

Labour & Trade Union Review

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Miliband's New Labour Runs Up the White Flag.

For the present we are stuck with the politics and the party system that we have, together with the electorate that shapes and is shaped by them. Neither is capable of bringing about a just society with which we can identify. There is therefore a two-fold task of changing the parameters of the debate—setting out a different perspective of development—whilst also making sense of what the parties are up to at the present time. By making sense to our readers in this way, it is hoped to generate new thinking that will gradually come to capture the public imagination and replace the liberal attitudes which have become deeply ingrained into the social consciousness of our society.

This journal has never entertained great expectations of the reconstituted New Labour project under Ed Miliband, but the swiftness and abject nature of the surrender of Miliband and Balls to the Mandelson-Blair cuts agenda is quite sobering. The Labour Party has now trussed itself up in a way that will make it difficult to put any space between itself and the Coalition.

Not only has Miliband in effect endorsed the austerity programme initiated by the government, even though it is manifestly creating a new recession, but Miliband has undertaken to leave the cuts in place indefinitely, thus endorsing the shrinking of the state envisaged by Cameron and Osborne as a long term project. It is very difficult now to see how it is possible for Labour to protest against the government's austerity programme even when it now seems to be running into terminal trouble. The Conservatives do have a liberal project of shrinking the welfare state and the economic crisis provided convenient cover for getting on with it in a serious way. The danger of a credit downgrade was used by them as a convenient excuse for mak-

ing the cuts an apparently pragmatic economic imperative.

However, the credit agencies have their own agenda which is, in turn, largely influenced by their own paymasters. They may well have been inclined, under the influence of these paymasters, to threaten dire consequences to the economy of not pursuing an austerity package which involves rolling back the state. However, these agencies do not have responsibility for what they advocate and there are clear signs that they are realising the damage to the nation's finances and to their own interests that their own policies are leading to, with low growth and the cutting of state expenditure continuing well into the middle of this decade, with consequent disastrous effects on economic activity. So some of them at least are warning of the dangers of simultaneous international austerity. It is evident that if everyone reduces their economic activity at the same time, then the individual capitalist economies are going to shrink and their chance of raising revenues to pay down cyclically incurred debt is going to decrease.

But Osborne, having hitched his star to the rating agencies and their paymasters in the first place, is well placed to change economic tack if that is what they would like him to do. He can argue that the cuts are no longer necessary if they threaten the UK's credit rating. We do not know if this development will occur, but it is evident that his general approach gives him some flexibility should he need it.

This is not an option open to Labour, however. Having decided that it is absolutely necessary for the purposes of public credibility to have cuts and to keep them as a sign of fiscal virtue, it is much more difficult to bend with the changing political winds and to say that they are no longer necessary. In his bid to win 'economic credibility' with the electorate, Miliband has had to adopt an ideological stance about public expenditure which it will be difficult to slough off when the times demand it. A further Blairite attempt at increasing his 'credibility' came with an announcement of the desirability of an ongoing pay freeze

for public sector workers. It remains to be seen whether Labour's contemptuous 'something for nothing' attitude to the Unions continues to be sustainable. Currently making growling noises, the Unions are probably too gutless to introduce a conditional element into their continuing funding of Britain's second largest liberal party (the Liberals are the third). It might be said in Miliband's defence that public expenditure cannot occur until revenues justify it, and that the currently disastrous course pursued by the Coalition makes that unlikely, even after a Labour victory in 2015. The point, however, is that such expenditure has got to be counter-cyclical (spending in a recession in order to boost economic activity and hence state revenue) if the economy is to recover. By forswearing expenditure on boosting the productive economy, Miliband has closed off the possibility of financing a government-led recovery through increased expenditure of any kind, including the financing of productive activity through loans from state-controlled banks.

This situation has come about because Miliband New Labour (MNL) has followed the Blair practice of seeing what the public appear to want through consulting opinion polls and focus groups and then tailoring policies to suit these perceived opinions, rather than deciding on what needs to be done and then attempting to persuade the public of its desirability. The Eighteenth Century Tory philosopher David Hume defined the task of politics as one of dealing with the necessarily short term perspective of the public. The politician, he thought, had to make the long term interests of the country his own short term interests. This is what the best politicians do. But it often involves going against the short term opinions of the public and that it turn requires courage, patience and a willingness to provide leadership to the public. What Miliband has in effect achieved is the transformation of the public's short term prejudices into Labour's long term programme, a disastrous perversion of Hume's formula. It can only lead to electoral ignominy.

A responsibility rests on the Unions to remind MNL of what the long term interests of employees in both the public and private sector actually are. They include stable and satisfying work, some say in how their companies are run, good voca-

tional education, a sustainable economic policy which involves counter-cyclical balancing of surpluses, a proper balance of free trade and protection of vital economic interests and, last but not least, the bringing of finance capital under the control of the state, so that its antisocial activities are restricted and the constructive social role of banks in promoting productive investment is ensured.

The most that Miliband can offer is employee representation on remuneration committees of companies, a proposal so feeble that Cameron had no problem in taking it up for the Conservatives. It is absurd of people like Polly Toynbee to suggest that this gesture opens up a vista of German-style co-determination in the economy. MNL are desperate to avoid anything so radical. Those, like Maurice Glasman and Blue Labour who adopt it are destined to be marginalised. Labour's future is steadily set on a course of economic liberalism echoing the current policies of the Coalition, but through monumental political ineptitude being tied into them for the foreseeable future. At the moment the Conservatives can claim, justifiably, that MNL agrees with them. If they change their views they can ridicule MNL if they try to follow suit. The electoral prospects of the Coalition must look very favourable in this situation. No wonder they are so pleased with themselves.

There is currently no meaningful choice in the politics of this country. We have a Conservative liberal party which is, in effect, an old-style advocate of an extreme form of economic liberalism. We have two other, less successful, liberal parties whose policies are a pale shadow of the Conservative liberals. The trade unions represent millions of citizens, they have the resources to influence political parties. We would like to think that they will try to do so in order to break the liberal monopoly. Experience, however, suggests that they won't.

At the moment the Unions are fighting a rearguard action to defend the economic interests of their members under a general ideology of free collective bargaining. On the occasions when they make wider points about social interests, their remarks can be easily dismissed on

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Social Partnership – What Does it Mean?

Trade unionism in Britain is all too often locked into a simple minded view of class conflict. The ruling impulse is to oppose whatever the bosses want, without worrying too much about the particulars of the case. Since, according to this point of view, the interests of Capital and Labour are fundamentally antagonistic, there is no point in seeking compromise on areas of possible common interest.

Where you do negotiate and bargain is over the extent to which the wishes of Capital can be checked, not on whether or not there is any common ground, let alone scope for co-operation between owners, managers and other employees.

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the basis that they are merely defending the interests of their members. And the fact is, so long as they can look no further than the wages/conditions struggle, they are simply part of the liberal economic system. The question, however, is: can the Unions cut adrift from the old way of thinking and set out to defend their members within a wider social context? After all, trade union members exist in society: they have parents, spouses, children. Their conditions are governed not merely by what they earn each month, but also by the social wage and by how society is structured. It is time to get off the free collective bargaining treadmill and consider the wider social horizon. In two articles in this issue different writers suggest ways in which we might begin to do this.

Christopher Winch

This kind of trade unionism, although it can have its uses in limited areas, particularly when dealing with megalomaniac and uncompromising managements, has not generally served the working class well.

There is another view, held by many trade unionists in neighbouring countries in Europe – there are conflicting interests between Capital and Labour, but compromises are possible which may be to the advantage of workers. There may even be areas where co-operation is to the mutual advantage of both. They do not adopt a blanket oppositionist policy but rather one that takes into account the interests of the workforce at each stage and considers the best way to advance those interests, pursuing conflict if necessary but co-operation if possible. ‘Social partnership’ is the term used to describe this way of managing conflict between Capital and Labour and of co-operating where possible and desirable. In doing so, Capital has to make considerable adjustments to its prerogatives. ‘Class collaboration’, a term of abuse by Trotskyists and so called militant trade unionists, is actually the intelligent working out of workers’ interests when it is possible to do so. The collaboration does not imply that the interests of workers, management and shareholders will always coincide.

So what is social partnership? It is the custom and practice of mediating common and conflicting interests between unions and employers through structures that both recognise as legitimate and useful. These can be national forums and bureaucracies, boards of companies, works councils or even insti-

tutions set up by individual trade unions such as trades colleges. Social partnership works at different levels in different countries. Ireland has a system of national agreements over key elements of economic and social policy between unions, employer associations, voluntary organisations and the government. Germany does not have such structures at government level at the moment but does have worker directors on the supervisory boards of large firms, works councils in most firms and institutions like BIBB which regulate and direct vocational education.

Who are the social partners in our neighbouring European countries? Most understand them to be: – trade unions, employer associations and the state, which sets the legal framework and regulates some of the institutions for pursuing social partnership. It can work at different levels. At works level there are works councils; at firm level – board of director membership; at national level – tripartite agreement on welfare, incomes, taxation and economic policy. In Britain social partnership is virtually non-existent. It is no coincidence that British workers suffer from poor conditions, minimal vocational education, insecure employment rights, weak health and safety regulation, poor unemployment benefits and relatively low pay in many sectors. Perhaps it is time that trade unions in Britain took a closer look at the practices of some of their continental colleagues and tried to learn from them. They are not doing a great job through their current strategy. Once, a long time ago, when British trade unionism was still powerful and self-confident, governments were interested in co-opting them into long term national institutions which could shape the economic direction of the country.

So, in the 1960s were born the National Economic Development Council and its sectoral offspring (the 'little Neddies'), the Prices and Incomes Board, the Manpower Services Commission and legislation like the Industrial Training Act of 1964, which basically reflected the views of both major political parties, that Britain's economy was uncompetitive and that co-operation across industry was necessary to modernise it.

However, these fine schemes and pieces of legislation came to nothing. This failure could not all be laid at the door of the trade unions but their inability to show much enthusiasm for social partnership, together with broader disruptive activity, particularly in the 1970 – 1980 period, left Britain's social partnership institutions vulnerable to abolition, which is what eventually happened. Basically, trade unionism in Britain was not up to the task of taking some responsibility for the way in which the society and the economy were run and has been paying the price ever since. The unions need to realise that trade unionism is about co-governing the institutions which affect the interests of their members, not just about opposing the policies of those who employ their members. There have been exceptions. In this issue of the Review, Mark Langhammer describes the successful social partnership strategy pursued by the NAS/UWT under the leadership of Eamonn O'Kane during the early 2000s. But such initiatives are all too often dependent on the

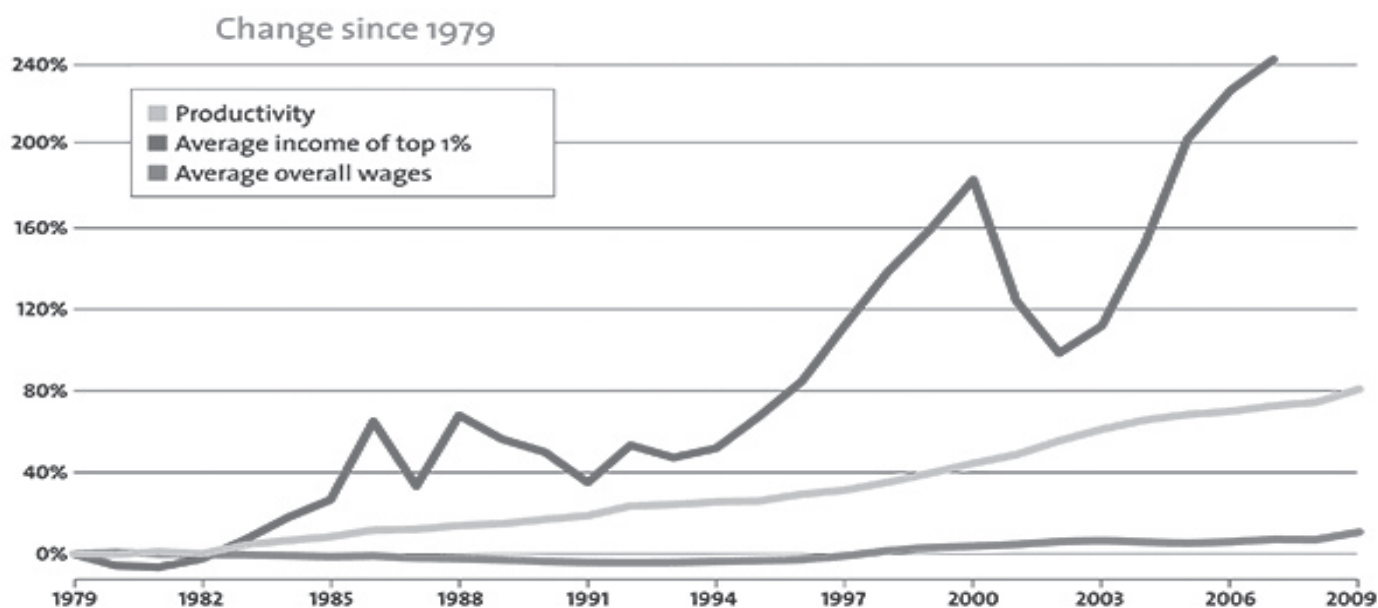
vision of one individual rather than being a powerful strand in the practice of British trade unionism.

But social partnership need not just be about institutions at the national level. Work can be done at the industry level as well. Under Eric Hammond the electricians' union EETPU developed an infrastructure of vocational colleges and qualifications for the industry. Employers paid for using this service to enhance the skills of their employees. Such an initiative could have been parlayed into a greater say in the vocational education and qualifications for the industry and then expanded to take in other possibilities such as how new technology could be employed for the greatest benefit of both employers and employees. EETPU was supplying a very valuable service to its members while at the same time providing a valuable asset to the industry. Sadly Hammond's vision did not long survive his term as general secretary and all that he had built up is no more, lost in the ignorance and incomprehension of the trade union leaders who succeeded him in the merged union. More generally, Hammond's ideas about making trade unions more relevant to their members are not appreciated within the movement, making initiatives difficult to take root.

There are many different ways in which social partnership can develop. It is up to the unions to develop it as it will not be handed to them on a plate by employers who are, with some notable

exceptions, among the most shortsighted and reactionary in Europe. But there are some possibilities. German-owned firms now employ over a million British workers. They are accustomed to working in social partnership arrangements. Firms like DB Schenker, EoN and Siemens would be prepared to work with trade unions who wished to be seriously involved in social partnership arrangements and their colleagues in Europe would support them. A start could be made with involvement in the collective arrangements for vocational education that are made by German firms in Britain and these firms would be more sympathetic to the setting up of works councils than the average British firm.

Essentially British trade unionism has a choice. Either a pure oppositional stance and continued decline or making themselves relevant to their members and prospective members through negotiating with employers over the running of their industries in ways that can promote mutual benefit. The mindless anti-European stance of many union leaders does not help either. Many trade unions in Europe do an excellent job of making work fairer, safer and more interesting for their members. They have accumulated a huge experience of running vocational education, managing day to day enterprise affairs and having a decisive say in the strategic direction of their firms. It is about time that British trade unions started to learn and benefit from that experience.



Gove and the Free Schools revolution – are the Co-operative left missing a trick?

In the first of a two part article, **Mark Langhammer** looks at the educational experiment of Free Schools and free standing Academies as a means to create a free-market of state funded schools in England

Michael Gove, the Education Minister for England, is setting an uncompromising pace in the promotion of Free Schools and Academies programme,

In May 2010, the coalition government announced that all maintained schools would be invited to apply to transfer to academy status, including, for the first time, primary and special schools. Existing maintained schools graded as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted were pre-approved for academy status during the summer of 2010. In November 2010, the government invited ‘non-outstanding’ schools to apply for academy status as well. Hundreds, if not thousands more schools are currently considering the pros and cons of academy status. Union campaigning has forced the government to acknowledge that no school can become an academy without first consulting both parents and staff.

More recently, schools deemed to be underperforming can be forced into becoming academies, and a number of schools, such as Downhills Primary School in the London Borough of Haringey, (where 92% of parents oppose compulsory takeover by a “sponsor”). Unions are aware of plans to turn hundreds of “*under-performing*” schools over, in forced academy conversions, to external sponsors regardless of the wishes of the school community.

Gove has set about creating a school “market” with gusto, even to the extent of using Parliamentary procedure usually reserved for emergency terrorist legislation in order to drive through more academy schools. Since the Coalition won power, legislation has awarded Minister Gove more than 50 new powers.

In addition to Academies, the controversial Tory initiative to set up free schools received fast-track support. Civil servants were urged that the **New Schools Network (NSN)**¹ – a charity providing advice and guidance to set up the schools – should be given “*cash without delay*”. Fierce lobbying of civil servants ensued. An e-mail from Dominic Cummings, a Tory strategist and confidant of Gove, urged: “*MG telling the civil servants to find a way to give NSN cash without delay.*” Cummings went on to work for the charity on a freelance basis. The charity, headed by a former Gove adviser, Rachel Wolf, was given a £500,000 grant with no other organisation invited to bid for the work.

The first wave of free schools included one which has the journalist Toby Young as its chair of governors, two Jewish faith schools, a Hindu school and a Sikh school. At least three of the schools – Discovery new school in West Sussex, St Luke’s in north London, and Canary Wharf College – have a Christian ethos. The Maharishi school in Lancashire, which was founded by the Beatles’ guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and teaches children to meditate, has become a state school as part of the programme.

The schools will be the most prominent part of the Tories’ “big society” vision, although in many cases faith organisations, education companies or existing academy sponsors have taken the lead rather than groups of parents or teachers.

Free Schools are not obliged to recognise trade unions, are not obliged to

hire qualified teachers, can set up in any building, do not have to follow the National Curriculum, can ignore the schools admissions code in their first year, can ignore national collective bargaining agreements on conditions of service, can set their own pay, hours, working days and holidays. Free schools are, however, inspected by OFSTED, receive taxpayers funding and teachers in Free schools can access the Teachers Pension Scheme.

All three main British parties are “*progressive liberals*” and support – in some measure – the creation of an educational market

The aim is not just to provide choice or to “*marketise*” education, but to create a “*for profit*” pie for the private sector to feed off. All this is clear from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers’ publication “*English Schools: Not open for business*”² – which is a directory of “potential privateers” – the types of companies, a mixture of charities, private companies and huge global multi-national corporations, which are likely to have an interest in sponsoring schools. These include AMEY, ARK, BPP Holdings, Capita, Cognita Group, E-Act, the EC Harris Group, Harris Federation, Edison Learning, Kunsapsskolan, Mouchel, Oasis, Pearson Education, Serco, Synarbor, Tribal Education, United Learning and VT Four S.

The education market, initially prised open by New Labour, already supports two publications, *Education Investor* and the *Assignment Report*,

which describes UK education as a £100 billion market. The CBI has enthusiastically backed private sector entry into state education in its 2010 report, *Fulfilling potential, the business role in education*.³

Union Opposition

The general opposition of the joint education union campaign – the Anti-Academies Alliance (AAA)⁴ – have opposed the ideological “choice” agenda on solid educational and trade union grounds.

In its report, *A New Direction*,⁵ the TUC has urged the government to establish an independent panel to assess the effectiveness of the Academies programme in regard to pupil performance.

Unions argue that, on Pay and Conditions, Academies/Free Schools are not subject to the statutory terms and conditions that operate for teachers in state schools, nor to the prevailing local authority frameworks for support staff. Worryingly, the fourth annual PricewaterhouseCoopers evaluation comments that: *“Changes to the school day, teachers’ pay and conditions and the flexible use of support staff have been noted as positive benefits”*. Minister Gove has already dispensed with the School Teachers Review Body (STRB) the body which effectively determined teachers pay. The loss of the STRB in England has posed challenges for the devolved regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (who pegged teachers pay substantially – and often exactly – to the STRB determinations) and has, effectively, opened the door for regional pay in the devolved areas.

Lack of Public Accountability is another concern. Although the Department of Education continues to act in the place of a local authority, apparently monitoring compliance with the confidential funding agreements with sponsors, which control the behaviour of Academies or Free Schools. As the number of free-standing schools increases, lack of transparency will emerge as a serious defect. Unions argue that, like maintained schools, Academies should be openly accountable to their local communities. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers General Secretary, Mary Boustead commented

“This policy is a huge exception to the rule that he who pays the piper calls the tune. In this case, taxpayers will provide the funds for these schools, but will lose all democratic accountability. Where will a parent go if there is not school place for their child, or if no school will take on their child’s special needs? We shall have, if the government is successful, a national service which is privately administered.”

The 2010 National Audit Office report revealed that the rapid expansion of academies has created challenges in terms of staff restructuring and the appointment of senior staff which are likely to have a significant impact on teaching, finances and the long-term viability of academies. And the Department for Education has said that over a quarter of academies may require additional financial or managerial support.

Sponsorship & Governance is also a key issue. Ed Balls commented back in 2007 *“The test of whether an organisation can be a potential sponsor should not be its bank balance, but whether it can demonstrate leadership, innovation and commitment to act in the public interest... I now want every university to actively engage with Academies,”* An end to inappropriate sponsors would have been a useful step. Under New Labour, all Academies replacing local authority schools had to proceed with local authority endorsement at the feasibility stage and they had a duty to collaborate with all other schools in their area. This is no longer the case.

Several local authorities have entered into sponsoring arrangements for Academies, some with guaranteed conditions for staff. In practice these arrangements will meet the need for local accountability as well as ensuring participation by academies in local collaboration. An Academy sponsored by a university and the local authority looks like a different kind of institution from a freestanding Academy under the control of a carpet salesman or religious fanatic.

So what? It’s nothing new

Regarding union opposition, one is tempted to ask, *“So what?”*

All three main British parties are “progressive liberals” and support – in some measure – the creation of an educational market – the “choice agenda”, as New Labour used to call it. Have not the principles of “choice”/marketisation already been adopted and older ideas about education as a national service already been sold “down the Swanee River” by the Blair/Brown governments.

Initially, under New Labour, the slogan was “Education, Education, Education” but the focus under David Blunkett and Estelle Morris was largely on “Standards, not Structures”. A successful social partnership in education provided one of the few collaborative frameworks in the British industrial relations landscape (the late Eamonn O’Kane, well known to L&TU Review readers – was central to this development) and resulted in years of improved pupil performance as well as improved pay and conditions for teachers through the 2003 National Agreement.

But the “Free Schools” policy of the new Conservative and Liberal coalition is not a new departure. The New Labour “choice” agenda set out exactly the same direction of travel, favouring the ideological principle of “contestability” ie that public services work better when they are contested. This “choice” or “contestability” agenda saw a range of initiatives, which included:

- the dogmatic and ideological use of “off books” PFI and PPP procurement methods in capital development (see ATL Members Briefing, Northern Ireland, 2008)
- business orientated and sponsored Specialist schools
- extended schools to support the long hours “work culture”
- development of an “Academy” programme to free schools from the alleged “dead hand” of local authority control. The Academy programme was, itself, a derivative of the previous Conservative administration’s “City Technology Colleges” initiative

In short, the “Free Schools” policy of Michael Gove follows a well-trodden

direction of travel set by the previous Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown governments and is nothing new. In short, the Gove policy represents no departure in principle.

And what would Miliband's "Next Labour" do anyway. The only difference between the marketisation of Gove, and the marketisation of Labour and Clegg's Liberals is that Gove unashamedly supports the principle that service providers in education should be able to profit from their activity.

By the time this Parliamentary mandate is over, many if not most schools will be free standing schools, next month's *Labour and Trade Union Review* will consider whether it is now time for education unions to consider a tactical change in direction?

Mark Langhammer is a member of the (Irish) Labour Party, an education trade unionist and an elected member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

To be continued next month

(Footnotes)

¹ New Schools Network, see <http://newschoolsnetwork.org/>

² English Schools: Not Open for Business" see <http://www.atl.org.uk/Images/ATL%20Privateers%20Brochure.pdf>

³ See <http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1119903/fulfilling-potential-the-business-role-in-education.pdf>

⁴ Anti Academies Alliance, see <http://antiacademies.org.uk/>

⁵ New Direction, TUC see <http://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-13535-f0.cfm>

Froggy

News From Across The Channel

The deindustrialisation of France (continued)

France lost more than 900 industrial firms in the past three years; 100 000 industrial jobs were lost in that time; there were 6 million industrial workers in 1982, to day they are 3,2 million. This is loss of employment. And industrial employment means much more than just "jobs"; the nature of society and the character of France changes with this loss. These figures were discussed (13.1.12) on France Inter between Jacques Attali and Jean-Pierre Chevenement. Jacques Attali said they were nothing new, outdated structures had to go; the solution was "new products". Chevenement blamed the European Commission.

The government does nothing to stop this evolution.

The only protests are local protests. Sarkozy sometimes goes to the stricken area and promises support, and nothing further happens. Unions and political parties do not seem to have national campaigns on this; the question is mentioned in the presidential campaign only in general terms.

Here is another example of the process of deindustrialisation.

Lohr

Lohr Industries is a French firm, founded in Alsace in 1963 by Robert Lohr, now with factories over the world. Initially it made lorries, then car transporters, both by road and rail. It then made tramways which run on rubber tires guided by a central rail. Lohr tramways run in Shanghai and another Chinese city, as well as cities in France and Italy.

No one can accuse the society of not being innovative and dynamic. However, it has been struggling financially for the past four years; the number of orders for its lorries and car transporters has dropped by 90%. Robert Lohr has

refused to make his workers redundant ("He knows them all individually") and instead has spent the firm's capital and borrowed. The repayment of a loan contracted 2 years ago is now due. The firm is now facing bankruptcy for the want of 50 million Euros.

Now the only alternative is to sell a majority share in the most profitable part of the company, the tramways.

This firm is one of the glories of French industry. It is in trouble partly because the French Railways, on which it depends for a market for its rail-car transporters, is late in constructing its latest line. The situation is actually being handled in part by the French ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance has a committee designed to handle this sort of thing: the Interministerial Committee for Industrial Restructurations.

(The train constructor Bombardier is in a similar situation in Britain, and its case is also handled by the government, here the Ministry for Transport.)

Nevertheless, Lohr has asked Lazard Bank to handle the sale of the tramway side of operations so the future does not look good.

It is unbelievable that the government does nothing, except shuffle paper around, when what is needed is finance.

Sea France

Another minister, this time the Minister for Transport, is overseeing another case of bankruptcy, that of SeaFrance.

SeaFrance is owned by French Railways company SNCF. It faces bankruptcy, with the loss of 880 employees. The government is trying to find a solution for them.

The employees suggested running the cross Channel company as a cooperative supported by the union CFDT.

It's Just A

By Joe Keenan

If nothing else is simple about the dilemma in which British working class politics is currently entombed, at least the lumpen crudity of it can be stated simply enough. Britain is full of workers, full and overflowing, but all those workers do not now constitute a working class.

They can possibly be said to embody the human material of a labour element in some political economy or other, but all that means is that there are a variety of policies in existence, or under consideration, for dealing with them by way of making use of them.

At best, they are the means of other purposes, the instruments of other wills. At worst they are just the same. And, for better or worse, in and of themselves, they just don't count.

Britain is full of workers, isolated groups of one or two, or thousands of, individuals, the defining characteristic of whose individuality is ineffectual passivity; they are an inarticulate mass, a mass of incoherence; and, all together, altogether useless to themselves and all pertaining to them. Useful to others, but useless to themselves.

The essence of a class lies in its being constituted of individuals who, being useful to themselves, are useful to all of their society. At the root of class is a necessarily common economic position with regard to ownership and/or control of the means of production.

The British ruling class is such in the first instance because of ownership and control. But the immediate context of all its ownership and control is the competitive world of the markets. Left to its own devices, it would not be a class but rather a war of all against each in pursuit of ownership and control. And so class is made functional beyond the first instance by politics.

All the politics in Britain today is party politics, in which all parties are of the bourgeoisie and all making politics in the bourgeois interest.

There are three main political parties in Britain today. The Liberal Party. The whole Liberal Party. And nothing but The Liberal Party. That configuration of party politics makes the bourgeois class interest functional beyond its unpromising first instance.

An earlier configuration of party politics in which the Labour Party became the party of the working class interest ended up by undoing the working class interest entirely, and completely atomising the working class.

As the British working class cannot be reconstituted other than by way of politics, other than through the operations of a new and revolutionary Party dedicated to, and structured so as to be unable to stray from, its political interest, it is essential to understand what went wrong with British workers' first attempt at a Labour Party.

The general left (which is to say, the extra-parliamentary Liberal) view of the making of the British working class sees that making as having occurred by virtue of the subjection to industrial discipline of pre-capitalist social formations. Feudal remnants, agricultural labourers, craftsmen and artisans, failed petty-bourgeois riff-raff were all hauled off the land and out of workshops and stores to be collectivised in factories. Industrialisation created the working class, albeit with only an economic consciousness. That working class then was a collective of hollow men waiting to be filled out, a potential waiting to be actualised, by class consciousness. Supposedly.

In fact, that collective was made up of the brutalised, demoralised, pauperised, declassed remnants of the pre-industrial working classes. The industrial revolution did not make a working class, it simplified and undid a complex of working classes (the use of the plural there is really only a consequence of the pre-capitalist existence of an urban/rural division of labour, but its the common form, so I might as well use it). The forcing of workers into factories did not make a class of them. On the contrary, it unmade the class of them. It declassed them.

The agricultural labourers who were organised by William Cobbett in the early years of the 19th. century, to fight for better working conditions and parliamentary reform, were a coherent working class. The consequences to them of the defeat of their insurrection in 1830, starvation, squalor and the workhouse in the countryside, starvation, squalor and the factory in the towns, were utterly dehumanising. Industrialisation was not an organising or a socialising force, but rather the hammer that beat every social aspect out of the lives of those who were then transformed into a heaving, lumpen, mass of undifferentiated labour.

Formless and incoherent as it was in its making, the raw material of the British working class was scarcely possessed of any economic consciousness, or of any consciousness at all beyond awareness of its sheer unrelenting, unrelenting, utterly physical need. The earliest stirrings of trade unionism within the factory system did not arise in any natural way out of these new conditions of existence, out of any economic consciousness that the workers possessed. The whole idea of trade unionism was brought to British workers by way of politics, from people like Francis Place, a worker himself, who had managed to drag himself out of the levelling process.

Labour Affair...

Place escaped the lump through succeeding in becoming a small-scale capitalist, but one with a firm notion of his roots in the urban working class. The essential condition of development of trade unionism then was repeal of the 18th. century combination acts which outlawed any such thing, a political measure which was finally carried in 1824-25 as a result of Place's agitation. It is no more than interesting that Place, who was a very complex and utterly political person, considered that repeal would be the beginning of the end of trade unionism which could never succeed in raising wages against the operation of an iron law of population. More than merely interesting are his remarks on the workers' attitude to the matter:

"...not a single journeyman, nor any one for them, came near me, nor at any subsequent time did they do anything to promote the repeal of the Combination Laws;—except a small number at one house of call signing a petition for that purpose at my request, when I had prepared it for them..."

"[The workmen] could not be persuaded to believe that the repeal of the laws was possible..."

"I wrote a great many letters to trade societies in London, and as often as I heard of any dispute respecting the Combination Laws in the country I wrote to some of the parties, stated my purpose, and requested information. Few condescended to notice my applications, and scarcely any furnished me with the information I wished to have; but many of the country papers inserted the articles I sent to them, and these must have produced some effect, though no signs of any appeared. Workingmen had been too often deceived to be willing to trust to any one who was not well known to them. Habitually cunning, and suspicious of all above their own rank in life, and having no expectation of any mitigation, much less of a chance of the laws being repealed, they could not persuade themselves that my communications were of any value to them, and they would not therefore give themselves any trouble about them, much less to give such information as might, they thought, be some day used against them. I understood them thoroughly, and was neither put from my purpose nor offended with them. I was resolved to serve them as much as I could. I knew well enough that if they could be served in this as in many other particulars, it must be done without their concurrence, in spite of them." (quoted in *The Life Of Francis Place*, by Graham Wallas, 3rd. Edition, New York, 1919, pp. 202 - 204.)

British trade unionism was made possible by a form of politics that was prepared to act on behalf of workers *"without their concurrence, in spite of them"*. Its development throughout the rest of the 19th. century occurred under the wing of the Liberal Party, in the course of which workers as trade unionists finally acquired an economic consciousness worthy of the name "economism", while Liberalism provided them with all the politics they could wish for.

As the British working class cannot be reconstituted other than by way of politics, other than through the operations of a new and revolutionary Party dedicated to, and structured so as to be unable to stray from, its political interest, it is essential to understand what went wrong with British workers' first attempt at a Labour Party.

In the 1930's, Ernest Bevin, having determined to at long last make Labour a working class Party, told its conference:

"Our predecessors formed this party. It was not Keir Hardie. The Labour Party grew out of the bowels of the T.U.C."

That was a programmatic statement, which Ernie was in the process of establishing the truth of. But it was not, strictly speaking, or even loosely speaking, accurate.

Really, the Labour Party grew out of the bowels of Gladstonian Liberalism. And, though it would certainly have been better otherwise, really it was Keir Hardie. Hardie, along with Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson and others who could not progress either quickly or far enough through antiquated constituency structures, took the New Liberalism of Hobhouse and Herbert Samuel to the logical conclusion of a New Party.

Hardie set out his political programme when standing as an Independent Labour candidate (not an Independent Labour Party candidate, the ILP was not founded until 1893) at Mid-Lanark in 1888. He had first offered himself as a candidate for selection by the Mid-Lanark Liberal Association but withdrew his name from the official list because the Executive of the Association had preempted the members' decision.

His original letter to the Liberal Association...

"...claimed that he had all his life been a Radical of a somewhat advanced type, and from the first he had supported Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule proposals" (J. Keir Hardie, by William Stewart, London, 1921, p. 37).

In his election address he said:

"I adopt in its entirety the Liberal programme agreed to at Nottingham, which includes Adult Suffrage; Reform of Registration Laws; Allotments for Labourers; County Government; London Municipal Government; Free Education; Disestablishment. On questions of general politics I would vote with the Liberal Party, to which I have all my life belonged" (quoted, *ibid*, p. 37 - 38).

That said, he declared that, in the event of a difference between the Liberal Party and the Irish Party, he would vote with the Irish, and added *"I am also strongly in favour of Home Rule for Scotland..."* (*ibid*).

The substantial distinction he made between himself and the Liberal Party was on class grounds of a sort:

"...What help can you expect from those who believe they can only be kept rich in proportion as you are kept poor?...I ask you therefore to return to Parliament a man of yourselves, who being poor, can feel for the poor, and whose whole interest lies in the direction of securing for you a better and happier lot?" (quoted *ibid*, p. 39).

Ramsay MacDonald, who at that time was Honorary Secretary (living in London's Kentish Town) of the Scottish Home Rule Association, and a Liberal, wrote to Hardie, saying:

"...let the consequences be what they may, do not withdraw. The cause of Labour and of Scottish Nationality will suffer much thereby. Your defeat will awaken Scotland, and your victory will reconstruct Scottish Liberalism" (quoted *ibid*, p. 40).

Hardie lost that election and formed the Independent Labour Party in 1893. Other New Liberals joined him in what, apart from the incidental flourish of a fashionable name, was just a strategic defection in preparation for a return in strength to the Grand Old Party itself.

There was a moment a little later, when the ILP was involved in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, a point at which the

coming Labour Party might have become a substantially working class party. The first resolution then moved stated that *"...this Conference is in favour of the working-classes being represented in the House of Commons by members of the working class as being the most likely to be sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour Movement"* (quoted in *A History of Labour Representation*, by A. W. Humphrey, London 1912, p. 144).

John Burns and George Barnes of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers moved an amendment favouring *"...working-class opinion being represented in the House of Commons by men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour Movement and whose candidatures are promoted by one or other of the organised movements represented at this Conference"* (quoted, *ibid*, p. 144).

Burns spoke to declare that he was *"getting tired of working-class boots, working-class trains, working-class houses, and working-class margarine"*. The LRC, he said, should not be *"prisoners to class prejudice, but should consider parties and policies apart from class organisation"* (*ibid*, p. 145).

When it came to a vote the amendment was carried by 102 to 3 votes, out of 129 delegates attending. And so, the first chance to establish a working class party went begging. It should be worth a moment to point out the history of the movers of the successful anti-working class amendment. John Burns was a future Liberal Party Cabinet Minister. George Barnes was a Labour member of Lloyd George's wartime coalition who was expelled from the Labour Party for refusing to resign at the war's end.

I can only hope that when the new party I spoke of earlier comes to be formed that lesson is well learned and it is settled upon as first business that all representatives of the working class shall be members of the working class. Long live working class boots, working class trains, working class houses and working class margarine! Hurrah for class prejudice and plenty of it!

In any event, with the Labour Party established as the standard bearer of

New Liberalism the only prospect of independent politics open to workers appeared to be some kind of syndicalist development of trade unionism. At its height this took the organisational form of a Triple Alliance of the Miners, Railwaymen and Transport Workers which was established at a delegate conference in the Westminster Palace Hotel on 9 December, 1915. The Triple Alliance really only came into its own after the war, when, between 1919 and the General Strike of 1926 it failed to live up to all the hopes it inspired. And the politics of its failure were evident in its beginning.

The first outing of the Triple Alliance in 1919 initially appeared to be a success in the course of which the trade union leaders were called to a meeting with Lloyd George. The President of the Miners' Federation at the time was Belfast-born Bob Smillie, a founder member of the ILP and minister in the 1924 minority Labour Government. According to Aneurin Bevan (*In Place Of Fear*, London, 1952, p. 20) Smillie later told him what Lloyd George said to the Triple Alliance on that occasion:

"He said to us: 'Gentlemen, you have fashioned, in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you, a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has occurred already in a number of camps. We have just emerged from a great war and the people are eager for the reward of their sacrifices, and we are in no position to satisfy them. In these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us.'

'But if you do so, have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen, have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?' From that moment on, said Robert Smillie, we were beaten and we knew we were."

In June of that same year, at a meeting of the Transport Federation (soon to be the Transport and General Workers' Union) James Sexton said, in the course of a fairly heated exchange with Ernie Bevin, who was advocating using the Triple Alliance for a programme of direct action:

"The opinions of a powerful body like that will carry influence and there is every possibility if a resolution had been carried in favour of a national strike, it would have meant the end of constitutional rule in this country. Suppose we succeeded in a National Conference in deciding to fight the Government, and suppose we won, where would that land us?"

"It would be all right if the rank and file were capable of running the country, but they have a long way to go and they have not got there yet. Some of the rank and file I know who talk about running the country could not run a potato machine. Whatever the Government is to-day the rank and file of Trade Unionists have made it, and having made it they must take their share of responsibility in having helped to make it what it is..." (quoted in *The Making Of The Transport And General Workers' Union*, Ken Coates and Tony Topham, Volume 1, Part 2, p. 716f).

I think it's fair to say that, all in all, Bevin was forced in these years to reconsider the parameters of his militancy. Certainly, when thundering push came to godalmighty shove in 1931, there was little, if any, syndicalism left in his politics, which concentrated on using union power for party purposes.

In 1931 the Labour leader and Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, conspired with Liberal leader Herbert Samuel to split the Labour Party and reconstitute New Liberalism in one united progressive party. When MacDonald collapsed his Labour Government in that year he fully expected to take a clear majority of his Cabinet and of the Party with himself and Samuel's Liberals into a National Government that would eventually reveal itself as a new version of Gladstone's Grand Old Party. But Bevin, with Walter Citrine at the TUC and Clement Atlee at the Labour

Party, put a stop to all of that.

The Labour Party certainly was reborn in the 1930s, but not in the way Ramsay MacDonald had planned for it. That was the decade in which it became not only true but also accurate to say that the Labour Party grew out of the bowels of the TUC, and did so as a properly constituted working class party. And only one misfortune marred this remaking, that the Liberal wing of the party was frightened out of going along with MacDonald, that it stayed to prosper in the party and take a final revenge at the century's end.

The party which Atlee led into wartime coalition was a working class party of Bevin's making. While Churchill played war games and posed at summits of the truly great and good, and Atlee tended to the workaday of business, Bevin ran the home front in the working class interest.

Despite not being an MP at the time Bevin was brought into the cabinet as Minister of Labour and National Service in May 1940. From that position he exercised a dictatorial control over the social, economic and, thanks to a civil service bureaucracy anxious to please the powers that be that he was, even the cultural life of Britain.

The two party system within which British political affairs tend to arrange themselves is not, or at least not necessarily, a class divide. So, it was not because the Labour Party was in coalition, but rather because Bevin had the run of the country, that wartime Britain was governed by a fully fledged class alliance.

Just how deep that alliance went, just how thorough-going it was, was brought home to me recently, through watching the 1942 propaganda documentary, *Listen To Britain*.

This is a short film, about twenty minutes long, made by the Crown Film Unit (originally, until 1940, the GPO film unit), the movie propaganda arm of the Ministry of Information. It was directed by Humphrey Jennings.

Jennings was born out of Labour

and Art. His father was an architect, his mother a painter, and both of them Guild Socialists. In 1934 he joined the GPO Film Unit which was headed at the time by John Grierson (about whom a lot could, but just now will not, be said). In 1937 he was one of the creators of the Mass Observation project.

The film itself is a visual poem which celebrates the cultural aspects of the class alliance that was working to sustain the war effort. For such a short film there is a very great deal to it, but, what struck me most, was an utterly unpatronising (albeit exaggerated) juxtaposition of working class and upper class leisure. The upper class, including the Queen and an entourage of top brass, is shown at a lunchtime concert in the National Gallery, where Dame Myra Hess with an orchestra of sorts is playing a Mozart concerto. The working class is shown dancing in a Blackpool ballroom and, more particularly, listening to Flanagan and Allen singing *At The Back Of The Arches*. And, that juxtaposition to one side, British culture is shown as being overwhelmingly working class in character: which, in those bygone days, it very definitely was.

That wartime class alliance was dismantled at the war's end, but the culture it generated could be seen and heard on the BBC throughout the fifties and sixties and well into the seventies, around which time British culture went into an accelerating decline.

In the same period, the state apparatus which Bevin had accustomed to catering to a working class taste, continued looking out for a working class to cater to, to cultivate, or simply to serve. But the working class was busy with other things. Which brings us back to the question raised earlier: what went wrong with British workers' first attempt at a Labour Party?

I haven't answered it. I can't answer it. If there was any danger that I could answer it, I wouldn't. For really it is one of those questions that can only be resolved in action. By setting to, and getting it right next time.

This was vetoed by the Court of Commerce, but might happen now that Eurotunnel has expressed an interest in the 3 ships of the company. Eurotunnel would take the ships over even if the cooperative does not get off the ground.

SNCF will offer generous severance payments, to enable the employees to finance a cooperative.

Nicolas Sarkozy has intervened himself in the situation, asking SNCF to pay even larger indemnities and suggesting that SNCF could buy the ships and rent them to the cooperative.

SNCF is offering 500 jobs to ex-employees, but not necessarily in the same region or in the same type of job, coach driving being offered.

Le Figaro's online English version (9.1.12) is not a translation of any one article, but a sort of summary in English. It is much more forthright than the French. Titled:

"French government decides to sink ferry service SeaFrance," it continues: "The shipwreck of SeaFrance is official. Earlier today, a government tribunal finalized the decision to liquidate company SeaFrance. Last week, the union of SeaFrance workers, Scop, launched a 50 million Euros project to take over the ailing ferry service. Today, the French government deemed the union's offer "non-valable" [not valid], saying that Scop did not have the financial means to successfully restart the ailing company."

Mafia-like unions?

The national leader of the CFDT union disavowed the Calais-SeaFrance branch, to the point of deciding to expel them and of telling members not to invest their redundancy money in the proposed cooperative; Chereque, the leader, appeared on television saying he was ashamed at the behaviour of the Calais members.

The national media took this up. The Calais CFDT "operated like a mafia, giving jobs to friends and relations (35% more employees than required to run the ships), giving out promotions and bonuses on the same basis (workers giving

each other bonuses!). It dealt with opposition by thuggery, moral harassment or beatings. It was also corrupt and lining its own pockets.

The local paper *La Voix du Nord* also followed suit, except in one article which gave details of the accusations against the union.

Regarding violence, this amounted to a union official sentenced in 2009 for the beating in 2005 of a rival (CGT) union member; later two officials were sentenced for an attack on a plain-clothes policewoman during a demonstration.

So this is not a reign of terror against employees of SeaFrance.

Regarding corruption, an allegation that 720 000 Euros worth of perfume, tobacco, and whisky had disappeared from ship stocks got nowhere, even after checking members' bank accounts. The SeaFrance works council's accounts came under attack, but the CFDT won a libel case defending its honesty.

Firms have to hold elections among employees regarding union membership; last September's election resulted in 76% voting for CFDT. The firm might have been successful if management and unions had worked together, but they were at loggerheads. The branch accuses the new executive manager of SeaFrance of a concerted campaign against them since 2008.

Eurotunnel however do not seem to be ruling out supporting the union.

Finance as the enemy?

This was the rallying cry of the supposed presidential favourite, F. Hollande, at his first big rally Sunday 22 January. It might sound good. But looking at the two cases above, you see that finance is what you need to preserve industry and skilled employment.

The problem is that financial institutions are in a situation where aiming at maximum profit is their only option. Considerations that would end up lowering profits are outlawed. They must invest only where maximum returns are

expected. So any firm showing signs of going through a bad patch will not find the credit it needs. Presidential candidates should be saying to people: be prepared to invest and get a low rate of return, for the good of your countrymen. The state will look after you, so stop putting your money into private pensions and private insurance and private health care. Then we won't have these massive funds that only go for maximum profit, at your detriment. But no one will say that.

Fear And Loathing In The High Street

They can afford to kill
children abroad

but will they pay for their
welfare at home.

Union Jacks fly, the dead
are monochrome.

Military wives sing loudly to God,

where is your conscience
one would like to ask,

only Nazis required
to have had one?

A female army medic
has some fun,

shot her first Afghan and
in *The Sun* basks,

though don't try this at home.

Too late, they have: a dad killed
all his family in despair.

One called for England
to be Alcatraz,

for when the pips squeak
the streets declare.

A fat-faced parliamentarian
chav joins the ranks of
the visually-impaired.

Wilson John Haire.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

Protecting The Rich

I've said before that the rich in today's society are an Overclass, as disconnected and fragmented at the top of society as an Underclass in the bottom layers. And this fits with their continued willingness to scoop up huge amounts of money in salary and bonuses, embarrassing those politicians who try to defend their interests.

The Golden Calf has shat on ordinary Britons, and will be allowed to do so again. The Fancy Finance of the City of London makes those people about as useful as so many tapeworms, but it looks like they will be protected for as long as possible. Cameron has already shown himself willing to isolate Britain within Europe, rather than accept a Transaction Tax or Tobin Tax that would make speculative trading much less profitable.

Contrary to how it looked a few years back, the former Leninist countries have not formed a 'New Europe' supporting the values of the rich in the Anglosphere. The current crisis has hurt them, and currently Hungary is the biggest dissenter. It's rather a right-wing government, but also one that has asserted Hungarian interests against the demands of International Finance.

But International Finance is not a coherent entity. It is a mob of disconnected individuals, and most of them are concerned only with getting more for themselves. A prospective collapse increases the urgency of grabbing as much as you can while you can.

A ruling class can come together and perhaps make sacrifices for shared belief. An Overclass cannot and mostly does not wish to. If the whole thing might have collapsed by next year, it makes sense to scoop up as much as possible.

Creative Destruction

When capitalism has a particularly acute crisis, the phrase 'creative destruction' gets rolled out. The phrase was popularised by Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpeter and was originally an explanation as to why capitalism would destroy itself. Neo-Liberals took it up and reversed the meaning, believing that it must be a sign of health.

The destructiveness and waste of the current system is clear. Its usefulness for the creative process is open to question. You don't *have* to wreck things to regenerate them. In universities, where existing assets cannot easily be lost or taken over, the world's best are mostly centuries old. Places that have adapted but also kept a long tradition. Only very occasionally does a new start-up push its way to the first rank.

Still, talk of 'creative destruction' seems to reassure people. It feeds the "Only Fools and Horses" mentality that has spread so widely since the 1970s. Detached from Trade Union influ-

ence, ordinary people can easily be persuaded to resent most forms of skill and knowledge, the stuff they know they lack. Persuaded to admire money, luck and successful cheats, with always the dream of being the next. That's the mentality that keeps almost all of them at the bottom of a complex society, and increasingly irrelevant to that society.

Pensions

If the same society is producing the same wealth with fewer workers, then there is no reason why pensions shouldn't stay at the same level. Or even increase, given that retirement pay is always less than pay in work. The 'problem' is only a problem from the viewpoint of the richest 1%. In their eyes, pay for ordinary workers is an unwelcome expense, but mostly unavoidable. They also get better workers if they pay above the average rate, worse if they pay less. But from their viewpoint, pensioners are a pure burden, not needed and not contributing to the profits of the 1%. (Or not unless they are lured into foolish investments.)

Employed workers are fools if they see pensioners as a burden: they can reasonably expect to end up as pensioners themselves.

A great many of them are fools, sad to say.

Myths of Self-Employment

For most of human history, most people have had control over their own work, with a minority working for the rich. The Industrial Revolution changed that, gradually turning the bulk of the population into employees.

After World War Two, people mostly thought of themselves as employees and saw that their own interests were looked after through state power. Thatcher persuaded them to fear the Big Bad State, drawing on a general discontent that many leftists had fuelled in a short-sighted manner.

Thatcher's promise was more economic independence, and it wasn't met. Ideas like forcing big businesses to pay their bills on time got floated but never got anywhere. The rich get to evade most social controls and tax, the small businesses get squeezed. They get seen as an anomaly, "self-employed", an oddity between being an employer or an employee.

"Since the middle of the last decade, the number and proportion of self-employed Britons has been increasing, and the drastic events of 2008 did not slow the rise....

"The additional self-employed are unlike self-employed people as a whole in terms of gender, hours of work, occupation and sector of employment," says the CIPD's report. Tell-

ingly, of those who make up the net rise in self-employment since 2008, 90% are part-time...

"All this has been boiled down to talk about a new crop of 'odd-jobbers' – but there's something more important going on, so far undocumented in official statistics: the accelerated conversion of proper jobs into a mess of 'self-employment' that's completely fraudulent. Eighteen months ago, two Daily Mirror journalists began a brilliant campaign on this issue titled 'Gizza Proper Job', and exposed such firms as Ryanair and the minicab firm Addison Lee; it has also been touched on by BBC1's Panorama. That it remains a political non-issue says a lot about the current debate about the supposed fundamentals of the economy: politicians and the press will happily fume about either overpaid executives or ripped-off customers, but thinking about the nitty-gritty of working lives is still somehow beneath them.

"We are looking for a number of door supervisors, security guards and CCTV operatives,' says one typical online job ad. 'You will be employed on a self-employed basis'. This from the suburbs of Bristol, and another trade long steeped in such sharp practice: 'Self-employed hairdressers are required for a busy, newly opened and re-vamped Beauty Salon.' A lot of ads predictably push the supposed merits of 'being your own boss' – but in most cases the boss is where he's always been, only he's found a neat new way of paying you less." [C]

It's not always like that. One commentator summed it up nicely: "If you have a difficult to find skill then 'self employed' is not a bad crack as you can charge almost what you want. However for the average worker 'self employed' is a ticket to poverty as your employment can disappear overnight." [C]

The bulk of the 'self-employed' are actually day-labourers. They work for someone else but have no security. This suits the Thatcherite 'entrepreneurs', who mostly have no particular skills beyond squeezing money out of ordinary workers. Pre-Thatcher, foreign observers and especially the Germans said that British workers were fine and the management useless. More power to the managers has

confirmed this.

Adam Smith on Usury and Interest

"In some countries the interest of money has been prohibited by law. But as something can every-where be made by the use of money, something ought every-where to be paid for the use of it. This regulation, instead of preventing, has been found from experience to increase the evil of usury; the debtor being obliged to pay, not only for the use of the money, but for the risk which his creditor runs by accepting a compensation for that use. He is obliged, if one may say so, to insure his creditor from the penalties of usury

"In countries where interest is permitted, the law, in order to prevent the extortion of usury, generally fixes the highest rate which can be taken without incurring a penalty. This rate ought always to be somewhat above the lowest market price, or the price which is commonly paid for the use of money by those who can give the most undoubted security. If this legal rate should be fixed below the lowest market rate, the effects of this fixation must be nearly the same as those of a total prohibition of interest. The creditor will not lend his money for less than the use of it is worth, and the debtor must pay him for the risk which he runs by accepting the full value of that use. If it is fixed precisely at the lowest market price, it ruins with honest people, who respect the laws of their country, the credit of all those who cannot give the very best security, and obliges them to have recourse to exorbitant usurers. In a country, such as Great Britain, where money is lent to government at three per cent. and to private people upon a good security at four and four and a half, the present legal rate, five per cent, is perhaps as proper as any.

"The legal rate, it is to be observed, though it ought to be somewhat above, ought not to be much above the lowest market rate. If the legal rate of interest in Great Britain, for example, was fixed so high as eight or ten per cent, the greater part of the money which was to be lent would be lent to prodigals and projectors, who alone would be willing to give this high interest. Sober people, who will

give for the use of money no more than a part of what they are likely to make by the use of it, would not venture into the competition. A great part of the capital of the country would thus be kept out of the hands which were most likely to make a profitable and advantageous use of it, and thrown into those which were most likely to waste and destroy it. Where the legal rate of interest, on the contrary, is fixed but a very little above the lowest market rate, sober people are universally preferred, as borrowers, to prodigals and projectors. The person who lends money gets nearly as much interest from the former as he dares to take from the latter, and his money is much safer in the hands of the one set of people than in those of the other. A great part of the capital of the country is thus thrown into the hands in which it is most likely to be employed with advantage."

That comes from *The Wealth of Nations*, which right-wing economists treat like the Bible – quote the bits you like and ignore the rest. The whole Thatcher / Reagan project has indeed shifted investment to "prodigals and projectors", people who spend money foolishly and people who borrow a lot of money for highly dangerous business plans.

Labour could demand that the concept of boring respectability be restored to banking. People should be told, if you need advice on investing you shouldn't be investing. And that there are no longer any trustworthy sources of financial advice – if indeed there ever were any. But it looks like Ed Miliband dare not do anything beyond mildly moderate New Labour doctrine, just as New Labour did not dare not do anything beyond mildly moderate Thatcherism. Even though the whole system is visibly falling apart, they do not dare.

Dogs going to the dogs

Yet another case recently of a dog attacking and severely injuring a child. But such cases are just the extreme of a wider pattern.

Dogs should be stopped from barking at people outside their own homes: immediately punished and told off by their owners if they do such a thing. If

the owners can't or won't do this, they should be banned from taking their dog into any public place. (Also dog licences should be re-introduced and enforced more seriously.)

What mostly happens now is that the victim gets stupid assurances, "he won't hurt you". So long as someone else is being harassed, they stay unconcerned. (Or maybe appreciate the violence of their dogs.)

Dogs need to be taught that the public space is public, then the occasional tragedy of a major attack would be much less likely. So too would the more frequent matter of a minor bite, and great deal of upset. I'd be arrested if I made a habit of threatening strangers who came too close to me in a public place. Why should dogs be allowed to behave worse?

Euro Conspiracies?

The Euro was and still is a threat to the dollar's hegemony. It has come under fierce attack, despite Europe's economy being no more stressed than the USA. A lot of the stress has come from Ratings Agencies, private companies owned by people in the US finance industry. And the Ratings Agencies certified a lot of rubbishy financial assets as excellent in the run-up to the crisis of 2008, allowing some people to make a lot of money in the process and leave others stuck with the loss. So why not be suspicious?

Such suspicions are sneered at "conspiracy theories", as if conspiracies of various sorts were not part of human nature in every single human society we have any knowledge of. The term "conspiracy theory" should only be used when the claim assumes at least one of the following:

- a) The accused is much more powerful than they seem
- b) The accused is working towards very different ends than those they openly admit to.

Even those can be true, but need a very high level of evidence before they can be taken seriously. But evidence

the ordinary sort of conspiracy – people using the powers they obviously possess to covertly advance their stated aims – should not be lumped with the crackpot conspiracy notions.

It's a very reasonable suspicion that financiers in the USA are out to break the Euro and are alarmed at the possibility of the European Union or a core group within in curbing excesses of capitalism.

A lot of the financial traders would be out of business if there were a Tobin Tax, the small tax on trades that Europe is proposing. A Tobin Tax wouldn't mean much for someone who was doing a trade because of need. It would be lethal to the profits of speculators who make a tiny profit on each of a vast number of transactions, based not on need but on reading the market's movements better than the rest. So a lot of reason to conspire against the Euro.

The Net and the Law

The brief shut-down on 18th January by Wikipedia and a vast number of other websites had a significance that everyone seems to have missed. This drastic action against anti-piracy legislation being proposed by Congress was an admission that the internet isn't in fact independent, or even very hard to control. The myth of uncontrollability is not believed by experts in the field, not when they see their own interests at risk.

The big problem with modern media is that once a single digital recording of a film, book or song has been produced, the cost of producing extra copies is very small. This applies particularly to films, where almost any film in the Top Ten will have cost tens of millions. The sale price has to reflect a share of producing the original as well as the copy. And with songs and films, and also some books, there is also a serious chance of losing money even without piracy.

It is also true that you get ludicrously large payments to a few lucky individuals. But that needs to be fixed in various ways, including tax. Piracy is not a fix.

So, I am against piracy. Yet there is

also sensible criticism that the proposed laws would allow very wide use of powers, with great scope for abuse. Broadly, I do not expect the USA to fix it and do not trust them to do so.

One interesting extra:

"US legislators seem to have been taken aback by the vehement opposition of the big US technology companies, for example – companies which have traditionally tended to have a relatively low profile in Washington, at least compared with the movie studios and their representatives. The truth is that while the so-called 'creative industries' are important, they are economic minnows compared with the technology industries, and realisation of this may have led politicians to backpedal on Sopa." [B]

The technology companies are not hurt by other people's goods being pirated, and may indeed gain because a pirated film still needs expensive hardware to show its merits and come near to cinema quality. Hardware now is very hard to pirate. Software has keys and licences and also fairly easy to protect.

Not so much a blow for freedom as the bigger capitalists seeing off the smaller.

Egypt is now Islamist

The exact results are still being worked out in Egypt's complex electoral system. But it is clear that Islamists of various sorts will control about two-thirds of the seats. The liberals and radicals who started the protests that brought down Mubarak now face something very much less to their tastes.

All of this was pretty predictable. And I was one of the minority who did predict it, even as most people in the West were enthusing about those nasty Arabs coming into line with nice Western values.

In my *Newsnotes* for February 2011, I said

"Things are moving so fast in Egypt that whatever I write now (Thursday 3rd

[February]) could soon be out of date. But there is some underlying logic to events, so I will try.

"I was ahead of the game on Friday 28th [January], when I circulated an e-mail suggesting that what was happening then resembled the early stages of the overthrow of the Shah in Iran, which was a mix of Islamists with Western-orientated liberals and leftists. I didn't see the mainstream British media saying that until later, and it had been noticed by then the Iranians themselves were making such comparisons...

"In Egypt, the position of the army is the key. The demonstrators gained power for as long as the army sounded neutral. But on Tuesday 1st February, Mubarak said he would be standing down in September. This seemed to satisfy the army, who then called for the demonstrators to go home. Since they could not fight the army, they would have been wise to have done just that, or at least offered terms for going. Instead they stuck to a demand that the army had rejected – that Mubarak step down unilaterally.

"The rally and the subsequent street-fighting has been about that issue: should Mubarak be humiliated and his 30-year rule criminalised, with unpredictable results for all those who served the regime? It seems quite a lot of people thought this unreasonable. They wanted Egypt to move on but not to overturn what it has.

"Since most of the secular protestors don't actually want Egypt to change very much, why are they continuing the confrontation?

"They should remember Iran, should be wary of the Muslim Brotherhood. I felt from early on that the Muslim Brotherhood were being smart in hanging back. The army would definitely crush an uprising that was dominated by them. But if secular protestors smash the secular state, or if the secular state smashes them, they are the coherent alternative. (The Arab left seems almost extinct, sadly.)"

The following month, I said:

"Various 'reflective' pieces have been written in the wake of the overthrow of

existing governments in Tunisia and Egypt. The absence of a coherent government in either place does not bother the commentators. Nor a sudden surge in people trying to flee from Tunisia to Italy. It is Democracy and therefore it must be A Good Thing.

"The USA does also seem to have learned some lessons from the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. The main lesson seems to be that you should rat on your Third-World friends as soon as they look shaky.

"In Egypt, the protestors would have been wiser to have kept Mubarak once he seemed committed to reform. This would have been sound advice, but it was not the advice they were given. Instead the West more or less endorsed the hard-line stand that Mubarak must go before anything else happened.

"The protestors missed what would have been the best way to ease tensions, an assurance of immunity. This worked in South Africa, but it was arrived at because the USA was then dominant globally and the USA was looking after its friends. Elsewhere they see no need for it. Mubarak may have thought the USA was his friend, but the way he was treated suggests that they saw him as their servant, and now 'surplus to requirements'...

"In Egypt, a lot of the anger has been about Egypt following a 'globalist' agenda, increasing inequality and trying to shrink the state. That's bound to be a big issue if elections actually get held. But it may also prove that no one can cope with the new politics except the Islamists.

"As I said last month, the Iranian Revolution of 1978-9 proceeded by stages, with the Islamists eliminating their enemies by stages. Something similar could happen in Egypt, particularly since the non-Islamic forces have nothing very obvious to offer...

"The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings are being seen as a continuation of the 'Colour Revolutions', the wave of well-organised popular protests that knocked over some of the governments which had emerged from the Soviet collapse.

"The overthrow of most governments

in Middle-Europe in 1989 had a definite logic: those governments had become little more than puppets of Moscow, and people wanted a sharp change. Mostly they wanted admission to the European Union and incorporation in the European Union's way of life. This is pretty much what they got.

"The change to a Western system was carried through without disaster in countries where there was a memory of multi-party politics. It has still been distinctly disappointing, with many of the new politicians making fools of themselves at international gatherings. Still, it has lasted.

"East of Middle-Europe – east of the Baltic states and the Carpathian Mountains – things were much more muddled. Middle-Europe could see itself as returning to its natural place as the close associate of Western Europe. The true Eastern Europe had different traditions and nowhere clear to go."

It's about worked out as I expected. I forecast a civil war in Libya, and facts now emerging suggest that the 'insurgents' would have lost without massive Western military backing. I suspected that Bahrain would not be democratised and it has not been. I suspected that the Syrian regime had enough popular support to last and so far it has.

People had a ludicrously false notion of what would happen if you overthrew an authoritarian system. In real history, only a few things are likely to then happen:

1. Power may pass to some existing organ of government. Often the army. Sometimes to a parliament that had had limited powers, as in England in 1688. Or to regional governments, as in the American War of Independence where the thirteen states and most of the town and county governments were at the heart of the revolt.

2. You may get a personal dictatorship round some charismatic leader, the end point of the French Revolution and also their Second Republic of 1848.

3. You may get power passing to a

collective with a strong ideology. This was the end-point in both Russia and China, though it took months in Russia and took nearly four decades of break-down and weakness in China between the Republican revolution in 1912 and the Communist consolidation in 1949. Iran was more like Russia, a few months between getting rid of the Shah and the creation of an Islamic Republic.

4. You may get complete chaos, as in Somalia

All these things are treated as unexpected, even though they keep happening. Western media kept thinking of the break-up of European Leninism. But that was mostly a set of existing governments going in a direction they had long wanted when the Soviet Union became too weak to stop them. In the fragments of the Soviet Union, the main trend has been back to charismatic leaders or else chaos. In Russia, it looks increasingly possible the Communists could get voted back into power.

The position in Egypt is that the more serious liberals know they have failed and are clinging to an alliance with the larger and more moderate branch of the Islamists, the party of the Muslim Brotherhood. The army seems to be taking the same line, support the new popular majority and be safe for the criminalisation that some of the protestors were calling for. And of course the price of that will be much more serious Islamisation of Egypt, traditionally moderate and secular.

Despite which, the West is still determined to destroy secular Syria. Some people don't learn.

US Republicans

The USA should be ashamed of South Carolina, prime defender of slavery in the early 19th century and initiator of secession several months before Abraham Lincoln actually took office. (The USA differs from most multi-party systems in making the newly elected leader wait for months before taking over the government. The election takes place in November, but the President only takes office in January, and in Lincoln's day

had to wait till March.)

South Carolina should be ashamed of itself. It produced John C. Calhoun, Andrew Jackson's vice-president and several times Senator for South Carolina. He was the big advocate of slavery as a positive and noble institutions. Previous Southern politicians had been slave-owners but had seen it as a necessary evil, something it would be good to be rid of eventually. Calhoun championed liberalism and democracy for whites, but also believed that blacks should be slaves forever. He was also the leading figure in the Nullification Crisis of the 1830s, in which South Carolina claimed the right to reject federal trade tariffs. His last effort before dying in 1850 was to get passed a powerful Fugitive Slaves Act, which allowed intrusion into Northern states where slaves might have taken refuge. He certainly paved the way for the later Civil War, which was of course precipitated by South Carolina seceding.

(That was of course a revolt by Southern Democrats against a Republican presidency. This alignment lasted nearly 100 years, but when Kennedy and Johnson as leaders of the mainstream Democrats forced through racial equality, the Republicans led initially by Nixon managed to pick up the racist vote while avoiding ever being labelled as racist.)

South Carolina should be ashamed of itself and the USA should be ashamed of South Carolina. Neither outcome is very likely, of course. But I also get the feeling that the whole US Republican and Tea-Party tradition is desperate and not at all sure of itself. It hates change, but it is also an enthusiast for unfettered capitalism and global trade, the greatest agents of random change that the world has ever known. It correctly senses that it is a dying tradition, but has no idea what to do about it.

South Carolina may have made history again with reviving the Presidential campaign of Newt Gingrich, who was born in Pennsylvania but has mostly made his career in Georgia, right next to South Carolina. At one time he seemed out of the race, but now he and Romney are the only serious contenders. And he

certainly knows how to work popular prejudice.

Gingrich got away with claiming it was unfair to voice the claim by his second wife that he had suggested an 'open marriage' before dumping her and moving on to his third wife (so far). It would have been unfair if Gingrich had always treated private morals as private, but that's not true at all. He was prominent in going after Bill Clinton for doing much less. What's sauce for Bill Clinton ought to be sauce for Newt Gingrich, but evidently Gingrich thinks otherwise and gets applauded for it by hard-core Republicans.

Intolerance begins at home or it is a bad joke. In the USA it is indeed a bad joke: I count them as weak because they have a history as such evasions.

Weak but dangerous, they still have nuclear weapons and the world's biggest armed forces, including half of the world's aircraft carriers and much more than half the actual naval might. They also still have lots of admirers, though 'President Gingrich' might help to cure that. The man is really a joke but a successful one, a man who can attack the 'elite media' while serving the richest 1% and be 'Grinch Newtbridge' when it comes to those on welfare. (He tells people to get off welfare and into a job, at a time of high and rising unemployment.) I assume he'll say anything to get elected: he has reversed his position on Climate Change, where he used to believe but has now followed the key US Republican voters in becoming a Denialist.

It isn't ignorance that makes you a fool: it's what you know that ain't so. That's a piece of US folk wisdom, but it seems to have been excluded from current New Right package. Gingrich is a highly intelligent fool. He resembled Enoch Powell in lacking any self-critical ability, being unable to be skeptical about what he wants to believe. And in thinking conservatism is compatible with unchained capitalism, even with much more evidence than in Powell's time of its utterly nihilistic effects.

Return of the Mixed Economy?

Since the mid-1990s, I've been as-

serting that People's China was very far from capitalist. It is less equal and much more profit-driven than it was when Mao ruled, but it would have a long way to go before it got to the point that Western Europe was at during the high years of Keynesianism. I don't think I've had any influence outside of readers of this magazine, but the non-capitalist nature of China is now being conceded. Thus in the *Guardian*, one expert said:

"Unlike Britain, the US and the stricken eurozone economies – China has a modest budget deficit of around 2%. Which points to the central reason why China was able to ride out the global crisis of 2007-8 with such dramatic success. China's response was to launch the biggest stimulus programme in the world, investing heavily in infrastructure.

"But instead of doing it through deficit spending and printing money, the Chinese government was able to use its ownership and control of the banks and large state companies to increase lending and investment. Which is why China has grown by 10% a year since the crash, while the west and Japan have shrunk or stagnated.

"China has travelled a vast distance from the socialised economy of the Maoist period and has a huge private sector and large-scale foreign investment. But its hybrid economic model continues to be based around a publicly owned core of banks and corporations. So while in Europe and the US governments rely on indirect (and so far entirely ineffective) mechanisms to reverse the collapse of private investment at the heart of the crisis – and private banks and corporations hoard bailout cash – China has the leverage directly to boost investment, jobs and incomes.

"And that state-owned core has been central to the country's extraordinary growth over the past three decades. Of course that advance has also been based around the largest migration of workers in human history. And the costs of its economic rise have been massive: from rampant corruption and exploitation of low-wage labour to environmental degradation, decline in health and education provision, an explosion of inequality and serious restrictions on civil rights.

"Strikes and rural upheavals across China – as well as political shifts – are now challenging and having their impact on those failures. But China's authoritarian system can also lead people elsewhere to ignore some powerful lessons about its economic experience. And one of those is that what used to be celebrated across the political mainstream in Britain and Europe as a 'mixed economy' – along with long-discarded levers such as capital controls – can deliver results that a privatised, deregulated economy is utterly unable to do." [D]

The Economist for 21st January went rather further, noting that most of East Asia and many other developing economies had been run all along as a Mixed Economy, or what they call State Capitalist.[E] They complain about it, saying that the various semi-state companies and state-dominated banks could easily be adjusted to be much more profitable. No doubt they could be – but would that actually benefit the society as a whole?

The New Right thesis has been that profit for individual enterprises is the best guide to advancing the overall welfare of the society. That was Adam Smith's doctrine – and quite unproven. As I detailed a few months back, neither the USA nor Britain have done better decade by decade since the Thatcher / Reagan revolution than in the decades before. Germany, Italy, France and Japan have done rather worse. And that was before the crisis that became acute in 2008 and shows no sign of ending any time soon.

References

- [A] This particular passage comes from Book 2, sections 4:13 to 4:15
- [B] [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/jan/22/sopa-pipa-john-naughton>]
- [C] [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/22/self-employment-proper-jobs-cameron>]
- [D] [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/17/china-success-challenges-america-britain>]
- [E] *The Visible Hand: The Rise of State Capitalism*, 21st January 2012.

Revolting Ramelson?

Sean McGouran

Lawrence & Wishart has published *Revolutionary Communist at Work: A Political Biography of Bert Ramelson*, by Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley. The mainstream Communist Party of Britain's daily Morning Star had an article about, as opposed to a review of, the book (Thurs 12.01.12), Revolutionary tale of an enemy within.

Ramelson was born in Ukraine, brought up in Canada, fought in Spain and gave up on Zionism after an encounter with anti-Arab feeling (and action. Histadrut, the Zionist 'trade union' struck against the employment of Arab workers in kibbutzim). Ramelson thought WW2 was a 'people's war' from very early on, prior to Operation Barbarossa (the Fascist invasion of the Soviet Union where practically every state in 'occupied Europe', including Spain and Italy, supplied volunteers). He was wounded, captured, and escaped to join Italy's Partisans. Later, transferred to India, he was involved in the Forces Parliament. An exemplary 'Left life' - thus far.

Shortly after the War he became an influential Communist Party (CP) operative. He "fought against the right wing" in USDAW (the shop workers' union), and helped "organise the historical turn to the left in the Yorkshire Area NUM". One person who helped in this latter matter was "Young Communist League and CP member Arthur Scargill". Scargill is pictured at a "Bert Ramelson tribute night" in April 1988. Harold Wilson (a villain in this article, by Robert Griffiths General Secretary of the CP) "informed MPs from his MI5 reports" that Ramelson became the CP's national industrial organiser in 1966. A somewhat strange statement - was this a big secret?

Ramelson's greatest victory was over Wilson's attempt to build on the offer, (to the trade unions), of power in industry first mooted by Edward Heath. Ramelson produced "one of the biggest selling political pamphlets in decades", *Social Contract or Social Con- Trick*. This was in opposition to "left-wing union leaders Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon" who had backed the "social contract".

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Parliament Notes

Dick Barry

Evasive Information

In the weeks leading up to last November's one day strike by public sector workers, David Cameron repeatedly claimed that it would cost the economy in the region of £500 million. Cameron didn't disclose where he obtained this figure. Subsequently, on 19 December, Plaid Cymru's Jonathan Edwards asked what assessment had been made of the effects on the economy of a) the Royal wedding of April 2011, b) the industrial action of November 2011, c) the winter weather of December 2010 and d) Her Majesty's Jubilee celebrations holidays in 2012.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury Chloe Smith told Edwards that, "The Office for National Statistics is responsible for compiling statistics on the economy such as GDP. In background briefing the ONS have provided their assessment of the effects on GDP of some of these events." Alas, a thorough search of the website of the ONS revealed no information on the above. Perhaps Edwards should ask again.

Asylum Seekers - Where Are They?

Most asylum seekers/refugees are internally displaced in Africa and Asia. Last year Europe as a whole took in about 1.6 million, but this figure was overtaken by Pakistan who accepted 1.7 million. Less than 2 per cent of the total number of asylum seekers come to the UK. And most of these are excluded from claiming most benefits. For those who do claim, strict conditions apply to their entitlement. Readers of the popular press however are led to believe otherwise. But the location of asylum seekers is not widely reported. The list of cities and towns where they are placed makes interesting reading.

There are 86 cities and towns in the UK designated as dispersal areas for asylum seekers. Information on this was provided by Home Office Minister Damien Green on 17 January. 80 of the 86 cities and towns are located in England. And

30 of these are in the North of England; with 19 in the North West and 11 in the North East. A further 18 are located in the Midlands and 16 are in Yorkshire. The remaining 16 cities and towns in England are in the South East, which includes London, (6), the West of England (4), and the East of England (4). Plymouth in the South West and Luton in Bedfordshire make up the final two locations. Of the 6 cities and towns outside of England, 4 are in Wales. The other 2 are Belfast and Glasgow.

The striking feature of all this is that the overwhelming majority of the cities and towns to where asylum seekers are dispersed have large concentrations of working class people. And almost 70% have Labour Members of Parliament. They also tend to have social problems associated with housing shortages, unemployment and poverty. This is in stark contrast to huge swathes of the south of England - Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey - and solid Conservative held Parliamentary seats such as Basingstoke, Christchurch, Henley, Winchester and Windsor, where there is greater wealth, fewer social problems and a notable absence of asylum seekers. This may explain, at least partly, why working class people are resentful of asylum seekers.

Iran - A Legitimate Target?

Louise Ellman is Labour and Co-op Member of Parliament for Liverpool Riverside. She is also Chair of the Jewish Labour Movement and a Vice Chair of Labour Friends of Israel. She has a long history of uncritical support for the state of Israel and a deep antagonism towards Palestine and Palestinian leaders. On 30 March 2004, the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was answering questions relating to unlawful killings under the terms of the 4th Geneva Convention and, specifically, to the assassination of Sheikh Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas. Crispin Blunt, Conservative mem-

ber for Reigate, put Yassin's murder in context when he said, "Before the killing of Sheikh Yassin and three people in his immediate vicinity, B'tselem, the Israeli information centre for human rights - the Foreign Office accepts its figures as accurate - recorded that since September 2000, 135 Palestinians have been judicially executed by Israel, and that in the course of those assassinations another 90 Palestinians were killed, including 28 children."

After further criticism of Israel's action, Louise Ellman popped up to say "Will the Foreign Secretary accept that the views expressed up to now this morning do not reflect the views of all hon. Members? Does he understand that Israel's action in killing Sheikh Yassin was a legitimate response to an extraordinary situation? Sheikh Yassin was the leader of the terrorist organisation, Hamas, which is dedicated to the destruction of the state of Israel, and which greets every attempt to make peace and reconciliation possible with more killings of civilians, whether they be young people in pizzerias and discos or old people at religious ceremonies sitting round the Passover Seder table. Does my right hon. Friend understand that Hamas is the enemy of peace; and can he give us any news as to whether he will follow the lead of the European Union in banning Hamas and its activities in the United Kingdom?"

Did Ellman mean to say that the killing of Sheikh Yassin was an understandable response by Israel? Perhaps she did. But by describing the killing as a legitimate response, she clearly condoned the breach of the 4th Geneva Convention and suggested that Israel was right to disregard any international conventions and laws and to do whatever was necessary to defend itself. And there is nothing to suggest that her views have altered in the eight years that have passed since she made those remarks. It was fitting therefore that just a matter of weeks ago, on 11 January, she initiated a debate on

Israel's latest bete noire, Iran; specifically its human rights record. Human rights is a popular topic with MPs. And it's easier to attack Iran's human rights record than to accuse it of wanting to acquire nuclear weapons. The latter is more difficult to prove and it would draw attention to Israel's possession of nuclear weapons, something Ellman would find awkward to wriggle out of. Her speech however, focused exclusively on what she described as the 'persecution' of the followers of the Baha'i religion. (Ellman is treasurer of the all-party friends of the Baha'i group).

In her opening remarks she said, "This debate draws attention to Iran's horrendous human rights record." and she told MPs that, "It is extremely important to raise awareness, knowledge and consciousness of these atrocities. It is important that people take action to prevent or stop persecution, but unless they become aware of it, it is less likely that action will be taken." Furthermore, she said "In the context of the whole field of human rights in Iran, we are talking not about persecution by individuals, and something that is inconsistent with the general tenor of the way in which the Government operate, but about state-sanctioned persecution, which is what makes it so ominous and horrendous." Given Ellman's remarks on Iran, one is entitled to ask which other Middle East country carries out acts of state-sponsored persecution, including assassinations?

Ellman is right to draw attention to Iran's record on human rights, but mote and beam spring to mind on hearing her comments. Other MPs cast the net wider than the Baha'is and included the Christian community as a whole. And they admitted that their information on Iran was obtained from organisations like Christian Solidarity Worldwide. It was noticeable that the debate was chaired by the DUP's Dr William McCrea and that DUP MPs Gregory Campbell and Jim Shannon were among the 12 backbenchers who spoke. Almost all were scathing in their criticism of Iran.

However, it was Labour's Jeremy Corbyn who brought some balance to the debate. "Most countries in the world, including our own", he said, "have gone through periods of the most grievous

intolerance towards minorities. One hopes that at some point Iran will come through this. The current intolerance towards many dissidents is not particularly new. Indeed, it has gone on since the 1950s. The coup of 1952 brought in the Shah's regime and his secret police. The revolution of 1979 brought in the Islamic Republic and a great deal of repression of its opponents, particularly in its early days and more latterly. We should recognise that large numbers of people in Iran stand up for human rights, democracy and their own rights.

Any change within Iran is more likely to come from internal opposition and internal organisation than from anything done from outside or any outside pressure." Intolerance occurs in every society. It is not restricted to Iran, as Corbyn suggested. Intolerance towards the Baha'i in Iran has existed since the inception of the Baha'i religion in the 1840s, and in spite of that its followers have grown in numbers. But since the establishment of Islamic revolution in 1979, Baha'ism has been seen as heretical to Islam.

Corbyn went on to comment on bombings and assassinations in Iran. "It is also worth recognising," he said, "that there is a problem in Iran beyond that which has been mentioned so far. A number of bombings and assassinations of scientists - nuclear scientists and others - employed by the Iranian Government are taking place in Iran, and mysterious explosions are taking place at military bases. I do not know, any more than anybody else in the Chamber knows, who is perpetrating those attacks, but there is clearly a pattern.

I do not believe that any country, whether Iran or anywhere else, should have nuclear weapons. Iran is still a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and I hope that it remains one. I also hope that we take steps to achieve a nuclear-free middle east." It's interesting that in her criticism of Iran, Louise Ellman didn't mention the killing of the Iranian nuclear scientist. Furthermore, one would gather from reading the UK press that Iran was hell bent on obtaining a nuclear weapon. But that is not the view of US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta. On 8 January on CBS TV's 'Face the Nation' he was asked, "Are they (the Iranians)

trying to develop a nuclear weapon?" "No", he replied.

Bashing The Unions - Here We Go Again

In L&TUR No. 222 November 2011, PN's referred to a debate on 26 October last in which Conservative backbencher Adrian Burley proposed that trade unions, not the taxpayer, should pay for time off taken by union representatives during working hours, for the purpose of trade union activities. He was unsuccessful in this, but anti-trade union Conservative MPs are nothing, if not persistent. On 11 January Conservative backbencher Jesse Norman had another go. Norman begged to move, "That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that pay for hours worked on behalf of trade unions by trade union officials during hours when they are paid by an employer should be refunded to the employer by the trade union; and for connected purposes."

Naturally, Norman claimed that his Bill was not about attacking the unions. "The issue here", he said, "is one of basic principle: is it appropriate for the taxpayer to subsidise any such large-scale activity by private organisations? If it is, should it be allowed without proper processes of competitive tender and public accountability? My own answer to these questions would be, in general, a resounding no. Taxpayers' money should be spent, as far as possible, on the front line of public services. In general, private organisations should not be subsidised by the state. Moreover, the fundamental principle of no payment without accountability is already observed throughout the public sector in other areas. Public procurement is supposed to be competitive and transparent, and so is commissioning of services in the NHS and across local government. In exactly the same way, there should be proper transparency and accountability in public funding for trade unions."

If Norman believes that, in general, private organisations should not be subsidised by the state, why have we not heard a peep out of him about the generous state subsidies to the large numbers of private companies in the UK, without which many of them could not function? The state subsidy to the private rail com-

panies for example is five times greater in real times than it was to the publicly owned railways. Norman singled out the private finance initiative (PFI) as an example where he has attempted to recover taxpayer's money. But how does he believe it can work without initial heavy state subsidy? Introduced by Thatcher and extended by Blair and Brown, it is a device to keep state expenditure off the public accounts. It is a massive long-term burden on the taxpayer. An example of live now, pay later. However, Norman is not opposed to the PFI, he simply believes there should be proper transparency and accountability. And he argued that this should apply to the trade unions.

As proof that the unions are not transparent - they are, of course, accountable - he referred to a recent experience. "Last week", he said, "my office called seven of the biggest unions, asking for their latest financial reports and accounts as background research. The response was extraordinary. Some unions, such as the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, do not put this information on line at all - USDAW kindly invited me to write to their treasurer with a request. Others, such as the NASUWT, make it available only to members. UNISON had its 2009 statements on line, and the National Union of Teachers had a summary. Only the Public and Commercial Services Union had a full recent report and accounts online."

"Matters only become murkier on further investigation. The unions are regulated by the relatively little-known certification officer, who requires them to file an annual return. In the case of Unite, that reveals that the union had income in 2010 of £143 million and made a pay-off of more than half a million pounds to its outgoing joint general secretary, Derek Simpson...." At this point Labour's Denis MacShane asked if this was in order, but it was dismissed by the Speaker. Norman went on, "Astonishingly, there is no management report in Unite's annual return, no historical comparison of income and expenditure, no discussion of the year's activities, no analysis of the current environment or future prospects, no biographies of

senior officials and not even any photographs."

Norman's accusation of a lack of union transparency seems to be more a case of the unions failing to keep their accounts database up to scratch, than a deliberate effort to conceal the information. The information is there, it is just not available in the form that Norman expects. His criticisms of Unite will no doubt be answered by the union.

Labour's John Healey provided the opposition to Norman's Bill. "This Bill", he said, "attacks the most basic and most benign feature of trade union work - the day-to-day support for staff at work by their colleagues who are prepared to to volunteer as trade union representatives. ... I have to say to the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire that I am surprised to hear him attempt to bring in this Bill. He is gaining a growing reputation for hard work and intelligent comment, but his speech was a cheap-shot speech based on ignorance, ideology and inaccurate briefings from the Taxpayers Alliance.

He talks about trade union accounts and public service, but the Bill is a broadside against trade union organising in both the public and private sectors. It is a personal attack on around 200,000 people who are ready to help their colleagues by giving advice, by supporting them at grievances and disciplinaries and by negotiating with managers. That is difficult and demanding work, but many of those representatives are also ready to take on extra, special responsibilities for improving health and safety, equality, training and environmental standards."

"A recent Government survey showed that reps in the public sector contribute up to 100,000 unpaid hours each week to carry out their duties. Our union reps are the unsung heroes of the long, proud British tradition of volunteering. They are the workplace wing of the Prime Minister's big society. There should be receptions in Downing Street to pay tribute to their work. They support their colleagues and they save employers and the Exchequer millions of pounds each year by reducing the number of employment tribunals and days lost

through illness and injury. By improving productivity and training, they help organisations to get through periods of great pressure and great change....I think the House will have recognised that the hon. Gentleman did not quote one single employer. Employers are not calling for this attack; it does not even feature on the CBI's 11-point checklist of curbs it wants to see on trade unions."

The Bill was defeated by 211 votes to 132. The SDLP's Mark Durkan and Alasdair McDonnell, the Green Party MP Caroline Lucas and 12 Liberal Democrat MPs helped to oppose the Bill. The DUP's Gregory Campbell, Nigel Dodds, Jeffrey Donaldson, Dr William McCrea, and Ian Paisley Jnr, and Liberal Democrats Stephen Gilbert and Alan Reid, gave their support of the Bill.

Migrants And Jobs

On 10 January, the Daily Express carried a headline stating 'It's Official: Migrants Take Our Jobs.' The sub-text referred to a report by the Government's Migration Advisory Committee, (Mac), which claimed that immigration from outside Europe is linked to short-term job losses among British workers. The report said that for every 100 non-EU working-age migrants to Britain over the last 15 years, 23 "native workers" have lost their jobs.

But according to The Independent for 11 January, "the Mac said there were 160,000 UK-born workers currently out of work after the arrival of 2.1 million migrants between 1995 and 2010, but it stopped short of saying that there was a causal link between immigration and job losses." The Daily Express ignored this latest comment and picked up on the interpretation put on the report by the anti-immigrant Migration Watch.

The Express failed to report that the Mac's Chairman, David Metcalf, suggested that jobs in computing and in hospitality and retail, where large numbers of foreign students work part-time, could have been affected. Metcalf also said that large numbers of migrants worked in the health and care services, but that this was during a time of a lack of UK workers so British jobs were unlikely to have been displaced. A report

published at the same time by the independent National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) stated categorically that there was “no association” between higher immigration and joblessness. Neither the Daily Express nor any other tabloid paper mentioned the NIESR report.

Executive Pay

The following statement on executive pay was presented to the House of Commons on 24 January by the Business Secretary Vince Cable. Readers can judge for themselves whether it will make any difference to the current position, but a slight clue was given by the CBI and key business figures who gave it a guarded welcome. Perhaps St. Vince is not the enemy of greedy capitalists after all.

“Last September, I published papers which explored the issues around the rapid growth in executive pay in our largest listed companies. Yesterday I announced the package of measures that the Government will take forward to tackle this issue on four fronts: Greater transparency; More shareholder power; Reform of remuneration committees; Best practice led by the business and investor community. Through secondary legislation later this year the Government will require companies to publish clearer and more informative information about how executives are being rewarded. This starts with remuneration reports being split into two sections: one detailing the proposed future policy for executive pay; the other setting out how pay policy has been implemented in the preceding year.”

“When outlining future policy, remuneration committees will be expected to explain why they have used specific benchmarks and how they have taken employee earnings - including pay differentials - into account in setting pay. They will have to explain how they have consulted and taken into account the views of employees. Companies will be required to say clearly and succinctly how the proposed pay structures reflect and support company strategy; how performance will be assessed; and how it will translate into rewards under different scenarios. When reporting on pay for the previous year, companies will have to provide a single figure for total pay for

each director and to explain how the pay awards relate to the performance of the company. To provide context, companies will be mandated to produce a distribution statement, outlining how executive pay compares with other dispersals such as dividends, business investment, taxation and general staffing costs.”

“Alongside more information, shareholders need powers to hold the board to account. I will consult shortly on proposals to reform the current voting arrangements and give shareholders a binding vote, enabling them to exert more pressure on boards. The consultation will include the following options: A binding vote on future pay policy, including details of how performance will be judged and real numbers on the potential pay outs directors could receive. Companies will have to include a statement on how they have taken account of shareholder views and the result of the previous votes.

A binding vote on any directors notice period which is longer than one year and on exit payments over one year's salary. Binding votes are more difficult to apply retrospectively because of contractual complications and I will consider an advisory note. The consultation will also look at what level of shareholder support companies should have to get in order to pass pay proposals, and consider raising the threshold for a successful vote to 75% of share votes cast for the motion.

The Government will address fundamental conflicts of interest in the pay-setting process. We will require greater transparency around the role of consultants, how they are appointed and paid, and to whom they report and advise. I will also ask the Financial Reporting Council to amend the UK corporate governance code to put to an end to the practice of serving executives sitting on the remuneration committees of other large companies.”

“This package of measures will create a more robust framework within which executive pay is set and agreed. However, lasting reform depends on active shareholders and responsible business leaders accepting the need for change and pushing the agenda forward. In the following weeks and months I will strongly encourage business and investor groups to build

on the current momentum for reform, agree on what best practice looks like and promote this more widely.”

Most of the above will simply wash over UK business and it isn't surprising that they have given the proposals a guarded welcome. It's difficult to see what difference greater transparency and more shareholder power will make. Simply providing more detailed reasons for pay distribution will not automatically result in lower levels of executive pay. Companies will simply come up with plausible arguments for rewarding directors. And giving shareholders more power suggests that the Government believe shareholders are chomping at the bit to get at the directors. Shareholders are only interested in company performance. If a company performs well, shareholders will be happy. If it performs badly, they will switch allegiance. There is too much exhortation, too much pleading and too much faith in shareholders and business leaders being prepared to accept the need for real change.

A Provisional Nation?

Questions to Northern Ireland Minister Hugo Swire on 25 January relating to the celebrations of HM's Diamond Jubilee coinciding with the Olympics exposed the ignorance of one member of the House of Commons. The particular question concerned visits to constituent parts of the UK. Swire told MPs that, “2012 is the year to visit Northern Ireland, with the launch of ‘Your Time, Our Place’ last week, before returning in 2013 for the UK city of culture.” At this point Glyn Davies, Conservative Member for Montgomeryshire, allowed the exciting prospect of HM's Jubilee to get the better of his historical knowledge when he said, “A visit by Her Majesty the Queen to the devolved nations can be a huge boost to their economies and, indeed, their morale. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is not only one visit, but perhaps more than one visit to Northern Ireland in 2012?” Northern Ireland, a devolved nation?

It's A Fact

At December 2010, the percentage share of female employees in the following professions was (i) Librarians and Related, 69% (ii) Teaching, 68% (iii) Public Service, 58% (iv) Research, 52% (v) Health, 51% (vi) Legal, 43% (vii) Science, 42% (viii) Business & Statistical, 35% (ix) Architects, Town Planners & Surveyors, 14% (x) Information & Communication Technology, 12% (xi) Engineering, 7%. Written Parliamentary Answer 10/1/12.

The total income of the top 10% of taxpayers for 1999-2000 was £175.6 billion. Income tax paid on this was £46.8 billion, at an average rate of 26.7%. In 2010-11, the total income of the top 10% of taxpayers was £305.3 billion. Income tax paid on this was £89.5 billion, at an average rate of 29.3%. The total income of the top 1% of taxpayers for 1999-2000 was £58.5 billion. Income tax paid on this was £19.9 billion, at an average rate of 34%. In 2010-11, the total income of the top 1% of taxpayers was £108.7 billion. Income tax paid on this was £42.7 billion, at an average rate of 39.3%. Written PA. 10/1/12.

Nuclear Energy's share of total UK electricity supply fell from 22.8% in 2001 (Total electricity supply 395,177 GWh, of which nuclear was 90,093 GWh) to 16.2% in 2010 (Total electricity supply 383,791 GWh, of which nuclear was 62,140 GWh). Written PA 10/1/12.

The UK has defence attachés and advisers in 71 countries. A further 74 countries are covered by these attachés and advisers through the process of non-resident accreditation. In 2010-11, the total costs of provision of defence attaché and adviser cover to these countries were £43,623,976 of which £31,828,619 was attaché costs and £11,803,356 Foreign & Commonwealth Office charges for provision of service accommodation. Written PA 10/1/12.

The average amount of debt for those entering bankruptcy has increased by more than fourfold over the last ten years. Between April 2001 and March 2002, the average debt was £54,512. This increased to £235,827 between April 2011 and December 2011. The largest increase in debt, £106,661, occurred be-

tween April 2009 and December 2011; from £130,248 to £235,827. Written PA 23/1/12.

Over the five years 2006-07 to 2010-11, the cost to the UK government of defending the Falkland Islands was £350 million. Costs have increased in each year as follows: 2006-07, £65 million; 2007-08, £67 million; 2008-09, £70 million; 2009-10, £73 million; 2010-11, £75 million. Written PA 24/1/12.

At the end of September 2011 there were 1,163,000 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training. Of these, 222,000 (19.1%) were "work-limited disabled." Written PA 25/1/12.

At 1 December 2011 there were 189,000 full-time UK military personnel. This figure breaks down as follows: Army – 110,460; RAF – 41,580; Naval Service – 36,960. The strategic defence and security review proposed that by 2015 the number of full-time military personnel will be 158,000. Numbers for each service will be: Army – 95,000; RAF – 33,000; Naval Service – 30,000. Written PA 26/1/12.

55% of Syrians Support Assad

55% of Syrians believe that President Assad should not resign, says YouGov poll

In a poll carried out between 14 and 19 December 2011, people across the Arab world, including Syria, were asked:

In your opinion, should Syria's President Assad resign?

55% of the Syrians polled said NO.

The poll was commissioned by The Doha Debates [1] (which is sponsored by the Qatar Foundation [2]) and carried out by YouGov Siraj [3].

David Morrison

One could be forgiven for thinking that YouGov and the people responsible for the Doha Debates were not keen that this remarkable finding should become widely known. In their comments on the poll, both chose to emphasise the overall finding that a majority of Arabs supported President Assad's resignation, while barely mentioning the much more important finding that a majority of the Syrian people, whose views should surely be paramount in this matter, don't want President Assad to resign.

Thus, YouGov's 24-page report on

the poll Syria's President Assad - should he resign? [4] has only one mention of this remarkable finding (at the bottom of page 11) – the report's Executive Summary doesn't mention it all. And an article on the poll on The Doha Debates website is headed Arabs want Syria's President Assad to go - opinion poll [5].

I am not in a position to assess the reliability of the finding that 55% of Syrians don't want President Assad to resign. I would emphasise, however, that YouGov state the finding without qualification on page 11 of their report, saying:

"The vast majority of respondents

(81%) want Syria's President Bashar Al Assad to resign. This is highest in NA [North Africa] – a region that witnessed the biggest number of revolutions and ousting of rulers in the MENA [Middle East North Africa] region over the past year. On the other hand, those in the Levant were not as insistent with almost two-thirds (64%) stating that President Assad should resign.

“Respondents in Syria are more supportive of their president. 55% do not believe Assad should resign vs. 45% wanting him to leave power.”

(*)

The Qatar Foundation is an institution of the Qatari state, which was founded in 1995 by the present Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, shortly after he seized power from his father in 1995, when the latter was on holiday in Switzerland. According to the Foundation's website [6], his wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, is “the organization's chairperson and driving force”.

Qatar has very active in supporting the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya. In March 2011, along with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States, it supported the Arab League resolution for a no-fly zone over Libya, which gave the green light for Western intervention. It also provided 6 Mirage 2000 fighters to the NATO air operation to overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and assisted the anti-Gaddafi forces in a variety of ways, for example, Qatari special forces were on the ground in Libya in the latter stages of the campaign.

Qatar has also been to the fore in supporting Arab League intervention, including military intervention, in Syria, which, according to the YouGov poll, has widespread support in the Arab World as a whole, if not in Syria itself.

References:

- [1] www.thedohadebates.com/
- [2] www.qf.org.qa/
- [3] www.yougovsiraj.com/
- [4] clients.squareeye.net/uploads/doha/polling/YouGovSirajDoha%20Debates-%20President%20Assad%20report

pdf

[5] www.thedohadebates.com/news/item/index.asp?n=14312

[6] www.qf.org.qa/news-center/press-room/faqs

Needs Sectioned?

Kim Jong-il dies, the media sickens in competition to be of mean spirit, the rhetoric of a cold war they inherit, causing their intelligence to thicken.

The *free-world-press* descends as a snowstorm. Cry democracy, those tears from war-cries can burn away the heart of a nation.

A million-army, a nuclear bomb denies rape and mindless, murderous laceration.

The sit in suits, bourgeois language disguises the gangster soul that craves defenestration.

Wilson John Haire

continued from page 18

Jack Jones was enthusiastic about the initiative as a follower of Ernie Bevin.

Griffiths admits his victory was a pyrrhic one “because of the damage done by the Social Contract to the left and labour movement unity”, another odd formulation. The ‘damage’ came from the CP, Ramelson at the forefront, and the Labour ‘left’, Neil Kinnock being very prominent in attacking the Social Contract for not being full-blooded socialism. Robert Griffiths writes, “Ramelson worked tirelessly to help return the labour movement back towards free collective bargaining and the wages struggle”. Or to put it another way, ‘management’s right to manage’. Industrial workers could only be passive spectators of the management of their livelihoods.

Griffiths claims the Social Contract debacle sowed “...the seeds of Thatcher’s victory in 1979”. Implying that the Labour movement was too enfeebled to respond to her reordering of relations between government, management and workers. But Thatcher was very cautious in her first administration. It was after her victory (over Scargill’s disastrously conducted 1984 mine workers strike, rather than even the Falklands) that she purged the Heathite ‘wets’ and ‘one nation’ Tories. She went on an ‘anti-statist’ binge, privatising state-run industries, allowing them to disintegrate or be bought by anyone with enough ready money (or compliant bank). This led to the situation in the UK at present where industry is very low-priority (for the Government) and high (or if you are inclined to moralism - low) finance is the major money-making industry.

It may seem absurd to accuse one man for this situation, and of course, Bert Ramelson was not a villain. He was an important member of a small (but very influential) political formation. He was the crucial element in the interface between the CP, the unions, and the Labour Party. As Griffiths very nearly acknowledges, the strategy pursued by the Communist Party, and dutifully carried out by Ramelson (and Scargill, helped by the ‘useful fool’ Kinnock, among others) was disastrous for the trade unions, the labour movement at large, and conceivably for the whole UK economy.