

Labour Affairs

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Brexit Divisions

The vote to leave the European Union has thrown a spanner in the works of the British political machine. Labour and the Tories are divided over Brexit. Only the Liberal Democrats are united. But their support for Britain remaining in the EU and calls for a second referendum on the final deal go against public opinion. Opinion polls show that voters, both leave and remain, simply want the whole exercise to be completed as quickly as possible.

Boris Johnson's 4,200 word essay in the Daily Telegraph of 16 September, in which he appeared to question Theresa May's ability to lead, set the cat among the pigeons. Naturally, he denied it was a bid for the Tory leadership. Nevertheless, it was distinctly unhelpful. It came just days before May was due to set out the government's proposals for a positive Brexit in Florence, the birthplace of the 16th century political philosopher and schemer Niccolo Machiavelli.

Johnson's essay was described as a carefully constructed case for a dynamic global Britain once it leaves the EU. But it contained elements of his political views that are a cause for concern. It is said that the devil is in the detail. And there appears to be a lot of the devil in his promise that after we leave the EU, "We will keep environmental and social standards that are fair and wise." If Johnson, the devil, a strong advocate of deregulation and free markets, is to judge what is fair and wise then we can expect a clear out of at least some environmental and social standards, including workers' rights.

Answering the critics of his essay, which they claimed was divisive, Johnson boasted that "we are a nest of singing birds." Blissfully unaware that birds sing in trees not nests. Even former Tory leader Lord (William) Hague, said that Johnson's speech showed "a lack of coordination" between Ministers. This is just Newspeak for a total absence of discipline within the

government, led by a weak Theresa May.

May's unwise decision to hold a general election this year, with the resultant loss of her majority, has held back progress on the Brexit negotiations. The March 2019 deadline for leaving the EU has become too short a period in which to hammer out a positive deal for Britain. May's Florence speech recognises this. Hence her call for a two year transition period during which Britain will remain within the single market. Plus the offer of 20bn euro as a down payment of the leaving bill, with the total bill possibly in excess of 40bn.

May's acceptance of EU rules during the two year period, including allowing EU citizens to live and work in Britain, submitting to EU laws and paying into the EU budget may be practical politics, but it will not find favour among her Brexit hardliners. Boris Johnson is said to be supportive. But who knows what really goes on in the head of a man who changes his mind more often than a catwalk model changes her clothes. Johnson and other hardline Tories will cry foul, but the party will close ranks as Tories do when faced with a resurgent Labour opposition.

May has to straddle the hard-line Brexiters who want a clean break from the EU and the softer Remainers who seek a positive, practical break that protects the economy. It is a tough task which, in spite of the flowery rhetoric, she is incapable of resolving. She is caught in a revolving door from which there appears to be no escape.

In ruling out both a Norway-style deal inside the European economic area and a Canada-style (CETA) free trade deal, on finally leaving the EU, it seems that May is gambling on attaining beneficial global free trade deals under WTO rules. At the same time as successfully negotiating mutually beneficial free trade terms with the EU. Like Boris Johnson, she may believe that we are living in an "exciting time, full of

promise”, but it is the promise of ultimate failure that many people fear.

Jeremy Corbyn was quick to point out that May’s support for remaining within the single market for a limited period closely reflects Labour’s policy. Like May, Corbyn has his opponents within the party. A group of forty or so Labour MPs, MEPs, members of the Lords, trade unions and mayors have called for Labour to adopt a more bold policy of full and permanent membership of the single market and the customs union. If Labour were to go down this road it would effectively commit political Hari-Kari. It would be seen as an arrogant rejection of the result of the June 2016 referendum. And public anger would be likely to manifest itself in the next general election.

Continuing membership of the single market during a transition period is the only point of agreement between Labour and the Tories. A substantial difference between the two lies in the detail of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which received its second reading on 11 September. Labour’s opposition to the Bill is based primarily on the understanding that Clause 9 enables the Executive, if it so wishes, to bypass the House of Commons in converting EU law into UK domestic law, the so-called Henry VIIIth clause.

Labour, understandably, is playing a cautious game. Adopting a pragmatic policy. It accepts that Britain will leave the EU, but seeks a deal that protects the economy, jobs, and workers’ rights. The attempt to tie Labour down to a policy of permanent membership of the single market and customs union has been sidelined for now. But its supporters will no doubt continue to press its case, providing credence for those who accuse Labour of

being divided on the EU.

Jeremy Corbyn claims that Labour is now the mainstream party, brushing off accusations of a hard-left takeover of the party. Labour’s 2017 election manifesto was more Keynes than Marx. It had costed spending programmes designed to stimulate growth and productivity.

At Labour’s recent conference, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell set out a bold, radical programme of returning energy, post, rail and water to the public sector. These are laudable objectives, popular with conference and the wider public. Privatisation of these services has failed. But Labour must show in more detail how it is to be paid for without placing too much of a burden on public spending.

Corbyn’s leadership is now firmly established among party members, with whom he is the most popular Labour leader in living memory. But while there is a semblance of unity within the parliamentary party, a significant number of his colleagues continue to undermine him. They resent the disproportionate influence of party members over the election of the party leader. They opposed the lowering of the percentage of nominations from MPs required for a candidate’s name to appear on the ballot paper. This was reduced at Labour’s conference from 15% to 10% of the members of the parliamentary party. This facilitates a candidate from the left of the party to stand for the leadership. So, as long as the party retains an electoral system of one member one vote, with a membership leaning to the left, many Labour MPs will continue to voice their dissatisfaction.

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

GERMAN PRISONERS.

17 January 1918

Mr. GILBERT asked the hon. Member for Sheffield (Central Division) if he can state the number of German prisoners detained in this country on 31st December last; and if he will state what number of the total are employed in agriculture or other industries?

Mr. HOPE (Lord of the Treasury) The total number of combatant prisoners of war in this country on 9th January was 49,817, but of these only 31,541 were available for employment, the rest being exempted by rank or personal disability. The number actually employed on necessary camp duties and services of national importance was 28,050, while the whole of the remainder have been already allotted to such services and only await the necessary accommodation.

Mr. G. FABER asked the hon. Member for Sheffield (Central Division) whether Captain von Müller, late of the "Emden," and Lieutenant von Tirpitz were both, or was either of them, among the German prisoners of war recently returned by us; and have

they been returned to Germany or to Holland for internment there?

Mr. HOPE Both of these officers are now interned in Holland under the provisions of The Hague agreement.

Mr. FABER Will the hon. Member tell me who were received back in exchange for those two German prisoners?

Mr. HOPE I am afraid that my hon. Friend has not quite taken in the provisions of The Hague agreement. Officers interned in Holland go there not in exchange at all, but solely according to the time they have been in captivity. There is no question of setting one prisoner against another. Those officers who have been in captivity for a certain length of time have a right to go, just as certain of our officers have a similar right.

Mr FABER If we have an officer of high rank in a corresponding position, will he come home or be interned in Holland as a matter of course?

Mr. HOPE Certainly. He will not come home, but be interned in Holland.

Major HUNT What is the length

of time?

Mr. HOPE The length of time for an officer to be eligible for internment is eighteen months' captivity, but those who are eligible take their turn in priority of captivity.

Mr. FABER Do the Germans recognise this practice of ours the same as we do and treat it as automatic?

Mr. HOPE Yes; I think they do. I cannot say absolutely that it goes date by date, but certainly all our earliest prisoners, so far as my information goes, have gone to Holland now.

Mr. FABER Can the hon. Gentleman say, if and when it suits Germany, whether Germany holds back any people who may be of special value to her?

DOWAGER DUCHESS

OF COBURG.

23 January 1918

Mr. LYNCH asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he will place in the Library of the House a copy of the contract whereby the Dowager Duchess of Coburg is paid a large annual pension; whether he will state the exact amount; whether he will make it clear whether this contract was made with the Russian Government or with the lady herself; whether, if made with the Russian Government, it is still valid in spite of the disappearance of that Government; whether, if made with the lady personally, he will indicate the consideration, as, for instance, the services rendered by her to this country; whether since that date he has been made aware that she is herself an active agent of the enemies of this country, and that her son is lending troops against this country; and whether, in view of the effect on the public mind of such subsidies granted to alien enemies, he will take steps to stop the payments?

Mr. BALFOUR The hon. Member will find a copy of the treaty on which the question turns in the Library, No. C. 901 of 1874. I think this will supply

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The Labour Party is in a strong position in a fast-moving situation. Continuing turmoil within the Tories means that a leadership contest in the party cannot be ruled out. That could easily occur if May has to make more concessions to the EU negotiators, who so far have shown themselves to be surprisingly resolute. At some point Labour will need to shed its ambiguity and adopt a stance on the deal that is presented to Parliament. Up to that point however, it needs to make sure that the Tories own Brexit and everything that flows from it. The negotiations could well turn out to be a fiasco, both in terms of what the UK is able to negotiate and what the Tory party is prepared to accept. It must be seen to be their fiasco, not Labour's.

Editorials and older articles at our website,
<http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/>

This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

him with all the relevant facts of the case. As regards policy, I must refer him to the reply returned by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the lion. Member for Roxburgh on 18th November, 1914.

Mr. LYNCH Is it also a fact that this lady is a conspicuous enemy of the Allies, and that she also is being subsidised by the British Government?

Mr. BALFOUR I am not going to argue the question. We have a treaty obligation, and we keep it. The reasons for keeping it were stated by the Prime Minister. I have no more to say in answer to the question.

LABOUR PARTY (WAR AIMS MEMORANDUM).

24 January 1918

Mr. LEES-SMITH asked the Home Secretary whether, in view of the decision of the Government to take no action against the Labour party for its refusal to obey the new Regulation 27c of the Defence of the Realm Act Regulations and to submit its memorandum on war aims to the Censor, the same policy will be followed in the case of other organisations which refuse to obey this part of the Regulation?

Sir G. CAVE No, Sir. The question is one to be determined in each instance according to the merits of the case.

Mr. LEES-SMITH Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Labour party refused to obey this Regulation as a challenge to him, in order to show that he would only carry it out against small and weak organisations; and will he either accept that challenge or withdraw the Regulation?

Sir G. CAVE I am certainly not aware of that. I understood that the omission was inadvertent. If I had understood that it was a challenge to me, I should have taken a different course.

HIS MAJESTY'S MOST GRACIOUS SPEECH.

06 February 1918

Mr. SPEAKER I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, being one of the High Commissioners, delivered His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to

both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of His Majesty's Command, as followeth: My Lords and Gentlemen, Since last I addressed you great events have happened. Within a few weeks of that occasion, the United States of America decided to take their stand by the side of this Country and Our Allies in defence of the principles of Liberty and Justice. Their entry into the War, followed by that of other neutral States, has united practically the whole civilised world in a League of Nations against unscrupulous aggression, has lent additional strength to Our arms, and inspires fresh confidence in the ultimate triumph of Owe cause.

On the other hand, Russia, distracted by internal dissensions, has not been able to persevere in the struggle until the fruits of her great sacrifices could have been reaped: and for the present has ceased to bear her part in the Allied task. The negotiations opened by her with the enemy have, however, served but to prove that the ambitions which provoked this unhappy war are as yet unabated.

These tragic events have added to the burdens of the other Allies, but have not impaired the vigour and the loyalty with which one and all continue to pursue the common aim. Amid the confusion of changing events the determination of the democracies of the world to secure a just and enduring peace stands out ever more clearly.

In all the theatres of war, My Naval and Military Forces have displayed throughout the year a noble courage, a high constancy, and a fixed determination, which have won for them the 2294 admiration of My people. In France, the enemy has been repeatedly and successfully thrown back, and I await with assurance the further progress of the conflict. In Palestine and Mesopotamia the most revered and famous cities of the Orient have been wrested front the Turk; while in Africa the enemy has lost the last remnant of his Colonial pm-sessions. In all these fields, the forces of My Dominions and of the Indian Empire have borne their full share in the toil and in the glory of the day.

During the year the representatives

of My Dominions and of the Indian Empire were summoned for the first time to the sessions of an Imperial War Cabinet. Their deliberations have been of the utmost value, both in the prosecution of the War and in the promotion of Imperial Unity.

Gentlemen of the House of Commons, I thank you for the liberality with which you have made provision for the heavy expenditure of the War.

My Lords and Gentlemen, I have been pleased to give My consent to your proposals for the better Representation of the People. I trust that this measure will ensure to a much larger number of My subjects in the United Kingdom an effective voice in the government of the country, and will enable the National Unity, which has been so marked a characteristic of the War, to continue in the not less arduous work of reconstruction in times of peace.

The settlement of this difficult question by agreement leads me still to hope that, in spite of all the complexities of the problem, a solution may be possible in regard to the government of Ireland, upon which a Convention of representatives of My Irish people is now deliberating.

The successful prosecution of the War is still our first aim and endeavour. I ham watched with a proud and grateful heart the unvarying enthusiasm with which all sections of My people have 2295 responded to every demand made upon them for this purpose, and, as they face the final tests which may yet be required to carry our efforts to fruition, I pray that Almighty God may vouchsafe to us His Blessing.

HIS MAJESTY'S MOST GRACIOUS SPEECH.

12 February 1918

Mr. SPEAKER (standing at the Table, in the Clerk's place) I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended His Majesty in the House of Peers to hear His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament in pursuance of His Majesty's Commands, and of which I have for greater accuracy obtained a copy.

My Lords, and Gentlemen, The necessities of War render it imperative for Me, after but a brief interval, to summon you again to your deliberations.

The aims for which I and My Allies are contending were recently set forth by My Government in a statement which received the emphatic approval of My peoples throughout the Umpire, and provided a fair basis for the settlement of the present struggle and the re-establishment of national rights and international peace in the future.

The German Government has, however, ignored our just demands that it should make restitution for the wrongs it has committed, and furnish guarantees against their unprovoked repetition. Its spokesmen refuse any obligations for themselves, while denying the rightful liberties of others.

Until a recognition is offered of the only principles on which an honourable peace can be concluded, it is Our duty to prosecute the War with all the vigour that we possess. I have full confidence that My forces in the field, in close cooperation with those of My faithful Allies, will continue to display the same heroic courage and My people at home the same unselfish devotion that have already frustrated so many of the enemy's designs and will ensure the ultimate triumph of a righteous cause.

Gentlemen of the House of Commons, You will be asked to make suitable provision for the requirements of the combatant services and for the stability of Our national finance.

My Lords, and Gentlemen, The struggle on which we are engaged has reached a critical stage, which demands more than ever Our united energies and resources. I confidently commend to your patriotism the measures which will be submitted to you, and I pray that the Almighty may bestow His blessing on your labours.

PERSIA — ANGLO-RUSSIAN AGREEMENT.

13 February 1918

Mr. KING During the course of his speech just now the Noble Lord the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs,

challenged my accuracy when I said that Lord Curzon had criticised severely the Anglo-Russian agreement about Persia of 1907, and he advised me to look up my references. I told him I would do so, and I informed him that I intended to raise this matter on the Adjournment. I regret, therefore, I cannot see him in his place. I shall not trouble the House long, but I have looked through the Official Reports of 1908, when this Treaty was discussed in the House of Lords. It was discussed on two occasions. The first was on the 6th of February, when Lord Curzon made a speech which occupies twenty-six columns of the OFFICIAL REPORT, in strong criticism of this Treaty. I do not intend to give even one quotation from this ponderous oration, but, on a later occasion, on the 6th of June, 1908, Lord Curzon again criticised this Treaty, and on that occasion he used these words: We cannot congratulate His Majesty's Government on their diplomacy. Then he said again, a little later on, I have no great admiration for this treaty." He said also, Though the main objects of this treaty are admirable, as for the terms I think them bad. Yet, in spite of quotations like these, which I can multiply, the Noble Lord, who presumably knows something of the history of diplomacy, the history of his own Department, and of foreign affairs, says that Lord Curzon never criticised this Treaty at all adversely. I will trouble the House with one more quotation of his Lordship upon this Treaty, a quotation so sweeping in its condemnation and so appropriate to the present time that I commend it to the attention of the House. Lord Curzon used these words: I am almost astonished at the coolness, I might almost say the effrontery, with which the British Government is in the habit of parcelling out the territories of Powers, whose independence and integrity it assures them at the same time it has no other intention than to preserve, and only informs those Powers concerned afterwards of the arrangements when the agreement has been concluded. That is the way in which Lord Curzon spoke of this Treaty of 1907, and which the Noble

Lord says his colleague at the present time never criticised adversely at all. Let me point out that this quotation about having the effrontery to parcel out territories of Powers with which it presumably is in alliance, and then telling them that it has done so is just what we have done, or, if I may put it otherwise, just what the treaties have done, because I declare that neither this House nor this country would ever tolerate these treaties for one moment if they were ever put openly before them. It is what we have done with respect to our obligations to Serbia, to Montenegro, to Greece, and I believe to other parts, and therefore it is with particular satisfaction that I call the attention of the House to the opinions of Earl Curzon on our traditional diplomacy in days when he was in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility.

NOW THEY'LL GO ON ABOUT THIS FOR DAYS AND DAYS

The endless TV
overstuffed pages of a
newspaper
the piece-to-camera
caper
the experts on terrorism
clichés
platitudes
in rhythm
they forecast
Syria Libya Iraq
and
who will live and die
in the wreckage
these hacks
but they can't forecast
the next ruined
holiday package
with their morality
heaven-sent
integrity
long ago
spent

Wilson John Haire.

FLAG OF CONVENIENCE

The people's flag is deepening red
from the blood of the Iraqi dead
Palestinians knocked out cold
when Zionism sought to twist its soul
then there are the luxury
yachts
for cavorting Mandelson
the microdot
alas poor Prescott the bosses friend
proletarian from end to end
once militant trade unionist
now very much at sea
sits in ermine buzzing wildly as a
one-winged bee
bring on bagpiper Alistair Campbell
fingers chanter of blood and guts
mad-dancing
as he rambles
ah Tony Blair someone fetch me a chair
helped high finance now vigorously
collects his share
roams the world as a PR hit man
lock up your wife if you can
did George-W-Bush impregnate him
with hate
when he last went on that Whitehouse date
but as a lawyer on the go it's a word
he very well knows
can't think like others as the blood
continues to flow
now nothing at all Left of New Labour
since it last tossed it's Thatcherite
caber

Wilson John Haire.

BUT NOT LIKE THAT

One of the most blood-thirsty tribes
on earth
Scythians 900 – 200 BC warriors of
ancient Siberia
slaughtered men women children
those about to
give birth
today's criteria
drank their blood
no humanity
at its hub
though produced great art
says
the historian
but they're not like
us
not valedictorian
not the same
European empires
such a shame
yes
but not like that
what
Iraq Libya Syria Afghanistan
a bane
yes
but not like that
Hiroshima Nagasaki
bad cess
yes
but not like that
US war-mongering
to control the planet
maybe
dammit
but not like that

Wilson John Haire.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



Macron: victories and defeats.

Macron has had some victories and a defeat recently. He has achieved the reform of the Labour legislation which previous governments had foundered on: the Labour Law has been passed, and it's all over bar the shouting.

He has made well received speeches internationally. At the United Nations General Assembly on 18 September he spoke after Trump and sounded sensible and far seeing: 'respect treaties, put diplomacy first' he said.

In Athens on 7th September he showed once more his success in presenting himself, and his country, in a grandly spectacular manner. He made his speech outdoors, in the darkness of the evening, standing behind a white pulpit, the illuminated Parthenon on its hill in the distance. He had gone a bit far with his march between a double row of Napoleonic Guards at the meeting of the assembled Parliament in Versailles, although a similar slow dramatic approach with Putin also in Versailles had looked convincing.

The setback, rather than defeat, is the low number of LRM (*La République en Marche*, Macron's party) senators elected in September. As said in the previous Froggy, Senators are renewed by half every 3 years, and they are elected by 'grands électeurs' made up of local government elected representatives. The LRM party having only been in existence for a year, it didn't have any *grands électeurs* so there are only 28 LRM senators. That means Macron does not have a majority of the assembly of both houses, needed for example to change the constitution. This set back has been pooh-poohed as of no importance. 96% of *grands électeurs* are local councillors, little

people. A certain professor of law called the Senate the 'The Rye and Sweet Chestnut Assembly'. That means, the assembly of the poor sods reduced to living on rye and sweet chestnuts, traditional produce of the poorest soil. This is an exaggeration, but you get the idea that people who count are well off and live in towns.

The opposition

The opposition, what opposition? The Socialist Party is in disarray, and anyway compromised with its participation in the Macron government. The 'Republicans' are in a similar situation. Mélenchon continues with his one-man outfit '*France Insoumise*' ('Unsubmissive France'. The stupid translation conveys quite well the flavour of the name) with its symbol, the Greek letter phi.

Mélenchon has made himself ridiculous recently; Macron speaking in New York to CNN had said that he would not yield to street demonstration against the Labour Law: "Democracy is not [the rule of] the street," he said. To which Mélenchon replied: "It was the street defeated the Nazis". Even those with the haziest notion of history would realise the utter absurdity of the statement.

Opposition to the Labour Law has come to nothing. Because the law was passed during the summer and it is disheartening to try to undo an accomplished fact and because the different strands of possible opposition to it did not come together, instead calling for separate days of action on different dates.

The CGT called for two days of action, 12 and 21 September; Mélenchon called for demonstrations on 23 September. The nearness of the dates

is a dismal demonstration of disunity and weakness.

All were relatively poorly attended. At the end of September, there remained the action of CGT lorry drivers who mounted small blockades to protest against the unfair competition presented by poorly paid foreign drivers employed by French companies. They did not blockade oil refineries, which are now well guarded.

Brexit good for Europe, says Macron

Macron has made it clear that he thinks that Britain leaving is good for Europe. In Luxemburg on 29 August he said that now there will be an end to the situation where during the last 5 years of the Euro crisis the countries of the euro zone dared not meet as a Eurozone, because that would displease the UK and Poland. And what thanks did Eurozone countries get? That is now irrelevant, said Macron during his visit to Luxemburg. Now the Eurozone will meet firmly as Eurozone, it will be reinforced with a Parliament, a finance minister and a budget (subject to Germany going along with that). In another important speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris on 26 September he was expected to set out this project in detail and to say that, previously, that is before the departure of the UK, the EU had been hampered by the necessity of taking decisions unanimously. This could now change.

Now pioneer countries in Europe will take their own decisions and others will follow if they want, but no country will be able to obstruct, as the UK used to do. Unwilling countries would no longer be able to prevent other countries from going

forward in their desired direction. Nor will countries have to resort to the lowest common denominator as the price for agreement. If Poland does not want to change the rules on 'posted workers' (working e.g. in France, but paying the lower social contributions of their country of origin), it won't be able to stop other countries like France banning them; that doesn't mean Poland is not part of Europe. There can be common understanding between Poland and other EU countries on European defence, said Macron. Macron is preparing this new reform with personal meetings: he has met face-to-face 22 leaders out of the 27.

He is also making proposals to make Europe more popular with the voters, such as a wider Erasmus programme and the creation of a European Innovation Agency; he also supports a tax system for giant digital companies like Amazon etc, which should prove popular in a Europe where people still believe in taxation.

Macron following the UK nevertheless?

In many other respects however, Macron gives the impression he wants to modernize France by making it more like the UK. For example, he wants to introduce PAYE, which is fine, except that it goes together with individualization of taxation. At the moment in France, households declare tax as one and pay tax on their combined income of the previous year. Macron proposes that husband and wife/official partners be taxed separately, with the children being attached for tax purposes to one or the other parent. This is an attack on the family.

Macron wants to sell council houses. He wants the population to save less. The two are connected. There is a state saving scheme, which is very popular, called the 'Livret A' [Savings Book A]. The money saved in this scheme is partly used by the state to finance social housing. Macron wants to freeze the interest paid to Livret A holders, to discourage saving. This will have the result among other things of reducing public money which can be spent on housing.

The mingling of social classes has a name in France: *Social mix, la mixité sociale*, and it is held as a good thing but policies drive in the opposite direction: once people reach a certain income, their council rent is increased to such an extent that they are forced to move. Social housing used to be generally liked, for example teachers moving to a new area were allocated a state flat for as long as they wanted it. There was no stigma attached to that. But in one of his early speeches, Macron alluded to council estates as 'sad'. This is reminiscent of the situation in Britain. Sadiq Khan and Nicola Sturgeon boast of having 'overcome' their growing up on a council estate. Yet many people used to be very proud of their council house.

Then there is austerity. The state budget for social housing is also being drastically reduced. Housing benefit is being reduced, by 5 Euros a month, and social housing providers have been told to reduce rents accordingly; they have also been told to sell 1% of their stock each year, that amounts to 40 to 50,000 flats a year. As a first step, flats will be sold

to housing associations. You would have thought that the images of Grenfell Tower beamed in France as in the rest of the world would have been a warning against tinkering with the management of council housing.

Another austerity measure is a cut in the number of subsidized jobs; in 2016, there were 459,000 people on 'aided contracts' i.e. jobs paid partly by local authorities partly by the state, for teaching assistants and other help with local initiatives.

Macron is being given more leeway to do what he wants than previous presidents. So far he has been able to carry out his programme. He faces a very poor opposition and in a situation perceived as infinitely complex, nobody is presenting a clear alternative to what he is doing. On the other hand he seems to be just following the liberal English model of thirty years ago.

NOW WHY DID I THINK LIKE THAT

Cacophony whistles
 blow
 steam others electronic
 8 am
 panic
 haven't put on clothes
 panic
 coalmines' tongue out
 to swallow me
 down its throat
 shipyard wants to coffin me
 in a cold steel boat
 blast furnace melts eyes
 down cheek
 cotton mill chatters chatters chatters
 bangs and batters
 freaks
 reoccurring dream
 lie there
 the brain evaporates
 the scene
 down the deserted street
 nitrous oxide canisters
 needles on a park seat
 not laughing now
 sliding down endless
 banisters
 at job centre
 play air-guitar
 please your mentor
 play air-hammer
 simulate the wrecking bar
 midst the demolition
 the state
 your embalmer.

Wilson John Haire.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

The Never-Ending Tories?

With hindsight, we can see that Brezhnev doomed the Soviet Union. At the time it looked enormously strong. Able maybe to advance into South Asia, once they crushed resistance in Afghanistan. But within 7 years of his death,¹ it was all breaking up.

Will future historians say the same thing of Thatcher and the Tories? Has she set a party with 17th century roots on a path to ignominy and oblivion?

It is normal for political parties to have a definite lifetime, and theirs is unusually old. Toryism emerged in 1678, to defend the right of the Roman Catholic James to be heir to Charles 2nd, who himself was privately a Catholic. The bulk of them also compromised in 1688, when the English mainstream lost trust in King James and rallied to William of Orange.

Over three centuries, they compromised many more times. Defending the working class from free-market excesses from the 1830s to 1850s. Accepted the Welfare State after World War Two. Accepted the loss of the dwindling British Empire after bitter wars in Cyprus and Kenya.

Thatcher changed all that. She started an ideological drive that has made the entire Tory Party hostile to the modern state. And in practice hostile to the small independent businesses that the older sort of Tory once defended. To the new sort, the only point of a small business is to grow into a huge enormously profitable business. The rest are failures and not wanted.

Small businesses have been falling like ninepins in the crisis that began in 2008. Money was given to the banks, who were supposed to pass it on. Who preferred to keep it to balance 'assets' from Fancy Finance that might be completely worthless.

The tax system is also rigged to make it easy for the rich to legally

avoid tax. Not much harder to evade them. But since state spending has not been reduced *at all* after many years of Tory rule, the taxes still get paid. Paid by small businesses and by the working mainstream, who would pay less for better returns if the system were fairer.

Labour has promised to increase the number of tax inspectors.² And end fiddles whereby gigantic corporations claim to be based in absurdly small islands in the Caribbean, avoiding most taxes in the places where they actually exist.³

One of Thatcher's last acts was to get Britain committed to overthrowing Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Bush Senior maybe realised that Saddam and people like him were the only functional pro-Western force in Iraq. He cut short the war, hoping that Saddam could be replaced by someone very much like Saddam, which could be claimed as a victory. But the whole ideological revolution spearheaded by Thatcher and Reagan meant that it was impossible to make peace with Saddam and ease the suffering of the Iraqi people. Suffering which inspired most of the violent Islamists, even though they were violent foes of Saddam. (Foes precisely because he was a functional Westerniser, and they wanted the exact opposite.)

Abandoning Britain?

Thatcherism failed economically. The 1980s were no better overall than the 'disastrous' 1970s. We continued to lose ground. Germany has bounced back much stronger from the pain of absorbing and trashing East Germany.

Not liking the results of their own actions, a section of the Tories decided that the European Union was to blame. Free to make its own trade deals, the UK would surely do better.

Back in the 1960s, many said that Britain had *lost an empire and not yet found a role*. Merging with the USA was considered, but joining the expanding European Union was preferred. And now has been mindlessly rejected, by people who can't face up to how much weaker post-Thatcher Britain has become.

Maybe the Brexiteers think Britain can find a Swiss Role – a haven for dirty money, even more than London now is. But this depends on a strong underlying economy, otherwise investors will fear economic collapse.

As some non-Britons had hoped, British withdrawal has strengthened the European Union. It is ready to accept pain and loss in return for making it clear that quitting the Union is not a soft option. And with no need to please Britain, integration should increase.

A lot of rich Britons seem to be keeping their assets liquid so that they can use the deregulated financial system to rapidly pull their money out of Britain if things go badly:

"Britain's manufacturing exporters have 'hoarded' the gains from last year's fall in sterling by putting up prices rather than increasing output and sales.

"The Office for National Statistics said exporters could have allowed their prices to decline in line with the fall in the pound, making their products more attractive to foreign buyers, but chose to boost their profits instead.

"Illustrating the uncertainty following the Brexit vote, which has made exporters nervous about expanding production, analysis by the ONS shows that UK companies increased export prices by 12.7% year on year in the months after the referendum in response to a 16.9% fall in the exchange rate.

"The figures will disappoint Brexit

campaigners who have urged exporters to make the most of the fall in sterling by expanding production and increasing employment.”⁴

British business saw Brexit was a bad idea. As indeed did Theresa May, but many have accused her of being lukewarm. Of positioning herself to be the next leader. Which has worked in the short run, but maybe gives her a role equivalent to Gorbachev in the Tory Party’s decline and fall.

Traffic Accidents and Unemployment

Blaming most of the unemployed for their plight is no more sensible than blaming everyone who has been involved in a traffic accident.

You could imagine a theory of ‘Rational Traffic-Flow’. It starts from the obvious fact that people would not set off in a car with the intention of having an accident. Therefore, if they actually have an accident, they must be bad and inferior people and do not merit sympathy.

Of course some people do drive carelessly, or too fast. This makes accidents more likely. But there is also almost always some bad luck, and ‘accident black spots’ are well known. And people who drive safely may be hit by speeding fools.

A theory of Rational Traffic-Flow would also ‘prove’ that traffic jams either do not exist, or are a result of needless state regulation.

No one actually believes this, of course. They may fiercely denounce new rules for road safety as tantamount to jack-booted Stalins thrusting their way into the privacy of your own bedroom. But I’ve never come across anyone protesting at intrusive regulations like a driving licence and compulsory licence plates. Nor with official rules at junctions and traffic lights.

Every road-user has a basic understanding of the dynamics of real traffic. Economics is always confusing and distant. We interact with the wider society using money. This ‘cash nexus’, once denounced by conservatives, is now seen as the reality of economics.

There are plenty of good popular

accounts of the Galapagos finches that inspired Darwin. Not one about the 18th century pin-making that Adam Smith used as a model. It matters that Smith’s account is a false account of a complex industry.⁵

The ‘Theory of Rational Markets’ has been a nice cover for having a vast tax-subsidised state machine serve the interests of a more-than-millionaire class. The Tories and US Republicans spent their way out of the brief half-forgotten crisis of 1987, when markets slumped drastically. In 2008, they prevented a chain reaction of bank collapses by giving them free money under the nice label ‘Quantitative Easing’. Rather than let the assets of the very rich be devalued, they used Austerity to reassure financial markets and inflicted pain on the rest of the society.

Korea – Still Shadow-Boxing

North Korea makes aggressive noises, but has never gone too far. Has specialised in irritating the USA and getting away with it.

President Kim can pose as the global equal of President Trump, rather than as boss of the poorer half of a medium-sized country. And President Trump can also play the game, to distract from his general failure. Perhaps as cover for another gigantic lowering of taxes on the rich.

It is anyway sensible for North Korea to make it clear that it could wreck South Korea and Japan if it were invaded. Might even hit the USA, which counts for much more.

The average US citizen is wonderfully stoical about *other people’s* suffering, including fake heroes doing improbable things in Hollywood movies. But with a dwindling number of honourable exceptions, they make an enormous noise about anything that hurts them personally. Witness the coverage of hurricanes Harvey and Irma, when many others suffered much worse.

Trump knows this. He can’t do what Churchill did – say ‘*I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat*’. The howl would be off the scale.

Meantime President Xi is quietly

accumulating power, for China and for himself. Just how strong he is personally will be seen in mid-October, when big changes happen in the top leadership.

China Successfully Sins Against Capitalism

“Firms around the world face ever more intense competition from their Chinese rivals. China is not the first country to industrialise, but none has ever made the leap so rapidly and on such a monumental scale. Little more than a decade ago Chinese boom towns churned out zips, socks and cigarette lighters. Today the country is at the global frontier of new technology in everything from mobile payments to driverless cars.”⁶

That’s from *The Economist*, which naturally also tells China it is doing it all wrong. But makes its money by providing useful hard facts for business:

“In recent days China set the record for the world’s fastest long-distance bullet train, which hurtled between Beijing and Shanghai at 350kph (217mph). This was a triumph of industrial policy as much as of engineering. China’s first high-speed trains started rolling only a decade ago; today the country has 20,000km of high-speed track, more than the rest of the world combined. China could not have built this without a strong government. The state provided funds for research, land for tracks, aid for loss-making railways, subsidies for equipment-makers and, most controversially, incentives for foreign companies to share commercial secrets.

“High-speed rail is a prime example of the Chinese government’s prowess at identifying priority industries and deploying money and policy tools to nurture them. It inspires awe of what it can accomplish and fear that other countries stand little chance against such a formidable competitor. Yet there have also been big industrial-policy misses, notably the failure to develop strong car manufacturers and semiconductor-makers. China is rolling out a new generation of industrial policies, directed at a range

of advanced sectors, raising worries that it will dominate everything from robotics to artificial intelligence. That result is far from preordained.”⁷

Little more than a decade ago, *The Economist* was assuring us that something bad would soon happen to China, if it held out against New Right wisdom.

Japan, after a run of brilliant success, started listening to New Right ‘wisdom’ in the 1980s. Has fallen into a stagnation that it cannot escape from.

Abnormal Weather the New Normal

Hurricanes are fickle things. But global warming means more *very large* hurricanes. Disasters like Harvey and Irma.

“Before it reached the Gulf of Mexico, Harvey had been demoted from a tropical storm to a tropical wave. But as it reached the Gulf, where temperatures this month have been far above average, it was upgraded first to a tropical depression, then to a category one hurricane. It might have been expected to weaken as it approached the coast, as hurricanes churn the sea, bringing cooler waters to the surface. But the water it brought up from 100 metres and more was also unusually warm. By the time it reached land, Harvey had intensified to a category four hurricane.”⁸

Other big hurricanes did not hit the USA. Hurricane Jose was Category 4: Hurricane Maria was Category 5. Both turned north early on.

The USA had a respite after the very bad season in 2005. They might get another dozen years of relative calm. But as I said at the time,⁹ there is reason to fear:

“For many scientists [Harvey and Irma] are a worrying sign of a ‘new normal’ in which extreme weather events become more intense as a result of manmade climate change.”¹⁰

Weak Socialism, Violent Religion

Islam has become more hard-line, after the West chose to attack secular nationalism. Believed that they could

stuff the human soul into a set of crude commercial values.

Socialism answered wider needs. Where it remains strong, the global surge in aggressive religion has been minimised.

I also find it suspicious that Islamic terrorists in Britain keep on exploding defective devices, as with the Parsons Green bomb. The repeated accusation that Western intelligence agencies have been cultivating them as an excuse for repression is maybe not so absurd.

It is not just Islam. Hindu extremism in India puts Hindu myths as real events in school science textbooks.¹¹ Orthodox Christians in Russia threaten violence over a film that apparently twists truths about the last Tsar.

“Nicholas II, who was executed along with his family by Communist revolutionaries in 1918, was canonised by the Russian Orthodox church in 2000. Some Russian Orthodox Christians claim the film [Matilda], which was funded by the culture ministry, is blasphemous because it portrays the ‘holy tsar’ in love scenes.”¹²

Western historians see the Tsar as a weak bungler. Less often mentioned are the pogroms that happened during his reign, which had obvious official sympathy. Were intended to drive Jews out of ‘Holy Russia’ (with many becoming enormously useful citizens in Britain and the USA). That the Tsar didn’t know is impossible: he had liberal ministers who were against it.

The man was a fool, but not a Holy Fool. Russian Orthodoxy has made itself ridiculous celebrating him. But it is part of a global pattern of folly.

Snippets Just Give Me Money?

The Saudi dynasty are an oddity in a fast-changing world. Do they now doubt that they will last?

“Saudi Arabia is lining up a privatisation of state assets that dwarfs the Thatcher ‘revolution’ of the 1980s, and rivals the 1990s dissolution of Soviet assets in scale and significance. It has hung a ‘for sale’ sign on virtually every sector of Saudi economic life: oil, electricity, water, transport,

retail, schools and healthcare. Even the kingdom’s football clubs are due to be auctioned off...

“With oil stuck around the \$50 mark, Saudi budgets are creaking and deficits are widening. Around \$75 is regarded as the break-even point for the national finances.”¹³

But it is the Saudi regime that keeps the price low, by refusing to cut production. Hurting many countries, including Russia and irritatingly left-wing Venezuela.

A sudden coup or revolution would lose them the value of state assets and oil still in the ground. But not assets moved into the global financial system.

Buddhism Without Compassion

“The security operation targeting Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar ‘seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing’, the UN human rights chief says...

“About 294,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh since violence erupted in Rakhine state last month.

“The military says it is responding to attacks by Rohingya militants and denies it is targeting civilians.

“The violence began on 25 August when the Rohingya militants attacked police posts, killing 12 security personnel.

“Rohingyas who have fled Myanmar since then say the military responded with a brutal campaign, burning villages and beating and killing civilians.”¹⁴

As usual, nothing serious is being done to prevent it. It will be another successful Ethnic Cleansing, soon forgotten like the eviction of Serbs from Croatia and most of Kosovo.

Planned cull of MPs abandoned

The Tory Manifesto had an outrageous plan to cut the number of MPs from 650 to 600.

It was outrageous because it would have ‘accidentally’ produced a vast bias. Let the Tories win more seats with fewer votes than Labour in some future election. As they did in 1951, when Churchill had a secure majority for his ineffective final term, even

though Labour got slightly more votes.

As I said in *Newsnotes* for July / August, it would have given Sinn Fein more seats at Westminster than the DUP. Not something for Tories to worry about, since Sinn Fein refuse to attend. But with the Tories now dependent on DUP votes, I was expecting it to be dropped. And it seems now it has.¹⁵

Or just possibly they could find an alternative ‘reform’ that would hurt Labour but not the DUP. The most absurd and reactionary things have been done under the nice label of ‘reform’.

Another Vanishing Document

A lot of British respectability was undermined by the Profumo affair, which broke in 1963 and undermined Harold Macmillan. (Who with hindsight looks like one of the best Tory prime ministers ever.)

Central to the scandal was Stephen Ward, a highly successful osteopath who moved in top establishment circles. He associated with prostitutes, but he didn’t make a living off of them. He supported them in times of trouble and seems to have received small sums of money at other times. This made him technically guilty of pimping, and he was convicted in defiance of common sense. Or so many people said, and felt the judge was horribly biased. But now we will never know:

“The Criminal Case Review Commission (CCRC) told Ward’s family on Friday they will not be sending the osteopath’s 1963 conviction for appeal as they cannot find an original transcript of the judge’s summing up...

“Geoffrey Robertson QC, representing the family, said... ‘it is mysterious – suspicious, almost – that every copy of the transcript of the wretchedly biased summing up has gone missing’.”¹⁶

Websites

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

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TOURIST CLASS

3000 bombs and missiles hit Mosul
 in three years
 this RAF pilot
 on TV appears
 his temper
 ultraviolet
 they hate us down there
 he says
 but we don’t kill civilians
 for we’ve counted none
 only villains
 and when we have polished them
 off
 he interrupts with a little
 cough
 it’s off to Raqqa
 to you Syria
 for another fling
 where our bombs will groom
 and our missiles will sing
 out of tune
 with the Assad aria

Wilson John Haire.

Northern Ireland: Britain's Responsibility

W. J. Haire

Britain is responsible for the deliberate dysfunctional condition of NI that has brought a lot of suffering to the Catholic population. There was absolutely no constitutional way of remedying this. SF has always been on the political trail with different leaderships over the years. So they supported the IRA. So The Times, The Telegraph and all media in England supported the British Army.

1963, in Belfast, with the IRA having abandoned their campaign, SF was campaigning politically when the Rev. Ian Paisley demanded that the Tricolour be taken out of the window of their campaign headquarters in the Lower Falls, a Catholic area. If the RUC didn't act then he and his followers would. The RUC used sledgehammers to take the flag. Severe riots followed. There were huge amounts of arrests. The press was full of pictures of the arrested chained together like the chain gangs of the US Deep South. The atmosphere in Belfast was one of fear and anger. Paisley led Loyalists through Catholic areas like Cromac Square in a provocative show of strength. 1963 was the beginning of the fight-back by the Catholic population. Tame Nationalist MPs like the corrupt Harry Diamond sat at Stormont mouthing nothings. His speech in the Unionist-dominated Stormont ran like: 'To resolve this crisis (the rioting) we should all get down on our knees and pray.'

It's impossible to convey with words what it feels like to be one of the persecuted. Your grandparents went through it, your parents are going through it, you are going through it, and your children will go through it. There is no doubt you have been made to feel inferior. On a daily basis you are a fenian, a taig, a mickey. You live in filth, you breed like rabbits, if the husband doesn't want any more children then the priest will take on the job of impregnating the wife, says the low-life within earshot of Catholics. You see Protestant confidence in all its shapes and forms. Once during the 12th of July, as a teenager, I was on a train with my father a Protestant, on our way home to Carrickfergus. He was wearing a green sports jacket. Then I heard the muted jeers from the Orangemen in full regalia, with their wives and daughters beginning to comment on the colour green. My father spoke up.

'if you think I am going to throw away my jacket

for the lot of you then you have another thing coming to you!'

That quietened them. Only a Prod could speak to them like that and they knew it. Me, well I pushed myself further into the seat like something caught in the headlights. That's what a dysfunctional NI has done. In my household there is a superior Protestant being with his Catholic family sometimes cowering behind him. The psychological pressures are enormous. You have a Catholic mother who will sometimes have outbursts about the Prods and curse the whole damned side of your father's family. Sometimes it's said jokingly. It's time then for father to say nothing but just weather it. You can be lined up as Catholic children against your own Protestant father.

Children were physically punished back then. You sometimes wonder: 'is my father beating me as a father or as a Prod? Then the confrontation again on religious grounds within the family and this time two of your sisters take pity on the father and support him against Prod-calling. Later they will convert to born-again Protestantism as teenagers. The father is blamed for this but the last thing he wanted was extreme Protestantism and two sectarian daughters harassing the mother.

As a teenager, during a softer moment, he might confide in me: 'I almost bumped into a woman in Carrick. She was carrying a bible like she was good-living. (religious) We almost clicked.' (flirted) I think he was tired of the religious antagonism within the marriage and having to defend it against outside bigotry. But in his dying years he understood what the Provos were doing though remaining a partitionist. He knew early on the main struggle was for reform. I did come across a few Protestants like that back in the 1970s. One was a journalist on the Belfast News Letter. I got a lot of support from the News Letter for something I had on in the theatre in Belfast. The Republicans didn't like that but then they didn't know the journalist who had to cover himself on a daily basis and having a father who had been a Unionist MP.

But the hurlers on the ditch chicken out every time!

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill 7 September 2017 Second Reading

The opening speech by David Davis, the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, has been omitted to allow inclusion of Labour's response from his opposite number, Labour's Keir Starmer.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)

I beg to move, to leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question and add 'this House respects the EU referendum result and recognises that the UK will leave the EU, believes that insisting on proper scrutiny of this Bill and its proposed powers is the responsibility of this sovereign Parliament, recognises the need for considered and effective legislation to preserve EU-derived rights, protections and regulations in UK law as the UK leaves the EU but declines to give a Second Reading to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill because the Bill fails to protect and reassert the principle of Parliamentary sovereignty by handing sweeping powers to Government Ministers allowing them to bypass Parliament on key decisions, without any meaningful or guaranteed Parliamentary scrutiny, fails to include a presumption of devolution which would allow effective transfer of devolved competencies coming back from the EU to the devolved administrations and makes unnecessary and unjustified alterations to the devolution settlements, fails to provide certainty that rights and protections will be enforced as effectively in the future as they are at present, risks weakening human rights protections by failing to transpose the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into UK law, provides no mechanism for ensuring that the UK does not lag behind the EU in workplace protections and environmental standards in the future and prevents the UK implementing strong transitional arrangements on the same basic terms we currently enjoy, including remaining within a customs union and within the Single Market.'

The Secretary of State is keen to portray the Bill as a technical exercise converting EU law into our own law without raising any serious constitutional

issues about the role of Parliament. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I will start with clause 9. As the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister know, the article 50 negotiations are among the most difficult and significant in recent history. Under article 50, the agreement will cover all the withdrawal arrangements and take account of the future relationship between the UK and the EU—a backwards look and a forwards look on something that might last for decades. We know that phase 1 will have to cover EU citizens, Northern Ireland, UK citizens in the Europe and the money, and that phase 2 will cover security, cross-border crime, civil justice, enforcement of judgments, fisheries, farming, Gibraltar—you name it, we hope it will be in the article 50 agreement. We want it to succeed; we need an agreement. It will also include our future trading arrangements—hugely important—including any transitional arrangements, if there are any, and much more.

Arguably, the arrangements will extend to every facet of national life—not my words, but I will come back to them. The article 50 agreement will be voted on, but it will then have to be implemented. It is a colossal task likely to involve a host of policy choices and to require widespread changes to our law—on any view. So how will that be done? Enter clause 9:

“A Minister of the Crown may by regulations make such provision as the Minister considers appropriate for the purposes of implementing the withdrawal agreement if the Minister considers that such provisions should be in force on or before exit day.”

It is very likely to have to be in force before exit day, because otherwise there will be a gap, so that means the whole of the agreement, including transitional measures, being implemented under clause 9. It cannot be implemented after exit day, otherwise there will be a gap.

Let us be clear about how widely clause 9 is drawn. We have had some discussion about Henry VIII. Subsection (2) states: “Regulations under this

section may make any provision that could be made by an Act of Parliament” --- it is a true Henry VIII clause; it can modify Acts of Parliament—

“(including modifying this Act).”

The delegated legislation can amend the primary Act itself. That is as wide as any provision I have ever seen. What are the limits and safeguards? Under clause 9(3), the regulations may not impose taxation, make retrospective provisions—they are usually a very bad idea—create a criminal offence or amend the Human Rights Act. Everything else is on limits under clause 9.

Given that the clause is drawn so widely, one would expect an enhanced procedure or some other safeguards—surely not just ordinary old delegated legislation. What are the procedures? Are they enhanced? No. The opposite. Part 2 of schedule 7 deals with clause 9. It makes it clear that unless the delegated legislation creates a public authority, or the function of a public authority, affects a criminal offence or affects a power to make legislation, it is to be dealt with by—what? The negative procedure for statutory instruments, which means the least possible scrutiny: it means that the widest possible power, with no safeguards, will be channelled into the level of least scrutiny.

That is absolutely extraordinary. Let us be clear about what it means, because I am sure that the Secretary of State and others will say that notwithstanding the number of statutory instruments for which the schedule provides, they can be called up and annulled, and Parliament will have its say. I looked up the last time a negative-

procedure statutory instrument had been annulled in the House, and it was 38 years ago. I do not know how many Members have been in the House for 38 years, but many of us will not have had that opportunity. So much for “taking back control”.

There is no point in the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister saying, “We would not use these powers: take our assurance.” If they would not use them, they are unnecessary, and if they are unnecessary they should not be put before the House for approval today.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con) The case that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is making is for an amendment to clause 9. He is not making a case against the principle of the Bill, which is what Second Reading debates are about, and as he and his party are determined to vote against the principle of the Bill, he ought to make that case.

Keir Starmer I have only just started

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) The Secretary of State made great play of the claim that the Bill was necessary for certainty. Given the legal situation that my right hon. and learned Friend has just excellently elucidated, does he agree that the powers that the Bill gives Secretaries of State to regulate every aspect of our lives mean that it is a charter for uncertainty for ordinary British people?

Keir Starmer I do, and I shall attempt to demonstrate that. Clause 7, “Dealing with deficiencies arising from withdrawal”, takes the same approach as clause 9, as does clause 8, “Complying with international obligations”. All

those provisions are channelled into the negative procedure with the least possible scrutiny: they constitute a giant sidestep from parliamentary scrutiny on the most important issues of our day. But let me top it off. If you think that is bad—and I do—try clause 17. Subsection (1) states: “A Minister of the Crown may by regulations make such provision as the Minister considers appropriate in consequence of this Act.”

So anything in consequence of the Act can be done under clause 17. Again, this is a proper, robust Henry VIII provision. Let us look at subsection (2). It states: “The power to make regulations under subsection (1) may... be exercised by modifying any provision made by or under an enactment.”

That means amending primary legislation. In case anyone is in doubt, subsection (3) states: “In subsection (2) “enactment” does not include primary legislation passed or made after the end of the Session in which this Act is passed.”

So the Government can amend any legislation whatsoever—primary legislation—including legislation in this Session. Everything in the Queen’s Speech that is coming down the track could be amended by delegated legislation under clause 17. I have never come across such a wide power, although I have come across consequential powers. The Secretary of State will no doubt point to other statutes that provide for not dissimilar powers; I have looked at them, but I have never seen one as wide as this.

Members should not just take my word for it. A minute ago, the Secretary of State said that no one could suggest that this

was a legislative blank cheque for the Government. Let me read out what has been said by the Hansard Society—not a political body, not the Opposition, but the Hansard Society—about clause 17.

“Such an extensive power is hedged in by the fact that any provision must somehow relate to withdrawal from the EU, but given that this will arguably extend to every facet of national life, if granted it would, in effect, hand the government a legislative blank cheque.” Those are the words of the Hansard Society.

What is the scope and extent of that legislative blank cheque? How many pieces of delegated legislation are we concerned with? As the Secretary of State said, the White Paper suggested that there would be between 800 and 1,000, the vast majority of which would be dealt with via the negative procedure route. I do not think that the White Paper could, or did, take into account the further instruments necessary to implement the withdrawal agreement, but there could be very many more—well over 1,000 pieces of delegated legislation, given the least possible scrutiny.

I was glad to see that the Prime Minister was here earlier. Yesterday, during Prime Minister’s Question Time, she told the House that “the approach”—the Government’s approach to the Bill—

“has been endorsed by the House of Lords Constitution Committee.” —[Official Report, 6 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 148.]

I read the report again last night, and I have doubts about that endorsement. As the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State will know, this morning the House of Lords published a further report on the Bill, which reached the following conclusion: “The executive powers conferred by the Bill are

unprecedented and extraordinary and raise fundamental constitutional questions about the separation of powers between Parliament and Government.”

The report—published by the Committee that the Prime Minister prayed in aid yesterday—went on to say: “The number, range and overlapping nature of the broad delegated powers... would fundamentally challenge the constitutional balance of powers between Parliament and Government and would represent a significant—and unacceptable—transfer of legal competence.”

Far from being an endorsement, that is an explicit and damning criticism of the Government’s approach.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab) I entirely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend, who has pointed out what a joke the Bill is. It sets out all those supposed safeguards, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend correctly pointed out, Ministers can make regulations to modify it. We are disappearing down an Alice in Wonderland rabbit-hole of legislation. Is it not also true that it does not matter when Ministers—the Prime Minister, or the Secretary of State—say, “Trust us: we will not use these regulations”? They could be here today and gone tomorrow, and the hon. Member for the 18th century—the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—could be Prime Minister. We could be totally in his hands, and there would be all these powers.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con) rose—

Hon. Members Hurray!

Mr Speaker Order. I think we can short-circuit this. The hon. Member for North East Somerset has often been noted to observe that the 18th century is altogether

too recent for him.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con) Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman believe that under clause 9, what is being called “the divorce bill”—the amount of money that we may have to pay to the European Union when we leave—could be agreed by a Minister, or by the Government, without this place having any say in the amount that was paid?

Keir Starmer If it did not come under clause 9, it would certainly come under clause 17.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con) As a new Member, I also looked at advice on how Parliament has looked at statutory instruments, and I, too, saw that the last time such instruments were annulled by this House was back in 1979. The issue then was the cost of paraffin, and I remember 1979 and the high cost of fuel; it was a significant issue. However, given that the Secretary of State has said in response to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) that he is prepared to consider a sifting process, which means serious issues do come back to this House, what is the right hon. and learned hon. Gentleman’s alternative—what is he proposing?

Keir Starmer It is not as if this point is being made for the first time today: these are the points that have been made since the White Paper was published—the moment we dealt with it. That was in March, the Bill was published in July, and there have been numerous reports since then, and I raised at the time the significant issues I am raising now, and there has been no move from the Government.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) The key point about clause 9 is that the Government have asked Parliament to allow them to alter the Bill themselves by secondary

legislation once it has been enacted. If we look through the history of the 20th century, we will not find a single Bill that has ever sought to do that—not in time of war and not in time of civil emergency. In fact, every single emergency powers Act has expressed said that there shall not be a power for Ministers to alter primary legislation.

Mr Rees-Mogg Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer I am on my feet answering the last intervention, which powerfully makes the point that this Bill is unprecedented in its scope. That is significant because the Secretary of State will point to some of the safeguards under the Bill for the exercise of some of these powers, but if delegated legislation can amend the Bill's powers once enacted then notions of exit day, how far the delegated legislation goes and which procedures are used could be amended by the delegated legislation. So it is a very real point.

Let me turn from parliamentary involvement to the protection of rights. Many rights and protections derived from the EU are protected in delegated legislation under the European Communities Act 1972. Because they are underpinned by EU provisions, they have enjoyed enhanced protection—44 years' worth. They include some very important rights: the working time rights of people at work; the rights of part-time and fixed-term workers; the transfer of undertakings provision, which affects everybody who is at work if their company is taken over, so that their contracts are preserved, which is something we all believe in; and all health and safety provisions have been handled by delegated legislation under the 1972 Act, too. It did not matter that it was just delegated

legislation, because they had enhanced protection because of the 1972 Act and our membership of the EU. The same is equally true of important environmental rights and protections for consumers. Under this Bill, the Secretary of State says they survive, and I accept that, and he does have a commitment to rights at work, but they do not survive with their enhanced status; they survive only in delegated form. From the date of this Bill, they are amendable by delegated legislation. All of those rights at work, environmental provisions and consumer rights are unprotected from delegated legislation.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con) On health and safety protections, the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, of course, that there is a 1974 statute—the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974—which gives not just employees safety protections, but members of the public who are affected by conditions in the workplace. Surely that in itself acts as the primary protection to workers in this country under health and safety provisions?

Keir Starmer No, I am afraid it does not. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 all post-date that, and in any event that does not deal with all the other rights I have mentioned.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an excellent speech. On environmental standards, does he agree that there is another problem—a governance gap? With the lack of the ECJ and the Commission, there is nothing to enforce those environmental standards, and therefore we need

a new legal architecture; judicial review is not enough.

Keir Starmer I am very grateful for that intervention, because one thing that is not on the face of the Bill is any enforcement provision for rights currently enforced in one or other way through EU institutions, or even reporting obligations. It is fair to say that there is the provision in the Bill for the creation of public authorities—by, guess what, delegated legislation—and maybe that could be used for remedies, but it is by no means clear on the face of the Bill, and that is an important deficiency.

Let me complete this point: does it matter that these rights have lost their enhanced protection? Yes, it does. Taking back control obviously carries with it that this Parliament can change those rights, as the Secretary of State rightly set out, but this is to change them by delegated legislation, not primary legislation; that is an important distinction.

Does it matter? Would anybody have a go—surely not in the 21st century? Well, in June 2014 the current Foreign Secretary called for an end to “back-breaking” employment regulations, specifically the collective redundancies directive. The current International Development Secretary during the referendum campaign called for the Government to halve the amount of protection given to British workers after Brexit. And the International Trade Secretary—[Interruption.] I am addressing the question of whether it is conceivable that a Conservative Government might change this; I am reading out the statements of three Cabinet members. In February 2012 the International Trade Secretary—I know the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has heard about this quote already this

morning—wrote:

“To restore Britain’s competitiveness we must begin by deregulating the labour market. Political objections must be overridden. It is too difficult to hire and fire and too expensive to take on new employees. It is intellectually unsustainable to believe that workplace rights should remain untouchable while output and employment are clearly cyclical.”

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has a proud record on human rights and protections of people at work, but these are the statements of Cabinet colleagues, and this power in this Bill allows these rights to be overridden by delegated legislation.

Mr Rees-Mogg Is there not a fundamental contradiction in what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been saying? A moment ago he was worrying that power would be lost from this House; now he is saying that power should in fact be with the European Union. Is not the fundamental point of this Bill that it is better that laws should be made by our Government and our Parliament than by an unelected EU bureaucracy?

Keir Starmer I am obviously a very bad communicator: I thought I was suggesting that workplace rights, environmental rights and consumer rights should only be capable of being taken away by primary legislation. If there is any doubt, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that when I say primary legislation I mean legislation in this House; I thought that was taken as read.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con) Does not the last intervention point to the fundamental misunderstanding that some have about this Bill—and I am afraid the Secretary of State mentioned it earlier? The point is whether the UK is going to

become a rule-taker rather than a rule-maker. Our membership of the European Union has allowed us to influence the directives and regulations which have then been taken on board in this House and through our laws. What we are doing in this Bill—I will expand on this in my remarks—is not repealing, but reintroducing European legislation into this country, contrary to the intentions of those who wanted to leave the European Union.

Keir Starmer I am grateful for that intervention and agree with it. May I move on to other rights, because they are dealt with more severely? Clause 5(4) singles out the charter of fundamental rights for extinction. There are thousands of provisions that are being converted into our law and will have to be modified in some cases to arrive in our law, but only one provision in the thousands and thousands has been singled out for extinction—the charter of fundamental rights. As the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) argued in an article published yesterday, the principles of the charter provide “essential safeguards for individuals and businesses”.

That has been particularly important in the fields of LGBT rights, children’s rights and the rights of the elderly.

The Secretary of State asks why this matters. I have here the High Court judgment in the case of David Davis MP, Tom Watson MP and others v. the Secretary of State for the Home Department. This was in 2015, when the present Prime Minister was Home Secretary. David Davis the Back Bencher was bringing to court the now Prime Minister. He will recall that he was challenging the provisions of the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014. He was concerned that they would impinge

on the ability of MPs to have confidential communications from their constituents. He continued to make that point in debates that we were having a year or two ago. In his argument, he cited the charter. His lawyers made the argument that the charter was important because it went further than the European convention on human rights and therefore provided added protection.

I will not read out paragraph 80 of the judgment, although I am sure that the Secretary of State is familiar with it. As he knows, the Court found in his favour—he was right: the charter did enhance his rights—and rejected the arguments of Mr Eadie, the distinguished QC representing the then Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister. So when the Secretary of State asks whether this move will make any difference, the answer is yes. We can see that from his case. I suspect that if he were still on the Back Benches, he would now be talking to me and others over a cup of coffee about how we should fiercely oppose clause 5(4) and ensure that it came out of the Bill.

Mr Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con) The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point. Reading the mind of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I think he asked why this mattered because he would insist that the general principles of EU law being preserved would replace the charter. However, if they are not justiciable because we do not find a cause of action in our courts, the ability to assert those rights would evaporate.

Keir Starmer That is exactly the point that was made earlier. To say that the changes do not matter because we can find that right elsewhere, but then to remove the right to do anything about an effective remedy, would mean that the

exercise had achieved absolutely nothing.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman be good enough to explain why other distinguished gentlemen—namely, Tony Blair and Lord Goldsmith—fought so resolutely to exclude the charter of fundamental rights from the Lisbon treaty and, furthermore, failed because their protocol did not actually work?

Keir Starmer No. I spent 20-plus years as a human rights lawyer interpreting and applying provisions such as the charter and acting for many people to whose lives it made a real difference, as the Secretary of State will know.

I want to move on the question of devolved powers. At the moment, EU law limits the powers of the devolved institutions. On withdrawal, the default position ought to be that the devolved institutions would have power over matters falling within the devolved fields, but clause 11 prevents that and diverts powers that ought to go to Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast to London, where they are to be hoarded. That is fundamentally the wrong approach, but it is totally consistent with the Government's approach of grabbing powers and avoiding scrutiny.

On that topic, let me deal with exit day, a crucially important day in the Bill. It is the day on which the European Communities Act will be repealed. It is also the day on which the role of the European Court of Justice will be extinguished in our law, and that matters hugely, whatever anyone's long-term view, particularly for transitional arrangements. I heard the Secretary of State say this morning that he wanted transitional arrangements that were as close as possible to the current arrangements. I think he

knows, in his heart of hearts, that that will almost certainly involve a role for the European Court of Justice—although he will say that it would be temporary.

Exit day, the day on which the role of the Court is extinguished, is crucial. Without it, we might not be able to transition on the terms that the Secretary of State was suggesting this morning. He knows that. Control over exit day is therefore hugely important. Who will have that control? People talk about bringing back control, and they might think that Parliament would have control over this important issue. But no. Enter clause 14, which states that “‘exit day’ means such day as a Minister of the Crown may by regulations appoint”.

This will be in the sole power of a Minister. Anyone simply passing this Bill must be prepared to be a spectator on the question of what the transitional measures should be and how they operate. That is a huge risk to our national interests.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) The Secretary of State said earlier that it was “silly” of me to raise the transitional arrangements in relation to our continuing to be in the single market and the customs union. If the Bill is enacted and we are outside the purview of the ECJ and not subject to EU law, we will effectively be ruling out membership of the single market and the customs union during the transition. How will that bring stability and certainty to British businesses? Why is this provision in the Bill?

Keir Starmer This is the conundrum that the Secretary of State and the Bill have created. If exit day is in March 2019, it is difficult to see how we could transition on terms similar to those we are now on. What could we do? We could choose to push exit day two years down the line. [Interruption.] No?

Well, if we did not do that, but we recognised that the ECJ was necessary to the process, we would end up repealing what was once this repeal Bill, only to have to bring it back in again. That is the extent of the absurdity of the powers in the Bill.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an outstandingly concise and forensic speech dissecting the difficulties in the Bill. He has drawn our attention to the problem with the definition of “exit day”. Does not that problem also feed into the delegated legislative powers? Clause 7(7) states that Ministers cannot make regulations “after the end of the period of two years beginning with exit day.” If exit day is going to disappear down the line, as the shadow Secretary of State has suggested, would not the power to make delegated legislation continue for even longer than the Government are now proposing?

Keir Starmer It certainly could. The only way out of that would be to have multiple exit days. Members might think I am joking, but someone who drafted the Bill has thought of that, and it is conceivable that there could be multiple exit days, all chosen by a Minister and not by Parliament.

The combined effect of the Bill's provisions would be to reduce MPs to spectators as power pours into the hands of Ministers and the Executive. This is an unprecedented power-grab—“rule by decree” is not a mis-description—and an affront to Parliament and to accountability. The name of the Bill was changed from the great repeal Bill to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The word “great” should have been preserved, however. The title should have been changed to the great power grab Bill. Labour voted for the article 50 legislation,

because we accept the referendum result. As a result, the UK is leaving the EU. That we are leaving is settled. How we leave is not. This Bill invites us to surrender all power and influence over that question to the Government and to Ministers. That would betray everything that we are sent here to do. Unless the Government make very significant concessions before we vote on Monday, Labour has tabled a reasoned amendment and will vote against the Bill.

n.b. The second reading debate was concluded on 11 September with votes on Labour’s amendment and the substantive motion.

Labour’s amendment was defeated by 318 votes to 296. The second reading was agreed by 326 votes to 290.

Seven Labour members defied the party whip and voted in support of the second reading. (They abstained on the vote on Labour’s amendment.)

The seven members were: Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley), Frank Field (Birkenhead), Kate Hoey (Vauxhall), Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North), John Mann (Bassetlaw), Denis Skinner (Bolsover), Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton).

Frank Field was the only speaker of the seven rebels.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab) I can be mercifully brief. I wish to make two points. First, I will vote tonight for the only option that implements the referendum result. That was the wish of my constituents and that was the wish of the country. I do not wish any different view to be put forward about whose side I am on—I am on the side of the majority of people who voted to come out.

Secondly, I want to address those on the Government Benches. When we started this process, many people bravely went against their lifetime views to implement the views of their constituents, but given the frailty of human nature we have had one or two recidivists who are now thinking, having read Thursday’s debate, that there may be reasons for not doing this or not doing the other. When we come back in Committee, I will table a four-clause Bill, because the Government, by having this mega-Bill, are storing up no end of trouble from Members who are wolves in sheep’s clothing and who will try to undo the measure.

We need four crucial things from that Bill. First, we need a leave date. Secondly, we need to incorporate all European Union law and regulations. The third clause will give us the means by which the House of Commons and then their lordships review which laws we want to keep, which we want to improve,

and which we want to do away with. We are voting from midnight tonight, and there is talk that it will be 3 o’clock on Wednesday morning before we vote on tomorrow’s business. With regard to the idea that this place is equipped to review all that legislation, there is shedloads upon shedloads upon shedloads, and it would fill up the House of Commons on several occasions. We therefore need a means whereby we review which legislation we will keep and which we will not. Fourthly, in case there are problems with people with their little hands on our windpipes who think, “If we can hold them to the two years, we will get what we want”, we need a safe haven.

That is what we need from this exit Bill: first, the date; secondly, the incorporation of everything; thirdly, a method of review; and fourthly, for a limited period, a safe haven. I hope that when we go into Committee, the Government will adopt those four proposals as clause 1 so that we can very quickly implement this Bill. We can then bring forward small Bills to implement other parts of the mega-Bill they are putting before us, should we need them. I hope that when the whole House of Commons is in Committee, we will carry that amendment.

OF TILLS AND PILLS

The Titanic sank on the 14th of April
1912

to the Atlantic Ocean floor

the Ulster Covenant made a call

to rebel

on the 28th of September

1912

against the Third Home Rule Bill

signed by loyalists galore

the shivering wreck has put money

in the till

while the Covenant has put Loyalism

on the Pill

Wilson John Haire.

Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier

By Michael Murray
murraymicha@gmail.com

Facebook: Michael Murray London -

a commentary/digest of political news for busy people - posted to be shared more widely.

Dictionary definition of “foot soldier”: *a dedicated low level follower.*

In this issue:

The Labour Party Annual Conference 2017

This is intended to be no more than a foot soldier’s view of the organisation and structure of this year’s Labour Party Conference and its symbiotic relationship with Momentum, which, within a few short years has emerged as a game-changer within the Party, as seen in its role during this year’s General Election. The implications for policy development can be read elsewhere in this issue of Labour Affairs. Suffice it for me to say that Corbyn’s Leader’s Speech, on the last day of Conference, can be taken as a draft of the next election’s Manifesto. And it’s looking good for the future of Democratic Socialism in Britain – and further afield.

*

I attended this year’s Annual Conference in the seaside town of Brighton, on England’s south coast – in swimming distance of continental Europe - not as a Delegate from my Hackney and Stoke Newington Constituency but as an Observer. The selection of delegates happened in Hackney North before the June General Election. Someone with my views on the Labour Party leadership and its political direction would not get a look-in at that point, and better people than me didn’t. And, to be fair, being a newcomer – a returning member – I wouldn’t expect to be sent as a Delegate to Conference. Time served and work contributed

over years should count for something. My less than three years of current party membership, albeit contributing more than my fair share of work in that time in 6 Constituencies from Stoke-on-Trent to Croydon - and, back in God’s time, before I returned to Ireland in 1982, many years of active service in the old Islington Central Labour Party – doesn’t give me any automatic nomination rights. As a footsoldier to the arsehole, too old to have to worry about “*career moves*” I don’t ask for any – happy to serve.

Had the selection of delegates for conference, and the various other committees voted on at the same time - for local, regional and national level committees - been made *after* that election result was known, it would have been a somewhat different, and more representative delegation that went to Brighton. More representative, that is, of the “broad church” that constitutes the 150 or so Branch, or Ward, delegates that meets at the monthly General Meeting of the Constituency – and, certainly, more representative of the wider membership, the majority of whom joined in response to Corbyn’s politics and style. I’m sure that is true of many other constituencies around the country.

I retain no hard feelings for those who were sent to represent Hackney North at Conference. Following Corbyn’s Zen-like forbearance and

forgiveness, I’m happy to move on to what is clearly a new phase in the history of the Labour Party - and our Constituency - knowing that attitudes *have* been changed, changed utterly.

When Jeremy called for a show of appreciation for Diane Abbott’s media ordeal, at one point, the entire Conference Hall rose as one to a prolonged and loud standing ovation. Diane Abbott is our Constituency MP. The Hackney North delegation rose with them. But I remembered a night, before the General Election, at our Constituency GM when I saw some of the same people arrogantly and dismissively turn their backs and talk amongst themselves while Diane was giving the customary MP report back from Parliament in a public show of contempt for their MP as she talked about her continuing support for Jeremy. I wrote about that incident in this Diary previously, then, as now, not naming names. But, like any foot soldier, remembering who is who and who can be relied on when, as they say in the common parlance, it kicks off.

The Conference drew the largest attendance ever in the entire history of the Labour Party. Apart from the main event -the policy decision-making Conference of delegates – over the five days, from Saturday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon – there were hundreds

of meetings on the whole gamut of economic and social policy in dozens of venues around the town centre of Brighton. The week began with a Saturday afternoon open-air rally, at which Jeremy and other local Labour Party people spoke. Six and a half thousand attended – and that was before the majority had even arrived in Brighton, including myself.

On Monday alone the Party organized 132 different events, in the form of lecture/discussions with Shadow Ministers and other Labour, trade union and civil society organisation people, going from one to the other to bring us foot soldiering activists into the Party's informational loop in a buzzy and celebratory atmosphere that was palpable. Celebratory? Absolutely. Not that you'd know that if you relied on the Main Stream Media for your information on what was going on. It was a celebration of the General Election result and the lift it gave the Party. It was a celebration of a dawning realization that a milestone has been passed. A breakthrough had been made in the decades-long unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism and its anti-social austerity politics in the Party and society. That, and people seeing their way to mend the damage done over the last three years since the emergence of the Corbyn-led assault on austerity politics. Simon Jenkins and John Crice of the Guardian have been sneering at what they see as the "personality cult" of Corbyn.

They don't want to see the adulation, the standing ovations, as being a newly re-uniting Party showing their appreciation and admiration for a supreme example of what can only be called "courage under fire": Corbyn's dignity and self-control maintained through two major coup attempts within the Parliamentary Party, relentless undermining from the mass media - and having to stand almost alone in the Parliament in the face of the most personal attacks by Cameron, later May, at the Despatch Box. Remember Cameron's public schoolboy bullying references to Corbyn? It even extended to comments on Corbyn's suits. And Cameron's contemptuous:

"for Heaven's sake man. Go!" which should have sparked a revolt from the Labour back benches – but didn't.

I think the members were cheering to thank him for his endurance – and not a few amongst them clapping as if to say "we're sorry for what this Party put you through." A young lad, sitting on one side of me, whom I later learned was a final year second level student, still a year away from having the right to vote, seeing the response to Corbyn's Leader's Speech, said: "I'm seeing history being made here." A battle-hardened comrade on my other side, from Southend, dismissing any cult of the personality, said: "Better (for a Leader) to be loved than feared." Corbyn is loved for all the right reasons and it's a love that's not lost on him.

A word about Momentum at Conference. Last year the media tried to stir it up by attempting to pit Momentum against the Party. This year it took a giant step towards being seen as an accepted, main stream, organization within the "broad church" - but not by everyone. That would be too much to ask for. Though a member of Momentum, I confess I still have some little question marks in my head about the organization, but not grave enough to disassociate myself from an organization that showed its undeniable worth during the General Election. By the way, I joined it as a "protest" against Labour Head Office disallowing any local meetings between members for the duration of the second Leadership election. It even ruled against local Branches holding summer barbeques, for feck sake. But, earlier this year the Momentum leadership moved to confine membership to Labour Party members only while keeping the door open, rightly, to non-Party members, who can have a role, but no voting rights unless they join the party.

Between Saturday and Tuesday evening Momentum organized a total of 200 hours of social, cultural, musical and artistic events across 8 venues, all sold out (I, a wise virgin, had purchased a season ticket in advance). On the Monday alone, it organized 24 events and, like the Labour Party, had attendances mostly in the hundreds,

not dozens, in venues which included two cinemas. The smallest attendances I saw was for CND's fringe meeting on Trident – which surprised me, though the Conference was correct not to open up the Trident can of worms at this time. Also, the Electoral Reform Society's meeting on Proportional Representation and its place in Democratic Socialism, under-attended because the venue was too small for the numbers interested – which had happened at other events also: a case of the Conference being the victim of its own success.

Two things which show the potential and seriousness of Momentum – apart from the phenomenal success of their entire "The World Transformed" (TWT) Programme, staffed by young volunteers were the following. First, their organization of a "Pop-up Think Tank" around the challenges facing Trade Unions going forward which involved shop floor and official trade union speakers and facilitators from across the board, from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) to the GMB. The second was even more noteworthy. Last year, when Momentum announced its first "The World Transformed" programme, the media depicted it as an 'alternative' Labour conference. It turned out to be a great success right across the party, with people, including top Shadow ministers, and Jeremy himself, going back and forth between both events, as, indeed, happened last year spontaneously and naturally. Last year, I was pleasantly surprised to see many openly anti-Corbynists from my own Constituency drifting into Momentum sessions and being impressed by the organization they witnessed, and the breath, openness and inclusive meetings participation techniques of the lectures, debates and its trademark "break-out" sessions to maximize attendees' participation if the debates. It's a technique I first participated in as long ago as the 1970s, in TUC training courses for shopfloor worker representatives. Strangely, it has been slow to develop within the mainstream Labour Party – at least in my more recent experience in Hackney North.

And, this year, to totally allay any possible fears about TWT growing into a de facto alternative conference, Labour Party delegates - and this was principally aimed at the new delegates to Conference - were given continuous information about debates and timing of votes in the conference hall and urged to attend. This was done using an “app” developed by Momentum.

Finally, It would be remiss of me not to mention the other dimension of the Labour Party conference: the ease of being able to engage in conversation with leading figures of the Party – and their accessibility outside of meetings: on the street between venues, pubs, restaurants. Thus, I got to talk to John McDonald about my idea that the Economic Seminars organized by him should be revived – so that the Tories would not get away with “Where’s the Money Tree?” shite in response to Labour’s change proposals. He assured me that this, in fact, is in hand and shortly to be re-launched. Or, Keir Starmer. What an approachable, no bullshit human being he is ! In this case, it wasn’t me, but a councillor from Keir’s constituency who initiated the conversation, on an aspect of Brexit. Or, Tom Watson, whom I’d met previously at a Cooperative Party event, not too full of himself to stop for a chat. I could go on. In fact, you couldn’t walk two yards without getting into conversations with comrades you’d met canvassing over the last few years. Or, whom you’ve never met before: all keen to stop and talk and exchange ideas. And that’s the definition of the social movement Labour has discovered within itself after the barren years. Long life to it. And who cares if the main stream media doesn’t understand ? The foot soldiers have been revived and re-energised. That’s all that matters. And all that you have a right to expect from such an event as the Party’s Annual Conference.

Continued From Page 24

pay back funds that he embezzled from the League and is disgraced and yet many northerners like him. Bossi is reported saying that Berlusconi has offered him a place on his candidates list. Provocative stuff.

The *LNdS* website seen on 22 September started with a strong anti-migrant rant using words which include: “*enough...layabout...endless violence*”. Berlusconi for *Fi*, is reported to be analysing the migrant situation and he suggested a UN coordinated Marshall Plan for Africa. His strategy is to use a different approach and he favours attack on the government for a situation that he sees as being “*out of control*”.

Indeed Italy is struggling to cope with migrants and the political left on the island of Lampedusa (nearest to Libya and often the first landing for migrant boats) has recently been reported using words similar to Salvini’s. Mayor Totò Martello, a *Pd* member, has said that following “*molestation of women and thieving there are enough migrants.*” He asked for Lampedusa to be taken off the *hot-spot* for migration landings. In fact Marco Minniti (*Pd*) the Interior Minister has spoken loudly about the need for all Mediterranean ports in other countries to share the landings of refugee boats. Clearly the topic is a very live and troubling issue being dealt with by Italy while the EU effectively turns its back.

The side issue being debated, or rather being used as a topic for political point scoring, is that of citizenship. Children born in Italy do not qualify for citizenship if their parents are not themselves citizens. This feeds into the case of the Rimini rapes where two of the accused are minors. More educated opinion in Italy suggests that cases like this are an exception and that children who have attended school alongside native Italian children should be able to apply for citizenship. There has been considerable debate about citizenship eligibility, with the *Pd* government publishing proposals for revising and widening them. These were withdrawn. Berlusconi later said that any relaxation in rules

would encourage people to try to get to Italy.

And what of Beppe Grillo’s *M5S*? Since the death of the co-founder, Giancarlo Casaleggio the Movement has been partly led by his son Davide, also an IT expert. The intention of continuing to conduct business, including members voting, over the internet has not changed. Davide has worked closely with the highly ambitious Luigi De Maio, also Deputy Leader of the Lower House and significant changes have been made. It is possible that *M5S* could win the next election. In this circumstance it is ludicrous for big decisions to continue to be made by a group. This had included three parliamentarians, De Maio, Fico and Di Battista. It is said that De Maio had used his networking skills and proximity to Davide Casaleggio to produce a coup within the Movement. There has been a great deal of conflict that resulted in Di Battista and Fico not standing for election. Grillo contradicted his statement of earlier in the year when he said that he would be leader for ever. Suddenly he was saying that he was 70, he would get some shoes without laces and that he would be everyone’s Papa. *La Repubblica* reported this as a dethroning.

The result was a poll of members resulting in the so-called “*coronation*” of Di Maio. However, the press were suggesting that his support within the Movement was not assured. Indeed less than a quarter of members had even voted. Di Maio also had his migrant moment. He as disparaging about the rescue boats calling them “*taxis across the sea.*”

The next few months will be strewn with political splits, alliances and argument. Attitudes and solutions to what is a huge problem: migration and citizenship are likely to be one weapon that will be wielded. Ex-premier and 10th President of the EC, Romano Prodi made a speech in Assisi on 14 September. In essence he criticised the use of issues such as citizenship as political footballs and regretted, as a founder member of the centre-left, the lack of reflection in all political parties. He also referred to the migration issue with a reference to the Pope’s speech saying that “*the church always has a principle that no one can ask anyone to carry a heavier cross than they are able to bear.*”

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

Politics and Immigration

In August a young Polish woman was raped in Rimini by a non-Italian migrant. This type of violence against women and the behaviour and rights of migrants suddenly became a hot topic for the press. Importantly for Italy, it also fuelled political debate at a time when a general election must be held within a year. The focus of this interest lies in the articulation of anti-migrant pressure that is building and can easily, as seen in the UK, be escalated by the press.

Italy has officially, and on a local level, proudly welcomed migrants who have been spread around the country, although there has been some resistance. The EU expects its members each to take a quota but this hasn't happened in practice; borders have been closed and refusals have been given. This has obviously led to anti-EU feeling within the country. On 7 September *La Repubblica* ran a double page spread headed "The fracture of Europe", which included discussion on contentious topics such as Catalan succession, Turkey, Brexit and the Visegrad countries. *La Repubblica* grouped the four eastern members: Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary together and noted the refusal of Hungary, The Czech Republic and Poland to take migrants. Péter Szijarto, Hungary's Minister for Foreign Affairs, considered the EU ruling "political and illegal". Milos Zeman, the Czech Leader is on record as saying that he would renounce EU funding rather than change his country's decision.

Many Italians hear what the Northern League's leader Matteo Salvini is also saying about migrants and agree with his stance, that it is "an invasion that threatens our society, our life and our security".

The details of the Rimini rape have precipitated Italians into examining critically the consequences of their

laudable actions in welcoming migrants. The Rimini story has provided absolutely classic fuel for generating and stirring anti-racial hatred. Two of the raping gang were born in Italy but they have illegal migrant Moroccan parents. The boys were also minors. Father had been deported for violent crimes but had returned. His wife, who remained in Italy, then had two more children. As the sexually abused young woman is Polish, the Polish Government have said that they would like to extradite the gang to be prosecuted in Poland.

In September the press were reporting more rapes by migrants. A Finnish woman was raped in Rome by a Bengali. An older woman was found in Rome's Borghesi Palace park. She was naked, muzzled and had been raped and robbed. Her attacker was possibly East European; she said he had a "clear" complexion. (A taxi driver found her, put her in the back of his cab, switched on the heater and called the police.)

Populism is currently gaining votes from the previously identifiable right or left. Or, when voters are quizzed in opinion polls they appear to be struggling to make decisions on who to vote for. A forthcoming Sicilian regional election is being seen as a predictor for the general election. *La Stampa* of 21 September said that 37% would vote for the centre-right candidate, with *M5S* and the centre-left on 29% and 28% respectively. But a distinctly different answer was given to the question of who would actually win. 32% were "don't knows", while the centre-right and their candidate Musumeci was given a 28% chance. *M5S* were a clear 10% higher than the centre-left.

The Sicilian elections have other complexities; the *M5S* candidate has been declared illegal after problems with his registration but is still in the running. He is also a close political

ally of *M5S*'s new leader, elected at the Movement's weekend gathering 20/21 September. This is yet another controversial election.

It is difficult to know where to start in giving a concise explanation of the current state of the three political groupings in Italy.

Paolo Gentiloni's centre-right *PhD* (*Patriot Democratico*) is in government while the party is led by Matteo Renzi, who resigned as Premier following his Dec 2016 referendum defeat. A split produced a small left-leaning party the *Mdp* (*Movimento Democratico e Progressista*) which nets an insignificant number of votes, but leeches support from an already weakened *Pd*. The *Mop*'s very existence, and its inability to reach consensus on a life-saving coalition with the *pod* highlight the disarray across the left. This year's regional elections saw widespread absenteeism, the most extreme example being the traditional left stronghold of Emilia Romagna where a little over 30% of people voted. There is pressure within the left to re-appraise the policy towards migration. The left are also unable to resolve the issue of the unpopularity of Renzi, who voters widely consider to be dictatorial. The left will stand a chance at the next election only in the, just as likely, circumstance that the other parties fall apart.

Forza Italia's (*Fi*) everlasting Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Salvini of the *Lega Nord* now *Lega Nord di Salvini* (*LndS*), both significant political figures and leaders of centre-right and very right-wing parties, could form a coalition, except that they share a mutual distrust and dislike. *La Stampa* of 22 September showed a photo of Silvio patting the League's founder Umberto Bossi on the head, rather like small dog. Bossi has been ordered to

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