

Labour Affairs

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Corbyn On A Roll

The Tories recent annual conference didn't go well for Theresa May. She received sympathetic support for battling through her speech with an irritating cough and the embarrassment of receiving a P45 from stunt comedian Simon Brodtkin. But it appears that the Tory faithful are abandoning her in favour of the right-wing, social conservative Jacob Rees-Mogg. He has said he would not be a candidate in any leadership election. But he may be pressured into standing by his fellow MPs, as an alternative to Boris Johnson who many backbenchers see as a loose cannon.

It is likely however that the Tories will stick with Theresa May at least until the Brexit negotiations have been completed. But it is abundantly clear that the Tories have lost their way. They no longer know what the party stands for and are therefore unsure of the direction it should take. This is manifested not only in the divisions within the cabinet over Brexit, but also the expressed alarm right across the party over the increasing popularity of Corbyn's Labour party.

Fear of a Corbyn Labour government was ubiquitous at the Tories conference. With Philip Hammond and other senior Tories warning that Corbyn would take the country back to the 1970s, a favourite theme of the Tory supporting Daily Mail. The 1980s Thatcher government did more damage to the economy and to working class communities than Labour, burdened with crippling high oil prices, did in the 1970s. But not a bad word was spoken about the Blessed Margaret. Many Tories want to complete the work that she started, and Blair continued, when Britain finally leaves the European Union.

Amendments to the EU Withdrawal bill, supported by members across the House of Commons, have been introduced. If they are carried they would give MPs a binding vote on the final deal. But it would require an act of parliament to formally enact Brexit. However, serious negotiations have yet to start and further delay could damage the prospects of a final deal. A No deal would force Britain onto World Trade Organisation rules, with, potentially, high tariffs on goods and services. This would satisfy the Europhobe Tories, who accuse opponents of talking the country down, but it could have dire consequences for the economy.

Labour is playing a smart game, by simply being spectators for the most part. While the Tories tear themselves apart over Brexit, Labour is getting on with being an opposition. They attack the government on its economic record and its apparent indifference to the negative effect of its policies on poor and vulnerable families and individuals. May's slogan 'A government that works for everyone' is widely seen as empty rhetoric. Attacking Corbyn and frightening voters with the prospect of a Labour government no longer works.

One senses that May knows this, which is why she is stealing Labour's policies. Some of which, not so long ago, she and her senior colleagues described as 'Marxist'. The cap on energy prices, the scrapping of the charge for calls on the Universal Credit helpline, the freezing of tuition fees and raising the salary point at which loans begin to be repaid, are all examples. Labour has been urging the government to take these steps for months. The government have announced the changes in policy, knowing that they are losing the support

among the over 55s voters and need to win over the lost under 25s. Labour have the government on the run.

Labour's policies resonate strongly with voters. Opinion polls show that they support public ownership of energy, rail and water; want the pay of chief executives to be curbed; are willing to pay more tax to support the NHS; and call for tighter market regulation. And they are not impressed when Theresa May boasts record numbers of people in work when they know that the UK workforce is the lowest paid in Europe. Voters see that Corbyn is right: free-market, neo-liberal capitalism has had its day.

There is a positive change in confidence and tone in Labour. Corbyn is beginning to look and sound like a Prime Minister in waiting. Even Tory grandee Michael (Lord) Heseltine has said that he can see him in Downing Street. This is not a prospect he would welcome, but nevertheless a ringing acknowledgement of the great strides Corbyn has made since the general election in May. Further endorsement of Labour, albeit for the last Labour government under Gordon Brown, came from former Chancellor George Osborne. He now accepts that Brown and his Chancellor Alistair Darling called the right shots over the 2008 financial crisis. Heseltine and Osborne are no longer on the Tory ship, but they give every sign that if they were, in its present state they would desert it quicker than the proverbial rats.

And there was further support for Labour from a surprising source. The Tory conference

warned that Labour's tax plans would lead to a 1970s-style brain drain. (There is no evidence that this happened but the Tories love their scare stories). However, in a recent report the International Monetary Fund said that the rich (globally) could pay more tax to help reduce inequality without hindering economic growth. It would be a matter for individual governments to decide the level of tax, but nevertheless the principle of higher taxes on the rich has been endorsed by an authoritative international body, whose wisdom is usually appealed to by the Tories.

It was the sight of Chancellor Denis Healy running to the IMF, cap in hand, for a loan in 1976 that set Labour on the slippery road to defeat in 1979. So Labour today shouldn't allow IMF support to go to its head. It needs to have a clear head and keep the momentum going. Letting the Tories stew in their own Brexit juices. But at the same time it is taking steps to foil a hard Brexit, by placing an amendment to the EU Withdrawal Bill that will give Parliament a say on the final terms. In the meantime Labour is focusing on the bread and butter issues that voters most care about. It is now a united party, with close to 600,000 members. It performed extraordinary well in the general election last May. But winning the next general election will be a monumental task. It will require Labour staying united and convincing voters it has a creditable programme to re-build Britain as a fairer, more equal society.

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Editorial Board

Dick Barry Christopher Winch
Jack Lane Madawc Williams

labouraffairs@btinternet.com

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

Distribution

Dave Fennell

Editorial Address

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

Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

“FREEDOM OF THE SEAS” (GERMAN INTERPRETATION). 14 February 1918

Mr. PENNEFATHER asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if he has any information as to the meaning attached in Germany to the phrase, “The freedom of the seas”?

Lord R. CECIL The most recent declaration on the subject to which my attention has been drawn emanates from Count Reventlow, who is reported to have interpreted the meaning of the phrase as follows, at a public meeting in Berlin in March, 1917: What do we Germans understand by freedom of the seas? Of course we do not mean by it that free use of the sea which is the common privilege of all nations in time of peace, the right to the open highways of international trade. That sort of freedom of the sea we had before the War. What we understand to-day by this doctrine is that Germany should possess such maritime territories and such naval bases that at the outbreak of a war we should be able, with our Navy ready, reasonably to guarantee ourselves the command of the seas. We want such a jumping-off place for our Navy as would give us a fair chance of dominating the seas and of being free of the seas during a war. (Cheers.) The inalienable possession of the Belgian seaboard is therefore a matter of life and death to us, and the man is a traitor who would fainheartedly relinquish this coast to England. Our aim be not only to keep what our arms have already won on this coast, but sooner or later to extend our seaboard to the south of the Strait of Calais. It is, of course, obvious that the phrase as used elsewhere has a very different signification.

Mr. TREVELYAN Does not the Noble Lord think that a more important statement of the Central Powers is that of Count Czernin, in which he said that he accepted the interpretation of the phrase “freedom of the seas” given by the President of the United States of America?

Mr. SPEAKER The question here is as to the meaning attached to the phrase in Germany.

Mr. CHANCELLOR Would the right hon. Gentleman say whether Count Reventlow is supposed to be the official mouthpiece?

Lord R. CECIL I do not know that he is. He is a member and a representative of that clique in Germany which has usually exerted its sway over the Government of the country.

Mr. CHANCELLOR Is he anything more than a private person who happens to be a German?

Lord R. CECIL He may be a good deal.

Mr. ALDEN Does the Noble Lord think that Count Reventlow expresses anything more than the opinion of the German Navy League?

Lord R. CECIL It is impossible for me to say, but I should be glad if the hon. Member will tell me what in his judgment is the interpretation of this phrase in Germany.

Mr. LYNCH Can the right hon. Gentleman give us the meaning attached to this phrase in the United

States?

Mr. SPEAKER That does not arise out of the question.

GOVERNMENT POLICY.

14 February 1918

James Myles Hogge (19/4/1873-27/10/1928) was a British social researcher and Liberal politician. He was first elected to the House of Commons in an Edinburgh East by-election in 1912. He held the seat until 1924, when he was defeated by the Labour candidate Drummond Shiels.

Mr. HOGGE I am sorry that the Leader of the House has not kept the agreement which I made with his party Whips. I was perfectly prepared to move the Amendment I had down on the Paper and to agree to finish my speech before eleven o'clock, and I rose at two minutes to eleven in order that my Amendment should be got on the Notes. The Leader of the House has frequently said that if hon. Members of this House are not satisfied with the Government the proper course is to move a vote of “No confidence.” I have no confidence that the Members of the Front Opposition Bench will ever move such a vote, for although yesterday they “got over the top,” in speeches, in “No Man’s Land” they sheltered themselves in the shell holes made by the Leader of the Opposition. I think the Leader of the Opposition will do me the

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This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

credit of believing me when I say that I have never been afraid of stating my opinion regarding this Government. I have been prepared during the whole period of three days to move a Vote of "No confidence" in the present Government, because I do not believe in their capacity for making either peace or war. We have been discussing for three days a large number of Resolutions, all of which could have been included in one general vote of "No confidence." We have had a teetotal Debate for the last two hours which could easily have been raised on a general vote of "No confidence." It was not raised in that way, because the teetotal Members of this House are quite willing to wound the Government by an Amendment on a teetotal question, but are afraid to strike the Government when it comes to a question of voting against them. I believe in knowing where we are on subjects of this kind. I say quite frankly that I believe the present Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, are incompetent to make either war or peace.

In the Debate on Tuesday the Prime Minister accused me of deliberate falsehood in this House. He said he was not a party to any communication from Downing Street to the Press of this country. I told him, and I repeat it now, that he was not telling the facts with regard to this matter, and it is a prevarication which can be proved. I challenge the Prime Minister, and I hope the Leader of the House of Commons will convey the challenge to him, to set up a small Committee of three Members of this House of Commons, and let those of us who know the journalists who have been to Downing Street, and have got the information, give evidence before the Committee, which shall report to the House of Commons whether

or not it is true that these bits of information and this Press campaign did emanate from Downing Street. I am perfectly prepared to stake what public reputation I have—I think very little about that at all; it does not worry me at all—on an inquiry of this sort, and that is the point I wish to raise. I do not mind arguments being against me, but I do mind Ministers in the House of Commons riding off on these side issues. If I had had an opportunity of getting in on the Address, I would have said certain things. I would have said that there is a great difference between the points of view which we must take up now and the point of view which we took up when we went into the War. When we went into the War it was absolutely necessary that there should be unity among the nations. At that time we all went to war for different reasons, and there was no time to consider all the various reasons that brought the whole of the people of this country into the War. But now that the War has developed to such an extent that it includes practically every nation in the civilised world. I think that we ought also to have regard to that second point, which is extraordinarily important, and that is whether policy now ought to supersede the question of unity. We as a nation must find out what is our best policy in dealing with this War, and whether we ought not to sacrifice to the question of policy the more superficial question of unity in regard to the War.

Those of us who make this kind of criticism are frequently asked what we would do. I am perfectly prepared to tell my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House what I would do if I were in his place. It may, of course, be very presumptuous, but, after all, in this House hon. Members are never afraid to consider the views

expressed by another hon. Member, whatever his political views, and we arrive at conclusions here by a general consensus of opinion. I will tell my right hon. Friend what I would do if I were in his place. I would give up telling falsehoods in public about the strength of our Army and our Navy. I would give up misleading the public on those points. I would, further, give up telling more falsehoods when we get into Secret Session of this House of Commons. I accuse—and I do it deliberately, because I raised these figures originally—I accuse the Prime Minister of deliberately misleading this House of Commons after he has misled the public outside on his figures. After all, this is our country, and out of the complexity of this War we all want our country to come strongest. We do not want to be handicapped in the future race, and I say that if I were in the position of my right hon. Friend I would deliberately set about a policy—and I suggest it to him quite seriously—whereby I would ruthlessly comb out the Army on the Western Front until it contained, like the Army of Joshua, nothing but the most fit men for the purpose of fighting. I would release every other man for civilian and industrial work at home in order to build ships so that we might keep this country in food. Remembering what our small "contemptible" Army did in the early days of the war; remembering that it held up the advancing forces of the highest-trained troops in Europe, I would depend upon our modern Army, chosen in the way that I have suggested, sitting tight on the Western Front and preventing the Germans making any advance until the great power of the United States could be used against the Germans.

Why should this country go on sacrificing its men, and its money,

and its material while there are other great civilised Powers in the world who are professing to help us? In all conscience we have done enough! We have served the cause of civilisation enough, and we want a policy by which our men and our country can be protected. It may not be the right policy. I do not claim it, but it might be. I put it forward as my policy, the ruthless combing-out of the Army, so that the German forces might be held on the Western Front until the forces of the United States are prepared to come in. I say I this deliberately, although I am not a military man—there are military men in this House who can say what they think of the opinion— that if we are to depend on a purely military decision in this War, this War may last for ten, fifteen, or twenty years. Now this Government to-day is putting all its money upon the military decision. That is proved by what is going on outside this House at this precise moment. I am quite certain that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House of Commons could not say to-night whether Sir William Robertson will be at the War Office in the morning. Everybody knows what is happening outside the walls of this Chamber. Everybody knows the kind of offers that have been made to the man who is in charge, who happens to be a Scotsman, and who happens to have this view of the situation— that if the Government do not like him they have to dismiss him. He considered himself competent enough for the work he is asked to do. If the Government do not think him competent the only way they can get rid of him is by dismissing him, which means that the Government is pinning all its attention on a purely military decision. I think that is wrong. When you look at the conquests of Germany in this War— and, after all, we have to face the facts— they have all brought material benefit to the German Empire. They have the coal mines, they have the granary of Europe, and everything that will help them to fight us. Every

conquest that we have made— glorious as the military achievement has been in getting them— has been a burden to the country.

Colonel Sir R. WILLIAMS No!

Mr. HOGGE Yes— Palestine, Mesopotamia.

Sir R. WILLIAMS What about the Colonies?

Mr. HOGGE My hon. Friend again knows it to be so. Because of these things our great Navy and mercantile marine is so being used that we are not getting the food supplies for this country that we might otherwise get. I am not objecting. I am glad that we have done it. I am saying that they are a burden to us, and that Germany's acquisitions in that sense are not a burden to them. Germany has got the granaries to supply them with food and the coal mines to supply them with coal. Our military achievements are actually weakening our position. Take the personnel of this Government. There is the Leader of the House of Commons. Incidentally, as a critic who perhaps has annoyed him as much as anybody in the House, I pay my tribute to him for the way in which he attends to the House of Commons. He is always prepared to meet us half-way. Take the speech which he made the other night on the alternative vote. He said that he and his Friends went into the Division Lobby because it was purely a party issue. Well, we Liberals—

Sir G. YOUNGER Did the same thing!

Mr. HOGGE My hon. Friend who, like myself, is a Scottish Member, says that we did the same thing. He is quite right about the fighting members of the Liberal party, but he will also know that the Liberal members of this Administration, which he supports, did not go into the Lobby in favour of the Liberal side of this Division. If he wants the names I will give them. If the members of this Administration who are drawing out of the same pool as the Leader of the House of Commons had gone into their Lobby, the Liberals would have

had a majority of twenty-one in that particular vote. I do not think that the Leader of the House of Commons had any business to be thinking during the War of a party subject. He is a member of the War Cabinet. This War Cabinet should get its collar down either to the making of war or the making of peace. That is the burden of my complaint. The Leader of the House of Commons has done sentry-go in this House while a so-called Liberal, who is Prime Minister at the moment, has carried on this War. I could make a long speech if I wanted about the folly and incompetence of our present Prime Minister. He came into power promising this country victory and success. He came into power to do things now. He has given us neither victory nor success. He has given us 1s. 3d. worth of meat a week, ½lb. of sugar, and 2 ozs. of margarine.

This has been the achievement of the present Minister who presides over the destinies of this country. But what I should have liked would have been to come to grips with this Government. I think we want a new Government, a smaller Government, with fewer men in it, and with the one thought in their mind all the day, and all the week, and all the time, that either we must make war successfully, or we must bring this country out on terms of peace which are an advantage to it. They want to comb out all the Departments, they want to strafe all the hotels. This country is to-day in the hands of the policeman who used to direct the traffic, but who to-day direct the domestic lives of the people of this country. If the Government would get down to that that would be the business, and they would get the support of intelligent Liberals in this House instead of the support of the Front Opposition Bench. [Laughter.] The House laughs, but after all this is a tremendously serious thing. This country has spent a lot of money and has lost a lot of lives, and many on the Front Bench have lost the lives of the people they cared for most

in the world. We have got to get out of this. What I feel at the moment is that there is too much of the policy of drift in the Government, who do not know where they are going. You have got the irony of this situation, that the Government which came in on the policy of "Do it now" is waiting and seeing at this moment. That is the trouble. We are told that Russia is out of the War. Everyone says Russia is out of the war. Is Russia out of the War? I suggest, in all seriousness, that Russia is not out of this War, and that if this country is thrown into antagonism to the Revolution in Russia, Germany, through Russia, may, on the policy of self-determination, attempt to set up new buffer States between Russia and India as the result of the policy which we also largely adhere to at the moment. One sees the kind of exhibition that went on yesterday from the Foreign Secretary. We have all witnessed many scenes in this House, but the one we witnessed yesterday reminded most of us of the days when we were at a public school and used to go paper-chasing. It is that kind of thing that makes me feel that the present Government has not got a grip. I am quite sure it has not got it.

The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland told us yesterday that there were ninety-one members of the present Government. I do not know how we can recognise them. I suggest to the Leader of the House that he might suggest to the ninety-one members of the Government that they should wear a brassard so that we might know them when we came up against them in the House of Commons. In the half-hour on the Adjournment Motion one cannot develop an argument, and I should have liked on the Address to get really to grips. Either this Government possesses the confidence of the country or it does not. I have no wish for people to get up in this House and say it does not who are not prepared to test it. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will do me this amount of credit, that I will test it at any time he likes, even though there are only the two Tellers in the opposite Division Lobby. I am sick to death in this House to see leaders of progressive opinion who continually contend that this Government does not retain the confidence of the country and who ride off on all sorts of Amendments to the Address to the King. Let us take the gloves off. If the Opposition mean business let them take the gloves off and fight the Government. This Government ought to be fought. I believe it is the most incompetent Government that ever sat within these walls, with the laudable exception of the Leader of the House, who always meets the House quite fairly. That is why I should have liked the opportunity to move an Amendment directly challenging the policy of this Government. I believe I am only the harbinger, and that in a few months we shall have got rid of this Government and be on the road either to a successful military victory or to a settlement which will bring peace and contentment to this country.

Question put, and agreed to.

TRUTH AS AN ILLNESS

It was beating the dollar-a-day
 bod
 someone
 robbed
 their family of food
 to make an IED
 concede
 so many prayers
 so many gods
 still there the wheelchair
 in care
 the examination
 here to share
 16 years hasn't fixed
 this mess
 never mind the tears
 it was duress
 that strategy
 for the region
 I know
 they're leaking again
 my lesions
 but I haven't passed
 have I
 no extra money
 may as well say
 goodbye
 wait?
 I'm not running
 this fodder won't
 anymore
 double-march to order

I do have
 post-traumatic-stress-disorder!

Wilson John Haire

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



The 17th October 1961

The 17 October 1961 is the date of a set of demonstrations of Algerians in Paris, against the imposition of a curfew. Police reaction was extremely violent, many Algerians were killed and injured, 14,000 were arrested and taken to internment centres where more deaths and injuries occurred. The state news next morning only made mention of '3 deaths'; there is no official tally of deaths or acknowledgment of responsibility to this day.

At the time, De Gaulle had already conceded that Algeria should have autonomy; on 20 May 1961 negotiations had opened in the town of Evian between the French government and the FLN (National Liberation Front). The representatives of the FLN were given protection against possible attacks by the OAS (*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*) who opposed Algerian independence. In August, De Gaulle agreed that the Sahara should belong to Algeria, and that paved the way for the negotiations to proceed. Why then this massacre of unarmed Algerians demonstrating peacefully in Paris?

There was strong opposition to granting independence to Algeria or giving up 'French Algeria' as it was called. It wasn't just the OAS that fought against the independence of Algeria, members of the government also shared that position, all the way up to the

Prime Minister, Michel Debré. Debré at the time no longer had responsibility for the Algerian question, but he was in charge of law and order in France.

Debré was so opposed to De Gaulle's position on Algerian independence he presented his resignation, which was not accepted. Debré then demanded the replacement of the minister of the interior, an ex-collaborator of Pierre Mendès-France, who disapproved the violent methods of the prefect of police, by another man who shared Debré's hostility to Algerian independence.

A book published 2017 throws light on the question. It is Marie-Odile Terrenoire's "*Voyage intime au milieu de mémoires à vif. Le 17 octobre 1961*" [Personal Journey through burning memories: The 17 October 1961] and it contains the notes written by one of De Gaulle's ministers who supported Algerian independence, Louis Terrenoire, published by his daughter. The notes were written by Terrenoire during cabinet meetings (he was minister of information); diary extracts are also included.

During WW2 Terrenoire engaged in clandestine operations from 1940, was secretary of the National Council of the Resistance, was arrested by the Gestapo, tortured and deported near Dachau. There he met Edmond Michelet, a Christian like him.

Edmond Michelet was a Resistant, arrested and deported in 1943. He became minister of Justice in 1959; he improved the prison conditions of FLN prisoners, stopped executions and let FLN prisoners organise life in camps and prisons. Debré accused him of protecting writers who had denounced torture and summary executions practised in Algeria. Debré had Michelet replaced by someone more in tune with his own ideas. From 23 August 1961, when Michelet went, extra judiciary repression together with increased censorship became the order of the day. Debré also wanted Terrenoire removed, but De Gaulle kept him as his personal spokesman and minister delegated to the Prime Minister.

With the removal of Michelet, the prefect of police, Maurice Papon, was able to organise auxiliary police forces which made night raids in the shanty towns of the suburbs, demolishing homes and arresting residents, who were imprisoned or herded in internment centres, some of which had been used to detain Jews during the occupation; other paramilitary groups machine-gunned cafes and hotels frequented by Algerians; these attacks were described in the press including *Le Monde* and the radio as 'FLN attacks'. On the 5th October a night curfew was imposed on the Algerian population. This curfew was illegal since Algerians at the time

had French nationality. It was implemented by threat of violence. The leadership of the French FLN reacted by organising a number of large peaceful marches in several locations in the centre of Paris. Police reaction was massive and went on for several days, as thousands of Algerians were arrested and corralled in internment centres, beaten, tortured and killed, in addition to those killed on the streets; and near the bridges (St Michel, Neuilly, Clichy), thrown into the Seine.

After the massacre, there were very few, muted, protests. In March 1962, a general amnesty was declared for crimes and misdemeanours committed related to law and order operations during the Algerian war; the matter of the massacre had been dropped much before that. Since then, even when there has been some official recognition that events had taken place, they were mentioned as a general 'repression' and no responsibility assigned or acknowledged. For example the Mayor of Paris presided over the unveiling of a plaque on the St Michel Bridge on 17 October 2001 "to the memory of the many Algerians killed during the bloody repression of the peaceful demonstration of 17 October 1961". The same day there was a walk out of the right of centre and right deputies in the Chamber of Deputies when mention was made of a 'racist curfew' in 1961.

Similarly, on the 2012 anniversary, Francois Hollande made an official announcement that 'On 17 October 1961, Algerians demonstrating for the right to independence were killed in the course of a bloody repression. The Republic acknowledges these facts with lucidity. Fifty-one years after this tragedy, I pay homage to the memory of the victims.' (The demonstrations were not 'for independence', but it is true that they were part of that struggle.)

Marie-Odile Terrenoire was shocked to hear, in the course of a non-governmental commemoration which took place in Paris in 2011, the events qualified as 'state crime'. That demonstration was organised by a number of associations. Marchers held up silhouettes bearing the names of Algerians killed or disappeared on the 17th and subsequent days. The son of one of the ministers who were like Terrenoire and Michelet in favour of the independence of Algeria, Denis Joxe, had made the silhouettes. Unlike the original marches, this one was mixed Algerian and French.

When historians began to attempt to write an account of the events, they found many documents had been destroyed. When archives started to be opened, two reports ordered by ministers were written, neither of which satisfied historians. So, why this massacre when negotiations were underway?

Marie-Odile Terrenoire wishes to show that it was not a state decision or a state crime, since some ministers, including her father, were in favour of Algerian independence, as was De Gaulle. British historians Jim House and Neil MacMaster, authors of an important book on the subject, on the contrary throw the blame on De Gaulle. According to them,

it was to put pressure on the FLN that, from July to October 1961, De Gaulle gave Debré and his associates enough room of manoeuvre to implement a strategy of intransigence. The extreme anti Algerian violence unleashed during September and October 1961 is not so much due to uncontrolled extremist elements in the police (the official version of events) but rather the instrument of government policy. In other words, intense repression was designed to challenge and weaken the FLN and make sure they were not in a position of power during the negotiations. Anti-FLN police actions continued unabated after the event of mid-October, leading to the arrest of important FLN leaders 9-10 November.

MANNEQUIN AS PRESIDENT

She ranted on about women's rights in
politics
wanted a president in place without
a dick
she would use her maternal instinct to take humankind
to her bosom
though she didn't mention the torturous death of Gaddafi and
her laughing
as gruesome
nor of Bin laden and her loud wow at his demise
by her country's assassins
and with each drone decapitation
did she admit to a high-five
she squeezes humanity out of the
TV screen
but the blood-waves lap the cyber-shore
as she preens
while the talk-show-host drives deaf-mute-blind
through her valley of severed limbs
whilst attending to her every
whim
his explosives are catherine-wheels
his witches and demons
makes for nothing more than Halloween
so much chat
nothing ever revealed
it seems

Wilson John Haire.

A Letter From Our New Zealand Correspondent

Feergus O'Raghallaigh

"New Zealand is set for a centre-left coalition government led by Labour head Jacinda Ardern.

"Ms Ardern has been opposition leader for the last three months. At 37, she is set to be the country's youngest prime minister since 1856.

"Her Labour Party came second in September's election, where no party was able to secure a majority.

"They are now tipped for power after the small New Zealand First party agreed to join them in government.

"The new coalition will also be supported by the Green Party..."

"New Zealand First head Winston Peters on Thursday announced his party's decision to ally itself with Labour, after 26 days of negotiations.

"His party holds the balance of power with nine seats, while the Labour-Green bloc has 54 seats and the National Party 56 seats.

"He said his party was faced with a decision between 'modified status quo or change' and decided to go for change." (BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41675801>)

The result finally, of the general election here has inevitably prompted comments on the continuing power of 'populism' around the world. Winston Peters ('Winnie') and his New Zealand First (NZF) party have ended up holding the balance of power between the National Party and Labour and choosing to go with Labour. So Labour is back in power for the first time in nine years with again, Winnie in the driving seat.

I am not too sure that Winnie and New Zealand First are 'populist' – or rather I really do not know what the word means, if anything actually in current political discourse. Trundling the term around the world and sticking it as a label on anyone who in any way deviates from some kind of (usually externally) imposed imagery of an imagined British-style left/right model throws little to no light on the particular political events that might be in focus – for example Winnie's decision to back Labour, the Trump presidency, the Austrian situation and so on.

I am more inclined to try and read runes from a perspective of local particularities rather than externally imposed political-theoretical models. Life is more complicated and nuanced than hacks and university lecturers imagine. Is China capitalist? Are the US Democrats leftist socialists? What is Fianna Fail (or indeed Fine Gael)? Is Corbyn's

Labour 'ultra'?

Peters and NZF have been around a very long time – and been and are a considerable force in the politics of this country over that time. Peters personally has been a powerful figure, predating his creation of the Party in 1993. He split from the National Party at that point where he was a leading figure under Bob Muldoon (some thought him prospectively next leader). Instead Muldoon's National imploded, Winston went solo, Labour (under David Lange) came to power and with Roger Douglas as finance minister, privatised everything (including the labour market) leading to a series of crises in the economy (including a banking collapse) and the society.

If Winston is anything he is a 'Haughey-type' figure, though I hesitate to say this. It is the application of a label and image that relates to Ireland and not New Zealand. Howsoever, it is a somewhat useful categorisation.

Peters is Maori (mixed race but Maori). He loathes Maori politics and hates the Maori Party with its quasi-separatism and its application of this ideology to the Waitangi Tribunal treaty settlement processes. He sees it as almost a form of inverted apartheid. He is in this sense a one-nationist, a "New Zealander" as one might say. He

is at best agnostic on the separate (homeland-type tribally based) Maori electoral roll and Maori seats in parliament.

During the election he very briefly campaigned for a referendum on the continuation of the Maori seats arrangement. However he abandoned the proposal pretty quickly when Labour (for its own historical reasons and its campaign strategy to win all of the Maori seats in the election) came out against the idea.

I actually think Winnie has a point: at least there should be a very serious debate about it all. The majority of Maori actually are not on the Maori roll, are urban dwellers and not in their tribal homelands and have fully entered the Pakeha society, if mainly in the lower socio-economic strata with all the problems this entails. In a sense Winnie fully represents this – thus 'New Zealand First'.

In this regard he actually believes in government-directed and led economic development actions toward provinces like Northland, which are home to very big Maori populations (and Winnie's home territory). The policy is one of national development – which bourgeois (usually Pakeha) townies from Auckland sneer at as tax-funded, public spending and waste. It is racism.

Winnie is also a consummate democratic politician in a real social-democratic mold and tradition.

He is a 'welfare-state' man in for example his policy toward older people and pensioners. He invented what is called here the Gold Card which gives pensioners free travel and they love it and him for doing it many years ago. He plays to the grey vote - although 'play' is maybe not the right word. Similarly his ideas on regional development and natural resources.

Peters also regrets a passing - the industrial economy of the Muldoon years in particular, destroyed and wrecked by the capitalist class first unleashed by Labour governments of the 1980s and continued since under National. 'Muldoonism' to coin a term, was of course based on protection and there may have been excesses. However the free trade and privatisation policies of Labour ('Rogernomics' as it was called) and under National, the Jenny Shipley government, ruined entire towns and swathes of country, communities and indeed Maori and dismantled the welfare state.

There is no going back to be sure. On the other hand the rampant speculation on land and property that now prevails here is a real problem for ordinary New Zealanders. Also the role of simply serving China: to see the convoys of logging trucks and huge freight trains all full of raw logs heading for ports and then to China and ultimately presumably to Ikea in Dublin and elsewhere is a bit much to put it mildly. I don't know how many Kiwis I have met and conversed with who explode with anger on one thing: the logging operations and the trucks heading to a local port (you have to see a felling operation and the logging trucks to begin to understand). Peters has an idea of regional economic development, a renewal of regional and provincial life and economy, which seems to me to be fair enough when you look at the desolation of today in former thriving communities, the results of free trade, de-industrialization and the rationalisation of the dairy and meat processing industries.

There is also the issue of immigration. Again Peters will be cast by commentators as 'populist' and 'anti'. On the other hand New Zealand is

experiencing explosive population growth including to a considerable degree through immigration. I think that would be fine and dandy - if government was directed about this. Instead governments in this country have not spent a penny on infrastructure, schools anything since the 1930s and 40s (apart from laying waste to Auckland and a bit of Wellington through covering them with motorways. Infrastructure, housing, schools and so on are disintegrating and the earthquakes of recent years have exposed this neglect. It is amazing for me to be in this country from the point of view of electricity - brown outs and black outs all the time, all the result of having a market for electricity, including creating a series of state companies all competing with each other - the market model. This country cannot at present cope with the influx of immigrants - ironically including thousands of Kiwis returning home from an increasingly viciously racist and anti-foreigner Australia. 'The Lucky Country' is today an awful place.

Part of the problem with immigration is the failure to invest in education and training thus creating 'skills shortages' - the old English system and problem to this day lives also in New Zealand. This is hugely ironic as the working class in this country has within it a huge 'tradie' element, skilled artisans and so on, electricians, plumbers, mechanics, agricultural contractors, all kinds of skills and skill groups and reflective of an enormously rich skills-based past destroyed by de-industrialisation. It is the 'Polish plumber' problem in another country.

Part of the problem also is the foreign money - Chinese, American, Indian, especially, all pouring into a country the borders of which were as far as foreign capital is concerned, in the private sphere finally completely dismantled by John Key as prime minister. He is an ex-Wall Street money flipper: what more need one say.

Again I think lots of New Zealanders see problems but also are two-minded about it all. On the one hand they can see problems every day and see the need for some kind of significant

controls and state intervention. On the other there is the joy of becoming a paper millionaire because of property valuations - and the further joy of seeing Yanks and Chinese at your gate wanting to buy your dairy farm or vineyard or simply your house and garden. Again Peters sees all of this - and in particular, the situation in Auckland, which is now approaching something like an Indian city, homelessness on a gigantic scale, people literally living in cars and under bridges, teachers and others fleeing the city because of living costs - a kind of miniature London in the southern hemisphere.

Winston hates it all. It is a little more complex than Winston sees it, some of the inflow has been invigorating in some little but important sectors - the wine and viticulture industry in particular. Having said that, the big thing that immigration has highlighted is how bad the state has become in its provision of basic public services and how much the privatisation of everything and opening up to the market has rotted physical and social fabric and corrupted politics and public administration. Europe to my mind is intent on going the same way - but that is an aside.

I could go on (and on) but my point simply is 'populism' does not do justice to Winston or indeed to any of the others to whom it has been applied, including The Donald.

Winston is real and in a real, substantive middle ground dealing with local circumstances from a point of view. He is not a socialist or anything like that. But he is someone who can see the wreckage wrought by a rampant market-based capitalism particularly when it takes the state and its politics prisoner - as it is intent on doing in Europe today, in my view.

Is Peters a stone-age fool? A primitive and harking to Hitler? I think not - even I suggest Corbyn might just read up on things here as might everyone, which brings me back to my starting point: current political labels and constructs make no sense at all

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Behind every Great Man there's a Great Ape – Harvey Weinstein

The Weinstein scandal may have begun as the Establishment throwing one of its own to the wolves. But now many more are emboldened to speak out.

As we long suspected, it's not unusual:

"Sir Tom Jones has said the abuse and harassment alleged to have taken place in Hollywood is also widespread in the music industry.

"The singer was discussing the allegations surrounding Harvey Weinstein...

"'Things have always happened in the music industry as well,' he said.

"Asked... whether it was something he'd experienced, Sir Tom replied: 'Yes. At the beginning, yes.

"'There were a few things like that. But you avoid it. You just walk out... But what's tried on women is tried on men as well.'"¹

Behind every Great Man there's a Great Ape. Where apes and monkeys live as groups, the top male claims all of the females. Males are much bigger than females, mostly to help them fight other males. Only where the two sexes form pairs are they much the same size.

Humans are the grand exception. We live in huge social gatherings, whereas pair-bonded apes live well away from others of their species. The Top Male has extra women, but most women are pair-bonded and the Top Male mostly respects this. (Though women until recently had little choice about who they were

pair-bonded to.)

Cinema, theatre, music and fashion are exceptions. Many people seek entry: sex is one way in. This helps sexual bullying and rape become acceptable. Women can't easily prove that they hadn't originally consented.

One problem is the void after Christian Morality was deservedly undermined. 1960s radicalism talked loosely of freedom, freedom without limits. Then when some of the mature Baby Boomers were taken into existing power structures, it was convenient to cast fog and darkness on awkward exceptions to 'Everybody Free'.

The Sexual Revolution unexpectedly extended its boundaries to include Gay Marriage. Someone who'd suggested in 1965 that the Irish Republic would within 50 years vote 2-to-1 to legalise it would have been treated as insane. But there was a fierce rejection of Under-Age Sex. Milder but definite rejection of polygamy, bestiality and incest.

I'm not saying that the things forbidden should be allowed. I'm saying that humans always operate within *areas* of freedom. Young people in the tricky process of metamorphosing from children to adults definitely do need protection and care: a lot more than they are currently getting. The rest is about what sort of society we want to live in.

The trick used by the now-powerful elite of Baby Boomers was to think '*anything I don't like, isn't freedom*'. This lets you still defy boundaries that the society

recognises but that you wish to overthrow. That was the norm for gays and lesbians, socially confined even when not criminalised. (Lesbianism was never illegal in Britain, but lesbians had to stay obscure until the 1960s.)

Heterosexual sex before marriage and outside of marriage was a wider, deeper and more significant change: one that challenged much more of the social order.

Not acknowledging the shifting limits on Freedom was convenient for the now-powerful elite of Baby Boomers who had been taken into the Establishment. It made it easy to deregulate business and finance: Feed-the-Rich economics. It helped disempower the majority, hiding from them their power to define and redefine what was or was not Freedom.

That sex must always be consensual *ought* to be the most solid and unalterable principle. But if the rule you are using is '**anything I don't like, isn't freedom**', it becomes much easier to cheat. To bully and to rape. To say '*I should be able to do it my way*'. Which is why some clear thinking is needed.

'Pulp Fiction' Good, 'Pulp Facts' Bad

My first question when the scandal broke was '*who the hell is Harvey Weinstein?*' Most of us know the stars and sometimes the directors. Producers are needed to raise vast amounts of money that may well be lost completely in an unpredictable business. They don't have huge public profiles, which must contribute to nasty attitudes.

They have power over people who are much more famous than they are. So who is this man that everyone now hates?

“Harvey Weinstein CBE is an American film producer and former film studio executive. He and his brother Bob Weinstein co-founded Miramax, which produced several popular independent films including *Pulp Fiction*, *Clerks*, *The Crying Game*, and *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*.”²

“[*Pulp Fiction*] features an ironic combination of humor and strong violence. Its script was reportedly turned down by Columbia TriStar as ‘too demented’. Miramax co-chairman Harvey Weinstein was instantly enthralled with it, however, and the film became the first that Miramax fully financed.”³

I found *Pulp Fiction* gifted but repellent. Treating vicious gangsterism as if it were normality. Adding demented quotes from the Bible. A mainstream US cultural fantasy in the New Right era, with its debased version of Classical Liberalism. The world is a lawless snake-pit of competing individualists. You just play and you don’t make the rules.

I’ve not seen the other three films. *Clerks* and *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* sound just as bad. *The Crying Game* features a transsexual mistaken for a woman, making it standard aggression to normalise the latest trends in liberalism.

Pulp Fiction does not glorify or excuse rape – that has long been unacceptable. That famous 1943 film *The Outlaw* had a romanticised Billy the Kid rape Jane Russell’s character: she accepts this and falls in love with him.⁴ Once common in films, but after a lot of protests it was pushed out of the mainstream. Driven underground, like overt White Racism.

Some people try to excuse Weinstein’s behaviour as ‘sex addiction’? Almost all of us would say he could have as much sex as he was offered or could buy. But not bully or use force to get sex from some particular person he fancied.

‘Sex addiction’ excuses the

misbehaviour of the powerful. We do not recognise Car-stealing Syndrome or Pickpocketing Syndrome. The left-liberal sometimes find excuses, but it has been justly ridiculed by saying the next step would be ‘my brain made me do it’.

It has also been said the US system of elected District Attorneys helped protect Weinstein and similar rich offenders.⁵ But similar things happen when the Establishment control it all: they protect their own.

Myself, I feel sympathy for needy people who do victimless crimes, mostly stealing food. But most crime is not victimless. Most criminals are not needy or poor. And it is no way to run a society.

Trump, a White Racist Like His Daddy Was

White racism and the acceptability of raping ‘loose women’ are among the things driven underground in Britain and the USA. Covertly believed by some right-wingers. Cynically exploited by others.

Both British Tories and US Republicans tap into racist feelings while avoiding being overtly racist. Allowing non-white immigration while denouncing it. What they really believe is anyone’s guess.

(Try imagining what you’d do if you had the cynical intention of getting racist votes without alienating too many non-racist voters. Then try finding a difference between this and actual centre-right politics. Any suggestions?)

Labour MP Frank Field tells us that Harold Wilson thought politics was

about being able to ride two horses at once. ‘If you can’t do that you shouldn’t be in the political circus.’⁶ Labour has ‘boxed clever’ on Brexit, but has always been the party of clear anti-racism. Likewise Democrats in the USA abandoned their traditional Southern Racist voters and the Republicans from Nixon onward gave them a home. Riding two horses quite nicely before Donald Trump took a hand.

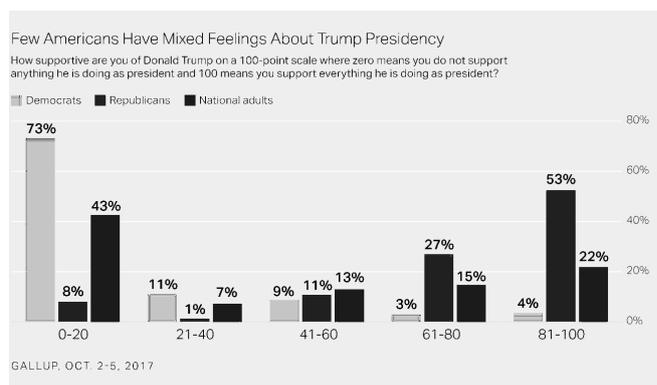
Trump is a one-horse thinker, as subtle as a bulldozer. He probably privately cherishes the fading values of White Racism, once the core of US identity. Hence his reaction to black players showing reservations about the Nation Anthem in games of American Football.⁷ A horribly insensitive phone-call to the widow of an African-American soldier killed in one of the USA’s ‘special operations’, saying “*He knew what he was signing up for, but I guess it hurts anyway.*”⁸ And a lack of concern for Puerto Rico, still suffering from hurricanes boosted by the Global Warming that Trump denies.

It is not just a lack of positive aid: Puerto Rico is hampered by a long-standing legal oddity: “Getting goods from the US mainland to Puerto Rico is much more expensive than sending them to Texas or even to other Caribbean islands as a result of a century-old man-made disaster that’s been crippling the island’s economy for a long time.

“Meet the Jones Act, an obscure 1920 regulation that requires that goods shipped from one American port to another be transported on a ship that is American-built, American-owned, and crewed by US citizens or permanent residents.

“For most Americans, this isn’t a big deal — it enriches a small number of American shipowners while introducing some weird distortions into the overall pattern of economic activity in the United States.

“For the



residents of the island of Puerto Rico, though, the Jones Act is huge. Basic shipments of goods from the island to the US mainland, and vice versa, must be conducted via expensive protected ships rather than exposing them to global competition. That makes everything Puerto Ricans buy unnecessarily expensive relative to goods purchased on either the US mainland or other Caribbean islands, and drives up the cost of living on the island overall.”⁹

“While President Trump announced Sept. 28 that he was suspending the Jones Act for Puerto Rico for 10 days as an emergency measure, that period ended Sunday and now the Jones Act is back in force for the island.”¹⁰

‘Free Trade’ has never been a real belief among politicians with the power to do something about it. Politicians would face hostile feedback from the rich if they were more honest. But the neglect of Puerto Rico is bizarre. Legally part of the USA, but not treated as such.

There is a logic to it. Trump fights an end-game for principles he won’t openly voice. And it’s not hopeless: he has almost as many people enthusiastic for him as bitterly against him.

Donald’s father Fred was a business genius. He made the fortune that Donald inherited and may have diminished. Also an open White Racist and activist: “On Memorial Day in 1927, the Ku Klux Klan marched in Queens to protest that ‘Native-born Protestant Americans’ were being ‘assaulted by Roman Catholic police of New York City’. Fred Trump was one of seven men who were arrested that day ‘on a charge of refusing to disperse from a parade when ordered to do so.’”¹¹

The empty liberalism of people like the Clintons has trashed the traditional US sense of community that was also all-white and male dominated. It tends towards ‘Asocialism’.

It has been justly said, ‘*If everyone is my brother then no one is my brother*’.

Which makes no allowance for women: *Comrades* does that. Socialism can harmonise where both covert white racism and asocial liberalism have failed.

Private Finance – a Lousy Legacy

“A Labour government will end the private finance initiative (PFI) ‘scandal,’ bringing all contracts and workers back into the public sector, John McDonnell announced yesterday.

“The shadow chancellor tore into deals that would see nearly £200 billion of taxpayers’ money siphoned to private companies over the coming decades...

“PFI was introduced by Tory prime minister John Major in 1992 as a way of using private cash to fund public infrastructure projects.

“Use of the schemes accelerated under former Labour PMs Tony Blair and Gordon Brown as they used PFI to fund improvements and new buildings in schools and the NHS, keeping the debt off the national books.

“But the deals proved costly and inefficient and Britain’s total PFI debt is now £300bn for projects worth just £55bn, meaning almost £250bn of profits has gone straight into the pockets of privateers.

“It would have been far cheaper to raise the money needed by issuing bonds, on which Britain has for years had to pay extremely low interest rates.

“Mr McDonnell told conference that an eye-watering £831 million in profit has been taken from the NHS in the last six years.

“A Labour government would develop alternative public-sector models for funding infrastructure, with the aim of saving taxpayers’ money and improving services and working conditions.

“Mr McDonnell told delegates that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has made it clear that never again would taxpayers money be used to subsidise shareholders’ profits, “often based in offshore tax havens.”

“He called on the government to take immediate steps to ensure companies based in tax havens can’t own shares in PFI companies and hide their profits from HMRC.”¹²

India – Illiberal Democracy

“US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said the US wants to deepen co-operation with India in the face of

growing Chinese influence in Asia.

“He described India as a ‘partner’ in a ‘strategic relationship’, adding the US would ‘never have the same relationship with China, a non-democratic society’.

“He said Beijing sometimes acted outside international conventions, citing the South China Sea dispute as an example.”¹³

China has an excellent claim to those islands, and refused to let an international agency barge into the issue without real authority.

China has settled all of its other border issues, except with Japan and India. It would probably accept the current lines of control as final. India will not drop its claim to the Aksai Chin, uninhabitable desert useful only for a Chinese road. Claims it as part of Kashmir, repeatedly refused the right of self-determination.

To most people’s embarrassment, a leading member of India’s ruling party has called for the demolition of the Taj Mahal. Built by India’s Muslim Moghul dynasty, whom he calls traitors.¹⁴

Indian economic policy disappoints the beleaguered New Right. The BBC tells India that any apparent success is a fluke. That they should immediately switch to policies that alienated Russia in the 1990s and now are visibly failing in the West:

“Is Mr Modi beginning to lose his mojo? Three years ago, when he won his landslide, he promised reforms and jobs. But under his leadership - and at a time when the world economy appears to be taking off - India is looking like a sorry outlier, battling an economic slowdown and a jobs crisis.

“Banks are struggling with mountains of bad loans, which in turn has choked credit and hurt domestic investment.”¹⁵

Snippets

UNESCO Punished

“United States withdraws from UN cultural agency Unesco”.¹⁶ That was a recent *Irish Times* headline

British media were surprisingly quite about the matter. Which has a history: “After withdrawing from UNESCO in

1984, the United States rejoined in 2002...

“On 12 October 2017, the United States notified UNESCO that it will again withdraw from the organization on 31 December 2018 and will seek to establish a permanent observer mission beginning in 2019. The Department of State cited ‘mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO.’”¹⁷

Also Trump is a vulgarian who hates the idea of Public Service. Very common in the USA.

China Deciding

Amazingly enough, most Chinese are not eager to embrace all aspects of current Western culture. They took in plenty in the 1980s. But in the Nineteen-Nineties and Twenty-Zeros, they saw the West display a mix of greed, malice and incompetence in its efforts to impose its values globally. A system that was anyway coming apart, with drastic economic failure from 2008.

Chinese Communism follows the normal Leninist pattern of a Party Congress every five years, to make the big decisions. This time it confirmed President Xi’s power and his scorn for Western wishes. Officially recognised his ‘Thoughts’. Failed to designate a probable successor in the way Xi himself was designated in 2007.¹⁸

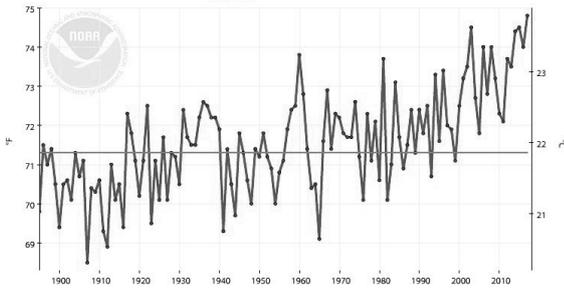
What else? I will say more next month. I might post sooner on my blog, <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>.

California Burning

“Much of California is naturally hot, dry, and prone to fires for parts of the year. But the state’s population is growing, leading to a significant overlap between the areas of high fire risk and areas with a growing population density...

“There are some unique weather conditions that are driving the exceptionally swift California fires, like strong winds and high temperatures. But long-term trends linked to global warming also exacerbated this year’s fire season, not just in California but in other states too.”¹⁹

California, Average Temperature, June-September
 — 1901-2000 Mean: 71.3°F — Avg Temperature



“Much of California is naturally hot, dry, and prone to fires And in Portugal. Red skies seen in parts of Britain with Hurricane Ophelia comes in part from Portuguese wildfires. They too are more frequent as the world warms.

Secession – Criminal Unless It Wins a War

The United Nations Charter mentions both Secession and Territorial Integrity as rights. Does not say what should happen if they clash. But many members have minorities that might want to secede. Territorial Integrity has always come first.

Early members include the British Empire and other noted Imperialists. France was a Permanent Member of the Security Council, and helped by the USA to get back control of Indochina. Likewise the Dutch in Indonesia.

Anti-Imperialists created a *United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories*. Helped free non-white colonies from European empires. And behaved inconsistently, demanding that Argentina get the Falkland Islands, a purely British settlement on land with no original inhabitants. Awarded half of Papua New Guinea to the entirely alien peoples of Indonesia. The other half was treated with untypical tolerance by Australia and is now a sovereign state. It includes Bougainville, which would more naturally belong with the Solomon Islands. Accidental colonial boundaries are mostly respected, to keep peace.

Both the Iraqi Kurds and the Catalans claimed a right to self-determination. Sadly, international law does not recognise or uphold it. Catalans are unlikely to start a war. Kurds do not seem strong enough or united enough to win one.

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/>. Blog at <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>.

(Endnotes)

- 1 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-41672902>
- 2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Weinstein
- 3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulp_Fiction
- 4 <http://www.2020-movie-reviews.com/reviews-year/1943-movie-reviews/outlaw-1943-movie-review/>, <http://www.apocalypselaterfilm.com/2013/02/the-outlaw-1943.html>. This was not mentioned in the film’s Wiki entry until I added it.
- 5 <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/10/16454182/cyrus-vance-harvey-weinstein-ivanka-donald-trump-junior-prosecute-donations-write-in>
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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 widely.

Dictionary definition of foot soldier: "a dedicated low-level follower."

In this issue:

- (1) "R & R - & R"
- (2) "An idea whose time has come"
- (3) "The Grownup in the Room"

(1) "R & R - & R"

R & R is, of course, Rest and Recreation: what happens when the pressure of electioneering and canvassing is off and the foot soldier is left with time on his or her hands. The third "R" is for Reflection: taking stock of where we are.

In a nutshell, while it's hard not to see 2017 as a turning point in British politics, within this year October will have a special place. It marks the point when the dust settled at the conclusion of the Party Conference season and we were left with the contrasting images of Corbyn and May's performances at their respective conferences - May's shambles, on the one hand, and Corbyn's strong and stable handling of the Labour conference, on the other. We are left with something else: confirmation of the General Election result and permission to accept and indulge the thought that there has been a fundamental sea-change in political ideas. Something else needs to be noted about October that may have been eclipsed by bigger events. At every level, from ward, or Branch, to the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party there has been change towards greater direct pro-Corbyn representation and, also important, enhanced Corbyn influence across the party. This has been felt in the selection process of candidates for next year's council election, and for other local and regional selection processes. Meanwhile, October has been a good month for Labour in council elections up and down the country too. So, much to reflect on.

"Corbyn's Momentum group is recruiting teams of paid activists on £25,000 salaries to oust Tory MPs around Britain."

A somewhat disingenuous headline in the Daily Mail, October 22. Momentum is recruiting a small number of full time team organisers not thousands of team members. Momentum duly posted the Mail article as it stood on Face Book and Twitter - to receive, in the first 12 hours, 9,000 visits to the Momentum

recruitment page. "Thanks to the Mail," Momentum posted, "we're expecting an even more diverse, experienced and enthusiastic set of candidates for the positions."

(2) "An idea whose time has come"

Victor Hugo it was who coined the aphorism: "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come." There is no clearer or better statement of this new idea than Jeremy Corbyn's, but, as a loyal foot soldier I would say that. It goes: "You can't cut your way out of a crisis, you can only grow your way out of it." That's it. That's the big idea. Around the elaborations of that simple idea you could write volumes. And people are writing them as the argument against neo-liberalism and austerity economics gathers pace. And now, that more and more people are grasping the relevance of it, we are beginning to see a political transformation happening.

At this year's annual Labour Conference, in the aftermath of the General Election, Jeremy could say: "2017 may be the year when politics finally caught up with the crash of 2008 - because we offered a clear choice. We need to build a still broader consensus around the priorities we set in the election, making the case for both compassion and collective aspiration. This is the real centre of gravity of British politics. We are now the political mainstream." (Official Party Transcript). What should be noted is the absolutely straight line between Jeremy's economic views at the very beginning of his bid for the leadership of Labour and the views he enunciated at Conference.

The source of Jeremy's "grow yourself out of a crisis" quote is one of the first labour leadership televised debates. First broadcast by Sky in 2015, it is still available on You Tube. Just google "Yvette Cooper Rips into Jeremy Corbyn. Or Does She?" There, only two short years ago, you will hear Yvette defend the Blairite neo-liberal "austerity lite" old idea and attempt to put the frighteners on the audience of Labour Party members present about what would happen to Labour "credibility" if Jeremy's idea won through. Her "killer" question was intended to be: "Well, Jeremy, how is the spending policy on

infrastructural development going to be paid for?" The audience, hearing Jeremy's answer, conclusively and spontaneously grasped the truth of what was, within the Labour Party, a new and radical reframing of an idea that had been gathering traction since the 2007/8 crisis, rejected her argument. It is an absolute gem of a video capturing a key moment in the ideational transformation of the Labour Party and I can't understand why it hasn't enjoyed more "hits" on YouTube. (Aha! I can help to remedy that: I'm pausing here to post it (again) on my Face Book page. There: done! I ask you to do likewise.)

Here is another approach to spelling out what is happening: "Ever since Thatcher and Reagan it has been the common sense of the age that the markets should rule, the public sector diminish and the growth of inequality allowed to accelerate... But none of it works any more. And the public knows it." Jon Trickett, Labour's Shadow Lord President of the Council (don't ask: google. Clue Privy Council). LabourList, October 17. Another Labour Shadow Minister, Chris Williamson, says "Corbynomics is now the mainstream." In support of his claim he cites statements made during the month by the OBR (The Office for Budget Responsibility), the IMF (International Monetary Fund), a cross section of British sectoral businesses – all calling for measures to "kick start" the ailing global and local economy – all in line with Labour policies and at odds with the Conservative Party's clinging to out-dated Thatcher-Reaganomics with a bit of Corbyn-lite policies thrown in, under pressure to hold the line with her party moderates. When the measures being put forward

by Labour at a recent PMQs were dismissed by Theresa May as belonging to "Planet Venezuela," it was one of those "is that all you've got?" moments.

(3) "The Grownup in the Room"

"Corbyn's meetings with EU leaders shows Labour as the Brexit grownup, "was a heading in the Guardian, October 23. "This cordial welcome on the continent can be explained by variations on one theme: credibility." A few days earlier the Independent had published the findings of a Bostock Management Group survey which found that as many as three quarters of the British public believed the Tory government's Brexit strategy was failing. Almost half think a "no-deal" scenario – much beloved by the hard-line Tory Brexiteers - would be bad for the country. They also opined that abandoning the talks ought not to be an option. (Independent, October 20). Of course, the rise of Labour to the status of an alternative government must come as a relief to the EU leaders, especially in the light of the fairly extensive Bostock Management Group survey of which they would be aware. They must see Labour as its best chance of resolving the Brexit mess, to Britain and Europe's optimal mutual satisfaction. After all, the EU senior players are on record for recognising that internal Tory Party personality politics was not only the source of Brexit, but continues to be the major complicating factor in the Brexit negotiating process itself.

It should be mentioned here, in connection with the EU leaders' response, that Corbyn and his Labour colleagues also received a rapturous reception at the EU-

wide "Socialists and Progressives Together" Conference in Brussels, a gathering of over 1,500 social democrat and progressive MPs, MEPs and others. Paul Mason also spoke, as a Labour activist and leading economist to an equally enthusiastic response. Their speeches can be found on YouTube at: "Jeremy Corbyn Speech and Q&A for Socialists Together Conference"; "Paul Mason Speech and Q&A for Socialists Together Conference"

In an article in the Guardian, "The Storm Clouds are Gathering," the UK economy was described as follows: "Business confidence dipping... inflation rising... consumer spending falling... household incomes shrinking." (October 24). Yet despite this and the debacle over Universal Credit, the NHS and Brexit - the quasi triumphalism of what's been written above about Labour's time having come - the most recent ICM/Guardian polls put Tories and Labour at 42% - neck and neck. (Lib Dems are at 7%). And, coming down the track (Final Report due 2018) is the Boundary Commission proposed changes, pointing to changes to the detriment of Labour – certainly enough to make a difference in a tight result.

Let's enjoy the break from electioneering - for however long it lasts. Enjoy the astonishing gains that have been made over the last few years. But not let's become complacent. There's a feckin' mountain to climb.

Zionism as the Abolition of Jews

by Gwydion M. Williams

The existence of Jews as an interesting minority within European culture is something entirely different from the colonisation of Palestine.

Zionists find it convenient to lump the two issues. They denounce anyone against their current hard-line policies as anti-Semitic. And in particular to throw hazy accusations against the British Labour Party.

The reality is much more complex. A summary existing of viewpoints would include:

1. Against Jewish minorities but willing to tolerate Jews settling in Palestine. (Included the Nazis, and also some of the Britons behind the Balfour Declaration.¹)
2. Against Jewish minorities but favouring Jews settling in Palestine. (Included some of the other Britons behind the Balfour Declaration. In today's world, a lot of the Christian Right in the USA. Also some secular US Republicans, who accept individual Jews sharing their view, but note that most Jews are against them, whereas Israel is increasingly a valued ally. This view is also shown by some Backwoods Tories, but very few in the Tory leadership.)
3. Unconcerned about or friendly to Jewish minorities and favouring Jews settled in Palestine. (Included yet more of the Britons behind the Balfour Declaration. Some of the secular US Republicans, and most Tories.)
4. Unconcerned about or friendly to Jewish minorities but against the original idea of Jews settled in Palestine. (The mainstream British ruling class position until it was decided that Jewish support was needed to win World War One.)
5. Unconcerned about or friendly to Jewish minorities but against the continuing expansion of Israel and suppression of Palestine. (Most of the world, including the British Labour Party and most of the left globally.)
6. Members of Jewish minorities against the original idea of Jews settled in Palestine. (Many well-integrated Jews, particularly before the rise of the Nazis. Also some religious Jews, for whom it was blasphemous to do this except as a clear Act of God, probably involving the appearance of the Jewish Messiah.)
7. Members of Jewish minorities against the continuing expansion of Israel. (Mostly left-wing Jews, but also some varieties

of religious Jews.)

8. Members of Jewish minorities who wished to end the separate existence of Jewish minorities in favour of a new Israel. (Hard-line Zionists.)
9. Members of Jewish minorities who wished to preserve the separate existence of Jewish minorities, but see Israel as a necessary refuge and a backup. (Soft-line Zionists or hazy supporters. Often alarmed by current Israeli policies. Note that a majority are not religious, or have religious feelings that are not expressed through Judaism.)
10. Members of Jewish minorities who broadly favoured ending the separate existence of Jewish minorities by merger into larger peoples. (This tends not to be a separate political position, but is a vast number of individual choices. Commonly the decisive point is a wish to marry outside Judaism: conversion of the non-Jewish partner can happen but is viewed with suspicion and sometimes rejected by religious hard-liners in Israel.)

There is a big difference between the existence of Israel and the continuous expansion of Israel beyond the generous share of land given to them by the United Nations settlement of 1947. Some early Zionists even hoped for land east of the River Jordan, where there were indeed Jewish populations in Biblical times.

Myself, I think the Balfour Declaration was a foolish move: a selfish strategy by the British Empire that double-crossed its Arab allies. It encouraged the idea that Jews belonged in Israel and had no right to be anywhere else.

The creation of Israel after World War Two was understandable – many millions had been killed, many more marked for death. And there was no certainty then that Jews in Europe would be safe in the long run.

I had been friendly to Israel up to and including the Oslo Agreement, which apparently split the land on terms favourable to Israel but giving the Palestinians a place. But I was one of the minority who saw Israel as mostly to blame for the breakdown of this agreement.

I was also sure from early on that the attempt to create a pro-Israel Arab world by knocking over secular dictatorships was astonishingly foolish, as well as wicked.² Those dictatorships were the best popular

governments that were likely to actually function in fragmented societies where party politics could easily turn into Civil War.

I'm now seeing it as a car-crash in slow motion. Western efforts successfully replaced secular dictators who might have made peace on sensible terms. They are being replaced by religious extremists who would be willing and even eager for an all-out war, very probably nuclear. I see the militancy of the dominant elements within Zionism as suicidal.³ I've said all this: and as a long-standing Labour Party member, I'd love to see someone try to expel me for antisemitism.

Accusations of antisemitism are used selectively. President Eisenhower compelled Israel to withdraw to the 1949 Armistice Line after the Suez Crisis of 1956. You'd assuredly be accused of antisemitism for suggesting that Israel now should withdraw to these lines, mostly called 'the 1967 borders'. But I've never heard Eisenhower accused. It is of course relevant that he remains well-remembered by most people in the USA.

Ken Livingstone got his Labour Party membership unfairly suspended for daring to mention that there was some cooperation between the Nazis and certain Zionists. As I've said before, he could have put it more clearly.⁴ Nor did Hitler 'go mad': Hitler's racist views led him to believe that Jews would always be incompatible with the pure 'Aryan' race he was determined to rescue. But there were also limits to what Hitler could do in peacetime, and he was quite happy with the idea of dumping the problem on the Arabs. Jewish communities trying to conciliate the Nazis were merely applying a strategy that had worked before, at a time when they had few good options. But nothing that Livingstone said justified his suspension.

Now we have the case of Dr Moshe Machover. This has been widely

misreported, which is probably not an accident. He was accused of antisemitism; but he was convicted of breaking Labour Party rules on involvement with other left-wing organisations.

The common rule has been that you can't be a member of any organisation that carries on electoral politics in competition with Labour, which is fair enough. Loose association with the Communist Party of Great Britain has always been common on the Labour Left, but that party fragmented in 1991, with its dominant Eurocommunists giving up. Its newspaper *The Morning Star*, always somewhat independent, has carried on separately and Corbyn regularly contributes. But Machover was linked to something very different, a small group called the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee). (There is also a separate Communist Party of Britain formed by a separate substantial anti- Eurocommunists faction and some other smaller groups claiming to continue the Leninist mission.)

With its surviving Blairite influence, the attitude of the Labour Party machine has mostly been Guilty Even If Innocent. But they did link Moshe Machover to the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee), which still tries to be a functional Leninist Party. He has published in their newspaper, *Weekly Worker*.

Removing Machover this way was much safer than trying to get him for antisemitism. He was born a Jew in Tel Aviv in what was then British-ruled Palestine. Growing up within Israel, he became anti-Zionist and floated the idea of a joint revolutionary movement of Jews and Arabs, which was more feasible then than it would seem now. He moved to Britain in 1968 but does not seem to have changed his views much.

Leninism was Militarised Socialism. This was justified in the Tsarist Empire, where a parliament

had existed since 1905 but was not in control and had largely been prevented from making moderate reforms. Leninism was strengthened by the bulk of Europe choosing war in 1914, including big socialist parties that had promised otherwise.

The destructive war continued through to 1917, when the population of Russia's big cities overthrew a government they had come to despise. I do not see the Bolsheviks as mistaken in grabbing power when it became clear that nothing coherent had emerged out of the February 1917 Revolution. When regular politics had produced only a government determined to carry on with a destructive war, and hesitant about Land Reform.

It was also reasonable in 1917 to see the Soviets as a more democratic alternative: open attitudes were lost after a bitter Civil War which reactionary landowner militarists, supported by foreign powers, came close to winning.

It was also reasonable to see political pluralism and drift as likely to mean a repeat of Europe's 1848 revolutions and France in the Paris Commune, when excellent left-wing intentions led to failure and a brutal triumph by reactionary forces. And there were good grounds between 1921 and 1941 in seeing Bolshevism or Fascism as the main alternatives.

What was unreasonable was European Leninism's failure to demilitarise when it should have. They still had good grounds to carry on as before when the Cold War began: Europe's colonial empires still largely existed. White racism was still the norm in the USA and very strong in Western Europe. Women in Leninist systems had far more rights and opportunities than in the West. Back then, Leninist regimes upheld a broadly tolerant and modern attitude about sex (though not including homosexuality).⁵

What was both unreasonable and tragic was the failure of Moscow-orientated Leninism to respond to

the massive changes in Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. The potential was there, with the Prague Spring in 1968 and later the highly successful transformation of People's China after Mao. But it did not happen.

While he might well be innocent of what he's been expelled for, I cannot find much fellow-feeling with Machover. I'd define myself as Post-Leninist – the movement was justified in its day, but that day is long past. Short of a nuclear war (which currently seems not a wholly absurd possibility) we should not be thinking of going back to harsh militarised methods when other methods work much better.

What concerns me more is Labour still letting itself be bullied on its supposed infestation with antisemitism. Myself, I found my ideas clarifying to see it as Zionism as the Abolition of Jews. This disentangles the two issues, Jewish minorities in other societies and Israel as an expansionist state. States with a religious-sectarian attitude were once fairly normal but have been increasingly abnormalized since 1945.

For me, the main Jewish identity is Jews as a very innovative minority within Western civilisation. It was mostly external pressures that led them to copy the sectarian nationalism that was developing all around the Jewish communities of Europe, and that was an historic tragedy.

Western Europe's initial reshaping of itself came entirely from its Latin-Christian majority. The cultural renewal of the Renaissance was in itself nothing very exceptional: it correctly viewed itself as a recovery of things that had flourished in the Roman Empire and in the Hellenistic kingdoms before that. Science was part of it and the Catholic Church was quite favourable to it, on the assumption that nothing much would emerge to contradict their theology. When Galileo showed otherwise, they cracked down and in fact sterilised science in Italy and

other territories that they had a firm grip on.

Galileo was a member of an Italian learned society called the Accademia dei Lincei (literally the Academy of the Lynx-Eyed, from that animal's presumed clear vision). This and not the 19th century notion of heroic lone geniuses is what made science, and was developing strongly as part of the Renaissance. Cracking down on Galileo for reporting inconvenient truths could neatly be described as 'blinding the lynx'.

As it happened, the violent splits within Europe's Latin-Christian culture meant that 'blinding the lynx' failed both in Protestant Europe and in Catholic countries like France that were keen to limit papal power. Defenders of Catholicism correctly note that Protestant theologians were even more hostile. I think it was Hungarian Jew and sometimes Leninist Arthur Koestler who first brought this out clearly: his 1959 book *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe* remains much the best account. But what mattered in history was that the Protestant clerics could do nothing to impose their narrow views, and mostly stopped arguing with scientific truths. Science proceeded, and created the basis for modern industry.

Science also proceeded without any Jewish input until much later. Jews were only drawn into Enlightenment culture in the 18th century. Socialism came out of radical Christianity and was quite well developed when some Jews and most notably Karl Marx were drawn into it. Jews were not important in science before the second half of the 19th century. I have been unable to discover any Jews at all involved in the highly radical birth of modern industry, which happened in parts of Britain where there were very few Jews. Jews were often prominent in spreading the new industrial methods beyond their countries of origin, most notably into the Austrian or Austro-Hungarian Empire, where antisemitism became intense. But

this was hostility based on historic ignorance.

That Jews should be drawn into vast changes happening all around them was unsurprising. Less expected was these newly integrated Jews becoming a very innovative minority within Western civilisation. For me, that is the main Jewish identity. Zionism is a deviation, and one that is less and less justified in a modern multi-cultural world.

The British Labour Party played a major role in creating the modern multi-cultural world, whereas Tories were weak or hostile. It was the Tory-dominated National Government that allowed Hitler's rise, and showed no concern about open antisemitic policies. A boycott of the 'Hitler Games', the 1936 Berlin Olympics, might have changed history. But it never happened, though a few left-wingers wanted it.

Labour's reputation is solid – always welcoming to Jews and if anything influenced by Zionism. We must not let ourselves be pushed around on the matter.

(Endnotes)

1 See 'Taming the Jew' by Pat Walsh for some British ruling-class attitudes. *Irish Political Review*, September 2017.

2 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/politics-various-articles/starting-the-iraq-war-2003/>, <https://gwydionwilliams.com/46-globalisation/reflections-on-the-start-of-the-iraq-war/>

3 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/politics-various-articles/zionisms-suicidal-militancy/>

4 <https://gwydionwilliams.com/politics-various-articles/ken-livingstone-not-antisemitic/>

5 See <https://gwydionwilliams.com/history-and-philosophy/the-left-redefined-the-normal/> for more on this

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

Universal Credit

Roll-out. 18 October.

Universal Credit was first introduced in 2012 by Ian Duncan-Smith when Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. It replaces six welfare payments for working age people in and out of work with a single payment. It is being introduced gradually across the country. In those areas where UC is operating, it has been heavily criticised for serious delays in payment and the financial shortfall in the payments themselves. There is abundant evidence that UC is creating more poverty and increasing anxiety among its recipients. Labour's Opposition Day motion moved by Debbie Abrahams highlights these problems and offers a practical solution. The motion was carried by 299 votes to 0, the government having told Conservative members to abstain. There is no record of who voted but it is believed that one Conservative member voted for Labour's motion. The motion does not bind the government to act upon its content but it is normally advisable for it to take account of the feelings of the House of Commons.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) I beg to move, That this House calls on the Government to pause the roll-out of Universal Credit full service.

I am delighted that we have secured this vital debate on universal credit, given the concerns across the country and among Members on both sides of the House. I am aware that some 90 people have put in to speak, so I will take only a few interventions from both sides of the House. I will try to get through my key points as quickly as I can.

Our motion calls on the Government to pause the roll-out of universal credit while the issues associated with this key social security programme are fixed. I genuinely offer to work with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to fix the many and varied issues associated with universal credit. To understand what needs fixing, we need to understand how we got here. When universal credit was first introduced in 2012, it had the underpinning principles that it would simplify the social security

system, bringing together six payments for working-age people in and out of work, and that it would make work pay.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab) My hon. Friend talks about the underpinning principles. Surely, one of those should be that our social security system should not drive people into debt, yet that is precisely what is happening to my constituents who are waiting months for payments.

Debbie Abrahams Absolutely, and I will go on to make those points in a moment. Getting back to the principles, we supported those then and we support them now. The Government wanted to pilot the implementation of UC, so they introduced a number of pathfinder areas, including my Oldham constituency, and planned a phased roll-out between 2013 and 2017.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con) My constituency was also a pathfinder, and since the introduction of UC in 2012, the claimant count in my constituency has halved. Does the hon. Lady think the two issues are connected?

Debbie Abrahams There may be many and varied reasons why the claimant count is down, not least the system of punitive sanctions the Government also introduced in 2012.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab) Newcastle was also a pathfinder constituency. As the local MP, I have seen at first hand the absolute misery and destitution that this system has forced many of my constituents into. Our Newcastle food bank was already the largest in the country, and now it regularly runs out of food as a direct consequence of this system. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister's attitude at questions earlier today showed a total lack of understanding of the impact and of the destitution and suffering of so many of her citizens?

Debbie Abrahams This is a real test for the Government; if there is a genuine desire to make life better for everybody across the country, UC is a key way in which we can respond. I am so sorry to hear about the issues in Newcastle as a consequence

of the introduction of UC.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) I can report to my hon. Friend that I have had exactly the same experience in my constituency, where people are being driven into destitution by the waits for UC. The local food bank, alongside the citizens advice bureau, has estimated that if this full roll-out goes ahead just six weeks before Christmas, leaving everybody destitute for Christmas day, it will have to collect 15 tonnes of extra food to deal with the demand that will be generated by these changes.

Debbie Abrahams This is the reality that people are facing; this is happening in the areas my colleagues have mentioned, and our concern is that, as this is rolled out to 55 areas this month, the situation will get even worse.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) The motion calls for a pause in the roll-out. Is she going to tell us what the Labour party would do during that pause period?

Debbie Abrahams The hon. Gentleman is pre-empting my speech, but I will happily propose exactly what we would like to do in conjunction with the current Government, whose programme this is.

From the start, there were a number of serious design flaws, which the Work and Pensions Committee, of which I was a member, raised in 2012. They included, first, the fact that UC applications would be "digital by default"; in other words, applications could only be made online. There are still several issues with that, not least the assumption that everyone is computer-literate or has ready access to getting online. We all remember the scene in "I, Daniel Blake" where somebody who had not used a computer before was trying to do so, and we saw the real stress and difficulties he found.

Secondly, there were concerns that UC payments would be made monthly, in arrears, and paid only to the main earner of each household, so women, as second earners, are automatically discriminated against in this process; it was also quite a radical change, with rental payments going directly to the household and not the landlord.

Thirdly, there were considerable doubts about the use of so-called real-time information, which was meant to ensure that information from employers to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs would allow the Department for Work and Pensions to calculate quickly what people in low-paid employment would be entitled to from UC. The reliability and validity of this data exchange was another key concern. I believe there is a DWPRTI issues group, so there are clearly still problems.

Finally, the Government said that disabled people would not be financially worse off under UC, but because the severe disability premium payment has not been incorporated into UC, it is an effective loss of up to £62.45 a week for a single person—more than £3,200 a year.

All that was in 2012, but a number of other issues emerged in the following couple of years—universal jobmatch, ballooning costs and of course several delays. One of the most worrying issues revealed in the January 2015 UC regulations was that people in low-paid work on UC will now be subject to in-work conditionality. So, for example, someone who is one of 1 million or so people working on a low-paid, zero hours contract, with different hours from one week to the next, will have to demonstrate to their Jobcentre Plus adviser that they are trying to work 35 hours a week and if they fail to do that to that person's satisfaction, they can and will be sanctioned. For Members who are unfamiliar with this concept, those people will have their social security payments stopped for a minimum of a month.

Fast forwarding to the 2015 summer Budget, the then Chancellor announced that cuts would be made to the so-called universal credit work allowances, which are how much someone can earn before UC support starts to be reduced. For example, a couple with two children claiming housing costs had their work allowances cut from £222 a month to £192 a month. In addition, approximately 900,000 families with more than two children could not receive support for third or subsequent children.

The UC equivalent of the family element in tax credits was also abolished. The Government's equality analysis showed that women and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities will be most adversely affected by these work allowances cuts. Let us recall what the principles of UC were and then consider that the Institute for Fiscal Studies stated at the time that the cuts to work allowances

meant the principle of making sure work always pays was lost. The Government's claim that UC is leading to more people getting into work is misleading, as it is based on 2015 data, before the work allowance cuts came into effect.

The current Chancellor's attempt to redress some of the damage of these cuts by reducing the UC taper rate in last year's autumn statement has had a marginal effect. Members may recall that he reduced the rate from 65% to 63%, so that for every £1 earned over the work allowance, 63p of UC support is withdrawn. That is a far cry from the 55p rate envisaged when UC was first being developed. On that basis, the Resolution Foundation estimated that some families will lose £2,600 a year because of these cuts.

This summer, the Library analysis that I commissioned showed the real-terms impacts on different family structures and for different income groups. It found that a single parent with two children working as a full-time teacher will be about £3,700 a year worse off in 2018-19 compared with 2011-12.

So where are we up to now? The most recent statistics show that there are currently about 600,000 people claiming UC, over a third of whom are receiving support via the full service. The roll-out of UC over the next six months will see the overall case load rise to just under 1 million, which is a 63% increase. On average, 63,000 people a month may start a new UC claim before January 2018, and by 2022 we expect about 7 million people to be seeking support from the programme. We are at a turning point in the Government's flagship programme, the roll-out of which is currently being ramped up dramatically.

On top of the design flaws and cuts that I have just mentioned, several other issues have emerged. Perhaps the most pressing is the Government's decision to make new claimants wait six weeks before they receive any support. Four weeks of that is to allow universal credit to be backdated, plus there is an additional week, as policy, and then a further week waiting for payment to arrive. This "long hello", as some have called it, is believed to be one of the primary drivers of the rising debt and arrears we are now seeing. Citizens Advice reports that 79% of indebted claimants "have priority debts such as rent or council tax, putting them at greater risk of eviction, visits from bailiffs, being cut off from energy supplies and even prison".

Half those in rent arrears under universal

credit report that they entered into arrears after they made their claim. What is worse is that many claimants do not even receive support within the Government's lengthy six-week deadline: one in four are waiting for longer than six weeks and one in 10 are waiting for more than 10 weeks. The Government's so-called advance payment, which is meant to be available to those in need, is in fact a loan that has to be paid back within six months out of future social security payments. I recognise and welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about speeding that up, but I will explain later in my speech exactly what we might need to tweak.

As we have heard, the measures I have outlined are pushing people into debt, rent arrears and even homelessness. Last year, the National Housing Federation warned that approximately 80% of tenants on universal credit were in rent arrears, with the six-week delay being attributed as the key cause. A few weeks ago, a nurse came into my surgery. She was a single mum who had transferred from tax credits to universal credit. She had the six-week wait, and as a result the arrears racked up. When she came to see me, she had just been served an eviction notice. As universal credit is rolled out, such stories will become more and more common.

The Mayor of Greater Manchester has warned that rough sleeping will double over the winter if the universal credit roll-out continues without its fundamental flaws being addressed. This is not scare-mongering; it is based on estimates by local authorities in which universal credit has already been rolled out. Throughout Greater Manchester, the average arrears for people on UC in social housing is £824, compared with £451 for non-UC tenants. It is already having an impact on rising evictions and homelessness—and that is without even going into what is happening in the private rented sector. In addition, the increase in rent arrears for social housing landlords means that less money is available for investment in housing-stock maintenance or the building of new social housing, thereby adding to the existing housing crisis.

The increase in food bank use is another consequence of universal credit delays. Earlier this year, the Trussell Trust reported that referrals for emergency food parcels were significantly higher in a UC area, at nearly 17%, compared with the national average of just under 7%. The trust's report also highlighted the impacts on the mental health of people on UC, who

were described as stressed, anxious or depressed, as they worried about being unable to pay bills and falling into debt.

Who is most likely to be affected and why? Single parents are particularly vulnerable under universal credit. There are now 65,000 single parents on UC. Gingerbread has described how, through “error in administration and the structure of the system itself, single parents have been threatened with eviction and jobs have been put at risk”.

Gingerbread told me about Laura, who lives with her two sons, one of whom is severely disabled. Laura had to apply for universal credit when her temporary contract at work ended. She had to wait eight weeks for support, and visited a food bank to feed her children. She was not told about advance payments and was struggling with rent arrears. Reflecting on her experience, Laura said: “it’s very stressful, single parents quite often have enough stress and worry about money; and other things, bringing up your children to start with and it’s exacerbated by this very unfair, very unjust system”.

With child poverty among single parents forecast to increase sharply to 63% by the end of the Parliament, it is vital that we fix the social security system to ensure that it is working. In a forthcoming Child Poverty Action Group report analysing the cumulative effects of social security changes on child poverty since 2010, the section on universal credit highlights its design issues and, in particular, the detrimental impact on lone parents. It states: “Universal credit was designed to be more generous to couples than single people, with lone parents in particular expected to lose out compared with tax credits. This was a deliberate reaction to the decision, within tax credits, to boost support for lone parents in comparison with couples because of their higher risk of poverty and the greater difficulty of increasing earnings from work if you are a lone parent.”

The report goes on to say: “Since its initial design, universal credit has been subject to a succession of changes and cuts which have substantially reduced its adequacy overall... As a result, it is now less generous than the system it is replacing, and no longer offers the promise of reducing poverty.”

Universal credit is not just affecting single parents; young families and families with more than two children will also fare much worse under UC. Young families going on to universal credit will be affected by

the decision to introduce a lower under-25 rate of the standard allowance in universal credit, even for parents with children. As a result, young families will be at increasing risk of poverty, especially if they have a single earner or a second earner working part time. Of course, among other cuts, limiting the child element of support to only two children leaves families with more than three children worse off as well. The report reiterates that as well as being less generous and actually cutting family income, UC fails to incentivise people into work or to progress in work, which are fundamental principles of UC. Shockingly, it has been calculated that, because of the cuts, universal credit will push a million more children into poverty by 2020, with 300,000 of them under five. Some 900,000 working-age adults will be pushed into poverty, while 900,000 children and 800,000 adults will be living in severe poverty.

Earlier, I mentioned the design issues that are affecting disabled people. This week, I heard from someone who has lost nearly £80 a week—a week—because of their transfer to universal credit after they moved house, ending their ESA claim. When UC was first launched, the Government said they wanted to “simplify the current complex rules which have been prone to error and complex and confusing for disabled people” and to replace “seven different premiums with a simpler, two-tier system that focuses support on the most severely disabled people who are least able to work”.

However, subsequent social security changes, particularly the abolition of the UC limited-capability-for-work element from April 2017, have meant that, instead of a net gain, it is likely that there will be a net reduction of support for people with health conditions and disabilities.

Under this Government, we are seeing unprecedented cuts in support to disabled people, with the consequence that more and more disabled people are living in poverty. The number currently stands at more than 4.2 million; this cannot go on. This is exactly what the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities said is causing a “human catastrophe”.

The self-employed are another group who are adversely affected by the Government’s changes to universal credit. We have seen a dramatic increase in self-employed people in recent years: they now make up 15% of the workforce—5 million in total—and account for 80% of the increase in employment since 2008.

But 45% of them pay themselves less than the living wage.

As I have said many times, it is absolutely right that we try to design a social security system that can properly support self-employed people and that recognises the fluctuating nature of the labour market for those workers. Sadly, universal credit no longer does so, after the introduction of the minimum income floor, which is an assumed income for self-employed people, found by multiplying the minimum wage on the assumption that self-employed people are working 35 hours a week. One self-employed recipient who contacted me said: “This system does not allow for the fluctuations in income that are experienced by the self-employed. Surely an assessment made on a year’s profits would be much fairer.” They went on to say that universal credit will close down enterprise as a route to employment.

Importantly, the Department for Work and Pensions does not average incomes over a year, which leads to issues around holidays, such as Christmas, when the self-employed may take time off. They will be punished for doing so under the Government’s universal credit system. The Federation of Small Businesses has also expressed concerns, saying that it expects major problems for low-income self-employed people to set in at Christmas.

We need to build a social security system fit for the 21st century and to make sure that all workers, employed or self-employed, are afforded dignity and security as work demands fluctuate. We cannot allow the devastating impacts of universal credit roll-out to happen. I reiterate my genuine offer to work with the Government to address the very real concerns about universal credit, particularly its design flaws, the administrative issues and the cuts.

I welcome the Government’s announcement this morning that the so-called helpline will now be a Freephone line. Given Serco’s appalling performance over the past few years and the profit that it has made from the Government contract, it should be paying for the Freephone lines. It is unacceptable that people on the lowest incomes have been paying money that they do not have on phone calls to find out about their claims.

Action must be taken to improve call handler capacity and competence, so that people making inquiries on their claim are not kept on hold or passed from pillar to post. Another key ask is for alternative payment arrangements to be offered to

all claimants at the time of their claims. That includes ending the one-week wait and enabling people to have fortnightly, instead of monthly, payments where appropriate with the option of the housing element to go directly to the landlord. Alternative arrangements have already been made available in Northern Ireland and will be introduced in Scotland, so there is no reason why they also should not be available to people in England and Wales. We need to look at the advanced payments and make them more manageable. A repayment over six months is still creating huge issues for people on the lowest income.

These are relatively straightforward suggestions. I recognise that reinstating the original level of work allowances and reducing taper rates are less so, but if the Government and the Prime Minister are sincere about tackling injustice in this country and making sure that work pays, they must act. Once again, I commit to working with them on this. We must address the poverty and discrimination that universal credit is causing women, children, disabled people and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities now. This will only get worse as universal credit is rolled out.

This country is at a crossroads. Brexit must not blind this Government to other obligations to their citizens. We must all work together in the national interest to avert the disaster that is about to unfold if universal credit is rolled out without fixing its failings. I urge all MPs to vote with their conscience, stand with us and their constituents and pause and fix universal credit.

DISEMBODIED VOICES

how do you treat rust
 ah that made you frown
 usually with a lot of fuss
 promise that it will go away
 thought it's spread throughout
 the town
 it must obey
 mortar-board and gown
 the speech-writer said
 on the campaign trail
 it's words in the mouth of
 the well-paid
 so get real
 just vote you dope
 then at least you'll have
 hope
 let's rewrite that
 did I promise you a yacht
 no
 a review
 of this rust-belt
 the naked truth stands here
 in its pelt
 maybe a little uncouth
 okay
 come alive
 hey
 I'm saying you exist
 and I shall remember you
 if your voting persists

they called him a son-of-a-bitch
 he and his great big Russia
 run like
 in the days of Prussia
 now that I've been elected sober and sane
 I'm asking you
 not to complain
 this great big country
 Russia
 to it I sing
 doh ray me fah
 come bear and let us together
 cling

to trade
 which they forbade
 and in all that oil we can wade

just a moment
 the phone
 was it meant
 can't answer I'm hollowed
 out
 there's a hand up my back
 I can't whisper
 I can't shout
 I sit on someone's knee
 a southern comfort breath
 can't reflect
 deaf
 a hack
 don't know what I'm about
 son-of-a-bitch
 Russia like Prussia
 well that went without
 a hitch

NATO
 don't need it
 don't heed it
 it's America first
 walled America
 before it bursts
 let's stop giving countries
 sciatica
 that brought in the liberals
 the baby boomers
 on the peripheral
 some Americans want to be
 decent
 too busy making money
 only
 heard that quite recent
 could I also be a honey
 back on that knee again
 they promised me my voice back
 but when
 in the meantime
 who do we whack

Wilson John Haire. 11th October, 2017

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

FIXING NEW VOTING SYSTEMS

Several issues currently fuel passions within the Italian political scene. Matteo Renzi (Secretary of the *Partito Democratico, Pd*) is being accused of using problems in the banking sector, and Bankitalia particularly, to his political advantage. There has also been very thick, injurious smog in Turin and Milan that resonate with concerns about pollution in London. Meanwhile two significant electoral issues are unfolding.

The first is the development, approval and implementation of a new electoral system. The previous one, declared unconstitutional, needs to be changed before the general election is due in early summer 2018. Time is very short. There is also an interesting technical point. As the current government was elected by this illegal system, the legitimacy of its decision-making could be questioned.

The second imperative, of enormous concern to the main, traditional parties was, and is, the rise to similar levels of popularity of Beppe Grillo's *M5S*. (*Movimento Cinque Stelle, Five Star Movement*). The parties needed to devise something that would stop *M5S* being able to enter parliament in sufficient numbers to form a government. The political left and right, usually enemies, coordinated to do this.

Italian governments have been relatively stable in recent times. But from 1946 to 1993 they lasted an average of nine months. The proportional representational system of that time gave small parties a great deal of power. It also took away the connection for the voters between their votes and those who actually entered parliament. The system

became very corrupt and extremely unsatisfactory for a country in the democratic West.

New systems, one given a disrespectful nickname, was introduced to rectify this. The *Mattarellum* lasted from 1993–2005 and was devised by the current President, Sergio Mattarella. The *legge-Calderoli* followed and came to be known as *Porcellum*. It was referred to as *una porcata*: crap, a dirty trick. Not good. This was followed by *Italicum*, which is now being superseded by *Rosatellum*, named after its progenitor Ettore Rosato. This passed into law after a parliamentary vote on 26 October. It is likely that elections will be held in the Spring.

The traditional parties have successfully devised a system that favours themselves. Naturally this produced loud protests from *M5S*, but it was carried in a majority secret vote in the Lower House. Very simply, the new structure will fill 36% of seats by first past the post and the remaining seats by proportional representation.

The second electoral development, particularly relevant with the current example of Catalonian independence, was the referendum on political autonomy in two Italian regions: Liguria and The Veneto. This took place on 22 October.

There was a vote in favour of autonomy but the results themselves were advisory (as was the Brexit referendum) and so are not binding on central government. Five existing regions already have a measure of autonomy. They are: Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Sardinia; Sicily; Trentino – Alto Adige/Süd Tirol; Valle d'Aosta. Although change is not automatic or immediate it strengthens the positions of the Presidents in future negotiations with central government.

The two jubilant Presidents: Roberto Maroni of Liguria and Luca Zaia of The Veneto both run right-wing *Lega Nord* administrations. Both realise that fiscal autonomy is not one of the 23 negotiable areas allowable under the constitution.

The second interesting point is that Lombardy trailed electronic voting for these elections. choosing a Venezuelan company. President Roberto Maroni could be seen on video demonstrating the clear, simple voting process. You pushed a rectangle for *NO*, *SI* or *SCHEDE BIANCA* that is: *NO*, *YES* or *BLANK VOTE*. Wow! It looked very easy.

Unfortunately, said the press, there was a “*flop del voto elettronico*”. A splendid idea but there were technical difficulties. The final results did not come as quickly as anticipated and Maroni was repeatedly forced to postpone the press conference. Then hackers, and these seem to be a section of the public now able to have an opinion, said that the system was easy to destabilise. There was a reference in *La Repubblica* saying Norway had abandoned electronic voting. *M5S* members vote electronically on their internal issues and they have also been “hacked” on at least two occasions.

The next general election is on its way. The electorate's choices are likely to be made without enthusiasm for *more of the same* offered to them. Will there be a decisive vote? Who will be able to coordinate a coalition? Will the eternally scheming Berlusconi still be a player? Will, as *La Stampa* suggested (13 Oct) he be out of the game and then “*biology and age will do the rest*”.