

Labour Affairs

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Labour's Poisoned Chalice

The so-called Brexit war committee met at Chequers on 22 February. Government policy on Brexit is now broadly described as “ambitious managed divergence”. What this means no one quite knows. What everyone knows is that the Brexit war committee is at war with itself. The hope is that the UK will pick the EU rules it likes and reject those it doesn't. This is unilateral cherry picking. A deal that solely benefits the UK will, ipso facto, disbenefit the other EU 27 countries. It's pure illusion, according to European council president Donald Tusk. It simply won't happen.

The policy of “ambitious managed divergence” is designed to placate both leavers and remainers in the Tory party. Hard Brexiteers like Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg want a clean break from the EU, freeing the UK to strike trade deals with minimum regulation, with non-EU countries, while Soft Remainers like Philip Hammond and Amber Rudd want as little divergence as possible from EU rules and regulations. The two positions are incompatible. Hence the stitch up at Chequers.

How “ambitious managed divergence” will affect workers' rights, for example, is at present an unknown. Theresa May has said these rights will not only be protected, but enhanced once the UK leaves the EU. Given the Tories record on workers' rights over the years it would be advisable not to hold one's breath. It should also be noted that EU membership guarantees many rights enjoyed by UK workers. And we should be warned that Prime Minister wannabe Boris Johnson wants full divergence from EU rules and regulations. The letter sent to Theresa May from 62 hardline Tory brexiteers, including Boris Johnson, calls for “full regulatory autonomy.”

In the search for free trade deals outside the EU, the UK will be able to create its own regulatory standards,

but it will also have to adhere to those adopted by other trading organisations, including the World Trade Organisation. These standards may be lower than those existing within the EU. Almost certainly, any trade deals with the United States will include lower food standards as the furore over chlorinated chickens has shown. Donald Trump may say he wants a beneficial trade deal with the UK but the main beneficiary will be the United States, not the UK.

Theresa May has said she wants a bespoke deal with the EU that includes frictionless trade between the UK and the EU. But frictionless trade with the EU is impossible outside of the single market and the customs union. And May has been very clear that the UK will be leaving these two trading blocs. It's difficult to see the UK getting all that it wants from exiting the EU without being in a customs union that offers similar trading arrangements - which May herself said she preferred in her Lancaster House speech - to those that currently exist. These at least would help to avoid a hard border in Ireland, with its potentially adverse effects on the Good Friday Agreement.

Outside the EU the UK will continue to have the problem of producing goods and services that non-EU customers want at a price they are prepared to pay. It will not automatically happen once we leave the EU. The UK's record in the trade in goods leaves a lot to be desired. The last full year statistics for 2016 show that the UK had a deficit of £135 billion in goods, partly offset by a surplus of £95 billion in services. Due to the decline in UK manufacturing over decades, it now accounts for just 10% of national output. The problem facing any government is how to boost manufacturing in an economy that is short-termist. Business has failed to invest in the UK's long-term future and the uncertainty around Brexit has diminished business

confidence.

There is confusion within the cabinet over the arrangements that will exist during the transition period, now referred to as the implementation period. Some in the cabinet believe that during the two year period the UK can begin to extricate itself from the clutches of the EU. But Guy Verhofstadt, the EU's chief Brexit coordinator told UK Brexit ministers, "Transition is simply a continuation of the existing situation, so nothing different can be implemented." This was confirmed by Theresa May in her Florence speech in September 2017. She said that during a transition period "access to one another's markets should continue on current terms".

Labour's position on Brexit is a little clearer following Jeremy Corbyn's speech in Coventry on 26 February. Corbyn told his audience that Labour would pursue "a new, comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure there are no tariffs with Europe and to avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland." Labour would also "negotiate a new and strong relationship with the single market", but would seek "protections, clarification or exemptions" in relation to nationalisation and state aid.

There is more than an element of wishful thinking behind Labour's policy. Wanting something is not the same as actually achieving it. Labour says that "A new customs arrangement would depend on Britain being able to negotiate agreement of new trade deals in our national interest." Being able to trade with the rest of the world while a member of a customs union that provides similar benefits to the customs union is like having one's cake and eating it, a charge Labour has levelled at the government.

Labour has now distanced itself somewhat from the Tories. Its new policy may attract enough Tory remainers to defeat the government on an amendment calling for a customs union to be included in the Trade bill.

This is now not likely to be debated until after the Easter recess and possibly the local government elections in May. (Elections which many Tory MPs will be watching to see if there are likely to be lost at the next general election). But would this be a wise move if it led to a vote of no confidence and a general election? More on this later.

According to opinion polls Labour members and voters support the UK staying in the EU, with 30 pro-EU Labour MPs urging the NEC to consult members about Brexit. Consult on what? Leaving the EU is not simply an internal matter for Labour. The referendum has been held and the result known. The opinions of half a million or more Labour members can no longer influence that decision. This is pure mischief making by Corbyn's opponents, posing as party democrats.

Furthermore, Labour should ignore the calls for a second referendum from those on its own back benches. If it were held it would probably result in a protest vote against politicians in general, not just those who don't respect the decision made in June 2016. Politicians are already held in low esteem. A second vote could sour politics and politicians for generations.

Nor should Labour allow itself to be captured by Tory remainers, hoping that together they can defeat the government on an amendment to the Trade bill calling for support for a customs union. If the government were defeated on the amendment and a general election was held which led to a Labour victory, Labour would be left holding the poisoned chalice of Brexit. Better therefore to leave things be and let the Tories sort out the mess of their own making. Corbyn's respect for the 2016 referendum result, which he repeated in his Coventry speech, is the only politically honourable position for Labour.

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Parliament And World War One

by Dick Barry

STATEMENT BY MR. BONAR LAW. 21 March 1918

Arthur Lynch (16/10/1861-25/3/1934) Irish Parliamentary Party Member for Clare West 1901- 1918.

William O'Malley (Feb 1853-Sept 1939) Irish Parliamentary Party Member for Galway Connemara 1895-1918.

Captain Daniel Desmond Sheehan ((28/5/1873-28/11/1948) Irish Parliamentary Party for Mid-Cork 1901-1918.

Mr. McKENNA May I intervene for a moment to ask whether my right hon. Friend has any statement to make with regard to the Front?

Mr. BONAR LAW As I have no doubt is known to many hon. Members of the House, an Infantry attack was launched by the Germans this morning upon our front. The attack covers almost the whole of the front from the Scarpe to the Oise — a front of something over 50 miles. This, I may tell the House, is an attack on a larger scale than any that has been made at any stage of the War on any part of the front. We have not yet received any information which enables us to give the House any indication whatever as to what the result of this attack is. We know that on part of that front our outpost troops, where the line was very lightly held, have withdrawn to the battle zone. That was exactly not only what was expected, but what instructions were in the event of such an attack.

Perhaps some hon. Members may recall that in discussing the military situation a week or so ago I pointed out that it was certain that if an attack of this kind did take place the attacking party would gain a certain amount of ground. Our information so far does not lead us to suppose anything beyond that has happened. I am sure of this, that, with the knowledge beforehand of what has happened in every similar attack on either side, the House and the country will not be unnecessarily alarmed by information of that kind. I should like also to say that there is absolutely nothing in the

nature of surprise in connection with what has happened. Our Staff and the Versailles Council have naturally been considering what would happen in the event of an attack taking place, and I may tell the House that this attack has been launched on the very part of our line which we were informed would be attacked by the enemy if an attack were undertaken at all.

I may say, also, that only three days ago we received in formation at the Cabinet from Headquarters in France that they had now definitely come to the conclusion that an attack was going to be launched immediately. I am sorry, as the House will understand, that in regard to an event, the importance of which we all realise, it is impossible for me to give any information whatever as to what the result is; but I do feel justified in saying that, as it has not come as a surprise, and as those responsible for our Forces have foreseen and have throughout believed that, if such an attack came, we should be well able to meet it, nothing that has happened gives us in this country any cause whatever for additional anxiety.

Mr. LYNCH The statement to which we have just listened is of such grave import that I will make no further reference to that subject than to express a hope, and even an ardent vow, for the success of the

arms of the Allies, trusting in this juncture, in what seems to be rather a soldiers' battle, to the tenacity and dazzling courage which the Allies have more than once manifested already. But despite, or perhaps because of, the very gravity of the situation, I propose to say a few words on matters which directly deal with the progress of the War. One is with reference to the speech which we had recently from the First Lord of the Admiralty. That speech, to me, was disappointing for more reasons than one—disappointing even on the basis of his own arguments. What we have to consider in judging of the nature of the present situation is not an elaborate computation of curves having reference to world's tonnage, and being so chosen by the experts in the Admiralty as to lead to a false conclusion, even in cases when each actual statement may be true. In estimating the character of the present situation we have to consider, not the construction of the world tonnage or even the construction of British tonnage, but whether, in view of the fact that the sustenance of these Islands depends in great part on sea-borne traffic, we have reached the point when we can say that the arrivals are such that, however the transport may be diminished by actual sinkings, the country has been placed

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beyond the danger of starvation. Placing that simple question before the First Lord of the Admiralty, and following his own course of argument, so far from finding his statement reassuring, I have come to the conclusion that that statement, if this country is capable of producing no better plan, has defeat stamped upon its face—ultimate defeat within a certain definite limit of time. When a man holding the high position of the First Lord of the Admiralty deliberately puts forward a plan and declares that is the plan on which he intends to rely, and when that plan is found in itself insufficient, then I declare that he has already condemned himself.

I speak with no personal animus what ever against the First Lord of the Admiralty, whose advent to office I was inclined to hail not without hope, but, judging him at the work, judging him by his own statements, and judging him by results, I say that he has failed. What was required in his position was not what the Government seem to have searched for, a man of what is called driving force. Driving force may be admirable up to a certain level of the hierarchy, but when a man reaches a position that by his commanding situation alone he is able to obtain all the driving force that he requires, then what the Government should seek—and I insist on this—and what the Government has neglected, is a high intellectual power, the stamp and character of a man who will envisage all these great problems and bring great qualities of intellect to bear upon them until he has obtained the solution, and who will then, by virtue of the strength and faith which he derives from his own solution, obtain all the driving power that he requires. Simply to look for what is called driving power without that great intellectual power is to condemn

that office to failure. Therefore, dealing with that, I invite the First Lord of the Admiralty to send in his resignation. I will not now touch upon the military side of affairs on account of the gravity of the events which are now before us. We can only hope and offer up our vows to Heaven. On the side of the Foreign Office, I will not for the moment add anything to what I have said repeatedly in this House to bring home the argument which ought now to be clear and patent to all that the Foreign Office has signally failed and that even now, if it is not too late, there should be a complete clearance of those who, having had their opportunity, have misused it in so extraordinary a manner.

I will touch, however, on one or two questions of Irish administration. I have very grave forebodings with respect to Ireland, and those grave forebodings are brought to my mind by what I see plainly to be the mishandling of the Government of a dangerous situation. The great panacea of the Government was the Convention, and I believe that an order has gone forth recently to all the newspapers to refrain from any comments on the Convention. It must be remembered that the Convention has been in existence now for many months, and, if it were a real, valid, and honest institution, that Convention would be ready with its Report. There is something suspicious in the attempt of the Government not to obtain the result of its deliberations, but to keep it alive by a sort of artificial respiration, knowing that as long as the mere name of Convention is kept alive the Government can avoid what for months has been their plain duty, namely, to look the Irish problem straight in the face. Their tricks, if they have been tricks, are at an end, and they must make up their minds to adopt one of several alternative

policies which have been presented to them. One of the policies with which I have heard they are toying, in their usual insincere, helpless, or drifting style, is that of Federal Home Rule. Federal Home Rule was at one time looked upon as a possible solution, not merely of the Irish question, but of various questions affecting the mutual relations of all those Condominiums. If it be really the intention of the Government to arrive at a solution of the Irish question which would give them merely the name of self-government without the reality, maintaining the great influence of this Parliament, not merely in the larger issues affecting Ireland, but even in very many details of the local government of Ireland, then I say that the time has passed by adopting that solution.

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Sir Donald Maclean) I would remind the hon. Member that he is now discussing matters of legislation which are not in order on the Motion for the Adjournment.

Mr. LYNCH I thank you for that reminder, and I will drop that question. I will come to one or two matters of pressing interest in Ireland. It has been thought necessary to introduce martial law in a severe form into certain places in Ireland and into my own Constituency. It is always a mistake in Ireland to have resort to force, especially in a case where it is quite possible to ascertain definitely the causes of the unrest and where the Government have, by their present action, shown no disposition to remove what I call the root causes of all these disturbances. We have had today the subject of food debated. That question is becoming more and more pressing throughout the country, and we are face to face with this position: that Ireland is capable of producing a far larger

quantity of food than it has yet turned out. That food may be necessary for the very subsistence, therefore for the very existence of this country. The possibilities are there, the labour is there, not merely available, but the tenants adjoining big cattle farms or ranches now untilled are not merely willing but anxious to enter upon those lands, to till them and make them fruitful to the last degree. The Government have prevented such a step. They have prevented it in the face of the fact that an Act was expressly passed so far back as 1909 to deal with these very evils. That Act should have been in complete operation years ago. Its application was retarded wilfully by the Government, and now, even under the menace of great privation, the Government is still with holding the application of that Act, defeating, even cheating, the hopes of those for whom it was framed and protecting those Irish landlords who have been thought to be the buttress of one of the great parties in this House, but whose action for generations has been detrimental to the best interests of the Irish people. Therefore, I say that the remedy for the present state of unrest in Ireland is not the brutal application of military force but the resolute removing from the path of the people of all the evils from which they unjustly suffer.

I will touch very briefly on quite another aspect of the question of public policy to say that, whereas the Prime Minister declared that unity of command on the Western Front was essential, in face of these grave events of which we do not now know the issue, that unity of command has not been obtained, a fact that already condemns his whole policy. A Government takes the spirit of its leader, just as an Army takes the spirit of its commander. We saw that clearly in the example of France. Before the arrival of M. Clemenceau the country was beginning to hesitate and doubt. Immediately after his arrival, as by magic, a new strength, a new force, and a new spirit were inspired in the French nation. We had all hoped that the Prime Minister would have given that spirit of force and faith when he

arrived himself at supreme power, but almost from the first he began to wilt and fade, failing to justify his own great reputation. The times are far too serious for us to abdicate our own judgment or our own criticism, however severe, in the face of great temptations. I declare that the Prime Minister, too, has failed. The best service that he can render to the country now is to retire and to allow, I will not say the formation of another Government within this House, but something which, however remote from Parliamentary practice it may now seem, will, I feel sure, within the next few succeeding months, be brought more and more insistently upon the attention of the country itself, that is, the necessity for the formation of a Committee of Public Safety.

Mr. O'MALLEY I am anxious to direct the attention of the House to a matter which very seriously affects my own Constituency and also all the districts on the Western seaboard of Ireland. My hon. Friend who has just spoken has referred to the unrest which at present exists in the West of Ireland. He has very properly pointed out that that unrest cannot very well be dealt with adequately except by removing its cause. We all know that that unrest exists. The general opinion in this country is that it is political unrest, and that the outrages we read about are caused by the Sinn Fein movement. I have no doubt that some of the outrages, such as the seizing of guns and entering houses and all that kind of thing, have been the work of the Sinn Feiners, but the unrest to which I should like to direct the attention of the House is of a different nature altogether. I have, in this House and outside it, and my colleagues also for a good many years have been pointing out to the Congested Districts Board the necessity of acquiring the untenanted lands in the congested areas. There is some unrest in my own Constituency, and it is directly traceable to the fact that these poor people living on their uneconomic holdings, who have the greatest possible difficulty at any time in making a living, are face to face every day of their lives with large grass farms in the possession of strangers,

who are generally shopkeepers. For the last twenty-seven years, since the establishment of the Congested Districts Board, there have been some people in my own Constituency who have been waiting all these years to get relief from that Board. They are waiting still. What I want to point out is that where they have bought estates in Connemara they have not divided up the grass lands among the tenants, but have continued to let those grass lands to the shop keeping graziers. The War has made this a very urgent question. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Board, in view of the urgent necessity for food, have not used their compulsory powers to purchase these small estates with grass farms, and divide them up among the poor tenants, who are only too anxious to have them cultivated.

I heard of one case in my own Constituency the other day, where, I believe, the Board have bought an estate. The untenanted land has remained in their hands for some considerable time. Some few weeks ago they offered some of the land on the conacre system for tillage to the tenants. The only part that they offered was the very worst and most unproductive part and the tenants declined it. The Board in this case actually gave to a man who does not depend upon the land at all the only decent part of that little estate which could be useful to the tenants and would be very productive. I understand that some of the tenants, I think very foolishly, entered upon the land and attempted to cultivate it. They are now, I believe, in jail or under remand, and their case will come on very shortly, and I shall say no more about it, but if hon. Members or the people of this country could fully realise the conditions of the peasantry along the Western sea board, pressure would be brought to bear upon the Board to bring this to an end. I hope the Chief Secretary will take some steps to carry out an improvement on the lines I have suggested.

Captain SHEEHAN I wanted to follow on the lines of the two previous speakers and to develop some arguments bearing upon the issues

which they raised and also dealing with the problems of Irish reconstruction. I feel that the manner in which the Minister of Reconstruction and the Chief Secretary for Ireland have been dealing with that issue is not at all satisfactory, but since neither of those right hon. Gentlemen is present it would be largely a waste of time to develop the issue at any length. I will content myself with saying that I will take the earliest opportunity of raising this question when they are here and insisting that the separate conditions and considerations which apply to Ireland must be considered and dealt with. I have the fullest sympathy with the demand which my hon. Friend (Mr. Lynch) voiced. I regard these so-called outrages in Ireland as legitimate efforts of the people to acquire the right of free Access to land which is not properly used. The denial of that right is at the root of most of the mischief in Ireland at present. I believe if the Government only tackled the problem properly of distributing the grazing ranches and the uncultivated areas in Ireland among the landless people they would be capable of using them to the national advantage, and you would have an end of a lot of the trouble in that country at present. I hope the matter will be earnestly considered on an early and a suitable opportunity. In every country, particularly where the peasant population is the mainstay and the backbone of the nation, the demand for utilising the land properly will always be the strongest national demand the people can make. I think in the highest Government quarters they will be exceedingly well advised if they remember that the agricultural labouring population, regard themselves as the dispossessed tenants of the land of Ireland and will never be satisfied until they get back to it on equitable conditions. As to the question of re-housing, we are not satisfied with the statements which have come from the Ministerial Bench. It is in a backward condition. You have already your schemes of preparation in England, Scotland and Wales, but you have done nothing for Ireland, and our demand is that we should

have a separate Irish Reconstruction Council to deal independently with the separate conditions which exist in Ireland, so that we should be able to frame schemes suitable to the needs of our people, and particularly I want for reasons which must be obvious to everyone, to see that the Irish soldiers and sailors who have given their services in this War, when they are being demobilised, must have conditions prepared for them so that they shall go back to useful occupations.

Question put, and agreed to.

**IRELAND
(ASSIZE REPORTS).
12 March 1918**

Major NEWMAN asked the Prime Minister whether he has received from the county high sheriffs and grand juries of counties in the West and South of Ireland representations as to the continued prevalence of agrarian Bolshevism, raiding for arms, and assaults on isolated members of the forces of the Crown and members of the Royal Irish Constabulary; and has he been able to assure them that the full authority of the executive will be used to restore order?

The CHIEF SECRETARY for IRELAND (Mr. Duke) My right hon. Friend has received the representations referred to, and has asked me to reply. His Majesty's Government has been well aware of the extent to which crime was occurring in association with the existing state of political unrest and anxiety in Ireland, and before any of these representations were made had taken measures whereby without any intentional interference with political controversy occurrences such as are mentioned in the question would be guarded against, and, if not prevented, would be punished. Resolutions such as the hon. and gallant Member mentions must not be accepted in all cases as evidence of local conditions. I observe to-day that the grand jury of county Fermanagh unanimously resolved on Saturday last that the disgraceful state of the country at the present time is entirely due to the neglect of the most elementary obligations of government by the present Irish administration. I

observe, however, that the learned and very experienced judge who presided at the assize in Fermanagh is reported to have stated in his charge to the same grand jury that there were two cases for trial, and there was nothing in the returns to suggest that the country was in anything but a satisfactory condition. A decrease of three was noted in the specially reported cases.

Perhaps I may add that specially reported cases are cases which the police think it necessary to bring to the attention of the executive.

Major NEWMAN Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the grand jury at Fermanagh referred to the West and South of Ireland?

Mr. DUKE I ask the House to be aware that these representations come from gentlemen, although they are of the highest respectability, who are drawn entirely from one class of the community.

Mr. LYNCH Have the Government considered the effect of using coercive measures simply, without removing the root causes of the unrest?

Mr. DUKE Nothing of what is ordinarily called coercion has occurred in Ireland. If it is desired to challenge that assertion, the proper opportunity must be taken to challenge it. But where there was an organised outbreak of crime which threatened to overturn the ordinary administration measures were taken without the interference of anybody who did not desire to break the law, and I am happy to say that they appear likely to have the desired effect.

Mr. LYNCH I will raise this question to-day.

Sometimes our fate
resembles a fruit tree in
winter. Who would think
that those branches would
turn green again and
blossom, but we hope it,
we know it.

*Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe*

Froggy

News From Across The Channel



Reforming the railways

Macron had a great victory last year, with the reform of the Labour Code. But some people still escape the consequences of this reform: civil servants enjoy rights over and above the new norm, such as job protection.

Macron complained that the civil servant statute had not changed since Maurice Thorez. Maurice who? asked anybody under the age of sixty. Maurice Thorez, the Communist minister who, in government in 1947, set up the statute of civil servants.

Another privileged category is the railway workers. Macron is keeping teachers and the other middle class civil servants in reserve for the moment, and is gunning first for the railway workers.

But there are 190,000 of them, all bar 30,000 with this protected statute.

How do you get rid of them? Have a general campaign against the SNCF.

Say that the SNCF is making a loss, and it's the fault of the costly privileges of the employees. This is laughable, comparing the cost of free tickets (a million euro?) with the cost of building TGV lines (several billion).

The second line of attack is that SNCF, following EU directives, must open itself to competition. The government does not even believe in this. The opening of competition of the freight arm of the SNCF has been a catastrophic example. Operators other than SNCF carry 40% of freight in France. SNCF has shed employees and material on a vast scale. But not only does it still make a loss in this sector, but the new operators do too. (As long as road transport does not pay its share of the social cost of transport, this will remain so.)

Over the Channel in England, franchises are failing but are made to continue for want of an alternative. The French are not calling for franchising, but open access for competitors, meaning they would use the same lines as the SNCF; they admit however that would be difficult, as there are many lines and stations that are

already saturated and couldn't be shared. But 'opening to competition' is used as an argument for reducing conditions of service: employees mustn't be so expensive; otherwise no one will want to take them on. So the campaign started as follows.

Macron commissioned a report from a certain Spinetta, previously head of Air France. The Spinetta report then recommended turning the SNCF into limited liability companies, cutting unprofitable lines and changing the employment statute of railway workers, removing their 'privileges'.

Four days after the report came out, the Prime Minister met the top executives of SNCF to set out the plan. Separately, but on the same day, the minister of transport, Elisabeth Borne, received, one after the other, the leaders of the four rail unions. These four unions have political differences which they have to overcome if they want to act as a front.

Previously, the government let the SNCF accumulate debt while holding back funds, letting the service deteriorate, allowing serious and long lasting breakdowns as well as accidents, the top executives remaining in post all the while, and the reputation of the service going downhill.

When there are breakdowns, cancellations and lateness, it is the visible employee who is on the receiving end of the frustrated passengers, as the Spinetta report recognises; they are the SNCF, even if they are not the ones who cut the number of posts or withheld resources. It is those same now unpopular employees who will be on the front line defending the service as a public service. Of course the unions were the ones warning about the effects of cuts in budget.

The Spinetta objective is to reduce the debt; the various methods are: concentrating on lines that are used a lot, that is the fast long-distance trains (TGV, Train à Grande Vitesse), and commuter trains; at the same time cutting lines that are little used and replacing them with buses.

Lose several thousand staff over the next two years through 'voluntary

redundancies'. The example of Orange is given as one to follow. But the example of Orange was an awful one. There were not enough spontaneous candidates for departure, so management deployed psychological pressure to get results, and there were a number of suicides. That Spinetta gives Orange as an example of good management seems very insensitive, to say the least.

Change the status of new entrants to the railway industry to a less favourable one. Thanks to the new Labour Code, pushed through legislation by decree last year, pay and conditions can be negotiated at branch level not sector level; in the case of the SNCF, the State will no longer be involved in these negotiations.

The assumption running through the Spinetta report is that, in a monopoly, staff have no incentive to be efficient. The report ends with nice words about the railway workers' dedication to their work, about their knowledge and expertise. But the report implies that they are not efficient. They have it too easy.

These new conditions are necessary both to save money now, and to prepare the opening of the industry to competition. No one will want to bid for a railway line if it's not profitable. But where is the problem there? The European Commission demands that the SNCF opens to competition, as the other European countries have already done, but it can't make it happen. Since competitors will pick profitable lines and leave aside the non-profitable ones, which still have to be run somehow, competition does not solve the financing problem. When the SNCF has a mixture of popular and unpopular lines, the popular ones help finance the others, which can't be done if they are no longer available.

One more worrying thing about the Spinetta report is that it takes British railways as a model, which now, he says, thanks to competition, have more traffic and better service, and are less of a drain on the public purse.

But Spinetta had also explained that

the increase in traffic has occurred in unreformed France as well. With the end of industrial jobs, and service jobs concentrated in towns, the population commutes. On the other hand, high speed trains have completely replaced planes for businessmen on trips of up to 300 km.

Spinetta also says that all European governments pay 40% of railway costs, and, incidentally in a footnote, he mentions that the wage bill increases with liberalisation. As for quality, who is to decide what that is? Companies like Southern can't be doing much for the 'arriving on time' and 'no cancellations' British statistics.

Railways cost money, much more than fares can pay for. 90% of journeys are made by car (and 90 % of freight is carried by road). People invest vast amounts in the purchase and running of their cars, plus they pay road tax. The state on the other hand must subsidise trains, and it is inconceivable that it should stop doing it. If everyone commuted by car, for example, there would be an environmental and social disaster; the state must therefore provide funds.

The opposition

If the railway workers (they are called '*cheminots*', and Spinetta uses that friendly name) protest against the whole project, they will be accused of selfishly defending their own interests. The population are attached to the national railways but may have little sympathy for the privileged defending their status. The main privilege actually is the right to security of employment, and incremental wage increases. They do have the free rail travel granted to the railway employee's family, including in-laws, in the form of a certain number of free tickets per year, four in the case of in-laws. Otherwise *cheminots* have health care on a par with other public or private employees, and work a 35-hour week. In the case of long distance shifts, allowances cover their absence from home.

There is an anti-*cheminots* campaign beginning, for example a well-known journalist appeared on TV to remind the public that the railway workers are no longer the Resistance heroes decorated in 1945 for their part in the liberation of France. It was found out that they were part of the machinery of the Holocaust, as the head of the SNCF admitted with apologies, in California in 2011. (This apology was a condition for contracts for the sale of French trains in America.)

Despite all these tactics, a week after the launch of the report, the government

is taking no chances, and suggests pushing through these reforms by decree, as it did the Labour Code, avoiding prolonged discussions and possible unrest. The Prime Minister (whose name few people know, but it's Edouard Philippe) said in a speech later that same week that he would not follow Spinetta in cutting lesser-used lines, but that the debt carried by the SNCF was equivalent to the French Education budget, 50 billion.

According to him French trains cost 30% more than other European trains, and that's due to the privileged statute of the *cheminots*. Lots of free tickets do not amount to billions, as said above, but anyway he is also not comparing like with like. Take the example of England. Unlike France, Britain has not built High Speed Lines and is therefore not burdened by that cost; there is one planned (HS2), costing 50 billion, and one already built (HS1, access line for the Channel Tunnel), and partly funded by private investment. Besides, private companies run railways in Britain; they are subsidised by the state, but costs can be made to appear or disappear from the national debt with clever accounting; what appears or does not appear on national balance sheets is a mystery, once the private sector is involved.

It is to be hoped that the unions will expose these figures, and not just make general statements, however valid, about defending public services. People want to know about costs. The unions should use arguments that demolish the case made by the government re costs. For example, a management consulting group, the Boston Consulting Group, has built a comparison tool for European rail systems. This tool included: number of passengers, tons carried, quality (reliability, price, speed), security and cost to the public purse. In 2012, this tool placed France second in Europe, after Switzerland. It is only seventh now. The group points to lower investments in France compared to other European countries, contrary to claims. It is studies like that that strengthen the unions' case.

Where is the opposition in all of this? Who is providing the alternative analysis and proposals?

The right wing agrees with the reform, and anyway is in a bitter internal dispute after a scandalous lecture by one of its leading lights, Laurent Wauquiez. Otherwise, there is no opposition capable of mobilising the masses, and none apparently able to grapple with the Spinetta report and say what is wrong with it in detail.

Mélenchon ("Non submissive France") is busy with a campaign to stop nuclear power in France; in his spare time he is arguing with Pierre Laurent, head of the CP, about making an alliance or not. The CP is embroiled in the preparation of its next Congress in November. The Tours Congress in 1920 had created the CP out of the Second International. There is talk of preparing a 'reverse Tours Congress', that would disband the CP altogether.

The National Front is a shambles. After its vigorous campaigns for the presidential and subsequent general election, its meagre result of 8 parliamentary seats (Macron's outfit has 308) and the switching off of the media spotlight, there were serious defections: the star politician Marion Maréchal Le Pen resigned, and so did Marine's left hand man Florian Philippot. His line had prevailed during the campaign; the party had stressed national sovereignty, leaving Europe and the Euro, protectionism, reindustrialisation, as well as the political similarity between the all-liberal main parties. Without him, the party is floundering and finds it difficult to find its way again. It could just revert to its traditional anti-immigrant plank. Marine Le Pen wants to change its name at the next congress in March. Marion Maréchal Le Pen was back in the news; she went to America to speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), in Maryland on 22 January, on the same platform as Mike Pence, Nigel Farage and Donald Trump.

Nevertheless eventually French radio quoted the National Front's opposition to the rail reform. The media love the National Front, and anyway the support of the National Front is not a good thing for the *cheminots*. But the other political groups are really inaudible.

Miscellaneous

Froggy cannot end without mentioning the annual international Agricultural Show in Paris which opened at the end of February. Macron prepared his visit by inviting a thousand young farmers to a buffet at the Elysée Palace the day before, to ensure a friendly reception when he attends the event. This is the same tactic as last year when, before attending the annual congress of Mayors of France, he had invited a thousand mayors to a buffet. You can't accuse Macron of not working on his popularity. When Johnny Halliday

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Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Cuckoo Capitalism

Classical Capitalism died in the 1930s. It had been unhealthy, ever since the rival Global Empires tore each other apart in the First World War. Ex-Marxist Benito Mussolini had pioneered the idea of a healthy economy in which the state was much more active. The rich kept their property, but the working class was looked after. He called it Corporatism, and it was widely copied.

The USA's New Deal was Corporatism without dictatorship. President Roosevelt depended on allies in Congress, including Southern Democrats who stopped him doing anything about racism and segregation. They *did* favour work and welfare. Black people with a vote knew he was on their side. Even so, the Supreme Court overturned some of it. The recovering economy might have been re-strangled in the name of Sound Finance, without World War Two.

Economists are agreed that measures suitable for killing large numbers of foreigners in warfare would be disastrous if used to help ordinary people in peacetime.

The Cold War had many causes: but the USA made it pay to justify continuing tax-and-spend. Money was pumped into every anti-Communist regime, though many were Corporatist and some dictatorships. In South Korea, military dictator and later President Park Chung-hee had Communist connections vastly more serious than the minor links Jeremy Corbyn has been accused of. Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore talks in his biography about secret meetings with the region's armed and illegal Communist movement. Along with the Kuomintang,

which never replaced the Leninist party structure it gained from its early-1920s alliance with the Soviet Union, they were the big successes of the Cold War in Asia. Successes then propagandised as victories of 'capitalism'.

A lot of this was the fault of the Far Left, which is where most new thinking begins before it spreads into the wider society. An intelligent approach would have been to say that Corporatist Capitalism had replaced Classical Capitalism, as a sensible step towards full Socialism. Instead there was an hysterical fear of Corporatism, identified with fascism, even though Corporatist USA and Stalin's Soviet Union had defeated Nazism.

Incomes policy and workers control were rejected as Corporatist, seen as an unusually wicked variety of capitalism.

Corporatism as a wicked distortion of capitalism was the New Right's argument. It attracted voters weary of pointless leftist militancy. Except you couldn't *actually* kill Corporatism. The half-forgotten economic crisis of 1987 was solved by Keynesian methods: more government spending to avoid a slump. Ronald Reagan *talked* capitalism, but ran up huge debts. Vastly increased military spending, anathema to Classical Capitalism. And when the Soviet Union finally collapsed – a long-term decline due to the crushing of Reformed Leninism back in 1968 – they soon found fresh enemies.

We have had Corporatism fine-tuned for a more-than-millionaire class. Cuckoos who depend heavily on accounting fiddles like Carillion:

"Predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s, timeshares were marketed as holidays

without the hassle, and many investors were told their timeshares would increase in value and be easy to get out of, whenever they wanted.

"But for many, like Wendy, this did not materialise.

"Instead she has been left to pay the maintenance charges that come with the property, which have now increased to £900 per year."¹

Most home-owners have done OK, but this has hurt others:

"The extent to which young people are locked out of the British housing market has been revealed in new figures from economists.

"The biggest decline in home ownership in the last 20 years has been among middle-income 25 to 34-year-olds, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said.

"In 1995-96, 65% of this group owned a home, but just 27% do in 2015-16, with the biggest drop in south-east England."²

Top Accountants as 'Easy Priests'

My friends from Roman Catholic backgrounds tell me that believers would go looking for 'Easy Priests'. Priests who would give you light atonements for whatever sins you'd recently been up to. How this would work out theologically, I don't claim to know. I don't anyway believe any of it. What worries me is how it works out in accountancy:

"MPs have accused the 'big four' accountancy firms of 'feasting on what was soon to become a carcass' as it emerged they banked £72m for work linked to collapsed government contractor Carillion in the years leading up to its financial failure."³

Corporations choose their own accountants, and can feed them profitable consultancy work. Accountants do not bite the hands that feed them.

Thatcherism supposedly restored British values. It has in fact destroyed them. A bloated managerial and speculator class grabs more and more. The 'Next Nine' – people in the richest 10% but not the more-than-millionaire 1% – have gained little or nothing beyond what they'd have had without the New Right. People below

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died, he made a very sentimental speech in the direction of the provincial mourners who had come to Paris to pay their respects. It was well received.

There is every chance that the reform of the railways will go through, and Macron's toughness won't be held against him. The *cheminots*, 190,000

of them, are the last bastion of 'non flexible' workers: trained, well rewarded, with a secure profession, with the expertise that is best used as part of direct labour, rather than outsourced, and part of a proud historical entity. The government is determined to do away with them over the next twenty to thirty years, starting with new entrants.

that have lost out, including much of the solid Middle Class.

The 'invisible hand' has been picking the pockets of the working mainstream. The money mysteriously flows to a more-than-millionaire class.

The 'deregulated' economy mostly scrapped useful regulations that had hampered them and kept them honest.

Let them starve, but do not sin!

"Former staff who worked for the charity in Chad alleged that women believed to be prostitutes were repeatedly invited to the Oxfam team house there, with one adding that a senior member of staff had been fired for his behaviour in 2006..."

"Our code of conduct now stipulates: 'I will also not exchange money, offers of employment, employment, goods or services for sex or sexual favours.' In 2011 the code only prohibited sex with beneficiaries and anyone under 18."⁴

New rules that please well-off Western Feminists. Some of whom have traded sexual favours for nice jobs, but never as crude as cash.

The new rules do not say '*I will never promote anyone for sexual favours*'. Something that's widespread, and unfair to those who don't seek advancement that way. And a 'gateway' to sexual harassment, obviously.

In Australia, a formal ban was imposed during a general scandal over the Deputy Leader.⁵ The man quit after leaving his wife for his former media adviser. He is also accused of sexual harassment, which he denies. But if there was a rigid rule that you don't have sex with anyone you have power over, a lot of the problems would vanish. It is often an informal rule, but needs to be beefed up.

Paying for sex with existing prostitutes should not be a crime, and in most countries it is not. Making this normal would make it less likely for other women to get harassment.

But women who are already privileged try to use the overall inferior and vulnerable status of women to lever themselves into equality with over-privileged men. Show too little concern for vulnerable people of both sexes: often they cover for unfair treatment. Sometimes fronting for outrageous pro-rich policies, as Thatcher did. And showing that women can be fully equal in shitty behaviour, if anyone doubted it.

Overall, the New Right have proved themselves as pure as the driven sludge!

Death of a God-Salesman

Not many Britons cared, when Billy Graham died at age 99. The satirical magazine *Private Eye* long ago called him 'the American God-salesman', when he tried his methods in Britain. But in the USA, he pioneered a wave of right-wing populist preachers.

Graham used tricks from commerce to debase religion. Made it the servant of business. He has been praised for his stand against racism and segregation:⁶ but that was part of the package that led to the New Right. Nixon was another pioneer, easing the Southern Racists out of their allegiance to New Deal politics. They could then be robbed of job security and good wages. Given small concessions, but without restoring segregation. But since state power was now seen as bad, informal segregation could and did flourish. Useful non-whites could be brought into the elite, while poor whites and non-whites were encouraged to resent each other.

Preachers like Graham rant a lot about how much they read the Bible. They actually ignore most of it. The entire teaching on care for the poor. The firm belief that wealth is dishonest. The rejection of violence. We now learn that Graham wanted Nixon to target water-control in North Vietnam, causing massive death by flooding.⁷

Will this last until skepticism and atheism triumph? They are already growing. But I recently saw a claim that younger Christians were turning against preachers who support social injustice:

"The devil's bargain by which the evangelical Protestant churches sold their souls to the Republican Party in exchange for political influence was never destined to have a long shelf life, and it's starting to stink too strongly for a good many sensitive noses. Donald Trump, interestingly enough, seems to have been the bright orange straw that broke this particular camel's back; a great many young evangelical Christians, watching their elders turn cheerleader for a man who's a poster child for every one of the seven deadly sins, have had enough."⁸

Fine if it happened. It probably will not happen.

The logic of Gospel teaching, taken to be God's Word, would be lives of quiet virtue and piety. To accept existing authority, while urging it to more mercy and restraint. This makes perfect sense if you see God as all-powerful, but choosing to let evil flourish because of 'Free Will'. Plenty of real Christians do uphold those

values, sometimes inconveniencing the USA. Russia's Orthodox Christians get sneered at for doing just that, and for having noticed that pro-Western liberals made a mess of Russia when they ran it in the 1990s.

There is lot else Orthodox Christians could be criticised for, including corruption in Greece. But they mostly follow the logic of their faith. Loud-mouths like the late Billy Graham did not.

China facing the 2020s

In 2020, President Trump comes up for re-election. The world could change in a number of different ways, depending on who wins. Trump *might* hold together his coalition and win, particularly if Bernie Sanders were Democratic candidate and the 'Clinton Democrats' backed a Centrist to split the vote. Or Saunders could win, making a radically different new world possible. Or the winner could be a 'Clinton Democrat' who would resume the USA's efforts to bend the wider world to its values.

Meantime Climate Change is happening faster and proving worse than scientists forecast. Scientists tend to be cautious. As well as overall warming, there is unusual warming over the Arctic. This knocks the Jet Stream into odd patterns, so while the USA has a warm winter, Europe got a burst of Siberian weather covering what is officially the first day of spring.

Trump has blundered by becoming a committed denialist, whereas Britain's Tories and many other right-wingers have shifted.

Seeing this and seeing the way in which US authority is in fast decline may explain why China has decided to change the rules on Presidential terms. Probably they will not now have a complete change-over of leadership in 2022, when they have their next Party Congress. This is seen in Western media as a power-grab by Xi. I see it more as the Party preparing itself for likely tough times.

Official commentaries stress the importance of concentrating power:

"It has been proved over history that a leadership structure in which the top leader of China simultaneously serves as the President, the head of the Party, and the commander-in-chief of the military is an advantageous and adoptable strategy."

And other things are being consolidated:⁹

"It has long been a reality that China is led by the CPC. To be more accurate, the new article is written into the Constitution

as a historical choice and a summing-up of the Chinese people's experience. There has been a related statement in the preamble to the Constitution, but this has been challenged by some who are supported and instigated by overseas forces. In this sense, stressing the CPC leadership in the Constitutional amendment proposal was essential."¹⁰

In the Tiananmen Crisis of 1989, the West briefly hoped that China's National Assembly might overturn party rule, as did happen in much of Eastern Europe later that same year.¹¹ That is no longer mentioned in the Western media— not exactly *denied*, but readers are nudged in an anti-China direction rather than encouraged to think. If you see the crack-down as a fight for survival, it becomes much less shocking.

There clearly is some Chinese fear of a repeat. One reform is a solemn oath that officials are now going to be required to take.¹² This may arise from the antics of opposition legislators elected in Hong Kong, who refused to take their own oath properly. Unlike the West, it seems oaths still have weight for many Chinese.

The existing anti-corruption work done by the 'Supervision Commission' is also being given a solid legal basis:

"China's national supervision commission will be given a constitutional place..."

"Making clear the legal status of the supervision commission as a national organ will significantly promote the full-scale supervision of public officers and press ahead with the strategy of comprehensively deepening reform, implementing the rule of law and strengthening Party discipline."¹³

Law and actual power are being brought into harmony, but not in line with Western advice. With Trump in the White House and Britain in Brexit chaos, that is hardly surprising.

Stagnation with an unchanging leadership is a real danger. But perhaps not the worst danger.

Czech Majority Undemocratically Elect Anti-Western Candidate

This is not an actual newspaper headline, but it comes close. The *Guardian*, bewildered by the failure of liberal-left politics, used the headline "*Czech Republic re-elects far-right president Milos Zeman*"¹⁴

Zeman was a Social-Democrat for most of his political career. He broke away to form a centre-left *Party of Civic Rights*

that the Wiki lists as "Social democracy, Direct democracy, Left-wing populism, Anti-immigration, Cultural conservatism, Soft Euroscepticism".¹⁵

His party has an alliance with '*Freedom and Direct Democracy*', which the Wiki lists as "Direct democracy, Hard Euroscepticism, Anti-immigration, Anti-Islam, Right-wing populism, Czech nationalism, Right-wing to far-right". Linked to the French National Front and the Italian Northern League.

Zeman is not Far-Right. He is a leftist who rejects immigration, and the entire Blairite or Clinton-Democrat package. Rejects letting in clever foreigners from all over the world while neglecting ordinary people.

Liberalism isn't working.

The best outcome is a revived left, as is happening in Britain. But the *Guardian* remains lukewarm about Corbyn.

From Outer Space came Baked Alaska

Back in the 1860s, a clever cook found that ice cream covered in meringue can spend long enough in the oven to brown the outside, but not melt the ice cream

A object called 'Oumuamua may be the same thing, on a galactic scale.

It has long been believed that our sun sits in the middle of a vast cloud of icy objects, a few of which get knocked out of orbit and descend into the Inner Solar System to become long-period comets. (Different from short-period comets, which come from the Kuiper Belt.) The Oort Cloud has never been directly seen. But if it is not there, where would those comets come from?

Definitely not from between the stars. Comet orbits can be calculated, and their far end is almost always where the Oort Cloud is assumed to be. 'Oumuamua was a long-expected rarity – its orbit pointed way outside the solar system, to some unknown star.

The belief is that all stars have Oort Clouds. That objects in them get knocked into interstellar space. Most stay there: but with billions of them, some must pass through our solar system.

'Oumuamua was the first seen, because it was also a Near-Earth Object. Never that close, but scientists now keep a close watch to be sure none of them are dangerous. This includes tracing their orbits – and 'Oumuamua was recognised as special.

It was also not a comet. There was no tail, despite the sun having warmed it to hundreds of degrees.¹⁶ Leaving aside

nonsense about interstellar spacecraft, was it a much rarer rocky fragment from some alien solar system?

Experts now think that it was actually a 'Baked Alaska' ice-ball. Cosmic rays over billions of years changed its surface to something that did not melt in the sunlight. Probably.

We should soon find many more such objects, as the watch for Near-Earth Objects improves. A new device called the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope will soon be working and should find hundreds.

Snippets

Massive Tory failure in Local Government

"Earlier this month, Northamptonshire went effectively bankrupt..."

"Northamptonshire's seven MPs, all Conservatives, accused the council of mismanagement. Heather Smith, the council leader, said the government had starved it of funds. Eighteen backbench Conservative councillors called on Smith to resign..."

"Furthermore, it has crashed after rigid adherence to the Tory ideological rulebook for local government. Northamptonshire embarked on a 'next generation' reform plan in 2014. Services would be outsourced or turned into profit-making companies. The council would drastically shrink in size and be run like a business."¹⁷

Like Carillion?

The patriot's Brexit game

"One of the biggest growers of berries in the UK is moving part of its business to China because it cannot guarantee it will find enough fruit pickers available to work.

"Up to 200 seasonal jobs have gone at Haygrove's farm in Ledbury, Herefordshire, and some of the company's raspberry and blueberry-growing will be relocated to Yunnan province in China because of uncertainty over migrant labour due to Brexit.¹⁸

They could have kept decent farm jobs. But 'market forces' were against this.

Boots, Boots, Boots, Boots, Marching over all of us!

"Boots billed the NHS £1,579 for one 500ml tub of a cream made up specifically for patients with skin problems in 2016..."

"Reports claim the same moisturiser- a

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Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier

by Michael Murray

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

In this issue:

- (1) My marching orders
- (2) Talking about Brexit, Blairites and the future of the Labour Party....

(1) Marching orders

I've just got my marching orders – and a stack of local election leaflets to distribute – “For a Fairer and more Sustainable Hackney.” The local party ward, Brownswood, is to intensify canvassing/leafleting in the run-in to the May 3rd local elections, from tomorrow, March 1st. A start was made before Christmas in some parts of our Hackney North constituency to which the typical response was “Elections? More elections?” Amongst the slow trickle of feedback from voters canvassed then was a small drift away

from Labour to Lib Dems in some areas, reminiscent of the early days of canvassing for last year's General Election, which, as we know, saw nearly all of the Lib Dem vote returning to Labour come polling day. In both cases the issue threatening to undermine Labour was its perceived stance on Brexit, hence the coverage in item (2) of Jeremy Corbyn's potentially game-changing statement on the Customs Union, (26th February.)

I canvassed at the weekend in Barnet, a North London suburban constituency which has been targeted as a potential Labour gain in the local elections and a parliamentary seat in any forthcoming General Election. It was a first for me in so many respects. The plentiful volunteers from outside the constituency were organized into

teams including experienced locals who, after the tea ceremony, gave us a brief but comprehensive introduction to the area, its social history and composition and the issues likely to come up on the doorstep. Though the area to which we were allocated mostly comprised single family residences there was also a large number of apartment blocks, mostly twelve to a building on three stories.

Now, that normally presents a problem in other parts of London: gaining access to the flat occupants. The drill is you work yourself through all the outside bells until some kind soul answers and allows you and your team members access. If no access is gained, you move along to the next block. A succession of blocks where nobody responds can make you question your

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mixture of creams- is regularly prescribed in the UK for around £1.73.

“The NHS said companies increasing drug prices were harming both taxpayers and patients, it is reported.”¹⁹

Websites

Previous *Newsnotes* at the Labour Affairs website, <http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/>. Also <https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/newsnotes-historic/>. I blog occasionally at <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>.

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vocation. But, invariably, in this corner of Barnet, the first bell rung did the trick and we were in. Not only that, people came to the doors to take the election literature and to engage in conversations.

I can say it was the first time in the four years or so, covering many local, national and mayoral elections I experienced people telling me they'd voted Conservative in the past and were now thinking of, or going to, vote Labour. There was a pattern to it: a combination of the impact of local council cuts and poor or non-existent communication with their elected Tory councillors. Brexit wasn't mentioned, one way or the other. But I got an earful about it from a fellow canvasser, a Brexiteer, or, as he would prefer to be called, a Lexiteer – a left wing advocate of Brexit.

I might mention that Keir Starmer, Labour Party Shadow Secretary for State for Exiting the European Union, saw us off on our canvassing run, from the Constituency Office, after a few encouraging words. For this foot soldier his very presence there, in this small suburban corner of London, in what must be a crazy schedule of Party activity, was more than enough encouragement. My Lexiteer comrade muttered something about him being a Blairite. If he is, I hope there are more "Blairites" like him around. There. I've nailed my colours to the mast. And my hope.

(2) And, talking about Blairites, Brexit and the future of the Labour Party.....

I'm not the only one who marvelled at Keir Starmer's forensic picking apart of the proposed Tory Brexit legislation last year. With the other shadow cabinet members of the Exiting the EU team he played a blinder in holding the Government to account and, tactically, gaining cross party support for substantial changes – the transition period being one. Challenging the Government's Phase I strategy was another.

But that performance didn't impress all in the Labour camp. They wanted Labour to take ten steps forward in pursuit of a vague notion of a 2nd

Referendum. But the Party stuck to its prosaic task of being the loyal opposition as the discontent grew. An exasperated Maya Goodfellow, berated the continued attacks on the Labour leadership. "This is practical politics," she pointed out. "Unprecedented negotiations and multiple moving pieces, compounded by a flailing government, does not make for a set of circumstances where quick, clear-cut decisions are easy to come by." She added: "Labour didn't cause Brexit, is not in charge of it and yet the party has the shrewdest position," (Guardian, 12 December, 2017).

On Monday, 26 February Jeremy Corbyn set out Labour's updated position on Brexit: for "a" customs union and a new relationship with the single market. I think of my Lib Dem customers, other floating voters – and sections of our own membership too – and I welcome it. They, like me, can see it puts real distance between Labour and the Tories on the burning issue of the day. "It's good politics and good economics," was one verdict, with which I agree. Andrew Harrap, in Labourlist, 26th February.

That takes some of the wind out of the sails of those 'remainers' within the parliamentary party and their support amongst the more politically active membership which was, again, growing bolder in, if not openly challenging, certainly pre-empting, the Corbyn leadership. Do I see the hands of the Mandelsons, Campbells and Blairs in this? Bloody sure I do. They haven't gone away. The proof? Their periodic statements through their well-established media networks.

That is not to say that there isn't a section of the party which is genuinely concerned about the Labour line on

Brexit. There is. Both Hackney constituencies have committed to setting up a Brexit "think tank," for want of a better word, to focus on Brexit and feed into the democratic policy machinery of the party. Incidentally, I'm pleased to report that, at the end of February, Hackney North, my constituency, at its monthly meeting, by a 2 to 1 margin, kicked to touch a motion calling for Labour to consider the 2nd Referendum route.

Ultimately, it can be said that the real choice facing the UK is a hard Brexit or a commitment to remain in the EU. The Referendum, by its close result, did not decisively resolve that. So, we are where we are. "Labour MPs in Leave-leaning seats" writes Harrop, "know there aren't many voters in Doncaster or Stoke who voted Brexit because they yearned to strike free trade deals as a sovereign nation state. And it is also manufacturing heartlands that stand to lose most without tariff-free, frictionless trade in goods with Europe. As long as Labour MPs can show their support is in aid of a Brexit that works, rather than no Brexit at all, they can avoid accusations of betrayal." Harrop concludes: "Backing a customs union ... may not be Labour's final line on Brexit – but it is a good one for now." And that's the point: options are being kept open. In the long run – and we could be talking the best part of a decade – Brexit, for Labour, is now a journey, not a destination. Certainly, Labour's stated position on the Customs Union makes this foot soldier's life a lot easier – and a lot more hopeful. The Grown-ups in the room are making a move on Brexit. And on the dying animal that is the Conservative Party.

Sometimes I wonder if we shall ever grow up in our politics and say definite things which mean something, or whether we shall always go on using generalities to which everyone can subscribe, and which mean very little.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Some great people are leaders and others are more lucky, in the right place at the right time. I'd put myself in the latter category. But I'd never call myself a normal designer of anything.

Steve Wozniak (co-founder of Apple Computers)

A Letter From Our New Zealand Correspondent

Feargus O'Raghallaigh

Babies for the Empire'

– a story of eugenics

"The Royal New Zealand Plunket Society is an incorporated society in New Zealand that provides a range of free health services to children under the age of five with their development, health and wellbeing"

Wikipedia

In 1883 Francis Galton, the British polymath and cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the word 'eugenics'. The root is Classical Greek and roughly translates as 'good breeding/stock'.

Galton was a eugenicist. He was an advocate of government and society adopting a worldview and policies and establishing bodies, as he put it in 1909, "agencies under social control that may improve the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally." He developed this idea from Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and his proposal of a process of natural selection as an explanation of species development, and the variations and diversities found in the natural world.

Galton was one of those who extended the Darwinian proposition to human life including as a mechanism through science, genetics, and through public policy of human improvement – and a protection against degeneration, an inbuilt aspect of the nature of the human race as many saw it at that point. Science and policy offered salvation – eugenics.

It was an idea that spread rapidly through the world including the British Empire's colonies and the dominions – Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. What is today one of the main voluntary bodies in New Zealand, the Plunket Society (or simply 'Plunket') has its origins in the eugenics movement.

Plunket is a pregnancy and infancy and early childhood healthcare service. It is a voluntary body but closely connected with the state. It is both an NGO and a QUANGO in effect. It dates from 1907 when it was established as the Society for the Health of Women and Children in Dunedin (South Island) by Frederic Truby King and his wife Bella. By 1915 it had gained Royal recognition and added 'Royal' to its title.

Truby King (1858 – 1938) was a medical doctor and polymath with interests in animal breeding, human psychology, psychiatry and mental illness as well as

child-rearing. He had also in his thinking a kind of crude Freudianism. He was a eugenicist and Plunket was an expression of his outlook – although today, neither Plunket nor New Zealand as such trumpet this. It has been quietly buried.

If there were an organisation, 'Families of the Empire' Truby King's family would be among its anointed. His father Thomas, was an English MP at one point but was also (in 1840) an original member of the Committee of Colonists established at Plymouth with its project of a New Plymouth in North Island's Taranaki, New Zealand implementing the colonial ('plantationist') project of Edward Gibbon Wakefield's New Zealand Company. King then, one of the first colonists, established himself in the new colony of New Plymouth in Taranaki, married the daughter of another first colonial and went on to become an MP in the colonial parliament and the manager of the New Plymouth branch of the Bank of New Zealand.

Truby King was colonial plantationist blue blood. But he was no backwoodsman. He was a progressive and 'scientist' in outlook, functioned within the living *web layer of the Empire – circulated easily between New Zealand and Britain and Europe and other colonies and wider. This was not simply a circulation of people, travel, but also ideas, concepts – and (another story) capital and its accumulation.

In 1880 he went to study medicine in Edinburgh. In 1886 he went on to do a BSc in public health (a new degree). In 1887 he became resident surgeon at Glasgow Infirmary. Shortly after that he returned to New Zealand, first to Wellington General and then in 1889 to Dunedin as medical superintendent at its Seacliff Mental Hospital, then New Zealand's biggest such institution. He also took up lecturing on mental diseases at Dunedin's Otago University, home to then New Zealand's only medical school, and today its premier such school. Through his life he continued to travel widely: for example in 1913 he was back in London as New Zealand representative at the Child Welfare Conference. He was a regular visitor to Britain.

People like Truby King were surely the means of globally spreading and developing Galton's idea, eugenics. He returned to New Zealand, his head full of the ferment of progressivism – of the ideas of science and progress circulating

in Europe, including eugenics and new theories of the mind.

Seacliff had a very large working farm attached. Truby King engaged in scientific research on the farm's dairy herd, plagued with high calf mortality due mainly to scouring (a bovine diarrhoea). He changed the feed regime, improved conditions and sorted the problem. He saw high infant mortality in much the same way. There was, he saw, a high correlation with again, diarrhoea, associated factors like dirty milk and poor personal hygiene. He advocated breast feeding and failing this, a substitute of his creation based on cow's milk.

In 1905 having been directly confronted with three dying infants he immediately took the infants into his personal care and also set about drumming up support for and setting about creating what would become 'Plunket'.

He turned his summer residence Karitane, into a child-care facility in effect. He based his care programme on nurses and his belief, based on his scientific research, in breastfeeding of infants. He attracted the support of Dunedin's bourgeois notables, especially the wives in his advocacy and fund-raising. In 1907 came the Society for the Health of Women and Children.

Truby King developed it all into a national cause, everywhere focused on the wives of the haute bourgeoisie as advocates and leaders. He was the first 'crowd-sourcer'. The crowning achievement was attracting to his cause of the then (1904 – 1910) Governor of New Zealand, (the Anglo-Irish) Lord Plunket – and critically his wife, Lady Plunket. She would play an influential support role in Truby King's development of child-care nursing. Thus the emergence of 'Plunket' as the adoptive and everyday name of the today, Royal New Zealand Plunket Society.

Truby King in effect developed a new nursing specialism among already trained nurses, paediatrics. They became the Plunket nurses. There was though a second group, wholly trained within Plunket philosophy and purpose, Karitane nurses.

In addition, there was a network of Karitane hospitals and community nursing, home visits and advice. There was a widely syndicated newspaper column. There were constant speaking engagements. There were a series of huge-circulation books on child-rearing, co-published by the government. One, *The Expectant Mother*

and Baby's First Months, was given free to every couple on their application for a marriage licence. Truby King developed, in the words of the historian Erik Olssen, a 'superb' propaganda machine but also a hugely effective infancy and childcare service.

Where is the eugenics in all of this?

The focus on pregnancy and child-rearing was inspired by a number of socio-political beliefs (as well as science). One was that the white races of industrialising and urbanising countries were degenerating: people of good stock and sensibility having learned the advantages of smaller families were being outbred by the large-family idle and feckless and undeserving. Rising rates of mental illness, alcoholism and unemployment and more in the whole population resulted. There was cultural degeneration, loss of discipline, community and citizenship in favour of individuality and selfishness.

Industrialisation and urbanisation led to family breakdown. Women went into paid work and themselves lost their understanding of the true cause and nature of womanhood. He adopted the cult of true womanhood in the cause of retrieving the conjugal family, having children and child-rearing.

Truby King could see all this in the early years of the twentieth century: in the very high infant mortality rates, the poor parenting, the malnutrition and disease that he saw in the course of his medical practice – and in the rates of mental illness and related conditions that he saw in his Dunedin mental hospital.

Further, there was also externally, the rise of the 'Asiatics'. The Asian Hordes threatened. Public spending and taxes had to be raised to cope with degeneracy and external threats.

The Plunket advocacy, the support services, the community nursing and family help services were all aimed at reversing the slide to degeneracy – and the threat to Empire that on the view of Truby King and bourgeois society lay therein.

In the face of all of this in *The Wealth of a Nation is Its People* we read, "The most urgent and pressing need of our vast Empire is ample British-born population ... In all civilised countries a smaller and smaller percentage of new population is being derived from the best sources."

Again, (1914), on Plunket, "Its objective was the care of the infant before birth and during the period of infancy; in other words practical eugenics. It was really an attempt to rear a strong and healthy race by

constructive and not restrictive means.

"The object primarily was to eliminate the unfit, but to prevent their production by aiding in the full development of the healthy. for the sake of women and children, for the advancement of the Dominion, and for the honour of the Empire."

There is here a Darwinian or Lamarckian idea, as opposed to the naked 'nature' argument of neo Darwinism. Positive intervention is possible – as opposed to the negative policy of elimination of the unfit: you can improve people and improvement can be transmitted. He did not believe in the predominance of nature (as opposed to nurture). The emphasis on the former led the Eugenics Education Society (EES), he argued, "to suppose that Nature is everything and that nurture scarcely mattered as regards the race. That was all wrong."

At the same time, he was not opposed to sterilisation or other 'negative' policies. Further, to quote Diane Paul in her essay, *Truby King, Infant Welfare and the Boundaries of Eugenics***,

"...he believed that infants born mentally defective should be left to die, as it was no kindness to them, their siblings or their parents to keep them alive ... and for that reason, 'laid it down as an absolute rule that no baby was ever to be admitted to a Karitane hospital if mentally defective or abnormal.'"

Until circa 1920 the emphasis was very much on breastfeeding, the early infant years, motherhood as a profession – and Plunket support for mother-and-child during these early (infant) years.

Post-1920 there was increased emphasis on longer-term child-rearing, the culture within the family – and the inculcation of in a word, discipline. Fondness and indulgence, play and the encouragement of precocity had no place in family life. Obedience, regularity in everything and discipline were emphasised.

Doris Lessing in her volume of autobiography *Under My Skin*, writes of her childhood,

"My mother planned to use the loving coercions of Montessori for our upbringing, but meantime it was the harsh disciplines of one Doctor Truby King that ruled the nurseries both in Kermanshah and in Teheran. He was a New Zealander, whose book was law for innumerable parents ...

"Truby King was the continuation of the cold and harsh discipline of my mother's childhood and my father's childhood. I am sure my mother never saw this: she was only doing what all good parents did.

Even to read that guide to excellence in family relations is painful."

Eugenics and ideas derived from eugenics were widely adopted through much of the world once Darwin's and Galton's thinking began to become known. Take-up was not confined to the British or their colonists – or Germans, Americans, Scandinavians or other whites. Many of the ideas took hold in for example, Japan and among Maori in New Zealand.

Plunket was not at all unusual. It would rather have been unusual if it had not adopted and pursued eugenic ideas.

Such ideas still circulate and have support but today eugenics is the idea that dare not speak its name: Hitler gave it a bad name.

Plunket also has changed. It remains a large voluntary body but today the regional structure is gone: it is now centralised and professionalised. Some features have disappeared: the Karitane hospitals for example. It continues in a relationship with government – but more NGO than the de facto QUANGO it also was in the past. Its power in that sense has waned. On the other hand it remains a presence in almost every major town in the country.

The eugenics and related ideas – for example those relating to stern discipline – have gone (but then they have largely gone more generally too). Plunket also is no longer de facto Pakeha – indeed it has pretty much inverted itself with today a huge focus on Maori and Pasifika peoples. It can justify this with the argument that these communities and groups are where the most acute family and childhood problems today exist – dysfunctional households, single-parent families, problems of nutrition and diet and overarchingly, poverty, low educational attainment and in truth outright racial discrimination.

Ideas of the undeserving, the idle and the feckless, the larrikin layabouts and scroungers do still exist here and even seem to prevail in one quarter especially, the state welfare agency, Work and Income New Zealand, (WINZ), and its parent Ministry of Social Development.

*The New Zealand historian Tony Ballantyne has proposed that the idea of the Empire was like a web, "with 'vertical' connections developing between Britain and its colonies and 'horizontal' connections linking various colonies directly. He has suggested that the key work of imperial historians is to reconstruct these 'webs of empire' to understand how the empire operated and the ways in which it incorporated new lands and peoples." (Wikipedia)

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/41728/summary>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Ballantyne_\(historian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Ballantyne_(historian))

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British Trade Unionists and the Soviet Union: the visit of Walter Citrine in 1925. Part Three

by Dr J. G. Moher

In Part 1, (Labour Affairs, Dec/Jan 2017/18) we described this personal but significant visit in the context of the close relations which had developed between the TUC and Russian trade union leaderships since 1924. We examined the trade union situation there post- revolution and their quite autonomous (but not independent role) in the context of CPSU control in the new USSR, with their leader, Mikhail Tomsky in the Politburo.

In Part 2, (Labour Affairs, February 2018) we examined Citrine and Hicks' discussions with the senior officials of the Russian TUC about some of the key Soviet figures – Stalin, Trotsky and especially Zinoviev, Head of the Comintern – during the struggle for power after the death of Lenin. It highlighted the political importance the Soviet leadership attached to the Anglo-Russian Committee, which the TUC had enthusiastically just set up with the Russian unions. The credentials of that left leadership (of which Citrine was also a part), of Fred Bramley, General Secretary, Alf Purcell as President of the TUC and IFTU and George Hicks, chair of the International Committee was explored.

Part 3 'International trade union unity'

An international trade union body was first set up in 1913, but fell into disuse during the First World War. In 1919 the western European and American unions reformed as the International Federation of Trade Unions based in Amsterdam with a membership of around thirteen million. However, no Russian unions were involved though they sought to make contact via their Danish union. No response was received but it soon became clear that the Bolsheviks were hostile. Tomsky on behalf of the Russian unions also questioned their 'international' representativeness.¹ Lenin was even more scathing, predictably questioning the moral right of national and social democratic union leaders to assume the mantle of international working class leadership so soon after their complicity in the slaughter of the First World War. Lozovsky and Red International Labour Unions (RILU) were therefore set up to win the western working class away from the IFTU for their revolutionary aims. On the other side, the anti-communist union leader, Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labour was involved in IFTU's creation and so this body emerged in a contest for the allegiance of the unions in each country and internationally. However, the AFL withdrew from the IFTU that same year, signifying

that they couldn't identify with the more 'Clause IV'-type socialisation platform adopted by the British, German, French, Dutch and Belgian affiliates.²

For them, IFTU's main role was seen as lobbying the League of Nations and its International Labour Organisation (ILO) on employment and social reform conventions, which League member countries could adopt.³ Soon after, in Moscow the Communist International (founded by Lenin in 1919), formed a rival body, the RILU (or Profintern in Russian), to win the western workers for the revolution they fondly expected to follow their own. RILU's General Secretary, a Bolshevik apparatchik, Aleksander Lozovsky,⁴ lambasted IFTU, as a 'yellow' body (meaning, 'paid agents of international capitalism' viz., the League of Nations) for involving themselves in the tripartite government/employer/union ILO.⁵ They thought they could persuade individual unions and international secretariats of IFTU, (transport, dock and railway workers), to join them. For a time after 1920, the success of the Bolsheviks and what appeared to be good prospects for the spread of world revolution to Germany and other parts of Europe, lent credence to RILU/Profintern. Naturally, this further poisoned relations between the two rivals and so the IFTU Executive would have nothing to do with RILU/Profintern for its entire life (1937). However, by 1923 it was

clear that RILU/Profintern was not making much impression and only a small number of IFTU national unions had split off to join them. Nowhere was their failure more evident than in Britain, where not a single major union had left the IFTU.⁶ It seems that by 1923, Mikhail Tomsky, Chair of the Russian TUC (ARCCTU), had come to the conclusion that a different approach was necessary. As the head of by far the largest RILU affiliate, (over 6 million members), he made overtures to IFTU for a merger with RILU on mutually agreed terms. Most of the IFTU Executive were hostile, but the British IFTU delegation and TUC, led by General Secretary Fred Bramley and Alf Purcell, were keen to include the Russian unions (though not RILU) in that mainstream international 'family'.⁷ Tomsky had, of course, as a member of the Politburo, got prior approval of the Soviet leadership for such a change of tack. His pitch to them was that his approach would have a far greater chance in gaining access to the organised western proletariat and eventually take them over during a revolutionary upsurge.⁸ He was a much shrewder union leader/politician and a milder and more personable individual from a genuine union/working class background than Lozovsky and they were keen rivals. He had much more in common with the likes of Fred Bramley, Alf Purcell, George Hicks and Walter Citrine, all former craftsmen who got

on well.⁹ Some western unionists' thought Tomsky's underlying aim of a link-up internationally was to strengthen the unions' position in the emerging Soviet society and in view of the controversy in the USSR over the role of unions (see Part 1 Labour Affairs, February issue), this may well have been on his secret ARCCTU agenda.¹⁰

So, Russian delegates were invited to a succession of annual TUC conferences with Tomsky to address the TUC Congress in Hull, which Alf Purcell chaired, as President, in September 1924.¹¹ This provided the Russian leader with a major platform and over seven hundred delegates cheered him enthusiastically after his warm address, in a general atmosphere of international solidarity. Tomsky, and other union leaders had been part of the recently negotiated trade and credit Treaty with the Labour government in London, and full British Empire/USSR diplomatic relations were established. The positive terms had been assisted by the TUC's representations, which we saw caused ructions in the British Parliament, leading to the fall of the government (see Part 2, Labour Affairs, February issue, pp15-16). The Treaty was not ratified by the incoming Conservative government, though recognition and full diplomatic status for the USSR was not then revoked.¹² Tomsky and his union colleagues came again to the 1925 Congress in Scarborough as fraternal delegates, after they had a very comradely Anglo-Russian conference at the then TUC Eccleston Square, Victoria offices in April.¹³ To get round the determined opposition of most of the IFTU Executive members at Amsterdam, the General Council formed a bilateral Anglo-Russian Joint Advisory Committee (ARJAC) to coordinate their efforts in persuading IFTU to admit the Russian unions on compromise terms (Profinintern was forgotten about in practice). They aimed to call their own international union conference if IFTU Executive's continued 'to drag their

feet'. The Russian representatives were Tomsky, Aleksander Dogodov, Grigoriy Mel'nichansky with Yarotsky as interpreter (Andrew Rothstein, a prominent CPGB member, was also involved, as their British translator).¹⁴ This 'Anglo-Russian Committee' came to assume great importance for the Soviet leadership, out of all proportion to its actual role, because they thought it would give them leverage with the hostile British Baldwin government and become the germ of a rival international union movement to IFTU.

XI – Labour Government and Left/Right balance at the TUC

The reason Bramley had been able to proceed with this Left policy towards the Russian unions was, ironically, due to the election of a very moderate minority Labour government in January 1924. Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister, immediately appointed a number of the more 'right-wing/moderate' TUC leaders as ministers in his government.¹⁵ Purcell took over immediately as Chair of the General Council because the President elected in 1923, Margaret Bondfield, became a minister in January 1924. Purcell also replaced rail workers' leader, J.H. ('Jimmy') Thomas, (leader of the 'right-wing'¹⁶ General Council members and ally of the Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, on the General Council). He therefore became President of IFTU (the TUC was the largest and wealthiest affiliate).¹⁷ George Hicks also replaced Thomas as chair of the important TUC International Committee.

Another important consequence of those government appointments was the replacement of the 'right-wing' Frank Hodges MP (who also became a minister), by Arthur Cook as General Secretary of the massive Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), in a very close ballot. Even Bramley appreciated the significance of this result (about as great as Arthur Scargill's victory to become President of the NUM in 1982 – and Cook was his hero), when he described Cook to Citrine prophetically as 'a raving, tearing Communist. Now the miners are in for

a bad time.'¹⁸ Cook, through his place on the General Council and IFTU Miners' International Secretariat, would prove a strong Comintern/Profinintern ally against Purcell and Hicks, when they fell out of favour due to the TUC call off of the General Strike in 1926. He was to disappoint the Soviets a year later however, when the MFGB only abstained on the decision to abolish the Anglo-Russian Committee.¹⁹

Of course, Bramley, Purcell and Hicks were not alone on those General Councils in wanting to help the new young Soviet 'Workers' Republic'. Alonzo Swales (1870-1952), General Secretary of the very left-led Amalgamated Engineering Union (President, Tom Mann), became Chairman of the General Council after Purcell in 1925 and continued the Left hegemony as regards 'international unity'. He chaired an Anglo-Russian Conference with Tomsky and his ARCCTU colleagues at TUC offices in April 1925. A formidable orator, he did all he could to help them and visited Russia in 1926. The legendary dockers' leader Ben Tillet (1860-1943) of the Transport & General Workers Union (T&GWU), on the General Council and IFTU delegations, was also a leading figure in the 1924 Russian visit.²⁰ Will Thorne MP (1857-1946), General Secretary of the municipal general workers (GMWU), who had visited Russia during the Revolution in 1917, strongly supported Fred Bramley on TUC IFTU delegations.

Although not yet on the General Council, Ernest Bevin, still only Assistant General Secretary of the Dockers' Union, had begun to make a name for himself as 'the Dockers QC'. He had also championed the famous London dockers' action in 1920, after they prevented the loading of armaments for the Poles on the *Jolly George* in the Port of London and he was spokesman for the joint TUC/Labour Party national *Council of Action*, which lobbied Lloyd George to prevent government intervention generally.²¹ However, he didn't visit Russia and does not seem to have been that interested in the TUC's 'international unity' effort. He it was who sought to 'rein-in' the

General Council side of ARJAC (Purcell and Hicks especially) from going along with the Russian sides' demands in 1926, and when it came to the termination of the link in 1927, he spoke strongly against any deferment as Cook and the MFGB wanted.²² He was probably too taken up with the formation and re-organization of the Transport & General Workers Union (1922) for most of this time and only came on the General Council in September 1925. Other key General Council figures of that time were: John Bromley (1876-1945) of ASLEF, and Labour MP 1924-31, a prominent ILP supporter of the *Hands Off Russia* campaign, who was also on the 1924 delegation to Russia. Robert Williams, (1881-1936), the syndicalist-minded Welsh Secretary of the International Transport Workers Federation, had stood for Parliament in 1918 on a 'support the Bolshevik Revolution' ticket. He had gone to Russia with Purcell on the 1920 Labour movement delegation.

XII - The General Strike 1926 - Citrine as TUC General Secretary

Citrine and Hicks returned from Russia in October 1925, and Citrine took on the far more daunting role as acting General Secretary of the organisation which was facing its greatest ever challenge – the General Strike. As joint Secretary of ARJAC, he also had responsibility for the TUC's continuing efforts to broker its international unity task. This continued well into 1927 with various meetings and increasingly antagonistic correspondence after the call off of the General Strike.²³ The unions' 'Triple Alliance' and the TUC had flexed their industrial muscles in July 1925 ('Red Friday'). As a result of his support for two major disputes (London tramworkers and dockers nationwide) during the term of the Labour government the previous year, Bevin 'bore the reputation of being the most aggressive trade-union leader in the country', while A.J. Cook as General Secretary of the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), needed no lessons in that regard, supported as they also were by the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR).²⁴ This 'Triple Alliance' forced Baldwin's government to reinstate the war-time coal subsidy and set up the Samuel Inquiry about the coal industries' labour relations and finances. Known as 'Red Friday', it inflated the appeal of such threatened syndicalist actions, and its success gave important psychological

impetus to repeat the threat a year later.²⁵ But this time, in May 1926, matters went very differently as the now prepared Government hardened its position with the charge that the TUC was 'instituting a strike to overthrow the constitution'. Government allegations of active Soviet/Comintern interference in/funding of, the General Strike and miners' dispute, which had considerable substance, sharpened the TUC dilemma considerably.²⁶ After much agonising the General Council decided to decline the £26,000 offer in case it confirmed the government's claims of 'Russian Gold' in the public mind. But this refusal was taken as a deep insult by the Russians, who had collected the money from half a days' wages of their workers. No amount of explanation by Citrine to Tomsky would excuse it.

Of course, the Opposition in the CPSU and Comintern/Profintern leaders, seized on this refusal so as to embarrass Tomsky and Stalin for dallying with such traitors. Nor did the refusal abate the government's pressure to call off the strike. In addition to declaring an emergency, preparing sedition legislation against the unions, setting up regional police and other bodies to counter the strike and mobilising the middle class and university students as volunteers to break it, they now marshalled the troops. Understandably, the TUC backed down from an ill-prepared and never-intended military confrontation with the state and called off what they sought to call the 'National' (rather than 'General' with its syndicalist connotations) Strike.²⁷

That decision drew an even more amazingly extreme reaction from Tomsky's Central Council of Trade Unions, from the Comintern/Profintern and naturally from CPGB/Minority Movement. They received 'a thousand-word torrent of abuse' telegram (in bad English) in the names of Tomsky and Dogadov dated 5th September 1926 (it was apparently written by A. Lozovsky, Secretary of the *Profintern/RILU*, in woeful English!).²⁸ Citrine said, 'We resented the use of such terms as 'traitor' and 'lick-spittle, although ...commonplace in the Russian movement...Lenin had apparently said that the more intimate you were with the other fellow the greater was your entitlement to abuse him!'²⁹ The telegram blamed the General Council and in particular J.H. Thomas and Arthur

Pugh (then Chair), though not Citrine, for calling off the General Strike. It blamed the Anglo-Russian Committee (ARJAC) for turning down all their proposals to assist the miners. The General Council circulated the telegram and in September 1926, 'the Congress recorded its emphatic condemnation of the Russian action.'³⁰ It was indicative of a return to Lozovsky's earlier approach. All the efforts of the TUC to assist the Russian unions with IFTU would now be forgotten.

If their attention was drawn to Stalin's speech to the CPSU Central Committee of August 1st 1927, they would know why. In that speech, the Soviet leader dismissed 'slandorous' accusations of the Trotsky/Zinoviev/Kamenev Opposition that they had 'banked, so to speak, on the Anglo-Soviet Committee'. In their internal CPSU power struggle, the 'Anglo-Russian Committee' i.e. ARJAC, had become the subject of a major attack on the Soviet leadership by the Opposition. They sought to use it as evidence of the miscalculations of Tomsky and Stalin for placing such confidence in the 'treacherous' TUC leaders, particularly the 'Lefts' Purcell and Hicks (at least Trotsky was consistent in this). Stalin had to distance himself from what he now called 'reformist trade unions, reactionary trade unions'. He claimed that their only reason for taking part in the Committee was to further 'our work for revolutionising the working class in Europe', 'to eliminate reformist political leadership from the working-class movement' and 'to defeat the reactionary labour aristocracy in the trade unions' through the Anglo-Soviet Committee.³¹

The CPSU General Secretary had previously taken little notice of the international world revolutionary activities of Trotsky, Zinoviev and the *Comintern/Profintern*.³² He was supportive of the Anglo-Russian Committee (ARJAC), mainly as a useful tool to blunt any renewed British government attack on the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations were broken off by Britain in 1927. The police ransacked the Soviet trade body, Arcos Limited's offices, and the government threw most of the CPGB leadership in jail, as tensions had sharpened over nationalist/communist-led rioting in British trade enclaves of Chinese cities. Stalin was convinced they would soon renew war against the Soviet Union. But now, to deflect the Opposition's attack,

he felt obliged to repudiate the very good relations which had developed between the Russian and British TUC's since 1924 and to minimize the importance of the Anglo-Soviet Committee. It is not often appreciated either how the Tomsky/TUC's efforts for 'international unity' ended up as a catspaw in a much more deadly power struggle in the Soviet Union in 1926.³³

XIII - TUC terminates Anglo-Russian Committee 1927

Aware of how it would seem if the TUC simply withdrew from ARJAC while the Soviet unions were funding the continuing miners' dispute – the decision to refuse the generosity of the Russian workers already looked bad to many British union activists – the TUC leadership bent over backwards to avoid winding up the ARJAC throughout 1926, as the Soviet leadership wanted them to do. There were a number of fractious meetings with the Russian side in Paris and other venues. Tomsky, who pleaded ill-health, was replaced by a hard-line apparatchik, Andreev, who abused Citrine, Hicks, Purcell, Pugh and the whole General Council roundly and yet demanded that they fulfil their promises to arrange an international conference of unions. Small chance of that, now! It was only a matter of time before the TUC wound it up.

At the Edinburgh Congress, late in 1927, Citrine moved a report on behalf of the General Council, recommending the end of Anglo Russian Joint Advisory Committee. They had circulated the further 3,000 word letter ('including the usual tirade of abuse'), received from the Russians.³⁴ Significantly, 'practically the same General Council members – including Swales, Purcell and Hicks – who, two years before, had taken the initiative to establish the Anglo-Russian Joint Advisory Committee, were now giving it as their considered opinion that no good purpose could be served by continuing the Council whilst the existing attitude of the Russians was maintained.'³⁵ The Congress voted by four to one to endorse their recommendation.

Citrine was left to reflect whether Tomsky and the colleagues he had got on so well with in Russia 'really believed such nasty things he said about us'. The fact that Tomsky's tactic of working with the TUC was now totally discredited in the eyes of the Soviet leadership and Opposition, must have

weakened Tomsky's position considerably, leading to his and close colleague Mel'nichansky's removal from the leadership of the Central Council of Trade Unions in 1928. At Amsterdam meanwhile, in 1927 there was a great 'bust-up' on the IFTU General Council as the continental union representatives refused to support Purcell for President. Correspondence was disclosed by the British executive member, J.W. Brown, that Dutch General Secretary, Oudejeest had been conspiring with the French vice-President, Jouhaux to block the merger since 1924.³⁶ This led to a TUC walk-out and the resignation of Oudejeest with the prospect of TUC disaffiliation. However, after the TUC's own withdrawal from the Anglo-Russian Committee relations were restored by January 1928, with Purcell stepping down to be replaced by the more acceptable Citrine as President. By 1930, with a new (Belgian) General Secretary, Walter Schevenels, Citrine extended the membership of IFTU globally and put it on a more secure financial footing.³⁷

It was in these heady times and amongst these 'big beasts' of the Labour movement, nationally and internationally, that Walter Citrine emerged to take over responsibility for the running of what was becoming the major trade union centre in the world.³⁸ Ironically, the great working class response to the TUC's strike call, though it failed to get its way by the force of protest, established the TUC as its legitimate spokesperson with all governments thereafter and in British society. At age thirty-seven, though with considerable Merseyside and Manchester experience, Walter Citrine was moving 'from the Championship to the Premiership' in which he was to prove such a serious player. Though hardly mentioned in the official TUC Annual Report of 1925, he was, in fact, in charge of the arrangements before and during the Scarborough Conference that September.

The increasingly ill Fred Bramley,³⁹ who made a short appearance and in his brief address to the delegates, praised his deputy fulsomely for covering so effectively for him.⁴⁰ He had clearly impressed not just Purcell, Hicks and the other senior General Council members also and he was elected without opposition to the substantive post at the September 1926 Congress. The other addition to the General Council

since the 1925 Scarborough conference, Ernest Bevin, along with Citrine would put the TUC on the national and international map from here on.⁴¹ Citrine would go to Russia again in 1935 for a personal visit with his wife, Doris, though as President of the IFTU, he would be allowed to go wherever he wished. In 1941, he led another TUC delegation to Moscow, just as it was being evacuated after Hitler Germany's invasion, to help bolster their entry to the war. He went again in 1943 as a plenipotentiary of the coalition government to the now firm Soviet ally. His last visit was in 1956, that time at the head of the nationalised British Electricity Authority delegation. Another paper will consider these trips. With this first-hand experience of that vast and complex society, Walter Citrine became one of the most knowledgeable observers of one of the forces that would shape the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The problem is achieving any consensus about the impact and those possibilities of the Russian revolution posed by the recent TUC exhibition. This has been particularly so since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intensified neo-liberal ideological onslaught against 'communism' and all its forms, since then. This has obscured what was for a long time regarded as an event comparable with the French Revolution in world history and has put the Left on the defensive everywhere.

The importance of trade unions for this new socialist Russia, as well as in the western capitalist developed world, was enormous, though their role has been little studied. There they were, the workers of Russia, joining unions for the first time, which were growing and developing in a vast country claiming to base itself on 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. It was a country still undergoing profound political, economic and social change in the 'aftershock' of war and revolution. Soviet Russia was ostracized from most of the 'civilized' world, yet there was this one group (as well as numerous prominent figures on the Left), for whom this experiment was a beacon of a new socialist civilization. Walter Citrine was one of those and as a senior TUC official, he had privileged access to see and discuss the possibilities with some of the top union and government people there.

Citrine was well aware that the trade

union world was divided in its attitude to the communist-led Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (later USSR). Lenin and the Bolsheviks had slated reformist-minded Social Democratic union leaders across the world as 'yellow' and traitors to the working-class interest, because of their support for their national war efforts since 1914. Worse, through the Communist International and Profintern in their pursuit of 'world revolution' since 1919, they had been actively seeking to undermine the west European Social Democratic and union leaderships and split the trade unions, especially in Germany. So, the TUC's efforts to broker 'international unity' between the Russian Central Council of Trade Unions and IFTU could be seen as a bold move or wishful thinking by a few besotted British left-wingers.

In the context of the times, the author prefers the former interpretation. Citrine's visit was part of that initiative and it strengthened his meteoric rise to become TUC General Secretary, soon after. This key position and his subsequent succession as President of IFTU in 1928, gave him the opportunity to become one of the leading union and national statesmen over the following decades. The prospect of the Russian unions developing a relatively independent role in the USSR and so influencing the course of the Soviet Republic, remained alive until Tomsy and his close colleagues in the Central Council of Trade Unions' demise in 1928. Citrine and Hicks used their influence to strengthen their Russian colleagues' determination to achieve this end. It was clearly a tragedy that this astute and brave Russian union leadership was lost and that their efforts to moderate the pace of industrial development came to nought. Clearly more detailed work is needed to confirm that thesis.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Goethem, *The Amsterdam International*, p.77-8.
- 2 *ibid.*,
- 3 Calhoun, *The United Front*, pp. 41-2.
- 4 *ibid.*, pp12-13.
- 5 Calhoun, *The United Front*, 4
- 6 *ibid.*, CPGB leader, Harry Pollitt recognised this, as they replaced RILU in Britain with the much more effective National Minority Movement from 1924.
- 7 Calhoun, *The United Front*, pp.145-7, probably correctly concludes that it was Bramley's 'stubborn persistence' which led to the creation of the key ARJAC committee.
- 8 Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, pp.395-6, 454-6.
- 9 The TUC Annual Report 1926, pp. 242-6, probably written by Citrine, vividly outlines the various initiatives and positions taken by ARCCTU and IFTU. One of the IFTU Secretaries, Mr J. Oudegeest of the Dutch unions and a key opponent of the merger, had spoken before him but was non-committal as to the TUC advocacy of the Russian unions' overture.
- 10 Calhoun, *The United Front*, pp.23 and 186. This was probably Citrine's hope.
- 11 TUC Annual Report 1924, Tomsy's address, pp.395-400.
- 12 TUC Annual Report, 1924, ' p.246.
- 13 TUC Library Collections, Minutes of The Anglo-Russian Conference, 6-8 April 1925, Fred Bramley Papers, B1/25.
- 14 Minutes of the Second Meeting of ARJAC on 8/9 December 1925. Warwick Digital Collections - *The Russian Revolution and Britain 1917-1928*. Calhoun, *The United Front*, 342 (re Rothstein).
- 15 Morgan, *Bolshevism, syndicalism and the general strike*, 23. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, p.261.

16 TUC Annual Report, 1924, p.251. The writer knows from long personal experience as an officer in two major unions, (the T&GWU/CWU) and at TUC committee meetings, that these conventional labels do not often capture the real positions of union leaders.

17 Goethem, *The Amsterdam International*, p.36 'The IFTU managed to survive only thanks to the contribution of the British TUC' as the next largest affiliate, the German ADGB, could only pay in grossly inflated Deutsche marks.

18 Citrine, *Men and Work*, p.77.

19 Calhoun, *The United Front*, 326-9.

20 He published a pamphlet 'Some Russian Impressions' in 1925 which was a paean in praise of the 'workers republic'. George Hicks wrote a similarly glowing Foreword. TUC Library Collections, DK266.

21 F. Williams, *Ernest Bevin*, (1952), pp.82-7

22 Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, p.263; Calhoun, *The United Front*, pp.287, 335-6, 384-6. Cook had surprisingly only proposed deferment. The MFGB abstained.

23 TUC Annual Report 1926, pp.242-8. Citrine, *Men and Work*, pp.90-1.

24 Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, p.251. See the writer's article in *Labour Review*, *Leaders in the Heyday of Britain's unions*, (February 2017),p.12

25 Moher, *Walter Citrine, A Pioneer of Industrial Cooperation*, pp.188-9.

26 Calhoun, *The United Front*, 253-6. They offered an immediate donation of £26,000 (equivalent today = just under £1million). The TUC declined, just before the government moved to block the transfer.

27 *Labour Review*, *Leaders in the Heyday of Britain's unions*, (February 2017), p12-13.

28 Calhoun, *The United Front*, p. 337.

29 Citrine, *Men and Work*, p.93.

30 *ibid.*, pp.91-2. See also TUC Library Collections Blog 2 September 2017 (<http://blogs.londonmet.ac.uk/tuc-library>).

31 J.V. Stalin, *On the Opposition*, (1974 compilation of Stalin's speeches by the Chinese CP, pp.765- 6, 797-802.

32 The Communist International was directed strategically by Lenin and Trotsky initially and it was they who initiated the United Front line from 1921(which Zinoviev initially opposed). 'Stalin was not in the inner circle at all. He had little use for the International anyway. He was convinced it was incapable of organizing a successful revolution anywhere and dreaded the possibility it might interfere in the internal affairs of the Russian party and government.' Calhoun, *The United Front*, 6.

33 *ibid.*,pp.369-71;388-90, 415-16.

34 Citrine, *Men and Work*, pp.92-3.

35 *ibid.*,pp.93.

36 Calhoun, *The United Front*, 374-5.

37 Goethem, *The Amsterdam International*, pp. 39-44.

38 Moher, *Walter Citrine*, pp.186-97.

39 Calhoun, *The United Front*, p. 180 thought it was cancer, but Citrine's private notes [reference] suggest that it was a serious mental condition, though he never mentioned it publicly.

40 TUC Annual Report September 1925, pp. 356-8.

41 Moher, *Leaders in the heyday of Britain's unions: Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin*, *Labour Affairs*, Part 1, pp.9-13, February 2017.

Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

On 22 February the SNP member Dr Lisa Cameron introduced a debate on the employment of disabled people. Her speech is published below with interjections from Labour and Conservative backbenchers.

Disabled People and Economic Growth

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) I beg to move,

That this House recognises the potential talent pool within the disabled community; notes that there will be an employment gap after the UK leaves the EU and that there is ample opportunity to include disabled workers in economic growth; calls on the Government to act immediately on its commitment to get one million more disabled people into employment by 2027; and further calls on the Government to increase awareness within the business community of the benefits of employing an inclusive workforce.

I pay tribute to the Backbench Business Committee for enabling the debate to take place. I also pay tribute to the many organisations that continuously champion the rights of people with disabilities throughout the United Kingdom. Without their enduring commitment, we would not be debating this important issue today. I pay special tribute to Leonard Cheshire Disability, to Disability Rights UK—which acts as secretariat to the all-party parliamentary group for disability, which I chair—and to the Disability@Work group. That group consists of dedicated academics from Cardiff University, Warwick business school and Cass business school, and it contributed to the APPG's inquiry report "Ahead of the Arc". Since commissioning the report, the all-party group for disability has been pressing the Government urgently to address

the disability employment gap, and I know the Minister is open and willing to listen to the report's suggestions.

This Backbench Business Committee debate is a significant step forward in the fight for equal rights for disabled people. To my knowledge, this is the first time that people with disabilities will be debated in the main Chamber with a focus on their abilities and as contributors to our economy, and not just as employees but as entrepreneurs and as business leaders.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab) Does the hon. Lady agree that many employers need education, particularly about those who suffer from mental health difficulties, as many employers are scared or reluctant to take on somebody as they do not understand some of the issues such people face?

Dr Cameron The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and only yesterday I was contacted by a number of people and organisations reminding me to highlight that very point. People with mental health difficulties, and often people with hidden disabilities or disabilities that are not always apparent, can find it a struggle to explain and raise awareness about their difficulties and the adjustments they require. We need heightened awareness among employers—and in Parliament, too, I would suggest. We must continue along that path to raise awareness, to make sure we can harness the skills and potential of everyone for our economy.

All too often, people with disabilities are portrayed as passive and unwilling to work, but that could not be further from the truth. I want to use this debate to change the narrative. I want to see meaningful action, rather than research and rhetoric. I want to see a welfare system that treats people

with disabilities as a willing and able workforce. I want to see improvements to current access routes and the development of new workplace cultures that reflect a genuine appreciation on the part of employers of the positive contributions that people with disabilities make, and I want to see accredited business schemes that go further than ticking boxes. While I might not be able to cover all of these points in my speech, I know that colleagues across the parties will be passionately advocating similar policy and attitudinal change, which is much needed. I hope the Minister will take on board all Members' suggestions here today, and that we will make progress moving forward.

I want to start on a positive, uplifting note. I have been greatly heartened over the past few weeks by hearing accounts of disabled entrepreneurs, employees and businesses that are champions of their fields. I would like to share but a few examples.

Hannah Chamberlain is a successful tech entrepreneur who recently won the £30,000 Stelios award for disabled entrepreneurs, which is run in conjunction with Leonard Cheshire Disability, after creating a video diary app that supports people to manage their mental health, called Mental-Snapp. The app allows users to record short video diaries, rate their mood and name their feelings. It is an example of innovation at its finest, and I applaud Hannah for creating an app that will help so many.

John Cronin is an entrepreneur and now business leader who owns and runs his own sock company, which has made £1.4 million in its first year. John has Down's syndrome. He runs the company in conjunction with his father, and is the face of the brand. John is a business leader and

manager, and nearly a third of his staff have a disability. John says his social and retail missions go hand in hand. He is a businessman and therefore is looking for good, reliable workers, and he believes the disabled community has a vast, untapped pool of great workers.

A number of larger corporations also understand the benefits of a diverse workforce. Corporations such as Channel 4 and Sainsbury's are good examples of inclusive employers. Sainsbury's and Channel 4's workplace adjustment guides are second to none; both companies choose to focus on positive aspects of making adjustments, rather than their legal duty and minimal requirements to do so. Most importantly, these policies are distributed to all line managers, so everyone is aware of the adjustments they are entitled to, creating an open and inclusive environment and workforce in which both employees and company outputs can thrive. Channel 4 goes a step further by issuing "passports" for employees after receiving a workplace adjustment, so when the employee moves into a new role, or their line manager changes, the "passport" can be referred to and used in all future discussions with new line managers.

There are many other great examples of disabled business owners and entrepreneurs, and of inclusive employers, but I wanted to highlight those three, because each shows that in every corner of our economy, and in every type and size of business, inclusivity should be championed not just for ethical reasons, but because it makes good business and economic sense.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab) I thank the hon. Lady for securing the debate and for the examples she has given of good practices in certain organisations, but is she aware that only 16% of people with autism are in full-time employment and only 32% of autistic adults are in any kind of employment at all? Does she agree that much more needs to be done to close the autism employment gap?

Dr Cameron I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention highlighting the autism employment gap, which is far too large—much larger even than the disability employment gap. We must take extra strides to support people with autism into work, because they have great skills and abilities and they will be fantastic contributors to our economy given the appropriate opportunities.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and

Ongar) (Con) I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate and salute the work she does on the all-party group for disability. I serve on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and we are currently looking at how employers, work coaches and people with disability can better understand the assistive technology that is emerging. Does the hon. Lady think we can do more to bring those three interested parties together to help people enter and stay in the workforce?

Dr Cameron The hon. Gentleman makes an important intervention. I am not a tech buff, but I am always heartened when we can see technology assisting people to achieve their potential and get into work. We need collaboration and to take those issues forward.

Examples of best practice are exactly that: they are examples to aspire to, and, as uplifting as they are, they are not a true reflection of the lived experiences of many disabled people. They do not reflect the systemic problems and barriers faced by many people with disabilities in looking for work or trying to retain it. It is time for Parliament to question why these practices, which move us forward and develop inclusivity, are not more commonplace.

In 2017 Scope published a report that found that one in two people with disabilities had experienced bullying and harassment at work and felt they could no longer take part in the workplace comfortably, and over half—58%—felt at risk of losing their job. So this is not just about getting people into work; it is about ensuring there is an environment that maintains people in work and helps them to aspire to and achieve their potential. Disabled people also have to apply for more jobs than non-disabled people before finding one; research shows that almost 60% more jobs have to be applied for. Lauren Pitt reported to *The Independent* in 2017 that she had to apply for over 250 jobs before securing one, so something is clearly not working correctly. We must ensure that employers are open to employing people with disabilities, and to seeing their skills, abilities and value to the workplace and the economy.

The disability employment gap is large and enduring. The most recent figures from 2017 show that the gap currently stands at 31.4%. About 80% of non-disabled people of working age are in work, but the figure for people with disabilities is just 49%. This has been routinely recognised by the Government, and in their 2015 manifesto the Conservatives committed

to halving the gap. However, research from the all-party parliamentary group for disability shows that, on the basis of progress to September 2016, that would have taken 49 years to achieve. Their 2017 manifesto replaced that commitment with a new commitment to get 1 million more disabled people into work in the next 10 years. Analysis suggests that this new target is weaker and is likely to be met simply because the number of disabled people within the working-age population is increasing. That means that even though the Government might well meet their new target, the size of the disability employment gap might not actually shrink. We must take account of that.

Most of the Government's proposals for reaching their more attainable commitment are published in the Command Paper "Improving Lives". A brief look at the paper shows that almost all the policies are dependent on further research or pilot schemes and cost very little to run, so I would ask that we have adequate resourcing and prioritisation. We cannot afford to sit and wait. Unemployed people with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities as everyone else—now. Our economy cannot afford to sit and wait either. Scope has estimated that reducing the disability employment gap by just 10% would generate a further £12 billion for the Exchequer by 2030, so it makes absolute economic sense.

Finding a solution to the problem will involve going significantly beyond the Government's current focus on welfare and benefits. We will not see significant increases in the number of disabled people in employment unless employers can be encouraged to up their game, to acknowledge the positive contribution that people with disabilities make in the workplace, and to develop new workplace cultures and practices that are more accommodating. Reasonable adjustments are key.

Alex Burghart I support what the hon. Lady is saying about businesses. Does she think that there could be a case for having larger employers report on the proportion of their workforce who have a disability, so that we could see which large employers were not pulling their weight and not taking advantage of the high-quality disabled employees who are in the market?

Dr Cameron I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman on that point. It is particularly concerning that the Office for National Statistics has suspended publication of disability statistics from the labour force survey. We should ensure that that

matter is addressed.

It is in employers' self-interest to make a difference in this area, not least because it presents a solution to the labour market problems that this country is likely to face in the event of tighter controls on the free movement of people. The UK currently has a skills shortage, and it will become more profound once we leave the European Union. Indeed, KPMG recently published figures indicating that almost 1 million EU citizens, many of whom are highly qualified, are planning to leave following Brexit. We already have a willing workforce of people with disabilities whose skills are undervalued, and they should be trained in sectors that are developing and that will be much needed in the future. As has been mentioned, the health and tech sectors are extremely important.

This is fundamentally a labour supply issue. The Government will not be able to deliver on their industrial strategy if they do not have the capacity to do so, so we need to train our ready-and-waiting workforces across the UK. We need to see more investment in apprenticeships, as well as the targeted, widespread advertisement of current Access to Work schemes, to encourage the business community to utilise our workforce. The new commitment in the industrial strategy to increase the proportion of apprenticeships started by people with disabilities by 20% is an excellent start, and I commend the Minister for that, but it is not enough. It will form only part of the solution.

The Government acknowledge this critical role for employers, but their main policy in this area is to encourage more employers to sign up to the Disability Confident scheme. As I have argued previously in Parliament, the evidence on Disability Confident is varied. It shows that the scheme does not go far enough, and that it does not result in enough people being employed. It is particularly worrying, therefore, that the "Improving Lives" Command Paper uses the scheme as one of its central policies for achieving the Government's target.

The all-party parliamentary group's "Ahead of the Arc" report sets out a number of bold new alternative policy initiatives that the Government should pursue. These include using public procurement contracts as leverage by stipulating that such contracts will only go to firms that monitor disabled people's employment and commit to adopting an inclusive approach to their recruitment and retention policies. To that end, Government initiatives should

think of people with disabilities not just as employees but as entrepreneurs and business leaders. The Government must ensure that disabled entrepreneurs receive the support they need from business advisory networks such as the Federation of Small Businesses and local chambers of commerce, as well as the financial support they need from bodies such as Innovate UK and the British Business Bank.

I referred earlier to two great examples of disabled entrepreneurs. The notion that disabled people can be business owners and entrepreneurs as well as employees was completely missed by the "Improving Lives" paper. We must ensure that disabled people are not pigeonholed into one sector, and that they have the opportunity to choose their own future and be masters of their own lives. That is why the Access to Work scheme should also apply to start-ups, to accommodate the talent and innovation of people with disabilities. The Government must also go further and fund specialist advice services on taxation and benefits for people with disabilities who want to explore the opportunities of self-employment.

As I have laid out today, the solutions are there in every corner of the economy, and if action is taken, the benefits could be felt by all in society immediately. But for this to happen, we need to change

the current narrative and put good policy into practice so that my constituents and those of other hon. Members throughout the land recognise that we need to tap into the under-utilised and important human resource of people with disabilities who are willing and able to work. The workforce are there and ready to fill the skills gap that will only grow once we leave the European Union. It is in the self-interest of employers and the Government to engage with this agenda and accommodate a diverse and inclusive workforce, but the reality is that far too many disabled people are facing no real prospects in today's job market. That is simply unsustainable and, quite frankly, bad economics. I am pleased to have been able to bring this debate to the Chamber today, and I look forward to hearing other colleagues' experiences. I also look forward to working together as part of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, and across the House, to take this extremely important issue forward.

So the universe is not quite as you thought it was. You'd better rearrange your beliefs, then. Because you certainly can't rearrange the universe.

Isaac Asimov

Continued From Page 24

from the party's title. He supported and visited Donald Trump and Salvini's election symbol closely resembles that of Trump's election campaign. Like Trump he has a strong on-line presence.

Salvini is divorced with a child, has one child with a partner, and is now living with another different partner, yet supports family values. He also supports: flat tax, tax cuts, fiscal federalism, the legalisation of prostitution and opposes same-sex marriage. He offers "order, rules and cleanliness". While on Milan Council he proposed that a number of metro seats should be reserved for residents only.

Salvini was openly controversial during the election, provocatively calling for all immigrants to be sent back: "mass cleaning" after a "migrant invasion". He avoided condemning racist incidents that occurred during the campaign. For example: February's incident in Macerata (mentioned earlier) followed the murder and dismemberment of an Italian woman by a black immigrant. A Lega candidate for a local election, Luca Traini, drove through the city shooting at anyone black. Several were injured but none were killed.

Many right wing anti-migrant and anti-right demonstrations took place on the Sunday before the election. Neo-fascist CasaPound and Forza Nova, who both stand for elections, organised some of them. The press reported that CasaPound were ready to support a Salvini government but Salvini stepped non-committally around this, neither confirming nor denying. Other members of the centre right coalition, members of Fi expressed their alarm. Berlusconi kept his mouth shut.

The unknown factor on this, the eve of the election, is the estimated 36% – 40% of voters who haven't decided who to vote for or even whether to vote at all. You may know the result, Orecchiette can't even guess.

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

ANYONE'S GUESS

This is being written on the eve of the Italian General Election held on Sunday 4 March.

The electoral system, referred to as Rosatellum bis, was new. By the time you read this 37% of the 630 deputati in the Lower House will have been elected by the first past the post system and 63% by the proportional largest remainder method. 12 seats will have been elected by Italians living abroad.

The final result might suffer from being no clearer AFTER the count than before. The publication of opinion polls stops two weeks before polling day. However, the relative positions of the parties remained nearly static and an outright win, where a party or coalition nets over 50%, was not predicted at any stage in the campaign.

Looking at the last opinion polls (and different ones vary) the Five Star Movement (M5S) was the largest single party with between 27.4% and 29.4%. The centre right coalition was listed as between 34.7% and 36.8%, while the centre left was running at 27.4%. Small parties accounted for 10%. The detail is the interesting part and that could point to which groups might be comfortable partnering up to form a government.

M5S say that they will not go into coalition. They regard the other parties as corrupt, while they see themselves as the only honest, anti-establishment alternative. Beppe Grillo, founder and leader before 31 year old Luigi De Maio took over, had heard that many Italian voters couldn't make up their minds and were going to hold their noses while voting for the least bad option. Grillo, a comedian by profession, made a characteristically ironic speech, which could only have caused confusion: "we have the opportunity...to change this country.... enough of voting for the least bad but vote for the worst, that's us..." Odd. He stepped into the background after that.

The centre right coalition's two largest parties were the 81 year old Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Fi) and Matteo Salvini's Lega, formerly Lega Nord. In short: the two men were so desperate to get into government for their own, individual selves, that they called themselves a coalition, while actively arm-wrestling in the background.

They dislike and distrust each other, would not work comfortably together and are unable to share. Salvini, at 45 years old, has cunning and youth on his side.

The campaign started with Berlusconi leading Salvini in both bombast and the centre right's polls. Berlusconi can't take up the prime ministerial role because of his conviction for fraud and was at one point suggesting substitute appointments, if he were to be the leading coalition winner after the election. He mentioned Salvini's fellow Lega Nord (Lega Veneta) politician and President of the Veneto, Luca Zaia, as possible Prime Minister. Obviously a suggestion that would have profoundly enraged Salvini. A late poll put Salvini only 0.3% behind Berlusconi and he (Salvini) was publicising himself as the indisputable centre right front runner in the last couple of weeks before the poll. Both Salvini, and to a lesser extent Berlusconi, increased their percentages in the polls during the campaign.

Georgia Meloni of Fratelli d'Italia was the third member of the coalition. She, like Salvini, has fascist leanings. but she only brought around 4% to the group. The fourth coalition member was insignificantly small at below the 3% limit to be eligible for a parliamentary seat. Meloni and Berlusconi have worked together in the past. But he dismissed the pregnant Meloni during the last election saying that "a mother's place is in the home". Strangely, Meloni can be seen making a caprese salad (tomato and mozzarella) on YouTube. Could she team up with Salvini to beat Berlusconi, enabling him to be the centre right's "capo di capi"? This would only be of significance if this ill-matched coalition achieved their 50%+. However, her party did join Salvini for a demonstration in 2015, so the precedent for some liaison exists.

Matteo Renzi, ex Prime Minister leads the Partito Democratico (Pd), and this was the second largest single party with between 21% and 23%. Renzi clung to the leadership for several years while his popularity plummeted. Understandably, his party lost support. Renzi developed a dictatorial manner while he was in government. The introduction of 'reforms' such as the raising of the pensionable age and the Jobs Act, which reduced workers

rights, split and damaged the party. He also alienated both the party, and many voters, with his long-lasting and secretive pact Patto del Nazareno with Berlusconi. They used this to force through unpopular legislation. So, incongruously, these two men with driving self-belief and ambition in common, could try to revive their relationship in the increasingly unlikely circumstance of the numbers adding up. (Fi had around 16%).

One of the significant aspects of this election is the rise of the extreme right. Roberto Saviano (author of the Mafia exposè, Gomorrah) claimed in La Repubblica that the Pd and M5S were deliberately downplaying the jubilant reactions of the neo-fascists to a racist incident in Macerata, in the Marche. By doing this, he said, Renzi and Di Maio were attempting to prevent the backlash which would help the right, at the same time as increasing anti-migrant feeling in the country. The Guardian ran Saviano's article plus almost daily articles in the run up to the election. These highlighted the rise of the right and the increasing clamour from fascist groups such as CasaPound.

This leads back to Matteo Salvini who, more than any leader, effectively used the media to increase his profile and his party's vote share in the opinion polls. As long ago as December 2014 the FT had called him "Italy's new political star". Salvini had been a member of both right wing and communist organisations. He took over the leadership of the Lega Nord in 2013 after Umberto Bossi was indicted for the embezzlement of party funds. Previously Lega Nord's primary aim was to make the large, prosperous northern Po Valley region autonomous under the name Padania.

Salvini had worked while a Euro MP with Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders. Later, in successive North Italian regional elections he saw his party beating Berlusconi's Fi. He grasped an opportunity and worked to develop a strategy to become the leader of the Italian right. It was obvious that he would have to organise in other parts of the country, including the islands so the word Nord was dropped

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