

# Labour Affairs

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## Rush To Judgement

In her statement of 12 March on the nerve agent attack in Salisbury on Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia, Theresa May pointed the finger of guilt directly at Russia. Before all the evidence had been gathered and examined by scientists at Porton Down, (the Ministry of Defence's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory), and the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical weapons, May stated it was "highly likely" that Russia was responsible. Even though earlier in her statement she had said "it is essential that we proceed in the right way, led not by speculation but by the evidence."

Such a degree of certainty by the British Prime minister put pressure on the experts at Porton Down to come to the same conclusion. But according to Craig Murray, former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Porton Down scientists were not able to identify the nerve gas as being of Russian manufacture and were resentful of the pressure placed on them to do so. This critical information was ignored by the British media. Furthermore, British intelligence services are puzzled about the murder attempt, unable to see any logic in it being state sponsored.

May's rush to judgement overturned the basic principle of British law, that one is innocent until proven guilty. Her accusation of guilt was based on her understanding that the military-grade nerve agent Novichok was "of a type developed in Russia", and that Russia had a record of assassinations on British soil, including that of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006. (Although Russia's guilt was never proved). Therefore, Russia had to be the guilty party. Such circumstantial evidence would be insufficient proof of guilt if applied to an individual in a British court. But in the new Cold War, initiated through NATO by Britain and its western allies, the "balance of probability" is all that is necessary for a guilty verdict.

The attack on two individuals was described as an attack on the British nation, as if the perpetrators had declared war on Britain. May referred to it as "an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom" which put "the lives of innocent civilians at risk" Yet on other occasions when questioned about the sales of military equipment to Saudi Arabia used to kill innocent civilians in Yemen, May blusters about the special relationship between Britain and the Gulf state.

Members on all sides of the House of Commons rose to offer unqualified support for the Prime Minister's statement, as if they had just heard the ghost of Churchill speak. Some also described the attack as an act of terrorism against Britain. Jingoistic Cold War warriors determined to push retribution to the limit; with many, shamefully, on the Labour benches.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson was accused of gross insensitivity when he said that Putin would use this year's football World Cup in Russia as a political showpiece, just as Hitler used the 1936 Olympic Games. But Johnson, who was appearing before the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, was simply agreeing with Labour's Ian Austin, a member of the committee, who first made the comparison. And Austin repeated his remarks on the BBC's Daily Politics on 23 March.

Within hours of Jeremy Corbyn's response to the Salisbury incident, a handful of Labour MPs, all critics of Corbyn, drew up a motion unequivocally supporting Theresa May. This was clearly an attempt to embarrass and undermine Corbyn who had expressed caution over attributing blame on Russia before the evidence had been fully examined. This was viewed as an act of cowardice by one of the signatories to the motion who implied that Britain's security would be at risk with Corbyn as Prime Minister. It was also

said he was willing to “exonerate a hostile power”.

Corbyn was accused of playing party politics when he raised the issue of Russian money finding its way into the coffers of the Conservative party and proposing that money laundering by British banks should be addressed urgently. As if the House of Commons wasn't the place to play at politics. (Separately, Marina Litvinenko, widow of Alexander Litvinenko, has urged the Conservative party to return £826,000 it had received from Russian oligarchs). Labour have moved a number of amendments to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs. British bankers and lawyers are allegedly acting on their behalf hiding their wealth in secret accounts. It's also believed that £4.4bn worth of property has been bought in Britain with suspicious Russian wealth.

In the weeks following his 12 March statement in which he urged caution, Corbyn was subject to severe criticism and intense media and political pressure. Boxed into a corner he was forced to admit in a further statement on 26 March that Russia was directly or indirectly responsible for the attack on the Skripals. This was a mistake. He should have stuck to his original line not to jump to hasty conclusions before the experts had gathered their evidence and offered their considered opinion.

For Theresa May the Skripal tragedy has come at a fortuitous time. Using it as a bridge to unite a bitterly divided party over Brexit and conscious that the Tories are facing a heavy defeat at next month's local elections. The tragedy will also help to alter the widely held opinion that she is a weak leader. There is now a general view that she has shown a steely side to her public persona

and led the chorus of anti-Russian sentiment with conviction.

We may never know who was responsible for the attack, but such enmity directed at Russia simply ensures a continuation of the cold war mentality of many in the British political establishment. Perhaps that is their intention. It helps to have a bogey man in Putin and Russia if Britain is to fantasise about itself as a global power. Britain and the west fail to acknowledge the deep feelings of the Russian people about NATO's military encirclement of their country. They appear to have forgotten, or conveniently ignore, that 25 million Russians died during the second world war with Nazi Germany. Given all the belligerent rhetoric about Russia's dirty deeds from May and her senior ministers, it's clear that the government now considers Russia to be a strategic enemy.

It's somewhat ironic that just as Britain is leaving the EU Theresa May ran to Brussels to seek support for her stance against Russia. It seems, after all, that Britain can't stand alone in the world against perceived enemies. And any future incident of the kind that occurred in Salisbury will no doubt see Britain pleading for the support of its European neighbours. A stand alone global Britain is simply a slogan with no basis in reality.

*Sergei Skripal was a Colonel in Russian military intelligence, jailed in 2004 for 13 years on charges of spying against Russia, when working for the British MI6. In comparison, British double agent George Blake was jailed by a British court for 42 years in 1961, convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. (It seems that 'democratic' Britain hands out more severe sentences to spies than does 'autocratic' Russia.) Skripal was granted a pardon and released after serving 5½ years, as part of a spy prisoner swap. He left Russia in 2010 to live in Salisbury, a military town in south west England, close to Porton Down.*

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# Parliament And World War One

## by Dick Barry

### STATEMENT BY LORD R. CECIL. 09 April 1918

*Sir John Jardine, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet (27/9/1844-26/4/1919) was a Liberal MP for Roxburghshire from 1906 to 1918. He had previously contested the seat in 1900.*

**Sir JOHN JARDINE** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he is in a position to make any statement about the state of affairs in the kingdom of the Hedjaz, the Sultanates of Riad and Hail, and the countries adjoining these?

**Lord R. CECIL** In reply to the first part of my hon. Friend's question I will, with the permission of the House, describe as briefly as possible the course which the operations of the forces of our Ally, the King of the Hedjaz, have followed since the declaration of Arabian independence was announced at Mecca in July, 1916.

At that time the Turks had in Hedjaz an army of 20,000 picked Regular troops with a proportional complement of artillery and plentiful supplies of transport, food and ammunition, besides having a military railway in direct communication with their northern bases. The Arabs, who rallied to the standard of liberation, were neither organised nor equipped with modern weapons, nevertheless the towns of Mecca, Taif, Jeddah, Yambo, Wedj, Akaba and Teima were seized at the commencement of the national movement. Consequent upon this numerous Arabian tribes and a number of officers and men prisoners of war in our hands joined voluntarily the army of the King of the Hedjaz and were organised by him into a permanent and disciplined force for the purpose of holding what had been won and extending the area of Arab independence.

The result of the efforts of this national army under the leadership of the Sherifs Ali, Abdullah, Feisal and Zeid, are that the Red Sea coast of the Hedjaz has been completely

cleared of Turks along a distance of 800 miles. The military railway has been continuously interrupted and severe losses inflicted on the material and rolling stock. The city of Medina has been blockaded for the last twelve months. The Sherif Feisal's force has advanced its front from Mecca to North of Tafileh on the shores of the Dead Sea, a distance of some 800 miles, and General Allenby's recent raid at Ammaw had the effect of assisting the Arabs to maintain their position.

The casualties inflicted on the Turks up to date are very considerable, and it may be safely said from the declaration of Arab independence up to the present time the Arab forces have occupied, isolated, or accounted for fully 40,000 Turkish troops and over 100 guns.

Although engrossed in this difficult military struggle for national liberty, the Government of the Hedjaz have been able to inaugurate a new era of civil order and justice unknown in the Hedjaz since its subjection to Turkish rule.

The national Arab Government have moreover succeeded in arranging for two consecutive pilgrimages to the Holy Places. On these occasions the pilgrims were, as never before, accorded comfort and medical care, and both pilgrimages were marked by a complete absence of epidemics or any of the usual concomitants of robbery, extortion, and disorder.

In Eastern Arabia the Emir of Riad Ibn Saud has proved our unswerving ally, and has established the independence of the greater part of Neid.

The Emir of Hail is still personally under Turkish domination, but has

not been in residence in his capital for a year.

### PRIME MINISTER'S REVIEW OF PICARDY BATTLE.

09 April 1918

**The PRIME MINISTER (Mr. Lloyd George)** I beg to move, "That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision with regard to military service during the present War."

We have entered the most critical phase of this terrible War. There is a lull in the storm, but the hurricane is not over. Doubtless we must expect more fierce outbreaks, and ere it is finally exhausted there will be many more. The fate of the Empire, the fate of Europe, and the fate of liberty throughout the world, may depend on the success with which the very last of these attacks is resisted and countered. The Government, therefore, propose to submit to Parliament, to-day, certain recommendations, in order to assist this country and the Allies to weather the storm. They will involve, I regret, extreme sacrifices on the part of large classes of the population, and nothing would justify them but the most extreme necessity, and the fact that we are fighting for all that is essential and most sacred in the national life.

Before I come to the circumstances which have led up to our submitting these proposals to Parliament, I ought to say one word as to why Parliament was not immediately summoned. Since the battle began, the Government have been engaged almost every hour in concerting, with the Allies, the necessary measures to assist the Armies to

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This also has old issues of Problems magazine.

deal with the emergency. The proposals which we intend submitting to Parliament required very close and careful examination, and I think there is this advantage in our meeting to-day, rather than immediately after the impact of the German attack, that we shall be considering these proposals under conditions which will be far removed from any suggestion of panic.

I shall now come to the circumstances which have led up to the present military position. It is very difficult at this time to present a clear, connected and reliable narrative of what happened. There has been a great battle on a front of fifty miles—the greatest battle ever fought in the history of the world. Enormous forces have been engaged. There was a considerable retirement on the part of the British forces, and, under these conditions, it is not always easy for some time to ascertain what actually happened. The House will recollect the difficulty we experienced in regard to Cambrai. It was difficult to piece together the story of that event for some time, and Cambrai was a very trivial event compared with this gigantic battle.

The generals and their staffs are naturally engaged, and have to concentrate their attention upon, the operations of the enemy, and until the strain relaxes it would be very difficult to institute the necessary inquiries to find out exactly what happened, and to furnish an adequate explanation of the battle. However, there are two or three facts which stand out, and in stating them I should like to call attention to two things which I think, above all, must be avoided. The first is that nothing should be said which would give information to the enemy; nothing should be said which would give encouragement to the enemy; and nothing should be said which would give discouragement to our own troops, who are fighting so gallantly at this very hour. And the second fact is that all recrimination at this hour must be shut out. [An HON. MEMBER: “And all prejudices!”] I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no one here afraid of criticism, and he understands the responsibility of the present Government.

What was the position at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917, the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917. Up to the end of 1917—up to, say, about October or November—the German combatant strength in France was as two to the Allied three. Then came the military collapse of Russia, when the Germans hurried up their released divisions from the Eastern Front, and brought them to the West. They had a certain measure of Austrian support, which had been accorded then. Owing to the growth of the strength of our Armies in 1917, when this battle began, the combatant strength of the whole of the German Army on the Western Front was only approximately, though not quite, equal to the total combatant strength of the Allies. In Infantry they were slightly inferior; in Artillery they were inferior; in Cavalry they were considerably inferior; and, what is very important, they were undoubtedly inferior in aircraft.

**Mr. LYNCH** They had unity of command.

**The PRIME MINISTER** I am coming to all that. The Germans, therefore, organised their troops so as to produce a larger number of divisions out of the slightly smaller number of Infantry and the slightly smaller number of guns. They had fewer battalions in a division—fewer men in a battalion. That is entirely a question of organisation, and it yet remains to be seen that their organisation is better than ours. It is necessary to explain that, in order that the House may realise why, with approximately the same number of men, the Germans have a larger number of divisions on that front. According to all the facts which have come to hand as to the losses of the battle, that roughly represents the relative strength of the combatants on both sides at this moment.

The Germans had, however, one or two important advantages. The first, the initial, advantage, which is always commanded by the offensive, is that they know where they mean to attack. They choose the ground, they choose

the location, they know the width of the attack, they know the dimensions of the attack, they know the time of the attack, and they know the method of the attack. All that invariably gives an initial advantage to an offensive. The defence has a general advantage. Owing to air observation, concealment is difficult. At the same time, in spite of all that, owing to the power of moving troops at night, which the Germans exercised to a very large extent, there is a large margin for surprise even in spite of air observation, and of this the enemy took full advantage.

I should like to say one word here as to the difficulty with which the Allied generals were confronted in this respect. Before the battle the greatest German concentration was in front of our troops. That was no proof that the full weight of the attack would fall on us. There was a very large concentration opposite the French lines; there was a very considerable concentration—I am referring now to German reserves—on the northern part of our line after the battle began. Immediately before the battle the Germans by night brought their divisions from the northern part to the point where the attack took place. They also brought several divisions from opposite the French in the same way, and brought them to our front; but it would have been equally easy for them, whilst concentrating troops opposite our front, to manœuvre them in the same way opposite the French.

I am only referring to that in order to show how exceedingly difficult it is for generals on the defensive to decide exactly where, in their judgment, the attack is coming, and where they ought to concentrate their reserves.

#### **AMERICAN CO-OPERATION. 09 April 1918**

**The PRIME MINISTER** The next step to which I should like to call the attention of the House is the material and dramatic assistance rendered by President Wilson in this emergency. It is one of the most important decisions in the War. In fact, the issue of the battle might very well be determined by that decision. In America there was a

very considerable number of men in course of training, and the Allies look forward to having a large American Army in France in the Spring. It has taken longer than was anticipated to train those soldiers into the necessary divisional organisations. If America waited to complete these divisional organisations, it would not be possible for these fine troops, in any large numbers, to take part in this battle—in this campaign—although it might very well be the decisive battle of the War. This was, of course, one of the most serious disappointments from which the Allies have suffered. It is no use pretending it was not one of our chief causes of anxiety. We depended upon it largely to make up the defection of Russia.

For many reasons—reasons, perhaps, of transport, reasons connected with the time it takes, not merely to train troops and their officers, but to complete the necessary organisation—it was quite impossible to put into France the number of divisions which everyone had confidently expected would be there. Under the circumstances, we, therefore, submitted to the President of the United States of America a definite proposal. We had the advantage of having the Secretary of State for War for America in this country within two or three days after the battle had commenced. My right hon. Friend (Mr. Balfour) and I had a long conversation with him upon the whole situation, and we submitted to him certain recommendations which we had been advised to make to Mr. Baker and to the American Government. On the strength of that conversation, we submitted proposals to President Wilson, with the strong support of Monsieur Clemenceau, to enable the combatant strength of the American Army to come into action during this battle, inasmuch as there was no hope of it coming in as a strong separate Army. By this decision, the American battalions will be brigaded with those of the Allies. This proposal was submitted by Lord Heading, on behalf of the British Government, to President Wilson, and President Wilson assented to the proposition

without any hesitation, with the result that arrangements are now being made for the fighting strength of the American Army to be immediately brought to bear in this struggle—a struggle which is only now beginning—to this extent, and it is no small extent. It has stirred up the resolution and energy of America beyond anything which has yet occurred.

I must also call the attention of the House to another important decision taken by the Allied Governments. It became more obvious after the battle even than before that the Allied Armies were suffering from the fact that they were fighting as two separate Armies, and had to negotiate support with each other. Valuable time was thus lost. Some of us had for some time been deeply impressed by this peril and had done our best to avert it. But the inherent difficulties to be overcome are tremendous. I have repeatedly pointed this out to this House. There are national prejudices, national interests, professional prejudices, traditions. The inherent difficulties of getting two or three separate national armies to fight as one are almost insurmountable. It can only be done if public opinion in all these countries insists upon it as the one condition of success. Versailles was an effort as a remedy. How were the Versailles decisions carried out? The extent to which they were or were not carried out—this is not the time to inquire. I respectfully suggest to the House that no good would come at this stage in discussing that question. If anyone needed conviction as to the wisdom of that policy, this battle must have supplied it. The peril we passed through by establishing that conviction without challenge may, I think, be worth the price we have paid for it.

### **EASTERN CAMPAIGNS.**

**09 April 1918**

**The PRIME MINISTER** There is another matter to which I should like to refer, and it is the suggestion that our forces have been dissipated on subsidiary enterprises. Not a single division was sent from France to the East. With regard to Italy, had it not been for the fact that there were Italian,

French, and British divisions there, the Austrian Army would have been free to throw the whole of its strength on the Western Front. If there were not some there now, the Austrian Army would be more powerfully represented than it is on the Western Front. With regard to Salonika, the only thing the present Government did was to reduce the forces there by two divisions.

**Mr. PRINGLE** You increased them at first.

**The PRIME MINISTER** The present Government reduced them by two divisions. In Mesopotamia there is only one white division, in Egypt and Palestine together there are only three white divisions; the rest are either Indians or mixed with a very, very small proportion of British troops in those divisions. I am referring to Infantry divisions. I want the House really to consider what that means. There is a menace to our Eastern Empire through Persia, because through Persia you approach Afghanistan, and through Afghanistan you menace the whole of India. Had it not been for the blows inflicted upon the Turks, what would have happened?

Before these attacks, I want the House to remember, there were Turkish armies destroyed. Had we Russia they would have been helping the Germans now on the West, exactly as they helped them in the East. But what has happened? They were attacked in Palestine and in Mesopotamia, and two Turkish armies were destroyed. Had we remained in Egypt, and defended Egypt by remaining there on the Canal, allowing the Turks to hold us with a small force whilst they were putting the whole of their force in Mesopotamia, and menacing our position in India by that means, the Turks could now have been assisting the Germans in the West, as they did in the East.

What is happening now? Instead of the Turks sending divisions to help the Germans, the Germans have sent battalions to help the Turks in Palestine. After all, if you have a great Empire, you must defend it. There was an Empire which withdrew its legions from the outlying provinces of the Empire, to defend its heart against the Goth,

and those legions never went back. The British Empire has not been reduced to that plight yet. We can defend ourselves successfully in France, and we can also at the same time hold our Empire against anyone who assails it in any part of the world.

May I, before I leave this topic, say how much gratitude we owe to India for the magnificent way in which she has come to the aid of the Empire in this emergency. It is not the fact that we have got three British divisions in India and Palestine and one in Mesopotamia that has enabled us to hold our own, but that we have had these splendid troops from India—many of whom volunteered since the War—and that they have been more than a match for their Turkish adversaries on many a stricken field.

I regret to have taken up so much of the time of the House on these matters, but I now come to the point put by my right hon. Friend opposite about losses. It is too early to state yet with accuracy our losses, because in the case of a battle over such a wide front, fought with such intensity for over a fortnight, with vast numbers of men engaged, the losses sustained must be considerable. The claims; of the enemy as to prisoners have been grossly exaggerated, and Sir Douglas Haig assured me that they were quite impossible from the figures at his disposal, which he showed me. The enemy's claims seem quite preposterous from the statement which he made to me. But, still, our losses are very great, and our reserves have been called upon to a considerable extent, to make up the wastage and refit the units. And if the battle continues on this scale, the drain on the resources of our reserves of man-power must cause the deepest anxiety, unless we take immediate steps to replenish it. The immediate necessity is relieved by the splendid and generous way and promptitude in which America has come to our aid. But the American troops are simply lent to receive their training, with a view to their incorporation, at the first suitable moment, in an American Army in France; and even if they remain with the British right through the battle, the time will come when we shall need

large reinforcements, should this battle continue.

I want the House to consider for a moment what the plans of the enemy may be as they are now revealed. It was never certain that he would take this plunge, because he must know what it means if it fail, but he has taken it. The battle proves that the enemy has definitely decided to seek a military decision this year, whatever the consequences to himself. There is no doubt he has overwhelming reasons. There is the economic condition of his country and the critical economic condition of his Allies. He is now at the height of his power, and Russia is at its lowest, while America has not come in yet in its strength. So that this year the enemy may put forth something which approaches his full strength. But soon he will grow feebler and weaker in comparison with the Allied Forces. Everything, therefore, points to the definite determination of Germany to put the whole of her resources into seeking a military decision this year, and this means a prolonged battle from the North Sea to the Adriatic, with Germany and Austria throwing in the whole of their strength. There are still seven or eight months during which the fighting can continue, and everything depends upon keeping our strength right to the end, whatever may be the strain upon our resources. With American aid, we can do it, but even with American help we cannot feel secure unless we are prepared ourselves to make even greater sacrifices than we have made hitherto.

So long as governmental power existed exclusively for the king and not at all for the people, then the history of liberty was a history of the limitation of governmental power. But now the governmental power rests in the people, and the kings who enjoy privilege are the kings of the financial and industrial world; and what they clamor for is the limitation of governmental power, and what the people sorely need is the extension of governmental power.

*Theodore Roosevelt*

## EUNUCHS UNITED

It was to be a bulwark  
 against  
 the US  
 when the dog awoke  
 and barked  
 bad cess to their  
 domination  
 but what happened  
 was more of  
 an aberration  
 and  
 what was that about the  
 power of  
 European trade unions  
 with  
 brothers and sisters  
 in  
 universal communion  
 a dispute in  
 Birmingham  
 Dublin  
 being a dispute  
 in Paris  
 or Berlin  
 worker's power  
 in a great  
 grand slam  
 the magic of  
 Merlin  
 are we dreaming  
 as the human  
 engineers  
 award  
 the  
 human rights prize  
 to the  
 opposition  
 in Venezuela  
 as just  
 happened  
 or helped  
 to bomb Libya  
 as individual nations  
 to hide their  
 association with the EU.

Wilson John Haire.

# ‘We Will Fight Them in their London Luxury Flats!’

By Gwydion M. Williams

“Boris Johnson has likened the way President Putin is promoting the World Cup in Russia to Hitler’s notorious use of the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

“The foreign secretary said Labour MP Ian Austin was ‘completely right’ to say Russia’s president wanted to ‘gloss over [his] brutal corrupt regime’”<sup>1</sup>

Boris Johnson waxes Churchillian. But fails to shine.

As London Major, he encouraged rich and often criminal Russians to settle in London. Will not view them as suspects, though many might want more bad feeling between Britain and Russia.

He ignores history, even the bits of history he has lived through.

Putin inherited the brutal corrupt regime that Boris Yeltsin created between 1991 and 1999. Yeltsin was a genuine hero in the fall of the Soviet Union, but then messed up.

China showed how to modernise a state-run economy without generating poverty and crime. Finland showed how to combine welfare and state planning with a vigorous economy and a happy population. Finland regularly comes top in studies of global happiness, with the rest of Scandinavia above Britain and the USA.<sup>2</sup> But Yeltsin foolishly listened to right-wing British and US advice. Worse, the ‘experts’ told him to apply extremes of New Right doctrine that they had not been allowed to try back home. Police are wasteful – cut them! (Just as Britain right now is cutting police despite rising crime.) Remove all state regulations – they are always burdensome and useless! Privatised at once, with a bland confidence it will work out fine! Give shares to ordinary workers, without the

normal rules that prevent them being sold on for ready cash!

Russians now believe this was a conspiracy to make them poor. I think it more likely the advisors were dogmatic fools. They have spread violence, inequality, and the breakdown of peaceful societies, everywhere they have influence. But these flowed naturally from their false beliefs. They did less damage – but still quite a lot of damage – within Britain and the USA, where there was a powerful ruling class that wasn’t entirely foolish. But in Russia, the new leaders were unreasonably hostile to the Soviet past. Unduly respectful of the power of the USA.

*It isn’t ignorance that makes you a fool: it’s what you know that ain’t so.* This piece of folk-wisdom from the USA is useful, only when you spot foolishness for what it is. They still have trouble: but if the Democratic Party had allowed its members to choose Bernie Sanders, he would now be President. It would be a different world.

It would also be a different world if George Soros had become famous earlier on. When the Soviet Union collapsed, he was one of many who called for a new Marshall Plan to help them.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, he is far from being a clear-headed thinker outside of the specialist world of parasitic financial speculation. He follows the Western consensus of seeing no link between Russia under Yeltsin being damaged by Western advice and Russia under Putin being suspicious of the West.

Yeltsin, at least, realised before the end that he had messed up. Spread poverty and given wealth to crooks who knew more about lethal violence than how to run a business with any skill. That’s why he was

too drunk to get off the aircraft and left leaders of the Irish Republic standing in the cold waiting for him, among other offences. That’s why he only got elected in 1996 with a lot of fiddles, with the candidate of a revived Russian Communist Party getting 40%.

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The world as a whole chooses who gets big sporting events. Not sharing the Anglosphere’s hostility to Russia, they gave it the 2014 Winter Olympics. Gave it the 2018 World Cup. It has remained much the same place throughout.

The scandal of the 1936 Berlin Olympics is that Germany had changed massively since Berlin was originally chosen. Given when the Weimar Republic sought peace and reconciliation. And where Berlin was famous for its tolerant artistic atmosphere (plus some open sex and a lot of slightly covert gay sex). By 1936, Hitler was openly a dictator. German citizens who were Jews were mostly excluded from sport and most other aspects of citizenship. And unlike most anti-Semitic regimes, this included Jewish converts to Christianity.

Nor was that all. The 1934 ‘Night of the Long Knives’ killed conservative politicians equivalent to Britain’s Jacob Rees-Mogg, as well as the gay stormtroopers who are more often mentioned. Germany had become a completely different place – but Britain’s centre-right mostly approved of it. The *Daily Mail* repeatedly praised Hitler. Even Winston Churchill approved of Mussolini,<sup>4</sup> and was more anti-German than anti-Nazi.

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Despite a lack of suspects or hard facts, we are told that the nerve gas attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal

*must* have been ordered by Moscow. Why? Because the Soviet Union had a secret program that may have produced a similar nerve gas, though outside the current borders of Russia.

Nerve gas programs are usually secret. The Soviet program was widely publicised after the Soviet collapse, and lost its security:

“The years following the fall of the Berlin Wall were chaotic, with chemical weapons laboratories and storage sites across the Soviet Union abandoned by staff who were no longer being paid. Security was almost non-existent, leaving the sites at the mercy of criminal gangs or disenfranchised staff looking to supplement their income...

“A Russian lawyer, Boris Kuznetsov, told Reuters he was offering to pass to the British authorities a file he said might be relevant to the Salisbury case. It details an incident when poison hidden in a phone receiver killed a Russian banker and his secretary in 1995. The poison came from an employee at the state chemical facility who sold it through intermediaries – in an ampule placed in a presentation case – to help reduce his debts.”<sup>5</sup>

But making nerve gas isn't that tricky. Back in 1995, a small Japanese sect attacked other Japanese with nerve gas it had been able to produce itself.<sup>6</sup> North Korea was blamed for the nerve-gas assassination of a half-brother of the North Korean leader in 2017.<sup>7</sup> Iran, wishing to see if the danger was real, successfully synthesised minute amounts of five 'Novichok' agents under the supervision of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.<sup>8</sup>

The *Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons* is the body that the British government should have taken its complaint to. Instead, it demanded that Russia ignore agreed procedures and be answerable to the British government. When Russia refused, they declared that Russia must be guilty. The European Union, busy with delicate Brexit negotiations, has now accepted this. Most of the world has not.

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The grand failure of Thatcherism is the real context of the new panic over supposed Russian aggression. Thatcher in the 1980s could have been an authentic conservative. She could have curbed trade union power and then left the successful Mixed-Economy system much as it was. She could have been much more serious about defending conservative social values. But instead she accepted crackpot New Right ideas. Ignored the awkward detail that most New Right thinkers privately believed a Libertarian creed that was just as hostile to conservative social values as any Far-Leftist.

Socially, Thatcherism failed. The values of the Libertarians won out. Tories under Cameron legalised Gay Marriage, which was a fringe idea in the 1970s and 1980s. This was part of a general relaxation about sex in general.

Economically, Thatcherism failed. Overall growth in the 1980s was slower than in the 1970s. Slower despite the enormous boost of North Sea Oil. Norway saved the revenues from its North Sea Oil and is secure. Britain wasted it on free gifts to the rich.

Thatcherism was all about free gifts to the rich. People with absurdly large salaries, £80,000 a year or more: the people Labour intends to tax more heavily. But even 80,000 is modest compared to the million-pound salaries paid to top managers for doing a much worse job than they did before the 1980s. And gigantic corporations have been allowed to evade most tax. The 'magic money tree' exists, but has been shielded from paying even as much tax as ordinary people pay.

Globally, Thatcherism failed. The 'Arab Spring' soon came tragically un-sprung. Multi-party democracy depends on habits of compromise that Western Europe and its overseas colonies build up gradually over centuries.

Meantime Boris Johnson has done everything he can to turn London into 'Upper London'. A global haven for the very rich, with ordinary people shipped out as far as possible. That's why he wasted £40 million on the never-built 'garden bridge' – it would be a nice curio to attract them.

Including super-rich Russians, most rich behave dishonestly. Some are anti-Putin, and many have given large donations to the Tory Party. They are among the foreign investors who build luxury flats that now stand empty, but remain a nice asset. Empty while many Londoners are homeless. Talk about action against the rich or for the needy is likely to remain just talk, as it has in previous crises.

*An 8,500-word study of the Nerve Gas Attack is available on-line at <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/the-soviet-past/3151-2/>*

(Endnotes)

1 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43487948>

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3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_Marshall\\_Plan\\_Initiative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Marshall_Plan_Initiative)

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# Froggy

## News From Across The Channel



### Actions against railway reform

A day of action on 22 March gathered 500,000 people throughout France.

65,000 demonstrators marched in Paris according to the CGT (49,000 according to police). Of those, 25,000 were railway workers, one in five railway workers. They were called out by 7 of the civil servants unions.

There were marches in most large towns. The next national day of action for public servants will be the 19 of April.

Further to this, the railways will be on strike two days out of five for the next three months (two days strike followed by three days work from 3 April to 28 June). SNCF employees are more unionized than others: 18% belong to unions, as against the national average of 8.7%.

Civil servants (who include teachers and health employees) are protesting against the planned loss of 120,000 posts 'through voluntary redundancies' and pay freeze. A quarter of teachers were on strike on 22 March.

The main point of the SNCF reform is the change in the status of the institution into a commercial society (still on principle nationalised) that will have a lower legal capacity for borrowing, and a change in the legal status of employees: new entrants will no longer have security of employment and regular pay increases.

The change in status of the institution is baffling. Railways always require more investments than can be paid back by users, if they are a public service that serves less populated regions, as it has been so far. The government claims it will not close unprofitable lines as part of the reform, but the reform will allow that to happen 'naturally' through lack of funding.

The railway workers are not the first in this process. State enterprises for gas and electricity, as well as post and telecommunications, have undergone the liberalisation process. Gas and Electricity employees have managed to retain their civil servant status, but not those of La Poste and Orange.

People understand that all this is

happening because the EU demands it.

### England gets a bad press

Normally England gets a very good press in France: it does everything right, especially for the handicapped, and its multiculturalism and apologies for slavery etc are admired. The following article from *Le Monde* of 10 March breaks the mould, drawing a picture of an England of food banks and falling life expectancy. Here is a translation:

"Travel to the country where austerity reduces life expectancy. In the United Kingdom, for the first time in a century, life expectancy is declining in some regions. Poverty, lifestyle but also budget cuts explain this phenomenon.

Paul Edmondson-Jones smiles when he mentions the strange concept developed by some doctors to summarize their patients' problem: "Shit life syndrome" [in English in the original]. "Yes, I've heard about it," says the public health director at Hartlepool City Hall, a town in north-eastern England. It's true: these people are sick because they have a shit life, which is getting worse. They have no job, no hope, and find consolation in beer and cigarettes, and they damage their health."

Hartlepool is the eighteenth poorest city in England. Shipyards, mines and chemical plants closed a long time ago. The last nearby steel mill died in 2015. For generations, poverty and social difficulties have become widespread.

But in recent years, a new phenomenon has been added: people are dying younger. For the first time in a century, life expectancy is decreasing. Until recently, even in places like this the population lived longer, despite being far behind rich areas. It's over now.

While life expectancy in the United Kingdom as a whole continues to rise, the trend has reversed in dozens of regions of England. In Hartlepool, for men, it dropped more than a year, to age 76, from 2011-2013 to 2014-2016. In the poorest neighbourhoods, it is only

71 years old. For women, the trend is stable at 81 years on average and at 79 for the poorest.

"Here, during school holidays, many children who enjoy free meals in the canteen are not really fed at lunchtime. Often, their only real meal is a take-away at night from the local kebab. Malnutrition leads to obesity, opening a vicious cycle of health problems.

"The problem is that healthy food is much more expensive," according to Julie Foster, a single mother of a 2-year-old girl who lives in the neighbourhood. You have to be able to go to the supermarket, which requires a car. You have to afford gas for cooking. She herself has a weight problem, after years of eating take-aways in the evenings, returning from her twelve-hour day cleaning.

At the town hall, Paul Edmondson-Jones sees these stories reflected in his statistics. "The direct causes of the decline in life expectancy are cancers, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. But behind this lies the way of life: alcohol, cigarettes, obesity ... He insists on one point: healthy life expectancy (without chronic disease) is only 55 years for women, hardly more in men. "Then the population bears the burden of disability. Look downtown, you see wheelchairs everywhere, people on crutches, mental disabilities ..."

Michael Marmot, professor of public health at University College London, was one of the first to sound the alarm. "When I saw that life expectancy across the country was barely growing, I thought maybe we had reached a natural peak. But I made comparisons with the rest of Europe, and their life expectancy continues to rise."

According to him, the explanation lies at the junction between poverty, the problem of access to care, the way of life, unhealthy housing ... But he adds an additional theory:

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# Diary of a Corbyn foot soldier

by Michael Murray

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

In this issue:

- (1) Reality check
- (2) “Highly likely”: Making words mean what you want people to think they mean”
- (3) What next for Labour – and its foot soldiers?

## (1) Reality check

For me, a Corbyn foot soldier, the month of March began in a good place. Labour appeared to be steaming towards considerable gains in the forthcoming local elections, which, in turn, would set us up nicely for any forthcoming General Election and provide an appropriate backdrop for the further honing of the Party’s Manifesto for Government, and the mass membership educational work around it. The peace which had broken out in the aftermath of the 2017 General Election gains amongst the party’s internal factions seemed to be holding up well.

Having experienced local election canvassing in a leafier part of Barnet constituency in the previous month, where I made new friends and comrades, I took the opportunity to join members of the Irish Society of the Labour Party canvassing on the westerly side of Barnet. The canvass began and ended in The Cricklewood Crown.

The Crown is an iconic pub in London Irish social history made famous by the song “McAlpine’s Fusiliers,” commemorating the men who worked for the McAlpine construction firm. It is the “Fields of Athenry” anthem equivalent of 1950-60 generation of Irish immigrants which begins with the lines known to most Irish people:

“The crack was good in Cricklewood

And they wouldn’t leave The Crown

With glasses flyin’ and biddies cryin’

Poor Paddy was goin’ to town”

I know, like a song from the Klondike gold rush. But “The Crown” now is as different from then as the post 2008 Irish immigrant wave is from the 1950s one. Our canvassing team was an interesting mix of the first-generation descendants of the 1950s immigrants and the Irish born, mostly third level educated 2008 immigrants – plus, of course, a goodly proportion of other ethnic groups, as you’d expect in any cross section of Londoners. And though the Crown’s facade and interiors have been retained it is now part of the Irish owned, lavishly appointed, 4-Star Crown Clayton Hotel. It is the venue for many London Irish social events and it is here, at the likes of the County Association dinner-dances you can smell the wealth of the “successful”

Irish immigrants.

The section of the ward we were canvassing, which began at the rear of the pub, was a hell of a contrast, shocking, actually with its dilapidated blocks of flats and houses and seriously pot-holed roads. And yes, I met some of the 1950s Irish immigrants on the doorstep as well as their grown-up children. I chatted to them about “back home,” generally communicating in the culture of clientelist parish-pump politics typical of similarly deprived areas of Irish cities and towns. The two enthusiastic, young Labour women looking for votes in that area have their work cut out. Not, mind, in securing promises of votes but in getting this section of “left-behind” voters to actually vote, as in Ireland or any other country represented in that area. And, no, I didn’t ask them if The Crown was their local.

One reason I chose to go to Cricklewood to help out was, apart from a curiosity about revisiting The Crown for the first time since my early years in London was to get to know the Labour Party Irish Society. I wasn’t disappointed. The session after the canvass was great and new friendships were made. And, in recognition of my help I was invited to the Society’s Paddy’s Night annual do at Portcullis House, Westminster.

There, I learned to my delight that one of the people I’ve been dying to meet for years is not only a member of the Irish Society, but is its Community Liaison Officer. This is Muhammad Al-Hussaini, the “singing imam,” a Muslim cleric. Muhammad is all over YouTube, if you google his name. He has a vast repertoire of sean-nos (traditional Gaelic) songs and music. He plays the fiddle and tin whistle also – and no doubt other instruments. I should add he sings in English too – and, in the Irish tradition, many of his songs are sung in a mix of the two languages. I had assumed he lived in Dublin.

I first saw him, in English and Irish

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“Until 2010, life expectancy in the UK was growing at the same rate as elsewhere in Europe. Then we dropped out. This period seems to correspond to the consequences not only of the financial crisis, but also of austerity.”

He recalls that the budget for assistance to the elderly has decreased by 6% since 2010, while demand is increasing, and the health system continues to grow, but four times slower than before the crisis.

“Life expectancy is an indicator, which shows us how our society works. If it does not increase, we are going wrong,” concludes Michael Marmot.

In Hartlepool, austerity is not a theoretical financial concept. The emergency department of the hospital has closed. The waiting list to see a doctor lengthens, sometimes to several weeks. The city’s budget has fallen by a third in real terms since 2010.”

The article ends by describing more signs of a society in trouble, food banks and drug addiction.

on Irish TV (RTE) and the Gaelic TG4. I was introduced and we duly exchanged the “cupla focail.” He sang on the night – and brought the house down. A senior Parliamentary Labour figure – one of the guest speakers, of another ethnicity – had visible tears in her eyes at the emotion evoked by Muhammad’s Gaelic songs. The corner of the venue was taken up with a dozen schoolchildren playing an assortment of traditional instruments as background accompaniment. One of the main speakers was an official of the British union, the GMB, a big, articulate, humorous lump of a man – of the McAlpine Fusiliers’ generation, and proud of it. Just as I felt proud to be there – a special night, for the night that was in it, and great to feel be part of a movement that seemed to be going somewhere.

Then just when you’re feeling happy, reality, as is its wont, rears its head and bites you in the arse.

## **(2) “Highly likely”: Making words mean what you want people to think they mean**

Like many, I’d believed from the time that Jeremy emerged as a serious contender for the Labour Party leadership, and possible Prime Minister-ship, that he was always going to be a likely target for serious dirty tricks. We’ve seen a succession of them, the most potentially damaging being the Czech and East German spy “revelations.” There are also the “anti-semitic” smears – ongoing and, if anything, intensifying as the John Mann types in the PLP rejoin the public opposition to Corbyn, after a misleading lull.

As Corbyn was spoken of more and more as the next PM it seemed to me some false flag was likely. A constant refrain of the Tories is that Labour can’t be trusted with the economy, including debt management. And that they can’t be trusted with defence. I think it’s fair to say large swathes of the British public remain to be persuaded that Labour can, indeed, be trusted with the economy – but a great start has been made over the past two to three years to establish Labour as the only party with a grip on the essentials. The 2017

General Election Manifesto’s wide electoral appeal is the evidence of that, as was the hasty withdrawal of the Tory Manifesto as an embarrassment by comparison.

The “Labour can’t be trusted with the economy” line was trotted out at the last PMQs of this term, on Wednesday last. It came across as a worn-out sound bite. Defence, on the other hand, is the soft underbelly of the Corbyn Labour Party. It was always going to be the “go-to” policy area to hammer Labour and, particularly, Corbyn. Instead of the military intervention, in the wake of some manufactured “false flag” pretext I had been expecting to happen between now and the next general election we had the incident in Salisbury.

That this may be a pre-meditated false flag job to compromise Putin or Corbyn in their respective leadership roles by persons unknown, or, Salisbury is being seized upon to turn a serendipitous incident into an opportunity. We may never know. But, what we do know is that Labour in Parliament has now been damaged, through the usual suspects coming forward from the backbenches, and from the shadow cabinet, to undermine Jeremy’s leadership yet again. And just when the tide of public opinion seemed to be turning slowly and inexorably in its favour.

“The Labour leader has come under criticism in recent days – including from Labour MPs – for calling on government ministers to avoid ‘rushing way ahead of the evidence’ by pinning definite responsibility for the attack on the Russian state without producing conclusive evidence to back the charge,” one newspaper reported. As Opposition leader Jeremy attempted to hold the Prime Minister to account for a highly threatening action taken against a nuclear-armed sovereign State, which, incidentally, is portrayed by the Tories as being a “rogue state.” Proceed with caution in dealing with a rogue state, if, indeed, post-Soviet Russia is such, would seem to be a responsible approach undeserving of the scathing opprobrium poured down on Corbyn by Government, the

media – and many of his backbench and Cabinet colleagues.

But this demonization of Russia and its leader, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, let us recognise, is now an established part of the modern “psy-ops/propaganda” phase of neo-con confrontation. The second phase is economic warfare, through escalating degrees of sanctions and sabotage of financial and other economic and social systems. The third is military action, through proxies, covert warfare and, finally, invasion. Of course, these overlap, and the mix varies depending on the context, and the targeted enemy.

As we’ve seen before – more recently in the run-up to the Iraq war – a high point of the first, psy ops phase is the discarding of hitherto liberal, tolerant debate about the issue and the adoption of the stance: “Those who are not with us, are against us.” This is true especially of the media: hence the targeting of Russia Today (RT) for boycotting and closure. That’s why John McDonnell’s call for actions to be taken against RT, such as boycotting interviews on its news programmes, has disappointed me gravely.

He hasn’t given any reasons for it I can pin down, having gone over the transcripts of his interviews on the subject – and genuinely wanting to continue to trust him. He’s been one of my heroes in Corbynist Labour and I’ve enjoyed several political chats with him over the last few years. But Peter Dowd, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell’s Deputy gave as a succinct, specific reason for taking steps against RT: “the light of events of this week” (i.e. Salisbury MJM).

The final part of this first phase of the neo-con is the identification of external allies, which we’ve seen happening in the EU and beyond, mainly in commonwealth countries. In response to Theresa May’s statement to the House of Commons on her securing of allies Jeremy Corbyn said: “On Russia I welcome the international consensus that the Prime Minister has built. As I said two weeks ago the most powerful response we can make is multilateral action, so I’d like to place on record our thanks to the EU and other states

for their cooperation with us.”

That last quote is verbatim from the House of Commons video record, posted on YouTube, Monday, 26 March, 2018, and can be viewed there. As a Corbyn foot soldier, who, with hundreds of thousands of others excited by a new politics “for the many, not the few,” I’ve burned some shoe leather – and invested heavily emotionally and intellectually – in the Corbynist vision. But I can’t square this statement with his earlier ones calling for caution and due process in line with the OPCW Chemical Weapons Conventions drawn up precisely for dealing with such a situation as that posed by Salisbury, not to mind the accepted principles of International Law.

In the last Diary entry in the March Labour Affairs I sang the praises of Keir Starmer and his sustained, mesmerising, forensic tearing apart of the withdrawal from the EU Bill presented by the Tory Government. The man has an incredible CV, well worth looking at on line. Yet, he fell into line with Theresa May’s mob rule mentality, disowning Jeremy’s principled stance in the process. And the Shadow Attorney General, Shami Chakrabarti was another “human rights” lawyer putting political expediency before legal principles.

And the thing is: we’ve seen all this before. I’m not going to revisit the Iraq war and the Chilcot Report. During the week Theresa May raised the Litvinenko murder. That’s more directly relevant to Salisbury. She held the Russian State responsible for it, as part of her circumstantial evidence in support of blaming Russia, once again, for the Salisbury nerve agent attack. She was telling a lie, knew she was telling a lie – and relying on a weak public memory of the details of that case.

But the truth is: The Judge in the Litvinenko case, Sir Robert Owen summarised as follows: “the FSB operation to kill Litvinenko was PROBABLY approved by Mr Patrushev (then head of FSB – (Russian) Federation Security Services, MM) and also President Putin... There was a “STRONG PROBABILITY” that Andrei Lugovoy poisoned Litvinenko “under the direction of the FSB” and “the use of POLONIUM-210 was “AT VERY LEAST a STRONG INDICATOR of state involvement.” The emphasis, as I said, is mine. There are more “Probablys” in the Judge’s summary than in a Carlsberg advert – which shows how inconclusive the investigation was contrary to the lying claims of Theresa May. This, of course,

can be cross-checked on the Hansard record (The emphasis in CAPITALS is mine MM.)

In the Salisbury case “A STRONG PROBABILITY” became “HIGHLY LIKELY” and “Novichok” replaced “polonium-210” as proof of Russian State involvement. As in the Litvinenko case concerning polonium-210, Novichok was described as: “...a military grade nerve agent OF A TYPE DEVELOPED IN RUSSIA....” Weasel words intended to be heard by a trusting population as: “Made in Russia, and only in Russia. “ Note the key weasel word “DEVELOPED” not ‘MADE,’ by the way. Craig Murray, the former British Ambassador sacked by Blairite Labour’s Jack Straw for blowing the whistle on torture in post-Soviet Uzbekistan drew my attention to the diplomatic service techniques of “making words mean what you want people to think they mean.” He ends one mocking critique of the vacuity of the British Government verbal disingenuousness with: “Well, I’m off to have a glass of vodka of a type made in Russia – but actually distilled in Warrington (i.e. North of England)

Maya Goodfellow has commented on these parallels in the historic and the actual cases: What both cases have in common, she says, is the involvement of the intelligence services: “...the moment the intelligence services are involved, as they may well be with Russian exiles, the whole subject is covered with a sort of veil, that both distort and conceal. Practically every conclusion of the Litvinenko inquiry is hedged to some degree. Yet all the hedging has long been removed in the retelling. Many of the “whats” and ‘whys’ remain elusive.” That’s a summary I’d be prepared to accept. As for the first action taken, the expulsion of the diplomats, the Russian Ambassador to the UK said that this punitive measure was “based on alliances rather than evidence”.

### **(3) What next for Labour – and its foot soldiers?**

When Theresa May blames the Russian State for the murder of Litvinenko, and then compounds that lie by offering it as proof that the Russian State therefore attempted to kill the Skripals what she is doing is abandoning legal principles and practice in favour of political expediency.

I am grateful to my colleague Eamon Dyas of the Aubane List for the following explanation of why Britain did not follow the Chemical Weapons Convention of the

OPCW, which the Russians were open to: “It is now clear why the UK blocked the Russian attempt to have the Security Council endorse the investigation by the OPCW. A UN commissioned investigation would have to be more open. It would have to be led by a named expert and would have to produce regular reports to the UN. This is what happened with the WMD investigations into Iraq. None of this would have suited the British so they opted to be a sovereign state sponsor of the investigation which gave them more control of events. The Russian proposal would not only cede control to the UN. But would have enabled the OPCW to investigate sites in Russia as well as Britain and would have produced a more useful report. That more was not made of this by the British media is not surprising but that the EU did not is shameful.” (Eamon Dyas, Aubane 28 March, 2018)

I’m left wondering why the Starmer and Chakrabarti of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition didn’t insist on it either. Perhaps they are trying to be too loyal.

And the result? The Guardian, 17th March, reported an Opinion/Observer poll which showed: “More than twice as many people back Theresa May to handle the UK’s response to the crisis in relations with Russia (than Corbyn).” The report on the poll results continues: “In a further sign that May could enhance her standing with continued firm handling of the crisis the poll puts the Conservatives two points ahead of Labour, despite deep Tory divisions over Brexit and uncertainty over the country’s economic prospects.”

I’ve asked a cross section of, admittedly, London based councillors standing for election in May, as well as canvassers, if they had noticed a perceptible change in attitude on the doorstep. They didn’t feel that Salisbury had changed anything, the conversations being about local issues. But, in marginals, I think, an, albeit, external issue like that must have the potential to effect the result. Certainly, any Parliamentary election result will be effected. Personally, as a foot soldier and Labour Party member, I feel gutted by Labour’s retreat from an ethical foreign policy. It can’t but be very encouraging for the Conservatives, their supporters and backers, who must now be feeling they have the measure of the Labour leadership. And that will have implications for other policy areas.

# A Letter From Our New Zealand Correspondent

Feergus O'Raghallaigh

## Milk and politics

Since the mid-1980s New Zealand politics, cross-party, has had a consuming obsession with 'free trade'. In the political spectrum two minorities, the Greens and New Zealand First have dared to raise questions. There is anti-American and anti-Multi-National Corporation (MNC) noise also on the Labour left but it amounts to nothing. When push came to shove and power beckoned after last year's general election there was arguably the most barefaced turnaround in global political history with the sudden discovery that the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) that Labour opposed in opposition wasn't the same TPP as it was once Trump pulled the US from the deal and in New Zealand Labour was in government. The TPP title was changed in favour of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (or CPTPP). The comedian and satirist John Clarke were he alive would have made a meal of it.

Global 'free trade' is an obsession here. Its absence is seen as a denial almost of New Zealand's birthright and entitlement. Kiwi paddocks could feed the world, cheaper than anyone else can. The udder economy, New Zealand beef and lamb, venison and vines could creak the dining tables of households throughout the world – affordably and therefore to consumers' benefit and to the benefit also of Kiwis.

Ricardianism Lives! In New Zealand anyway.

The China trade agreement negotiated by Labour's Helen Clark in her final year in office, 2008, is for New Zealand mainstream politics living proof of the benefit of letting comparative advantage rule the world. Being Beijing's food basket has worked wonders for the New Zealand economy most Kiwis would say. However, it has taken an enormous toll. There is the highly visible impact of dairy effluent on the environment. And then there's the issue of water: the drain on lakes, the rivers and the aquifers to feed

giant intensive irrigation systems that now underpin intensive pasture. 'The price of progress' is the rejoinder to the enviro-moaners.

There is another question: whether the China agreement is an example of comparative advantage and Ricardian theory – or whether it represents something else.

## Trade – export-led growth

The China deal was slow to yield gains. And then it did, relatively suddenly. This, one suspects, was very much on the push of the National-led governments of John Key and Bill English (2008 – 2017), and the adoption by these governments of export-led growth policy.

National's policy had three elements. First up, the target was to raise the export component of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over time from 30 to 40 per cent. Second, and central to this ambition was the target of doubling commodity exports (agriculture, forestry and fisheries) in real terms between 2012 and 2025. And third, the scope of 'free trade' would be expanded through negotiating China-type market access treaties with a range of countries.

At the administrative/institutional level government created two super-ministries, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE). They were to be business-driven. MPI absorbed a range of regulatory agencies and functions in areas such as animal disease control, biosecurity, and fisheries quota regulation. Similarly at the new MBIE it was to all about the needs of business including especially in respect of the labour market (where the emphasis was to be on 'flexibility').

The goal was again, growth. To this end every regulatory, veterinary and environmental fetter or rule, every regulatory requirement on business generally (including in respect of workers' pay and conditions) that

might remotely have been said to hold back cheap food production was to be made subject to growth objectives and their realisation.

**Trade was to be all, and all was to be trade.**

Domestic output of primary products (the supply side) would swell while demand (market access) would also be boosted by new, China-type arrangements with ever more countries and blocs. This latter aspect was to be the job of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Critical on this front, almost above all else, was securing enhanced access to the US market for NZ food and agriculture. Yes, getting a deal with the EU and securing deals with the Arab world (critically with the Saudis) and with Russia were important but as nothing to opening the US gates. That was the whole point of the TPP, a New Zealand invention or initiative.

New Zealand thinking on TPP was simple. It was first proposed as a small trade arrangement entering into effect in 2006 between Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore, known collectively as P4. Crucially, the NZ-led agreement allowed new members to join. Eventually, on the NZ view, the US could be enticed into the arrangement – especially as its pivot to Asia took hold coincident with and in response to the rise of China as a hegemonic Pacific power.

A geopolitical setting or moment then was used by New Zealand to achieve a specific 'free trade' purpose, lower tariff market access for its food producers to the US.

The pursuit of easier US market access has not worked. For one thing, the pivot to Asia simply did not happen. America remains mired in the Near East on a number of fronts including Afghanistan and Syria not to mention the continuing bogs of Iraq and Iran (and don't mention Israel). There is no end in sight to any of this.

Then along came the US presidential election of 2016. It was fought to a

significant extent in a torrid protectionist atmosphere – to such an extent that the key US advocate for the pivot and TPP Hillary Clinton, had to join the protectionist ranks abandoning her precious pivot and becoming a turncoat on TPP. Trump still won – and immediately junked TPP.

Meanwhile the putative Arabian deals have sunk in a sandstorm of bribery allegations in relation to the Saudis and disappeared. The EU talks are endless – and will go nowhere. Brussels and national EU governments will not sell out their farmers, which is essentially what New Zealand is proposing they do. Oh and as of now, don't mention Russia.

On the supply side, two points can be made. First, the export/GDP ratio target has gone for its tea, sunk by sustained domestic growth driven by a construction boom (including the Christchurch rebuild), a property bubble and record-level inward migration. And second, however much the China trade has boomed it is also a hugely volatile trade – it is after all entirely based on primary products (selling at world prices and subject to market exchange rates), just about the riskiest trade policy a country could pursue. As has proven to be the case for New Zealand; talk to any dairy farmer here about their profits.

### China realities

As to China specifically, there's been a mood swing in official America in respect of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It coincides with the end of the Obama era – but that is probably coincidence. It appears that a swathe of the US foreign policy establishment now realises that the PRC has beaten them at every turn since 'Nixon in China' and that today they have no answer.

In the current issue of Foreign Affairs two now-retired policy insiders, Kurt M Campell and Ely Ratner have a piece, *The China Reckoning – How Beijing Defied American Expectations*. They write:

“Nearly half a century since Nixon's first steps toward rapprochement, the record is increasingly clear that Washington once again put too much faith in its power to shape China's trajectory. All sides of the policy debate erred: free traders and financiers who foresaw inevitable and increasing openness in China, integrationists who argued that Beijing's ambitions would be tamed by greater interaction with the international community, and hawks who believed that China's power would be abated by perpetual American primacy”.

And, they write,

“Neither carrots nor sticks have swayed China as predicted. Diplomatic and commercial engagement have not brought political and economic openness... the liberal international order has failed to lure or bind China as powerfully as expected. China has instead pursued its own course, belying a range of American expectations in the process”.

In a second piece, 'Life in China's Asia – What Regional Hegemony Would Look Like' by Jennifer Lind, the author writes,

“For now, the United States remains the dominant power

in East Asia, but China is quickly closing the gap. Although an economic crisis or domestic political turmoil could derail China's rise, if current trends continue, China will before long supplant the United States as the region's economic, military, and political hegemon”.

Asia is now shared by two hegemons, the US and China. Soon there will on current trends likely be one. However Lind doesn't see it as inevitable. America can stay in there but not on its own. Japan above all Asian allies must become serious about own-defence and critically power projection, in short remilitarising. Other allies including Australia and New Zealand will on the Lind view also have to raise their security, defence-spending and military game. Further, the two must take seriously their old role in the Pacific Islands, now that China has become almost unnoticed a very big player in the foreign aid and development stakes, its budgets favouring big-ticket infrastructure projects.

From the Kiwi perspective the 2008 China deal may have looked like a model of Ricardianism. It is still seen in this light today. However it was never such for the Chinese – any more than they saw their Australian ore and coal imports in such lights. Feeding China for profit is now, suddenly, diplomatically and politically problematic. New Zealand is waking up to the reality that trade, in the end, remains not about anything much more than good old mercantilism – and geopolitical ambitions, rivalries and projects. Further, mercantilism and geopolitics are two sides of the same coin.

Any other takeaways? One at least for British readers: the British government in its pursuit of its hard Brexit is discovering much the same as New Zealand. Fox, Boris and mates are talking rubbish and life in a nineteenth-century imperialist-ideological tub will be distinctly uncomfortable as becomes clearer by the day.

### THE INKLINGS OF WHITEHALL

It's James here, James the octopus.  
I'm involved in Brexit.  
That can mean using lots of ink,  
and living on my wits.

Started discussions yesterday.  
The vaguer the better.  
Wasn't pushed into a corner  
by that Dublin letter.

Then someone tried to pin me down.  
But I am slippery.  
My suckers were in their pockets  
demanding something free.

Sometimes I don't want to be here.  
And other times not there.  
A large cloud of ink does the trick.  
So follow, I'm nowhere.

Wilson John Haire.

# Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

## Time On Our Side

“Women [in the USA] are more Democratic than men, and younger voters are more Democratic than older ones. The former has been true for decades, and the latter is a trend that’s at least 10 or 15 years old. But a new Pew [Research Center] survey using a huge sample to allow for insight into demographic details shows that the intersection of these two trends is staggeringly large.

“Among millennials, which Pew identifies as people born between 1981 and 1996, men lean toward Democrats by 8 percentage points — far and away a bigger tilt toward Democrats than older cohorts of men. But millennial women favor Democrats by a staggeringly large 70-23 margin.”<sup>1</sup>

Also true in Britain’s 2017 election.<sup>2</sup> The election when Jeremy Corbyn insisted the left knew better. Split or apathetic in 2015, when Ed Miliband sounded ashamed of his own policies.

Younger people are suspicious of the Baby Boomers, my generation. This had been encouraged by a right-wing Overclass that control most of the media. A more-than-millionaire class who’ve caused most of the problems by grabbing much larger incomes and a much bigger chunk of society’s wealth from the 1980s. People with unjust and unpopular privileges. So, make the young believe that Baby Boomers are the *real* problem. Make the Baby Boomer scared of the young. (Or they may believe their own rubbish: they are not that clever outside small matters of spin and manipulation.)

The young are discouraged from knowing that we Baby Boomers had to fight for freedoms they now take for granted. That it was once considered shameful for a couple to live together without being married, for instance. But it’s also true that there was always selfishness and confusion.

Victory was always uncertain. Nixon almost rallied the Old Order, speaking of a ‘Silent Majority’. Those people are now mostly dead of old age, but were indeed an anti-progressive majority at the time. But silenced by a Double Whammy: first Nixon’s unnecessary trickery in an election

he’d have won anyway, with tapes in which the ‘champion of conservatism’ talked and thought like a cheap crook. Then the humiliating collapse of the USA’s allies in Vietnam, showing that a whole lot of suffering had been just as pointless as the anti-war movement had warned.

This *could* have led to a political victory for the left, had the left been coherent. It was not. Too many were too scared of betrayal to make sensible compromises. Obsessed by Corporatism as an enemy.

In practice, rejecting Corporatism means rejecting useful politics. Advanced industrial societies all opted for collectivism in the 1930s, *and never switched back*. Unless it seeks war and genocide, as Nazi Germany did, a Corporatist system is a big improvement on Classical Capitalism. And it was Classical Capitalism that chose the gigantic slaughter of the First World War.

Preferring protest to winning, the left duly lost. In Britain, Labour wanted an Incomes Policy and Workers Control. The Far Left helped defeat this, believing they’d get something more radical. Instead they got Thatcherism. Trade Unionists got back the Free Collective Bargaining they’d cherished, but lost to an elite no longer scared of them.

From the 1980s, enormous inequalities were allowed in the name of Freedom. People were slow to learn that a rat race is usually won by rats.

I found myself thinking of a song from 1970, or rather the lines ‘*You don’t know what you’ve got / Till its gone*’ and ‘*They paved paradise / And put up a parking lot*’.<sup>3</sup> Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell was disgusted by the outcomes of capitalism — but unable to think clearly about it:

“Despite her prominence among the young musicians of the 1960s and 1970s, and her writing of ‘Woodstock’ (where she was prevented from performing because her manager thought it was more advantageous to appear on The Dick Cavett Show), she did not align herself with the era’s protest movements or its cultural manifestations. She has said that the parents of the boomers were unhappy, and ‘*out of it came this liberated, spoiled, selfish generation*

*into the costume ball of free love, free sex, free music, free, free, free, free we’re so free. And Woodstock was the culmination of it.*’ But ‘*I was not a part of that,*’ she explained in an interview. ‘*I was not a part of the anti-war movement, either. I played in Fort Bragg. I went the Bob Hope route because I had uncles who died in the war, and I thought it was a shame to blame the boys who were drafted.*’”<sup>4</sup>

## You Don’t Need a Gay Indian-Irishman To Know Which Way the Wind Blows

Bob Dylan was another confused protestor. It’s shallow to say ‘*You don’t need a weather man / To know which way the wind blows*’. Forecasters can mostly say how long the wind will still blow the way it’s blowing now. Experts confirm we have more extreme weather than there was in the 1960s and 1970s. Experts can explain that bouts of intense cold can be caused by the Arctic warming up: a northern Jet Stream has been displaced. Twisted to allow the three ‘Beasts from the East’ that brought snow to Britain in what was officially spring.

People can also believe that ‘capitalism’ should be credited with the adaptations that working capitalists made to buy off and incorporate most of the 1960s radicals, after Nixon’s bid to be a serious conservative failed. The drift of commerce is to view one ‘unit of person’ as much like another. Fungible. Valued only for money, fame, and power. The ‘pink pound’ is formidable and gays are good at quietly self-organising for shared interests.

“The Taoiseach [Irish Prime Minister] has issued a rallying call for the ‘American Dream’ ahead of his meeting with US President Donald Trump today, saying the dream of freedom, opportunity and hope for all citizens — regardless of race, gender, sexuality or religion — must survive.

“Leo Vardakas’s remarks — which drew on his personal experience of growing up gay with an Indian father — will likely be seen as strong criticism of the stance taken by Mr Trump and his vice president, Mike Pence, on various social issues, including LGBT rights and migration.”<sup>5</sup>

Bernie Sanders would have easily defeated Trump, had he been the candidate. The Democrat establishment backed Hillary Clinton, who deservedly lost. Saunders was progressive on LGBT rights, migration etc. But he also suggested modest curbs on parasitic finance. He would have made the rich pay their fair share of taxes. Demanded that the USA get the same national health service that almost all rich countries have – US life expectancy is falling for the lack of it.<sup>6</sup> He was blocked. Voters rightly saw Hilary as more of the same failed policies.

If you ignore the poor, or rob them of the little they have, you should not be surprised if a lot of traditional prejudices revive. Most of the poor are being stupid: tricked into resenting minorities rather than the dominant rich. But this is sadly likely to continue.

### **Ambiguous Leftism in the Czech Republic**

I told last month how Czech President Milos Zeman was falsely labelled far-right after being re-elected with some right-wing support.<sup>7</sup> I have now tracked down what the man himself said:

“I wanted to be the voice of the lower ten million underprivileged citizens, since the privileged ones have acquired their voice, or rather voices, already a long time ago.”<sup>8</sup>

“Migration is partially provoked by terrorist actions, for instance in Syria or in Iraq. But on the other hand, migration is connected with terrorism because some jihadists are hidden inside the migration wave. And in Europe and everywhere, they create sleeping units, lonely wolves and so on. Well, I understand the people who say that we must welcome the migrants. But my opposition starts from the fact that the massive migration from African and other countries represent a brain drain. The young, healthy people, mainly men, who leave their countries, represent the weakening of the potential of those countries and everybody who welcomes migrants in Europe agrees to the brain drain and with permanent backwardness of those countries. What we need is to help those countries with electricity, hospitals, schools, water resources and so on in order to stabilize the population in those domestic countries, but not to support the migration.”<sup>9</sup>

The man was a Social-Democrat for most of his political career. Is a much more moderate voice against Failed Globalisation than equivalent people in

Hungary and Poland.

### **More Old Hatreds Revive**

“Our obsession with Aung San Suu Kyi blinds us to the deeper causes of the Rohingya tragedy...”

“This former Buddhist kingdom had been conquered and incorporated into British India in the middle of the 19th century, and its long-established Hindu and Muslim populations joined by Indian newcomers.

“Burma’s large population of Hindu and Muslim traders, soldiers, administrators and labourers, many from the neighbouring Indian state of Bengal, became the objects of nationalist hatred, and were attacked in riots through the 1930s...”

“At the moment... non-Rohingya Muslims in Burma are not subject to the same kind of persecution as their co-religionists in Rakhine. For the latter combine two perceived threats—of ‘foreign’ immigrants, who may also include Hindus, and ‘secessionist’ minorities, including Christians and other groups...”

“Like the stars they had become, both Obama and Suu Kyi received Nobel Prizes before they accomplished anything—promissory notes they treated as blank cheques.”<sup>10</sup>

A good insight into events in Myanmar, even though the author used the old name Burma. Globalisation under New Right guidance ignored the needs of real people, so they retreat into their narrow ethnic identities. And easily go to war with their neighbours.

### **Jews, Seals and Antisemites**

Is there antisemitism in the Tory Party?

Of course there is, and everyone knows it. But while Tory policy is broadly pro-Israel, as little as possible will be said about it.

When Theresa may said “if you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere”,<sup>11</sup> Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable called it antisemitic.<sup>12</sup> But the matter was soon forgotten. (Labour should remind everyone.)

The Board of Deputies of British Jews, the main specifically-Jewish representative body, chooses instead to attack Labour on the eve of local elections that are expected to be very good for Labour.

There is a mural about the Battle of Cable Street, which was a major defeat of Oswald Mosley’s antisemitic British Fascist movement. Though neither Mosley nor Mussolini were originally

antisemitic. They would accept Jews as part of a global elite until they decided Hitler’s friendship was more valuable. George Orwell noted that early on, Mosley had a bodyguard of East End Jewish boxers.<sup>13</sup> Before Hitler’s rise, there were Jews who thought they could flourish as part of a small privileged elite, just as some of them are now doing.

Another mural could be seen as antisemitic, which Corbyn over-looked and apologised for overlooking.

Most people overlook the ‘eye in the pyramid’. A Masonic symbol, suggesting a belief in the classic nonsense of a Jewish-Masonic plot. It appears on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, still used on federal government documents,<sup>14</sup> and on some dollar bills. Masonry was widespread in the early USA. A lunatic fringe believes it is still in control behind the scenes.

The mural’s author claims it is just about a banking cartel which includes both Jews and Anglos.<sup>15</sup> It would help if he clearly distanced himself from anti-Jewish trash.

Masonry was loosely progressive, but the British royalty incorporated British Masons as loyalists. It was of no significance when Britain under Oliver Cromwell dropped its mediaeval ban on Jews living in Britain. Charles 2<sup>nd</sup>, always pragmatic, approved the move. Jews were fully incorporated, apart from a requirement till 1858 that Members of Parliament must declare themselves to be Christians. This was part of Britain ceasing to be seriously Protestant – Roman Catholics had been excluded till 1829 and had been in many ways worse off than Jews. Benjamin Disraeli, a nominal convert who completely ignored God and the Bible in his many books and speeches, was able to rise to the top of British politics.

It would help to show how widely spread Jewish opinion actually is, rather than tying it to Zionism as the Board of Deputies of British Jews is now doing. Bernie Saunders has a Polish Jewish background, and relatives who were killed by the Nazis.

Also treat antisemitism and similar false beliefs as things that people might be reasoned out of, rather than dogmatically denounced as wicked.

One major topic is Jews in the Bolshevik Revolution. There were indeed Jews in the Bolshevik party – *and everywhere else in Russian politics*. Including Jewish converts to Orthodox Christianity, who could hold important positions in the Tsarist state. The greatest concentration

was in the anti-revolutionary Mensheviks. Almost all Jewish socialists were happy for Jews to merge into the general population. A majority of Jews stuck with liberalism when most Russians opted for some variety of socialism. Some correctly reasoned that Jews would suffer worst in any disorder, as they did, with Ukraine being particularly bad.

The version of globalisation pushed by the New Right from the 1980s has been successful in giving the rich more money and power. A disastrous failure socially, since the fools believed that welfare was needless, economic regulation burdensome and their own values a Clear Truth that was bound to win out. Lots of Jews were involved, though many other Jews were opposed. But now that the whole thing is predictably falling apart. Some people are slow to learn.

### Gaddafi the Second?

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi will run for president in the next Libyan election.<sup>16</sup> A son of the murdered President, he was seen as his likely heir before the West casually destroyed what had been a safe and prosperous country.

But not a coherent country. Italians with colonial ambitions invented Libya out of three Ottoman provinces: Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan. (Much as Britain invented Iraq.) The Allies during and after World War Two chose to set up Idris Emir of Cyrenaica as King Idris of Libya. He was a useless ruler, overthrown in 1969 by Gaddafi.

Gaddafi offered a coherent Arab-Muslim and progressive identity. Without him, people living in the former Italian colony went many separate ways.

Interestingly, a US-based group called *Human Rights Watch* think Libya ‘incapable’ of holding elections.<sup>17</sup>

Russians chose Putin by 3 to 1, with less than 4% voting for any of the three rival pro-Western candidates.<sup>18</sup> Democracy faces the major challenge of people not accepting Western solutions when these have visibly caused chaos.

### Snippets

#### Don't worry, be Finland

The Soviet Union collapsed because it failed to change after the West conceded a lot of what the Bolsheviks originally demanded. Bread, peace and land – all delivered when the West thought it might lose the Cold War.

Snatched away some places when the West won, and the rich got arrogant again. But not everywhere.

“Finland has overtaken Norway to become the happiest nation on earth, according to a UN report.

“The 2018 World Happiness Report also charts the steady decline of the US as the world’s largest economy grapples with a crisis of obesity, substance abuse and depression...

“In the Nordic countries in general, we pay some of the highest taxes in the world, but there is wide public support for that because people see them as investments in quality of life for all. Free healthcare and university education goes a long way when it comes to happiness. In the Nordic countries, Bernie Sanders is not viewed as progressive – he is just common sense.”<sup>19</sup>

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#### Oranges Are a Revolting Fruit

“Less than two years after Nadezhda Savchenko returned from a Russian prison to a hero’s welcome, the ex-military pilot dubbed ‘Ukraine’s Joan of Arc’ is now accused of plotting to blow up Kiev’s parliament and massacre its deputies.

“The latest extraordinary claims from Ukrainian prosecutor

general Yuri Lutsenko – who recently accused former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili of planning a coup in Ukraine – are stoking a febrile political atmosphere that bodes ill for Ukraine’s stability ahead of major elections in 2019.”<sup>20</sup>

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### Money Fit for Crooks

If you are involved in major criminality, then Bitcoin might be perfect for you. I see no other use for it. Or you could gamble on its value increasing. As foolish as all other gambling. You can be a winner, only if many others are losers. Are you really cleverer than most gamblers? And it may not be as good for crooks as was thought. A recent leak suggests that the USA’s National Security Agency can spot the real owners. And use bitcoins to infiltrate the user’s computer.<sup>21</sup>

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### Remembering Stephen Hawking

Like many others, I said my regrets and farewells on Facebook. Now I take a wider view.

I’d noticed some years back how he kept doing public lectures, doing very useful work for science. But why burden himself, given his total paralysis? Did the adulation keep him alive?

Motor neuron disease usually shortens lives. Hawking lived till 76. But he always knew that he was a very useful and cherished person.

The other question is, why no Nobel Prize? The Nobel Committee are cautious about exciting but unproven theories. Einstein won for the uncontroversial photoelectric effect.

Hawking’s major advances on Black Holes predict Hawking Radiation. This has not yet been detected. Nor expected, so far. But there is a chance it does not exist, which would need new physics to explain why. And a small but real chance that Hawking’s approach will prove a dead end, which would be tragic.

The cluster of theories known as Supersymmetry was just as popular. The Large Hadron Collider has so far failed to find the expected particles, which is undermining it.

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### 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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# THE WAPPING DISPUTE

by W. J. Haire

The recent death of Brenda Dean (Lady Dean of Thornton — le-Fylde), former General Secretary of Sogat (Society of Graphical and Allied Trades), brought back memories of the Wapping Dispute of 1986 for W. J. Haire.

The Wapping Dispute involved print workers in a lengthy strike in 1986 against the new computer technology in newspaper and magazine printing versus the old hot-metal linotype method, which had been on the go for over a century. It allowed journalists and others to input copy directly rather than involve print workers.

Production was transferred to a new plant at Wapping, East London, in January 1986 by Rupert Murdoch's News International group.

The first dispute involved trying to prevent the distribution of the Sunday Times along with other newspapers of the Murdoch group which had been printed at Wapping. This plant had been clandestinely built and barricaded in expectation of a siege. That siege resulted in 1,500 arrests, 547 policemen injured (injured striker figures unknown or disputed) and 1,100 attacks by the strikers on TNT Newsfast vehicles, a new distribution service

which broke the old *Spanish Customs* method of the print unions. 670 printers were all that were needed now to print the same number of papers originally printed by 6,800 print workers at the Grays Inn Road and Bouverie Street (near Fleet Street) plants.

News International activated its new plant with the assistance of other unions, the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union, EETPU. Members of the Transport & General Workers Union, T&GWU, also crossed the picket line to work for TNT. At the time it was reported that electricians were operating the new technology after a few weeks training on computers. What was seen as mercenary unions siding with Murdoch led to a heightened atmosphere which involved yet more violence upon those working within the besieged plant. They were followed into pubs while on their break, some of them were punched and one or two glassed.

The print unions consisting of the National Graphical Association, NGA, the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT 82), and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers,

(AEUW), ran a closed shop. Most were the sons of members who would one day introduce *their* sons to the print business. An outsider could apply for their son to have an apprenticeship in the print business but first the father had to be interviewed in a print union chapel, and if accepted, a heavy donation to a print union was required. Most working families didn't have that kind of money. The new Wapping plant didn't have a closed shop.

Closed shops have been necessary in the past especially on construction sites where an interview by a shop steward was the norm even after the worker was accepted by the company. The company could be prevented from employing non-trade union labour. A union card had to be produced and it had to be no more than six weeks in arrears. These sites were militant with a strong influence of the Communist Party of Great Britain, CPGB. What is not generally known is that it stopped migrant labour from the West Indies, then being brought into the company to fill vacancies in transport and building., from being exploited as cheap labour. Everyone who had a union card was equal with equal wages.

The print unions rejected non-white labour, and most Irish labour for membership. An Irishman could still get his son into the print unions if he had the money. It was to me ironical when a shop steward, a Dubliner, working in the NHS told me that he had tried to get his English-born son into SOGAT and therefore into an apprenticeship. Though he had the militancy he didn't have the money.

This wasn't the only industry where non-white and Irish labour was rejected. You had it in the old meat market of Smithfield and in the old Covent Garden's fruit and Veg. market. They were also heavily unionised.

*Spanish Practices* in the print industry got out of control with highly inflated wages obtained through lightning strikes and threats of strikes.

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There was enormous over-manning in work places, so crowded at times that nightshift workers took turns to sit in all night cafes, awaiting their turn to return to the machines. Many had extra jobs as taxi drivers, or they might do two days on the vans delivering the papers to various venues and make a whole week's wages at that. A lot of the extra money they were making was invested in property. One member was even able to buy a pub while others invested in Italian vineyards. Income tax forms were returned with names such as Mickey Mouse, Mr Roadrunner or Brer Rabbit.

When news of this broke out in the media many middle-class professionals choked with rage at being out-waged. They mostly likely thought the working class was becoming too demanding and making inroads into their monopoly in acquiring a better lifestyle where their children would receive a private education.

Much was made of corrupt workers and corrupt unions by the media who said that new technology was brought in to end this. But new technology in the print business was coming in anyway. The problem was Murdoch made his move with the new stuff as an anti-trade union demagogue. But he did have to accept trade unionism within the new plant at Wapping. But he could still remain anti-trade union by using the Wapping unions against the outside print unions.

The tragedy was that the printers had been offered redundancy payments ranging from £2000 to £30,000 to quit their jobs. The print union rejected this offer and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1986 its 6,000 members went on strike. They ended up with nothing. The print unions were not unaware that new printing methods were coming in and that the old hot-metal linotype method was doomed. But they wanted control of the new methods and they wanted their union membership to fulfil those roles. That would be impossible with less workers required. The print unions themselves were fighting for survival. A drastic reduction in the membership and the funds for running them wouldn't be enough to continue. Terms for their members to be accepted by International News was: flexible working (probably meaning no demarcation) a no-strike clause, the adoption of the new technology and an end to the closed-shop. The print unions didn't accept those terms.

The picket line failed to stop TNT transport workers from crossing it so the T&GWU tried an illegal secondary boycott and was fined in court, losing all its assets.

Fleet street had been living with poor industrial relations for years with *Spanish Practices* in place that put restrictions on owners they considered intolerable.

It was the Thatcher era and the miners had been defeated during their strike of 1984-1985, a 51-week strike which didn't have the main support of the British trade union movement.

Now it was the printers turn a year later with their 54-week strike. It was the end of militant trade unionism however flawed and the British trade union movement can be said to be now a shadow of itself, though most seemed

to have had built quite prosperous looking headquarters. The old weekly branch meetings are long gone where you could replace indolent branch secretaries or chair people through a branch vote. A union card was once something to be treasured. Before I retired the day job I could have joined any skill union without having that skill. I wasn't an electrician or a plumber, but I had a EEPTU card almost forced on me by a union rep. because he needed to make up the numbers if the company was to recognise his full-time union rep. job on site. The Wapping dispute might have revealed corruption but at least it had life instead of the insidious quiet type now reigning.

### Continued From Page 24

to rebuild the party after years of damaging schisms within it. Perhaps more relevant would be the shame and reputational damage of acting as junior partner to the inexperienced and schoolboyish 31-year-old Di Maio.

While the arm wrestling continued, the parties met to decide on the important roles of the Presidents of the two houses, followed by their deputies, party leaders in the chambers etc.

The Centre Right coalition disagreed strongly with each other over their nominations and had to reconvene 12 hours later. The Coalition contains three uncompromising characters, predicting a future unstable and uncomfortable alliance. Berlusconi, not Salvini, won the choice of candidate for the Senate. The election of Fi's Maria Elisabetta Casellati was a tribute to his continued ability to scheme and win for his own ego – given an opportunity. Casellati is little known but she was dreamed up as a compromise when his original suggestion was met with universal horror. Paolo Romani, a seventy-year-old politician, convicted of several offences, could not be considered seriously. His candidature is also risible when seen alongside Silvio's stated aim to implement programmes dealing with crime. Brushing off his ill-judged choice of Romani, Silvio praised himself for nominating the first woman to take this role.

Roberto Fico *M5S*, a close ally of Di Maio, was elected as President of the lower house.

The stalemate stands at the time of going to press at the end of March. Di Maio and Salvini proposed different solutions to this but both refuse to accept the other as top dog and Premier. Beppe Grillo joked that they could try to govern together and called them *Di Salvini*. *La Repubblica* published a lurid painting of the two men in a passionate kissing embrace, admitting the impossibility with the headline: '*Operation Frankenstein*'. Berlusconi clearly recognises an impasse and calls any alliance an *ircocervo*, i.e.: a mythical half-goat, half-deer. The word does have history. Aristotle used it. Benedetto Croce, the writer, philosopher and politician used the term in 1942 while accusing socialist Guido Calogero of being totally unrealistic. To Berlusconi the possibility of cooperation between the two men is simply "*an example of absurdity*".

**POSTSCRIPT** President Mattarella to the rescue: On 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of April he will separately interview the new Camera and Senate Presidents, President emeritus Napolitano, and all-party leaders in turn. He will start with the smallest party and work upwards finishing with Luigi Di Maio.

# Parliament Notes



Dick Barry

## Salisbury Incident

12 March 2018

*We publish below Theresa May's statement on the Salisbury incident with Jeremy Corbyn's response. Also included are the short comments by ten Labour backbenchers, most of whom are critics of Corbyn's leadership. All 18 Labour members who spoke supported Theresa May's accusation that Russia was responsible.*

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May)** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the incident in Salisbury and the steps we are taking to investigate what happened and to respond to this reckless and despicable act.

Last week, my right hon. Friends the Foreign and Home Secretaries set out the details of events as they unfolded on Sunday 4 March. I am sure that the whole House will want to pay tribute again to the bravery and professionalism of our emergency services and armed forces in responding to this incident, as well as the doctors and nurses who are now treating those affected. In particular, our thoughts are with Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who remains in a serious but stable condition. In responding to this incident, he exemplified the duty and courage that define our emergency services and in which our whole nation takes the greatest pride.

I want to pay tribute to the fortitude and calmness with which people in Salisbury have responded to these events and to thank all those who have come forward to assist the police with their investigation. The incident has, of course, caused considerable concern across the community. Following the discovery of traces of nerve agent in a Zizzi restaurant and the Mill pub, the chief medical officer issued further

precautionary advice, but, as Public Health England has made clear, the risk to public health is low.

I share the impatience of the House and the country at large to bring those responsible to justice and to take the full range of appropriate responses against those who would act against our country in this way. But as a nation that believes in justice and the rule of law, it is essential that we proceed in the right way, led not by speculation but by the evidence. That is why we have given the police the space and time to carry out their investigation properly. Hundreds of officers have been working around the clock, together with experts from our armed forces, to sift and assess all the available evidence, to identify crime scenes and decontamination sites and to follow every possible lead to find those responsible. That investigation continues and we must allow the police to continue with their work.

This morning, I chaired a meeting of the National Security Council in which we considered the information available so far. As is normal, the council was updated on the assessment and intelligence picture, as well as on the state of the investigation. It is now clear that Mr Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia. It is part of a group of nerve agents known as Novichok.

Based on the positive identification of this chemical agent by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, our knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and would still be capable of doing so, Russia's record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations and our assessment that Russia views some defectors as legitimate targets

for assassinations, the Government have concluded that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for the act against Sergei and Yulia Skripal. There are, therefore, only two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on 4 March: either this was a direct act by the Russian state against our country; or the Russian Government lost control of their potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others.

This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has summoned the Russian ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and asked him to explain which of the two possibilities it is and to account for how this Russian-produced nerve agent could have been deployed in Salisbury against Mr Skripal and his daughter. My right hon. Friend has stated to the ambassador that the Russian Federation must immediately provide full and complete disclosure of the Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and he has requested the Russian Government's response by the end of tomorrow.

This action has happened against a backdrop of a well-established pattern of Russian state aggression. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea was the first time since the second world war that one sovereign nation has forcibly taken territory from another in Europe. Russia has fomented conflict in the Donbass, repeatedly violated the national airspace of several European countries and mounted a sustained campaign of cyber-espionage and disruption, which has included meddling in elections and hacking the Danish Ministry of Defence and the Bundestag, among many others.

During his recent state of the union

address, President Putin showed video graphics of missile launches, flight trajectories and explosions, including the modelling of attacks on the United States with a series of warheads impacting in Florida. The extra-judicial killing of terrorists and dissidents outside Russia was given legal sanction by the Russian Parliament in 2006, and, of course, Russia used radiological substances in its barbaric assault on Mr Litvinenko. We saw promises to assist the investigation then, but they resulted in denial and obfuscation and the stifling of due process and the rule of law.

Following Mr Litvinenko's death, we expelled Russian diplomats, suspended security co-operation, broke off bilateral plans on visas, froze the assets of the suspects and put them on international extradition lists, and those measures remain in place. Furthermore, our commitment to collective defence and security through NATO remains as strong as ever in the face of Russian behaviour. Indeed, our armed forces have a leading role in NATO's enhanced forward presence, with British troops leading a multinational battlegroup in Estonia. We have led the way in securing tough sanctions against the Russian economy, and we have at all stages worked closely with our allies and will continue to do so. We must now stand ready to take much more extensive measures.

On Wednesday, we will consider in detail the response from the Russian state. Should there be no credible response, we will conclude that this action amounts to an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom, and I will come back to this House to set out the full range of measures that we will take in response.

This attempted murder using a weapons-grade nerve agent in a British town was not just a crime against the Skripals, but an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom, putting the lives of innocent civilians at risk. We will not tolerate such a brazen attempt to murder innocent civilians on our soil. I commend this statement to the House.

**Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab)** I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement on this deeply alarming attack, which raises very serious questions. The whole

House condemns the suspected poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury and, of course, we wish them a return to good health. I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey a speedy recovery as well. No member of our police force and nobody on the streets of Britain should ever face such an attack—let alone one with chemical weapons.

I thank the Prime Minister for updating the House. The investigation into the shocking events in Salisbury must reach its conclusions. We need to see both the evidence and a full account from the Russian authorities in the light of the emerging evidence to which the Prime Minister referred. For now, can the Prime Minister clarify what level of threat it was believed that Mr Skripal faced at the time of the attack and what security protection, if any, was deemed necessary for him and his daughter?

This morning, the Conservative Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs said that he would be “surprised” if the Prime Minister “did not point the finger at the Kremlin”.

The hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) also accused the Russian Government of behaving “aggressively” and in “a corrupting way” in this country.

We need to continue seeking a robust dialogue with Russia on all the issues—both domestic and international—currently dividing our countries, rather than simply cutting off contact and letting the tensions and divisions get worse and, potentially, even more dangerous.

We are all familiar with the way in which huge fortunes, often acquired in the most dubious circumstances in Russia and sometimes connected with criminal elements, have ended up sheltering in London and trying to buy political influence in British party politics—“meddling in elections”, as the Prime Minister put it. There have been more than £800,000 of donations to the Conservative party from Russian oligarchs and their associates. If that is the evidence before the Government, they could be taking action to introduce new financial sanctions powers even before the investigation into Salisbury is complete. But instead they are currently resisting Labour's amendments

to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill that could introduce the so-called Magnitsky powers. Will the Prime Minister agree today to back those amendments?

More specifically, when it comes to the Salisbury attack, what actions are the local police taking to identify fellow diners at the Zizzi restaurant and the Mill pub in Salisbury on the day in question and to ensure that they come forward and are checked? What extra resources are being provided to the local police force, which quite understandably has never had to deal with such an incident before?

We know that the national health service is under incredible pressures across the country, but what extra resources have been provided to the NHS hospitals in and around Salisbury, and what training has been given to NHS staff and GPs in identifying the symptoms of a nerve agent attack?

The events in Salisbury on 4 March have appalled the country and need thorough investigation. The local community and public services involved need reassurance and the necessary resources. The action that the Government take once the facts are clear needs to be both decisive and proportionate, and focused on reducing conflict and tensions, rather than increasing them.

I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the magnificent work of our public services responding to this attack: the NHS staff, the police and security services, the armed forces and the analysts at Porton Down. Let us do everything we can to ensure that this never ever happens again.

**The Prime Minister** I am sure that everybody in the whole House sends their best wishes to all those who have suffered as a result of this incident and wish for their recovery. In the case of Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, I read a quote that I was not surprised by because I have heard it from so many police officers who have been in dangerous situations before; he said that he was merely doing his job. We are grateful to him and all our police officers and emergency services for doing that. We do not comment on the threats in relation to individual cases, but of course the police and others always look to ensure that we are taking these matters fully into account

and taking them very seriously.

In relation to Russia, we have a very simple approach, which is, “Engage but beware.” This shows how right it is that this Government have been cautious in relation to its arrangements with Russia. In my Mansion House speech last November, I set out very clearly the concerns that we have about the activities of Russia. It is a matter that I have discussed with fellow leaders at the European Union Council. We must all be very well aware of the various ways in which Russia is affecting activity across the continent and elsewhere. There can be no question of business as usual with Russia.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of party donations. I will say two things to him. First, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at the weekend, you should not tar everybody who lives in this country of Russian extraction with the same brush. Secondly, there are rules on party political donations, and I can assure him that my party, and I hope all parties, follow those rules.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about Magnitsky powers. I have been challenged previously on this question. We do already have some of the powers that are being proposed in relation to the Magnitsky law. However, we have already been talking with all parties about the amendment that has been put down, and we will work with others to ensure that we have the maximum possible consensus before the Report stage.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the question of police capabilities and resources. Not only are Wiltshire police involved in this, but they have support from neighbouring forces, as would normally happen when an incident takes place which requires that extra capability. But crucially, at a very early stage, it was decided that counter-terrorism police should take over the responsibility for this because the counter-terrorism police network has capabilities that are not available to regional forces, and they are indeed in charge in relation to this.

I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that Wiltshire County Council and Salisbury City Council are working with Public Health England, with the NHS locally and with the police to ensure that there is maximum information available to members of the public—the chief medical officer has herself reassured members of the public that the public health risk is low—and to ensure that the proper arrangements are being put in place to help the police to get on

with their inquiries. That is important. The police are still working on investigating this, and we should ensure that they have the time and space to be able to conduct those investigations.

**Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)** I thank the Prime Minister for her statement. It is hard to see any alternative to her grave conclusion that this was either a direct act by the Russian state against our country or the Russian Government have lost control of a dangerous nerve agent. In that context, I hope the whole House will be able to come together behind a firm response from the Government in the interests of our national security and public safety. Can I therefore ask her whether the National Security Council has asked for a review of the 14 other cases that I wrote to the Home Secretary about to see whether any of those should be investigated? Can I also press her on what further action she has taken in preparation for potential UN Security Council resolutions that should be drafted in order to get the widest possible international support?

**The Prime Minister** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right about the need for a clear response from the whole House, and everybody in the House should be in no doubt of the nature of what has happened and that we should respond robustly to it. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has responded to her letter in relation to those 14 other cases. I think the focus at the moment should be on ensuring that resources are put into this criminal investigation, so that the police are able to do their work with the maximum time and space.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)** May I commend the Prime Minister for today making the sort of resolute and realistic statement about the Kremlin that many of us have been looking for in this House for some time? Will she invite the heroic and brave Bill Browder, who has done more than any other single individual to uncover the Kremlin’s methods, to give her a full briefing about what he knows of Putin’s cronies’ money-laundering exploits in London and the British political figures who have been corrupted by Kremlin money? Will she also make sure that the whole of the Government machinery is now giving full co-operation to Robert Mueller’s inquiry in the United States, because of what he has already uncovered about what the Russians have been doing here?

**The Prime Minister** We have already

been clear, in relation to the Mueller inquiry, that we will of course respond to appropriate requests. I am told that the other individual to which the right hon. Gentleman referred has actually already met the Security Minister, and has therefore been able to brief him on what he knows.

**Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op)** Can I also commend the Prime Minister for her remarks? The last time we had a clear, defined, state-sponsored act of terrorism was in 2006, and she has referred to that. Can she have conversations with her predecessor, Tony Blair, who was Prime Minister at that time, about some of the issues that arose subsequent to the actions we took because it is clear that the Russians will retaliate and we will then be in a tit-for-tat process? They think we will back down. We have to say, resolutely and strongly, that we are not backing down. This is an act of terrorism and all Members of Parliament should stand together.

**The Prime Minister** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. When we take action, we must ensure that it is action that we will continue to follow through. As I said in my statement, many of the actions taken in response to the Litvinenko murder are actually still in place in relation to our relations with the Russian state. Nobody should be in any doubt, however, of the likelihood of an impact from the Russian state in attempting to suggest, as it did in that case, that the information we put out is incorrect. The inquiry, which followed significantly later, very firmly put the responsibility for Litvinenko’s murder at the door of the Russian state and, indeed, of President Putin.

**Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab)** The evidence that the Prime Minister has provided today makes it absolutely clear that the onus is on the Russian state to explain how this nerve agent entered our country. I thank her for her answer to my colleague, the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee. It is absolutely essential that we can, where possible, ensure that the public are aware of the Russian threat. Does she also agree that our inquiry should be able to understand the pressures on our intelligence and security services, and how best they are supported to do the job they have to do?

**The Prime Minister** Of course, it is for the ISC itself to determine the breadth of the inquiries it undertakes within the remit that it has been set by this House and by Government. Extra resources are being put into the security and intelligence

agencies because we have recognised the increasing challenges and threats that we need to address. That is why significant resources are going into the single intelligence account.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)** I do not suppose there is a single Member who is surprised that President Putin would resort to violence, because he has done it so many times before: 334 killed in the Beslan massacre; 170 killed unnecessarily in the Moscow theatre siege; 299 killed on flight MH17, the aeroplane brought down by the Russians; countless journalists and countless people who stood up to him as political opponents in other countries around the world murdered by him; and, yes, Sergei Magnitsky. I hear what the Prime Minister says, but may I just ask—this is the 29th time I have asked this question—whether we can ensure that, at the end of this process, nobody involved in the murder of Sergei Magnitsky, or in the corruption that he unveiled, will be allowed into this country? For that matter, can we just stop Russia Today broadcasting its propaganda in this country?

**The Prime Minister** The hon. Gentleman has asked me the question about the Magnitsky issue on many occasions in this House, both when I was Home Secretary and subsequently. We already have a number of powers that enable us to take action against individuals to prevent them from coming into this country, but we are looking seriously at the amendments. As I said, we want to ensure we have maximum consensus on this issue. On further action the Government might take, I will return to the House at the earliest possible opportunity, once we have a response from the Russian state, to update the House on the further measures we will take.

**Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op)** I say to the Prime Minister that there should be unity across the House on what I feel is the proportionate and sensible approach that she has taken to analysing what has been happening and to coming back to report to the House. I also say that there are certain circumstances, as she knows, where we take party political differences of opinion, but when our country is potentially under attack, that is just not appropriate.

**The Prime Minister** I thank the hon. Gentleman for the tone that he has adopted. He is absolutely right: this is a question of the national interest. It is a question of the interest of our country and what another state may have done on British soil to people living here in the United Kingdom.

That matter should concern all of us and be above party politics.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)** Now we have all agreed that Russia is a clear and present danger, will the Prime Minister agree that we have to be fully organised to meet that danger? If we walk out into London tonight, we see Russian mafia and Russian security people swaggering about our capital city—all over Europe we see them. What they do not like is sanctions that bite. Will she come back to this House on an early occasion with a firm list of new sanctions that we can take against Russia?

**The Prime Minister** The hon. Gentleman is asking me to refer to a particular measure. As I said in my statement and in answer to a number of questions, we will consider the response from the Russian state. Should there be no credible response, we will determine and conclude that the action amounts to unlawful use of force by the Russian state in the United Kingdom, and I will return with further measures.

**Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab)** In the light of her comments, which I commend, does the Prime Minister agree that there is no place for hon. Members on either side of the House appearing on Russia Today? It is a propaganda mouthpiece for the Russian state with which no democratic politician should engage, and they should think twice before doing so. We should not be engaging with and giving credibility to such a media outlet.

**The Prime Minister** We should all be wary and careful in looking at media outlets that any Member chooses to appear on. As I said, the issue of Russia Today is of concern to Members across the House, and I will make a further statement in the House after we have had the Russian state response.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op)** I have absolutely no doubt that the only way to deal with Putin's regime in Russia is robustly, decisively and together as a Parliament and a country. I also add my voice to those talking about the repression of the Russian people, not least in Chechnya, where Putin continues to back the brutal regime of Ramzan Kadyrov and his attacks on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. On Russia Today, can I urge the Prime Minister to speak with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to look at reviewing Russia Today's broadcasting licence and to speak to the House authorities about blocking its broadcasts in this building?

Why should we be watching its propaganda in this Parliament?

**The Prime Minister** As I said in response to a number of questions, we will look at the response from the Russian state but I will come back to the House at the earliest opportunity to look at the range of measures that could be necessary. In relation to the House authorities, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, that would be a matter not for me, but for the House authorities.

**John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op)** The level of resilience voiced by the Prime Minister today has been many years in coming, but it is hugely welcome—indeed, it would put our national security at significant risk if we were led by anyone who did not understand the gravity of the threat that Russia poses to this nation. She mentioned our NATO allies and that she will come forward with measures on Wednesday. Will she confirm that our NATO allies and the potential for a collective response is in her thinking?

**The Prime Minister** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is absolutely right: it is imperative that in this country we recognise the nature of the threat and actions Russia has taken through a wide range of means. I am also clear that, as we consider what further actions need to be taken, we must ensure they are robust, clearly defend our values here in the UK and send a clear message to those who would seek to undermine them.

*Note: John Woodcock, Mike Gapes and Stephen Doughty were among the main signatories of an Early Day Motion that unequivocally accepts Russia's culpability and uncritically supports Theresa May's position. It is clearly another attempt to undermine Jeremy Corbyn. Other Labour signatories to the motion who spoke in the debate were Luciana Berger, Chris Leslie and Phil Wilson. At 19 March there were 48 names attached to the motion: 35 Labour, 8 Liberal Democrats, 3 SNP, 1 Conservative and 1 DUP.*

She sounded like the Book of Revelations read out over a railway station public address system by a headmistress of a certain age wearing calico knickers

Clive James  
on Margaret Thatcher

# Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

## ITALY'S POLITICAL REVOLUTION

Silvio Berlusconi smiled at the cameras while he lifted his arm to post his vote in the ballot box at the Italian General Election on Sunday 4 March. Suddenly a topless woman jumped across his path shouting “*Berlusconi your time is up!*” It was deliciously appropriate that a reminder of his “bunga bunga” period would be predicting his loss of power a few hours later.

The result was a political revolution for Italy. Opinion polls had predicted the election result right from the beginning of the campaign. The electorate jettisoned the old parties, electing as front runners Matteo Salvini’s *La Lega*, the hard right, fascistic end of the Centre Right and the populist Luigi Di Maio’s *Five Star Movement*, *M5S*. Italy is now in uncharted territory with two inexperienced, untested leaders of two untested parties.

*Huffpost* in Italy summed up the result as “*weeks of contortions and a prolonged period of instability... possibly putting the future of Europe at risk.*” And it offered an intractable stalemate with future Italian parliamentary alliances impossible to predict. It also ran an article saying that the winner was Russia. Even Berlusconi has celebrated birthdays with Putin.

Italy has traditionally been ideologically and commercially close to Russia, also Salvini shares Putin’s family values in theory, even if not for himself. Both men have an antipathy to gays and same sex marriage. Both Di Maio and Salvini are sceptical about the powers given to NATO. Salvini calls the EU “*the enemy*”. While *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (13 March) reported that Di Maio had “*sent a message to Brussels saying ‘We are not extremists’*”

Italy’s large budget deficit is of concern to Brussels and pressure to conform has been strong. The EU have waited until the election concluded to make demands on the country. Renzi tried to introduce austerity measures but his party and the electorate tied his hands. There has also been resistance to pension changes and the raising of the qualifying age and to compulsory vaccinations. Salvini, Berlusconi and Di Maio succeeded by offering the opposite, however unrealistic it might seem.

New anti-fraud measures slowed voting, leading to long queues at the polling stations. Voting figures were generally in the high 70s, with the lowest polls in the South. The new electoral system is a mixture of first past the post and proportional representation. The *Camera* or lower house now has 618 seats, while the *Senate* or upper house has been halved to 309 seats. The premium given to the leading party, designed to avoid hung parliaments, was abolished. Ironically, this would have given *M5S* a lead over the coalition.

The Centre Right coalition’s vote share remained roughly static but in the weeks preceding the poll their leader Silvio Berlusconi of *Forza Italia*, *Fi*, was overtaken by *La Lega*’s Matteo Salvini. For this election Salvini had recognised an opportunity to spread his power base throughout the country. He changed his party’s focus and name from the provincial

and separatist *Legha Nord* to *La Lega*.

The ratings for the Centre Left and its only significant party the *Partito Democratico*, *Pd*, had plummeted and they shrunk further as the campaign proceeded. *M5S* was declared the largest single party with 225 seats. The Centre Right coalition comprised Matteo Salvini’s *La Lega* with 122 seats, Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*, *Fi*, with 105 seats plus two smaller parties amassing a total of 262 seats. Renzi’s *Pd* netted a disappointing, but predicted, 107 seats. So will the largest party or the coalition form the government? Neither has a majority.

Starting with the bottom of the poll: Matteo Renzi’s *Pd*, with its unpopular policies to cut expenditure, loosen the job market and absorb migrants was heartily disliked in Italy, while appeasing the EU. He worked closely and covertly with Berlusconi to implement policies, a factor also responsible for the alienation, as were his dictatorial tendencies. Renzi managed to lose 2.6 million votes in the 5 years from the 2013 election result. Called the “*gravedigger*” by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, its editor Marco Travaglio ridiculed him for saying that the electorate hadn’t understood his successes. “*Today I waited to see the arrival of the men in white coats*”.

Renzi resisted calls for his resignation saying that he wanted to stay until a new leader was elected at the *Pd* Party Congress in April. But he went. The unknown Vice Secretary Maurizio Martina is now in post as leader – “*regent*” and has already publicly defied Renzi in the chamber. Paolo Gentiloni, the Prime Minister (called Renzi’s puppet) was, oddly, an invisible figure during the election. He submitted his resignation but was asked by Sergio Mattarella, Italy’s President, to hold the fort while the country’s leadership vacuum is resolved.

And that is the puzzle. On 9 March Salvini speculated that there could be another election. Italy’s voters have no enthusiasm for voting in the summer heat and anyway it was generally agreed that there could be a similar result, so the idea was shelved. However he mentioned the chance as 50/50 on 28 March. Pier Carlo Padoan, previously Finance Minister and author of *The Political Economy of International Financial Instability*, said in answer to a question about Italy’s future: “*I don’t know*”. Romano Prodi, previously at different times both Italian and EU President tried to be reassuring: “*Silvio will fix it!*”.

Both Luigi Di Maio of *M5S* and Matteo Salvini of *La Lega* passionately believe that they have the strongest case to be Premier (i.e.: Prime Minister). After a short period of uncharacteristic quiescence following his defeat as Coalition leader, Berlusconi came out fighting for Salvini’s *right* to the position. On 12 March *La Stampa* recorded President Mattarella saying that he had faith in Italy but “*enough of this egotism and get on with it*”.

The key could be the *Pd* joining *M5S* in a coalition but both Renzi and now Martina refute the idea. They recognise the need

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