours.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con) During the election campaign, the right hon. Gentleman repeatedly refused to rule out a second referendum on our EU membership. Given that Brexit negotiations have now commenced, will he take this opportunity to rule out a second referendum now?

Jeremy Corbyn I am not sure the hon. Gentleman was listening very carefully to any of my many speeches in the general election campaign. I made it clear that we would negotiate sensibly and fairly with the European Union and bring the results of those negotiations back to this House. It is in all our interests that we get a Brexit deal that puts jobs and the economy first. No deal is not better than a bad deal: it is a bad deal and not viable for this country. We need full access to the single market and a customs arrangement that provide Britain, as the Brexit Secretary has pledged, with the “exact same benefits” as now. Neither must arbitrary targets for immigration be prioritised over the jobs and living standards of the people of this country. Let us decide our immigration policy on the basis of the needs of our communities and our economy, not to the tune of the dog-whistle cynicism of Lynton Crosby or the hate campaigns of some sections of our press, whose

idea of patriotism is to base themselves in an overseas tax haven.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con) Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm the contradiction in his own plans? He plans not to reduce immigration numbers, but he also plans to stop employers recruiting overseas. Is it not the right hon. Gentleman who is a bit wobbly?

Jeremy Corbyn Throughout the election campaign and before, we made it very clear that employers who unscrupulously recruit low-paid workers from overseas, exploit them in this country and run away with the profits, at the same time as creating community discord, are wrong; they are making money out of poverty and grossly exploiting very vulnerable people on both sides of the channel.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) The Tory position on the single market and the customs union is clear: we are out of both. What is the Labour position on the single market and the customs union?

Jeremy Corbyn Again, our position has been absolutely clear. Our position is that we need tariff-free access to the European market to protect industries and jobs in this country. Let us have a little bit less from Conservative Members on the dangerous threat to turn Britain into a tax haven, which would threaten jobs and public services here far more than in mainland Europe.

We do not yet know the official title of the Government's much-trumpeted great repeal Bill, but if we are talking about taking back control, Parliament must be able to scrutinise legislation. Thankfully, the thin gruel of this Gracious Speech allows plenty of time for longer debates and greater scrutiny. That must include ensuring that the Human Rights Act and our commitment to the European convention on human rights and the human rights of everyone in this country remain completely and totally intact. We will ensure that they do.

It is our determination that by working with devolved Administrations, responsibilities such as agriculture and fisheries will be devolved to those

Administrations and not hoarded in Whitehall. On the subject of devolved Administrations, may I also wish the Prime Minister every success in reconvening talks with all parties to restore the Stormont Assembly in Belfast as soon as possible? We also very much hope that any done deal with the DUP in this place respects the overriding priority of the Good Friday agreement to maintain peace in Northern Ireland.

A state visit from the Spanish Head of State was announced for July, but can the Prime Minister update the House on whether she can still expect the United States' Head of State to visit any time this year, or any time in the future? It is just a question.

As I said earlier, public service workers, such as fire service, police and NHS staff, receive huge praise when they respond to terrorist attacks and other major incidents, but it is not good enough to be grateful to our public service workers only at a moment of crisis and disaster. They deserve dignity—the dignity of fully funded services, and the dignity of not seeing their jobs cut and living standards fall. There are now 20,000 fewer police officers than there were when the Conservatives came into office in 2010. When the police raised this subject with the then Home Secretary, do you know what, Mr Speaker? She accused the police officers of crying wolf.

I hope the current Prime Minister will correct the mistakes of the former Home Secretary. The Gracious Speech promises the police and security services “all the powers they need”, but what they deserve and what the public demand is that they have all the resources they need.

What was briefed to the media yesterday about scrapping the changes to the police funding formula is insufficient. The changes would only have moved funding between rural and urban forces, when the real issue is the £2.3 billion cut to police budgets in the past five years.

Our firefighters did an outstanding job at the Grenfell Tower fire, but they worked incredibly long shifts,

in part because there are 600 fewer firefighters and 10 fewer fire stations in London—cuts and closures that were forced through by the previous Mayor of London. Talking to those firefighters, exhausted from their work, who went into a burning building to save people, I asked, “Why do you do it? Why do you go in when you know it's so difficult and so dangerous?” They said, “Because we're firefighters. That's what we're trained to do. That's why we serve the public the way we do.” We need more of them and there needs to be greater security for all of them. We have to fund our fire services properly, and not just at a time of crisis.

I welcome the fact that there is a public inquiry into Grenfell, but can we take action now? I pay tribute to councils such as Croydon Council, which has committed this week to installing sprinklers in all tower blocks of 10 storeys or more. However, such minimal fire safety standards cannot be left to a postcode lottery, so will the Government make available emergency funds for councils to check cladding and install sprinklers?

The Government should also have committed themselves to passing a public safety Bill to implement the recommendations of the 2013 inquiry into the fire at Lakanal House, and to reversing their guidance that removed the requirement to install sprinklers in new school buildings. They could still do so and they would have our support. That could happen in addition to any recommendations of the Grenfell Tower inquiry.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab) I thank my right hon. Friend for what he has said about sprinkler systems for high-rise flats. There are 116 blocks of high-rise flats in my city of Leeds, 26 of which are in my constituency. Only eight—those that are sheltered accommodation—have sprinklers. It would cost £30 million to have sprinklers in all those flats. Will he join me in urging the Government to provide the money for all local authorities to put sprinklers in their high-rises?

Jeremy Corbyn I absolutely thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Indeed, during the discussion we held in Westminster Hall about this matter last week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) raised a similar point about the number of tower blocks.

I do not suppose that many Members of this House live in tower blocks, but just think for a moment of the sense of fear that so many people would have had when they saw the Lakanal House fire—people living on the 15th, 16th or 17th floor, knowing that there is no fire ladder that can reach them and no helicopter that can land. They are reliant on being able to get out or the fire being contained. We need to give everyone that assurance. Local authorities that have seen massive cuts in their budgets over the past years need the resources now to install the necessary sprinkler and fire prevention systems. We cannot use the excuse that the money is not there; the money has got to be there to ensure that we save lives in the future. We will support the Government if they are able to bring that forward.

Andy Slaughter On behalf of my hon. Friends the Members for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) and for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and myself, may I thank my right hon. Friend for visiting the area and making this issue an absolute priority? Will he and the Government ensure that disaster relief in north Kensington and pursuing the issue of the safety of people in tower blocks are made the absolute No. 1 priority?

Jeremy Corbyn I thank my hon. Friend for that, and for the support that he has given my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) in the work that has been done. What happened in Grenfell Tower is terrifying for all those in the area, and the problems that have ensued since indicate just what happens when local authority spending is cut to the bone and local authorities cannot cope as a result. We need properly funded, good-quality public services in this country.

The Prime Minister says that legal support will be made available to the families affected by the Grenfell Tower

fire, but they should have had access to legal aid beforehand. When they were raising their desperate concerns about fire safety, they were ignored by a Conservative-controlled local authority. The lessons of the failed austerity programme must urgently be learned. We cannot have council housing—social housing—on the cheap, and we cannot have public services on the cheap. We have to invest in them. So will the Prime Minister now halt the cuts to the police—cuts that the former Metropolitan Police Commissioner this week called “an absurdity”? Those cuts have affected our prisons, too. Her Majesty’s chief inspector of prisons has expressed his concern at the lack of a prisons and courts reform Bill, which could have implemented our election manifesto promise to employ another 3,000 prison officers.

Our children’s schools are facing budget cuts. Can the Prime Minister confirm whether cuts to per-pupil funding are going ahead, and can she clarify for the House the status of the national funding formula? Headteachers and teachers are going through incredible stress, with oversized classes and the difficulty of maintaining teachers in employment.

The Gracious Speech mentioned legislation to protect victims of domestic violence, but does that include restoring legal aid in such cases or restoring the funding needed to reopen the many refuges that have been closed? We welcome the reform of mental health legislation to give it greater priority, and we would welcome an assurance that no mental health trust will see its budget cut this year, as 40% of them did last year.

Will the Prime Minister call time on the public sector pay cap, which means that our nurses are 14% worse off today than they were seven years ago? As she is aware, some nurses and other public service workers have been forced to resort to using food banks, alongside more than 1 million other people in this country. Rising inflation, the effects of low pay and falling real incomes are going to hit even more families—the 6 million workers earning less than the living wage, the

millions of people in insecure work, those subject to the benefit freeze and 5.5 million public servants. We owe them a much better deal than they have been given by this Government in the past seven years.

My party, Labour, won almost 13 million votes at the election, and that was because we offered hope and opportunity for all and a real change to our country. The Prime Minister began the election campaign saying: “If I lose just six seats I will lose this election”. When it came to it, she lost more than four times that many seats to Labour alone. From Cardiff to Canterbury, from Stockton to Kensington, people chose hope over fear, and they sent an unequivocal message that austerity must be brought to an end. Seven years of Conservative rule has left wages falling, inflation rising, the pound falling, personal debt rising and the economy slowing. By no stretch of the imagination could any of that be described as strong or stable.

If we want to boost pay, the most effective means is through strong and independent trade unions—workers collectively defending and improving their pay and conditions—so we would repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 and strengthen collective bargaining.

Across Britain, people have shown that they believe there is a better way. In recent years, this Government have thrown away tens of billions of pounds in tax giveaways to the very richest and to big business, at the very same time as closing Sure Start centres and libraries, and tipping social care into crisis and our national health service into record deficit. Under Conservative rule, school budgets have been cut and college courses have been closed, students have been saddled with a lifetime of debt, and per-patient funding in the NHS is set to fall for the first time in history.

Our manifesto—for the many, not the few—and its popular policies set out a very different path, which caught the imagination of millions, and a way for the public really to take back control, so that our key utilities and our railways are taken into public ownership and run in the interests of the many, and

not to pay the dividends of the few. We would end austerity by making very different choices; by asking the highest 5% of earners to pay a little bit more while keeping the top 10 percentage points lower than it was for most of Margaret Thatcher's time in office; and by asking big business to pay a little more in tax, while retaining a lower corporation tax rate than any other G7 country.

Austerity and inequality are choices. They are not necessities. They are not unfortunate outcomes. They are a choice to make life worse for the many to maintain the privilege of a few. If the Government reject austerity, challenge inequality, invest to expand and rebalance our economy, they will have our support, but if they continue down this path of deliberately making people worse off, of deepening division, and of neglecting communities that deserve support and respect, we will oppose them every step of the way.

This is a Government without a majority, without a mandate and without a serious legislative programme, led by a Prime Minister who has lost her political authority, and who is struggling even today to stitch together a deal to stay in office. We will use every opportunity to vote down Government policies that have failed to win public support. We will use every opportunity to win support for our programme. Labour is not merely an Opposition; we are a Government in waiting, with a policy programme that enthused and engaged millions of people in this election, many for the first time in their political lives. We are ready to offer real strong and stable leadership in the interests of the many, not the few. We will test this Government's Brexit strategy and the legislation that comes forward against that standard.

This election engaged more people than for a generation—a tribute to our democracy. In the election, Labour set out a vision of what this country could be. It could be more equal. It could be more prosperous. It could have opportunities for all. That is what we on this side of the House will be putting forward in this Parliament—what we will be fighting for in this Parliament; what we will be demanding in this Parliament. The people of this country deserve something better than this thin piece of very little, when they have so many problems they want and demand answers to from this Parliament. We will engage fully and make the case for a prosperous, more stable and more cohesive society in Britain.

On 28 June, **Diane Abbott** for Labour moved to add the following at the end of the Question:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to end cuts to the police and fire service; commend the response of the emergency services to the recent terrorist attacks and to the Grenfell Tower fire; call on the Government to recruit more police officers and firefighters; and further call on the Government to end the public sector pay cap and give the emergency

and public services a fair pay rise.”

The amendment was lost by 323 votes to 309.

Of the 309 votes in favour of the amendment, 256 were Labour, 35 SNP, 12 Liberal Democrat, 4 Plaid Cymru, 1 Green and 1 Independent.

Of the 323 votes against the amendment, 313 were Conservative. and 10 were DUP.

CLIMBING THE MONEY TREE

After Jack met the Chancellor of the Exchequer
on the road
and exchanged the old dry cow for a bag
of magic beans
it sure did goad
his poor ma who scolded
like a woodpecker
and threw them into the garden
it seems
a mighty tree grew overnight
and being in his teens
he climbed it quickly with vigour
to what looked like the Palace of Westminster
or something bigger
stacked high from ceiling to floor
from wall to wall
banknotes galore
he felt he was due a few
when a voice roared OUT
and began to shout
it's six billion plus for two aircraft carriers
one hundred billion for Trident
this is not phantasmagoria
it's billions for failing banks
do you think we have a money tree
for the lower ranks
now it's down down down
and looking for the axe
no axe and its lose your home
being class-cleansed out of town
it's take ma and hit the road Jack

Wilson John Haire.

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clandestine coalition, in order to force legislation through. Significantly and curiously, he made no attempt to forge alliances with groups on the left. The result, predictably, was, and still is, dissent within the party and the wider left, plus splits which have resulted in a break-away party.

In the immediate election aftermath - one commentator referred to it as Renzi's "ko" (knock-out), he appeared still, inexplicably, to be buoyant. Tomaso Montanari in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* saw that this "arrogance and grotesque deafness" are a "huge obstacle on the road to a left that is united and renewed". There are now indications that the left are examining and evaluating their future, even if Renzi is unwilling to do so.

Before the municipals Renzi was suggesting that a general election win could open the possibility of a formal grand coalition with Silvio Berlusconi. Peter Gomez (an Italian/American journalist specialising in corruption) referred to this in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* of 26 June, as "a super-vile compromise destined to increase the discrediting of politics in the eyes of the electorate". Gomez writes in the same vein as many others when he says that "for someone who is only interested in Power, and has abandoned every desire to change the country, this is not a problem".

Immediately after the polls Berlusconi's *Fi* party claimed to have a mandate for change in the cities. The *Lega Nord* (Northern League) of Matteo Salina and Georgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) were both reported to say that they were ready to govern the country and join a coalition with Berlusconi. Although small, both parties are able to influence useful numbers of voters. Both are at the extreme end of the right-spectrum. *La Repubblica*'s Monica Rubino (26 June) reported a more guarded Berlusconi saying that he favoured "a 'moderate' coalition". The explanation for this uncharacteristic circumspection came from Gianluca Luzi (*La Repubblica*, 26 June) who suggested that Berlusconi would never accept the internal leadership challenge that would inevitably come from Salvini.

The turn-out in the municipal elections was unusually low and several commentators have examined the significance of the absence of 54% of voters - in fact, a majority. To *Il Fatto Quotidiano*'s Tomaso Montanari it is more than just a crisis in the parties of the left but a crisis for Italian

democracy. After all, "we can't talk about democracy if the majority of people don't vote." And, if as several articles suggest, these abstaining voters do register their vote at a general election, the outcome will be unpredictable. There has been some swift analysis to guess future outcomes. But with a climate of general disillusionment any predictions are uncertain.

La Repubblica's obituary for Stefano Rodotà (23 June) makes a fitting conclusion. They quoted him as long ago as 2000, commenting on the Italian political scene, here translated literally: "There is a cultural impoverishment. The bad politics are a daughter of a bad culture".

NOT ANOTHER BURDEN!

It's the White-Man's-Burden again
 this Middle-East thing
 they have missionaries but they don't do
 Zen
 they fly in with a bomber wing
 don't do bibles
 or hymn-sing
 don't bring law-and-order
 for it already exists
 their mission is to bring
 disorder
 dysfunctioning puts nations in a
 wheelchair
 till they get the gist
 and compare
 liberal democracy
 with their bespoke dictatorship
 of obduracy
 let a thousand weeds bloom
 and a hundred Jihadist schools of thought
 contend
 wheel on nurse
 among those three wise men from the East
 there is a friend.

Wilson John Haire.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

AND MORE ELECTIONS....

Stefano Rodotà, 84 year old intellectual and independent socialist died on 23 June, two days before the second round of the Italian municipal elections.

Rodotà served four parliamentary terms, was a member of the European Parliament, a jurist, writer and professor of civic law. He had been a Visiting Professor at All Souls, Oxford, and was part of the team who wrote the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. He didn't seek celebrity, was not a natural leader, so was not a widely known European figure. He was however greatly respected for his intellect, integrity and modesty. Several post-election commentators used the coincidence in timing to compare current politicians unfavourably with Rodotà

Italy urgently needs to revise its unconstitutional electoral system for general elections before one is due in early 2018. This is currently being discussed in Parliament. Matteo Renzi leader of the centre-left *Pd (Partito Democratico)*, Silvio Berlusconi of the centre-right *Fi (Forza Italia)* and Beppe Grillo of *M5S (The Five Star Movement)* are attempting to develop a mutually acceptable substitute. It is obvious, predictably, that they are individually attempting to devise a solution that will serve their own interests..

The modifications might retain a version of the current system whereby a winning party, or a coalition, are given a premium of seats to ensure a majority. This strategy was devised originally to provide stable governments, where there had been enormous instability. A

proportional representation system, favoured by Silvio Berlusconi, is also being considered. Before the municipal elections Matteo Renzi had been proposing a September 2017 general election. As these constitutional wrangles dragged on the aspiration then became November.

The results of the 25 June municipal elections were unexpectedly bad for Renzi's party. Municipals are held every five years and, like the UK, are not all held simultaneously. Every major city and all communes (*comuni*) with more than 15,000 inhabitants are able to elect a mayor and council. The contest generally runs to two rounds unless one candidate exceeds 50% of the vote. The results of these elections are likely not only to change the balance of power but also to modify the leaders' proposals for the new voting system.

The increased vote for the right confirmed a drift that could be seen in the 2015 municipal election results. The left plummeted (in the current elections) from having a total of 15 mayors of major cities to having 5, while the right increased their tally from 6 to 16. Results for the *comuni* show a similar pattern of movement to the right. There were shocks when several places considered solid red strongholds (*roccaforti*) turned blue – Genova, Sesto San Giovanni (Milan), Pistoia and La Spezia.

The M5S vote was small. Beppe Grillo's home city of Genova astounded everyone by turning the customary *Pd* lead in the first round to returning an *Fi (Forza Italia)* mayor on the second vote. Grillo obviously had hoped for a

M5S win here. But early in the contest fierce arguments between the Movement and their candidates poisoned M5S's chances. The unresolvable oddity of the group is that candidates are forbidden the autonomy that seems normal and necessary within a functioning political party. Bizarrely, issues have to be referred upwards to the non-elected hierarchy.

Grillo hoped that the existing 3 M5S mayors, particularly those in Rome and Turin, would give an example of success to inspire voters. Virginia Raggi, Rome's mayor made senior appointments of people who had previous mafia connections. This has impacted negatively on her sense of judgement and the progress of her administration. *La Stampa* reported on 29 June that the satisfaction ratings for Chiara Appendino in Turin have now dropped to 45%. So, although M5S picked up a handful of mayors in the *comuni*, there are few visible signs to support Grillo's contention that he is ready to govern Italy.

The fiercest criticism in the press is for the conduct of Matteo Renzi. The background is that he resigned as Prime Minister and *Pd* party leader after losing last December's referendum. He made a come-back as party leader while Paolo Gentiloni (referred to as his puppet) was given the task of running the Government. Renzi is clearly still in control.

Renzi's own (previous) government had worked closely with centre-right Berlusconi to form an informal and sometimes

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