

# Labour & Trade Union Review

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## A Thistle In The Side

Last month's local elections in England, and the elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, exposed the extent to which voters hold the Liberal Democrats in contempt. Unfairly or not, they are being punished, not for forming a coalition with the Tories - polls show that voters prefer politicians to work together - but for broken promises on key issues, such as tuition fees. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg is the particular focus of voter hostility. From being the voter's pin-up during the pre-election TV debates, he has become their *bête noire*. Oddly, the popularity of Business Secretary, and fellow Liberal Democrat, Vince Cable, who was a vocal advocate of a substantial increase in tuition fees, has soared rather than waned.

It is obvious to anyone with an eye on the political scene that the Tories are using the Liberal Democrats as a cover for their right-wing agenda. The Liberal Democrats claim that their presence in the coalition is helping to ameliorate Tory policy in areas such as public spending, education and the NHS, and that they are encouraging Cameron to adopt a more sympathetic position on quintessentially liberal values like individual liberty and human rights. But such values cut little ice with the voters who are, at best, indifferent to a more liberal, open and tolerant society.

It is, of course, early days. We are just one year into the coalition, and the cuts are only now beginning to take effect. But a year from now the picture could look very different. As the next twelve months unfold, we could see a change in the fortunes of the Liberal Democrats, but only if they adopt a more critical attitude to what are clearly Tory policies; and if, and it's a big if, the voters then cotton on to the fact that the Tories, not the Liberal Democrats, are primarily responsible for their worsening plight.

So far, Cameron and Osborne have been successful in persuading voters that the recession is entirely due to Labour's

economic mismanagement. And that deep cuts are necessary to return the economy to health and get it back on the road to recovery and prosperity. To their shame, Labour have failed abysmally to challenge them on this. Miliband and Balls have so far shown themselves to be incapable of defending Labour's economic record and of developing a coherent alternative to the coalition cuts agenda, differing only slightly about the depth and timing.

This may be due to a private admission of guilt: some coalition policies are simply an extension of Labour's under Blair and Brown. The NHS being a striking example. It is why Labour's opposition to the NHS reforms has been decidedly lukewarm. However, it may also be due to the fact that Labour don't have a clue what the alternative should be. Consequently, Miliband has latched himself onto Blue Labour, an amorphous group of individuals, aiming to win back Labour's lost, mainly working class, voters, with a bizarre mix of socially conservative and economically radical policies.

May's election results showed that Labour has a lot of catching up to do if they are to attract enough support to form a government at the next general election, scheduled for 2015. In England they gained 800 council seats, at first glance a decent performance, but they expected to exceed 1,000. Labour polled well in the north, regaining from the Liberal Democrats, Chesterfield, Liverpool, Newcastle and Sheffield, but south of The Wash the country is a giant field of blue. In Wales, Labour won 4 extra Welsh Assembly seats; insufficient to give them a clear majority. With 30 of the 60 seats in the Assembly, they can only govern with the support of Plaid Cymru, the third largest party with 11 seats. The Tories are the second largest with 14 seats, an increase of 2.

But it was Scottish voters who gave Labour the thumbs down. The SNP is now firmly in control in Scotland, with 69 of the 129 Scottish Parliament seats, overturning in the process Labour majorities in key Westminster seats in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Admittedly, the Liberal Democrats were virtually wiped out, losing 12 of the 17 seats they held. However, Labour needs to poll well in Scotland to obtain a majority at Westminster, and on current trends this is unlikely to happen. Continu-

ing SNP support in Scotland could spell the end for Labour.

The most optimistic take for Labour on the Scottish results is that disillusioned Liberal Democrat and Tory voters - the Tories lost 5 of the 20 seats they held - switched in large numbers to the SNP. Some Labour voters may also have gone over to the Scot Nats. However, Labour shouldn't take comfort from such a scenario. They still have to win back their lost voters and not rely on Liberal Democrat and Tory voters returning to their respective camps. But the elephant in the room for all three parties is the SNP. In Alex Salmond the Scot Nats have the most astute politician in Britain. He has developed the SNP into one of the most powerful forces in British politics.

The SNP are now in a position to introduce a referendum Bill on Scottish independence, though this is unlikely to happen in the very near future. In the meantime, they could use their strength in Scotland to extract concessions, including the devolvement of economic powers to Scotland, from the Government at Westminster. Salmond was at Downing Street recently for talks on this. The post-meeting interviews suggested that he had gained little - though earlier Cameron had agreed to allow Scotland to borrow £300 million annually to assist the Scottish economy - but nevertheless Salmond expressed confidence that progress could be made.

But do the Scots want independence? A 14 May poll for the Sunday Mirror and Independent on Sunday showed that 38% of people in Scotland support an independent Scotland, but 46% are opposed. In the immediate euphoria of the SNP's victory, these figures hardly suggest overwhelming enthusiasm for independence. Polls can change, of course, and support for independence may grow over the coming months. But Scots are canny folk. They may wish to give the national parties a good kicking by voting for their own Scottish party, but they understand that independence could be a step too far. And who wants to move Hadrian's Wall 30 miles or more further north?

## The Day The Dream Died

They had hope, those  
Afro-Americans.

Radical whites, in  
their naivety,

saw human and civil  
rights as equity.

White supremacy,  
protest Rubicon.

A black president  
and his family,

voted for, and installed  
in the White House.

His politics quickly  
turned inside-out,

managing to sound-  
off mere homilies.

Did you not learn  
from J.F. Kennedy,

Irish-American  
Catholic, or black,

must also sing that  
manic rhapsody.

They fought for the right  
to invade and hack,

the rich richer, poor  
poorer perfidy.

That Yellow-Brick-Road  
was a cul-de-sac.

Wilson John Haire.  
11<sup>th</sup> May, 2011

## The Labour & Trade Union Review

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# Revolting Reds

Some former Reds have told us they no longer subscribe to their former ideas. Nick Cohen's (Observer, 06.02.11), Marxism — without the body count, is a review of Eric Hobsbawm's, *How to change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism*. Cohen, in part of a sub-heading claims Hobsbawm's "...whitewashing of the USSR remains unforgivable".

On first visiting the USSR Hobsbawm discovered Communist theory and practice were at odds. The place was "still bleeding from Stalin's last purge". That may well be accurate. But hadn't there been a clash between Stalinism and Fascism. The Nazi Realm's armed forces, those of their European allies, and volunteer armies from every 'occupied' land — and Spain, invaded in July 1941.

They intended to lay the USSR waste. The Nazis regarded most of the peoples of the place (including black-haired, black-eyed, olive-complexioned Georgians) as sub-humans, fit for extermination, or helotry. That is why over 20 million Soviet citizens died. It is disingenuous for Cohen to write as if this was inconsequential. And as if the USSR was not due (possibly backhanded) compliments for making good their losses in terms of plant, if obviously not in personnel, in record time.

"Eric" was looking in the wrong place. It is not stated where he was looking. "If he had gone to Siberia, alongside the corpses of "anti-Soviet" Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Chechens, Tartars and Poles, of tsarists, kulaks, Mensheviks and social revolutionaries", (the SRs, were a political party - L&TUR), Hobsbawm would have found "the bodies of communist intellectuals — just like him".

Stalin, (like Lenin, and like Trotsky) put many opponents in prison. What does Nick Cohen think ought to have happened to them? In 1917 Stalin thought the Bolsheviks would take their place in a bourgeois parliament like Britain's Independent Labour Party. Lenin decided Russia's Empire should be a one-party state. That's why the prisons (and trains and boats out of Russia) were full of the political opposition. Many 'anti-Soviet' nationalists in the (post-WW2) Gulag had taken up arms against the USSR, alongside

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S McGouran

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the Nazis. Nazism was ground into the dust by the peoples of the Soviet Union in arms, not by Bolshevik conniving.

Innocents suffered in the clearing-up after the war. The 'Western allies' weren't genteel with their enemies. The UK executed both Lords Haw-Haw, the double-barrelled Scottish aristo, and the American-Irish William Joyce. What was done to many German ex-service personnel doesn't bear thinking about. German civilians were maltreated until the Cold War 'broke out' in earnest. 'Western' intellectuals put a gloss on their 'own' rulers' behaviour.

The lapsed Trotskyist, born-again Zionist, Nick Cohen puts a shine on one of the British Empire's worst examples of bad faith — Israel. It was double-edged bad faith. The Zionists were encouraged (for anti-Semitic reasons) to form a 'little loyal Ulster' in the Middle East. It would get the Jews out of the way and make 'world Jewry', an element sustaining the Empire. The Jews regarded by the 'scientific' racists running the Empire to be on nearly the same plane as themselves could be trusted to keep the lowly Arabs down.

Cohen denounces Hobsbawm for euphemising "the merciless terror of socialism in its Soviet, Chinese, Korean and Cambodian forms", his readers, are assumed to be in tune with this. Cohen rants at the Soviets allying with Hitler's Germany. It is stated in 'true-Brit' fashion as if 'Russia' was morally obliged to fight the City of London's wars.

The USSR spent years trying to ally with the UK and France, who stonewalled. Berlin offered, by telephone, a non-aggression treaty and within hours sent representatives, by plane to negotiate it. What is Cohen charging the USSR with? Did its government not have a prime duty to its citizens? His default position is that the Communists killed people whimsically. They are responsible for all the deaths between 1917 and 1989. Including the mass starvations of the 1920s. The latter were caused by Ukrainian kulaks, (about whose fate he waxes indignant), eating their livestock and its feed. It includes the huge numbers killed in the course of the war on (mostly) the soil of the USSR.

Cohen agrees with some of Hobsbawm's notions. "[T]he only public figure" in the last 25 years to denounce capitalism "unhesitatingly" was "Pope John Paul II". The "crash of 2008" has put an end to Manchester Liberalism (is this wishful thinking?).

Christopher Hitchens's anger (Guardian G2 01.02.11 - Unspeakable truths) is aimed at Churchill portrayed in The King's Speech as an ally of 'Bertie' (George VI). He was "a consistent friend of conceited, spoiled, Hitler-sympathising Edward VIII". Edward (Duke of Windsor) was a "pro-Nazi playboy", with Mosleyite mates. When the Duke and his wife (Wallis Simpson, as was) visited Germany they gave and received the Hitler salute.

How outrageous was that in the late 1930s? Royalty were unlikely to lean towards Bolshevism, which had a brisk way with them. By 1937 the Nazis had turned Germany's fortunes around. Vanquished (at the Versailles 'peace' conference, not in battle) Germany had become an acknowledged Power. The regime, despite the 'Socialism' in the party's title (and a yen for 'National Bolshevism' in some members) was frantically anti-Bolshevik.

That partly explains "Neville Chamberlain's collusion with European fascism". They had beaten the Bolsheviks off the streets and put them into concentration camps. (The generation then ruling the UK knew about concentration camps). "Bertie" is implicated in 'appeasement', Hitchens quotes "Tory historian Andrew Roberts" quoting "fellow scholar John Grigg". George VI acted non-constitutionally in publicly congratulating Chamberlain on his return from the "Munich sell-out". None of them say what 'constitution'. British intellectuals used to boast that it hadn't a 'written constitution'. The constitution was what the House of Commons (effectively the leader of the ruling party) thought it was.

This slandering of an effective bourgeois politician hides the fact that after Munich Chamberlain was probably the most popular PM. He bought time for rearmament (which, in history as written by Hitchens and Roberts, took place of its own volition).

Continued on page 7

# Froggy

## News From Across The Channel

DSK

A French person's gut reaction to the events of 14 May in New York was that, to be treated in such a vindictive manner, Dominique Strauss-Kahn must have seriously annoyed some seriously powerful people. The common assumption is that, barring day light murder, high ranking personalities are protected from the consequences of their actions; the police does not act quite as swiftly, if at all, the press does not get notified, and in the worst cases, at the very least, bail is given. That this did not happen in this case smacks of covert punishment, in other words, DSK is being punished not for what he is alleged to have done, but for something far more serious, where his adversaries are not a hotel cleaner, but the most powerful in the world.

The second reaction is that this is an insult to France. DSK was the favourite to win next year's presidential elections in France. He almost represented France. His humiliation is France's humiliation.

### DSK and the press.

Did these gut reactions find expression in the French media? Only partially and indirectly.

On the question of covert punishment, newspapers and radio stations said that the photos of the "perpetrator walk" were hard to bear for the French public, but none suggested that DSK had been set up. Since the feeling existed in the country, they had to acknowledge it, so, without commenting, they reported that 57% of French people believed he had been set up.

On the question of national humiliation, the Socialist Party did not want to say that France had been humiliated; that was left to members of the ruling party, the UMP, who were happy to say it since in their eyes DSK is responsible for this humiliation. Bernard Debré said that the arrest was a humiliation and an affront to the honour of France.

### Attacks on the French press

A Times leading article said "In the dock, the head of the IMF and the French press culture of silence". The French press is accused of letting DSK and people like him get away with disgraceful behaviour; if they had exposed him sooner, this alleged crime would not have happened, goes the argument. This argument does not stand up. Journalists have come out, saying they knew he was unfaithful on a grand scale; none have accused him of using violence. Besides, DSK has lived in the US for the past four years, could he not have been denounced during that time by the US media?

Unfortunately, some French commentators have taken to heart this Anglo-Saxon charge, and think that from now on, the French press should follow the American and British media and expose the sex lives of famous people. They congratulate the Anglo-Saxons for their culture of openness and transparency and castigate themselves for their culture of silence, which is based on a despicable "Mediterranean" machismo and a light hearted approach to sex. They seem to forget that this so-called cultural difference is in fact a recent development. The press was discreet about the behaviour of Kennedy in the sixties, for example.

Following the Americans in this respect would have deleterious consequences. Allowing the press to invade private life is to give the owners of newspapers and radio and television stations enormous power, power that is of course unelected, unaccountable, in a word, undemocratic. Powerful men who have affairs or avail themselves of prostitutes then of necessity must belong to a club of sexual strayers, a club they can never leave for fear of being exposed; they must stick together and not change their line; any political straying, any act that displeases the media magnates will mean the end of their career. So long as they don't rock the boat, they have an immunity from public exposure; but owners

of brothels can appear on television and say "So and so is one of my clients"; one such appeared in the film *Inside Job* about the 2008 financial crisis and said many high ranking bankers were clients, without giving names. Discretion is maintained. But in case of dissidence, immunity will be lifted.

The media meanwhile pose as puritans and guardians of the nation's morality.

### The French Communist Party's attitude

The French Communist Party pointed out, in the pages of *l'Humanité*, that DSK was the candidate of the media.

It is the case that he was the favourite according to opinion polls, even though he had been away from the country for nearly four years and has not campaigned or made speeches in France, or has any media outlet campaigning for him. How did he become such a favourite? He was polled to win the presidential election in 2012 as a Socialist candidate, before the political programme was published or debated on publicly. What did the French public know about his economic ideas?

The Communist Party points out rightly that it is personality, not politics, that forms the basis of voting preferences. They call for a discussion of programmes, not the replacement of one providential champion by a new one, for example Francois Hollande, of which we know mainly that he is Segolene Royal's ex-partner and that he has changed his image recently, lost weight etc. Where does he stand on tax exemptions for the rich? It's not easy to find out. That's not the interesting bit.

### DSK on the Internet.

The Internet is the place where anything can be said, however crazy. Therefore any mention of a trap for DSK on the Internet can be dismissed as nonsense. Nevertheless, it is also the place where minority

opinions, in touch with reality and quoting from the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Irish Times*, can validly be expressed.

An early exponent of the idea that DSK was trapped was Mike Whitney (May 15, 2011 "Information Clearing House") writing on the site Global research.ca, Centre for Research on Globalisation. According to him DSK had signed his own death warrant by his positions on the economy:

"Strauss-Kahn had recently broke-free from the "party line" and was changing the direction of the IMF. His road to Damascus conversion was championed by progressive economist Joseph Stiglitz in a recent article titled "The IMF's Switch in Time". Here's an excerpt:

"The annual spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund was notable in marking the Fund's effort to distance itself from its own long-standing tenets on capital controls and labor-market flexibility. It appears that a new IMF has gradually, and cautiously, emerged under the leadership of Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Slightly more than 13 years earlier, at the IMF's Hong Kong meeting in 1997, the Fund had attempted to amend its charter in order to gain more leeway to push countries towards capital-market liberalization. The timing could not have been worse: the East Asia crisis was just brewing, a crisis that was largely the result of capital-market liberalization in a region that, given its high savings rate, had no need for it.

That push had been advocated by Western financial markets, and the Western finance ministries that serve them so loyally. Financial deregulation in the United States was a prime cause of the global crisis that erupted in 2008, and financial and capital-market liberalization elsewhere helped spread that made in the USA trauma around the world....The crisis showed that free and unfettered markets are neither efficient nor stable." ("The IMF's Switch in Time", Joseph Stiglitz, Project Syndicate)

"Strauss-Kahn is proving himself a sagacious leader of the IMF.... As Strauss-Kahn concluded in his speech to the Brookings Institution shortly before the Fund's recent meeting: "Ultimately, employment and equity are building blocks

of economic stability and prosperity, of political stability and peace. This goes to the heart of the IMF's mandate. It must be placed at the heart of the policy agenda. "

So, now the IMF is going to be an agent for the redistribution of wealth.... (for) "strengthening collective bargaining, restructuring mortgages, restructuring tax and spending policies to stimulate the economy now through long-term investments, and implementing social policies that ensure opportunity for all" (according to Stiglitz)

And further:

In an article today [15/5/11] in the *Washington Post*, Howard Schneider writes that after the 2008 crash led toward regulation again of financial companies and government involvement in the economy, for Strauss-Kahn the job is only half done, as he has been leading the fund through a fundamental rethinking of its economic theory. In recent remarks, he has provided a broad summary of the conclusions:

State regulation of markets needs to be more extensive; global policies need to create a more even distribution of income; central banks need to do more to prevent lending and asset prices from expanding too fast. 'The pendulum will swing from the market to the state,' Strauss-Kahn said in an address at George Washington University last week. 'Globalization has delivered a lot ... but it also has a dark side, a large and growing chasm between the rich and the poor. Clearly we need a new form of globalization' to prevent the 'invisible hand' of loosely regulated markets from becoming 'an invisible fist.'" (Link---<http://wcampaign.org/issue.php?mid=625&v=y>).

In another article on the same site Mike Whitney asks "Was Dominique Strauss-Kahn Trying to Torpedo the Dollar?", basing the question on information gathered from *The Daily Telegraph* [10/2/11].

"Dominique Strauss-Kahn, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, has called for a new world currency that would challenge the dominance of the dollar and protect against future financial instability...."

He suggested adding emerging market countries' currencies, such as the yuan, to

a basket of currencies that the IMF administrators could add stability to the global system....Strauss-Kahn saw a greater role for the IMF's Special Drawing Rights, (SDRs) which is currently composed of the dollar, sterling, euro and yen, over time but said it will take a great deal of international cooperation to make that work." ("International Monetary Fund director Dominique Strauss-Kahn calls for new world currency", *UK Telegraph*).

Whitney gives further quotes from the media on the subject of the IMF and the dollar and later in the article goes on to explain the IMF's recent positive role in Ireland:

[DSK] intervened on behalf of Irish taxpayers, trying to protect them at the expense of foreign bondholders. That's a big "No no" in banker's world. They keep a list of "people who count", and taxpayers are not on that list. Here's an excerpt from the *Irish Times*:

"Ireland's Last Stand began less shamefully than you might expect. The IMF, which believes that lenders should pay for their stupidity before it has to reach into its pocket, presented the Irish with a plan to haircut €30 billion of unguaranteed bonds by two-thirds on average. (Irish finance minister) Lenihan was overjoyed, according to a source who was there, telling the IMF team: "You are Ireland's salvation."

The deal was torpedoed from an unexpected direction. At a conference call with the G7 finance ministers, the haircut was vetoed by US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner who, as his payment of \$13 billion from government-owned AIG to Goldman Sachs showed, believes that bankers take priority over taxpayers. The only one to speak up for the Irish was UK chancellor George Osborne, but Geithner, as always, got his way. An instructive, if painful, lesson in the extent of US soft power, and in who our friends really are.

The negotiations went downhill from there. On one side was the European Central Bank, unabashedly representing Ireland's creditors and insisting on full repayment of bank bonds. On the other was the IMF, arguing that Irish taxpayers would be doing well to balance their government's books, let alone repay the losses of private banks." ("Ireland's future depends on

breaking free from bailout”, Morgan Kelly, *Irish Times*).

### **DSK and the Communist Party USA**

Finally, Emile Schepers in *People's World*, the paper of Communist Party USA, gives a very clear account of the IMF and DSK's role in it:

“The IMF and World Bank were established in 1944 as a result of an international conference at Bretton Woods, N.H. The IMF eventually became a major source of development aid, especially for poorer countries.

However, the IMF has always, by design, been dominated by wealthy European countries plus the United States. Votes on the IMF governing board are allotted on the basis of the size of the economies of the member countries (most countries in the world), rather than the size of their populations.

Thus France, with its population of 62 million, has 107,635 votes, while India with a population of nearly 1.2 billion, has only 58,832 votes. Moreover, major decisions require an 85 percent majority, further strengthening the Euro-American hegemony.

This, along with the “tradition” that the head of the IMF must be a European, has meant that the IMF has acted as an instrument of the interests of the ruling classes of the wealthy imperialist countries. Especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and the other European socialist states, poor countries have been caught between having to accept IMF and World Bank dictated “structural adjustment” policies, or forgoing help.

Structural adjustment means that in order to get loans from the World Bank and development aid from the IMF, countries have to open themselves up to bogus free trade, privatize their state enterprises and many services, and cut public budgets to the bone. This has led to an impoverishment of wide sectors of the populations of already poor countries, and serious damage to health care, education and other public services.

A very small number of countries have

simply refused to cooperate with these policies. Most notably, Argentina thumbed its nose at “structural adjustment,” and has been better off for doing so. But few have dared to imitate that example.

There have been many attempts to find ways to end reliance of poor countries on the Bretton Woods organizations. The integration attempts in Latin America, including the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America, UNASUR and MERCOSUR, have sought to better coordinate regional aid and development resources.

And recently, the rise of the BRICS group of countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as a powerful economic bloc has shown signs of being a game-changer, even as some crisis-wracked European countries look to the IMF for help.

The BRICS countries have been pushing within the IMF to change the way it does business, and to some small extent, Strauss-Kahn was open to this. For example, he was willing to reconsider the dominant role of the U.S. dollar.

But now all this is up in the air. American corporate economist Joseph Lipsky has replaced Strauss-Kahn on an interim basis. The international media are pushing the idea of French Economics Minister (and IMF governing board member) Christine Lagarde to permanently replace Strauss-Kahn.

As a member of Sarkozy's conservative government, she would be likely to promote the status quo. On the other hand, the BRICS countries and other poorer states are calling for an open process in which the “traditional” selection of a conservative European figure is set aside, giving them a chance to push for fundamental changes.”

### **Another suicide at France Telecom**

The SP Manifesto mentions in several places employee harassment, and false ideas of good performance, like thinking that putting employees under pressure makes them more productive. This had been talked about in France in particular in connexion with suicides at work of employees of France Telecom. It was denied that Telecom employees committing suicide at

their place of work had anything to do with work. If anything, the company's work force had a suicide rate lower than the rest of the population, according to a report on the radio.

“The cultural and organisational changes required by the move from French public monopoly to a competitive multinational were bound to cause stress.” said the BBC (12/11/09). In Britain people are used to ‘restructurations’, redundancies, transfers, targets and other ‘tough management methods’ but it is slightly easier to bear if the notion of personal attachment to a firm, and one's place in it, is absent, as it is in Britain more often than in France.

In 2004 France Telecom (now France Telecom Orange) was finally completely privatised and a policy was put in place aimed at 22 000 employees leaving in 3 years, but not by being made redundant. The employee who set fire to himself in the firm's car park (27/4/11) had been subjected to the sort of policies employed to achieve this; his post had been cut, and he had been transferred to another plant, but, for the next 10 years, not offered a permanent post, or employed in posts at the same level as his previous post. The uncertainty led him to sell his house. In the past 6 months he had been Health and Safety officer in a Telecom call centre. He actually committed suicide in the place where he had worked previously.

The thirty suicides, although link between work and suicide had been denied, led to a change in personnel and an end to forced transfers. The new Managing Director symbolically classed one suicide as ‘work related death’, symbolically because it was against the ‘evidence’ i.e. the opinion of Inspectors and without the signature of the CEO.

The Socialist Party Manifesto is ambiguous on this sort of situation, since it tells us not to expect to keep the same job for life and at the same time it tells us that employees must be valued and secure throughout their working life. How would the Socialist Party deal with France Telecom-Orange? It is a huge organisation that has taken over any number of foreign mobile phone companies; its success is not predicated on making its employees feel valued and secure.

# Whigicide?

## Liberals are History (?)

An aspect of the UK's May elections was the comparatively sudden death of the Liberal Party in Scotland. The Lib-Dems (Liberal Democrats, so called after the marriage of convenience between the ancient Liberal / Whig Party and the SDP) were wiped out in Scotland. The SDP (Social Democrat Party) founded by the 'Gang of Four' in 1981 broke from Labour towards 'moderation'. Some were so moderate they joined the Conservatives under John Major.

The SDP was quite successful in Scotland. Roy Jenkins won Glasgow, Hillhead, in a by-election in 1982, (retaken for Labour in the 1987 General Election by one George Galloway). Charles Kennedy took a former Whig seat, (Ross, Cromarty and Skye) when he was 23. SDP founder Dr. David Owen claimed Kennedy ran scared of the Liberals in his constituency. Which, 'Dr. Death' claimed, was why Kennedy favoured the fusion of the parties in 1988. (Owen led the 'continuing' SDP, which now has six Councillors.)

The new name was the Liberal Demo-

crats ('LibDems' - the exclusion of 'social' must have some implications). From 1999 to 2006 Kennedy was LibDem leader. Its parliamentary representation rose from 23 to 62. Despite this, from the 2005 General Election campaign, there was a whispering campaign against Kennedy. (He was accused of being too amiable, 'laid back' and fond of appearing on television. But the killer accusation was that he had 'a drink problem'. In 2006 Kennedy owned-up to alcoholism, and was unceremoniously dumped by the Party.)

Kennedy's controlled his 'problem' reasonably well. Every other British 'Prime Minister' has been a lush. Walpole, the first PM like most men of his class and period, probably got through several bottles of port or sherry a day. Pitt the Younger did too, Asquith and Churchill hardly need mentioning. Booze seems a help rather than a hindrance at the top of British politics.

Kennedy's successor, Menzies ('Ming') Campbell, was victim of similar plotting by MPs and Party officers, being allegedly too old for the job. He was replaced by the glowing youth, Nick Clegg. Clegg joined with the Conservatives in a coalition government. The LibDems could, in the manner of Irish coalitions, have constituted the tail wagging the dog. It slavishly did everything it was

told by the Conservatives (mostly Clegg's doing, his only examples of leadership has been slapping-down rebellious MPs, Vince Cable (and Charles Kennedy) among them.

This is part of the background to the Liberal meltdown. Apart from distaste for coalition Thatcherism, the treatment of (Scottish) Party leaders, and smug reliance on support in Scotland, are factors in the demise of Liberalism. Scotland was Liberalism's last stronghold (Wales and Cornwall produced Liberal MPs, but England, for generations, was a Liberal-free zone). England may well return to being a Liberal-free zone. Why have lily-livered Thatcherites when you can have the real, full-blooded, article?

Liberalism may never recover in Scotland, there are a few (Holyrood) seats along the Anglo-Scottish border, in Orkney, and in the seriously posh bit of Edinburgh — they may be lost when the current incumbents retire. It is interesting to speculate what will happen to the LibDems. Cable and Kennedy, and others straining at the Coalition lash-up are mostly ex-SDP. But given the slaughter in Scotland and the in the local government elections in England, the LibDems may be 'history' before they manage a split.

S McGouran

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Neville inherited elements of his father, 'Radical Joe' Chamberlain's politics, that the Empire content itself with what it had post-Boer War, and dominate the planet with the USA and Germany. There was a racist strain in this, there was a racist strain in the politics of the 'advanced world' at that time, 'scientific' racism was not confined to Germany.

German culture centred on Vienna, capital of a multi-national, polyglot, empire that had Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox, as well as Roman Catholic citizens, came rather late to racism. There was a touch, in Chamberlain's diplomacy, which he did not impose on his Cabinet, of the old balance of power, standby. It was hoped that the Nazis would do to the Bolsheviks in Moscow what

they'd done to the Bolsheviks at home.

Churchill was a 'balance of power' man, and a Liberal Imperialist who helped monger the Great War. Despite Hitchens's implication, Churchill didn't give a rap about Czechoslovakia. Hitchens writes that Chamberlain gave "his friend Hitler the majority of the Czechoslovak people", and "that country's vast munitions factories". Slovakia became independent when a Protectorate was established over the Czechs, who had discriminated against them, and the Germans, Hungarians and Ukrainians. Like 're-arming' the UK the 'vast munitions factories' are simply unremarkable. Czechoslovakia was a substantial military power that surrendered without a shot, because it was anti-Bolshevik.

Hitchens quotes a letter from Churchill to Windsor, his style was "empty and bombastic" when he was wrong, he opposed the "twin menaces of Hitler and Gandhi". He nearly destroyed the anti-appeasement lobby with the "resonant name of Arms and the Covenant". ('Resonant' is pleasing, wouldn't 'fascistic' do?) Hitchens quotes Andrew Roberts in an attack on Churchill's reputation. As Brendan Clifford has written in the Review, the British Left seems more in thrall to the Churchill myth than the Right (Roberts is of the toxic Right). It's time the Left liberated itself from infatuation with the old thespian. That's how Attlee and Bevin perceived him, he was up-stage sprouting, while they did the important work.

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# Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

## Pure As New York Snow

You don't need to view Dominique Strauss-Kahn as an innocent to see the whole handling of the case as remarkably fishy. A man of 62 with no criminal record and no history of fighting other men does not need to be handcuffed, as he was. Nor is there any logic to sending him to a maximum-security prison: that sounds like harassment. Putting him on 'suicide watch' also sounds like harassment.

Another curious detail: the man had phoned the hotel to ask about his missing mobile phone. He then told them that he was at the airport, and without this he would probably have been out of US jurisdiction before any arrest could have been made.[B] First reports suggested he was acting like a fugitive, but this now seems untrue.

While he was jailed but still head of the IMF, I wondered why he could not be put under house arrest, or some other form of civilised confinement. Remarkably, this has now happened – but only after he decided to resign. That looks highly political: someone was out to get him. And it seems he was on the moderate wing of the international financial community that has been scooping up wealth and damaging the Western economy since the 1980s.

“The big picture is probably much more impactful on French politics and President Sarkozy than on the global economy, writes Channel 4 News Economics Editor Faisal Islam.

“He's a credible candidate from the Socialist Party to beat Sarkozy, and Sarkozy regularly manoeuvres to try to limit his popularity in France.

“However, you did see his influence after the economic crisis. For example, after the Lehman Brothers crash, really for the first time the IMF talked about using fiscal policy to pump-prime the economy.

“The IMF is also far less doctrinaire about what became known as the 'Washington consensus' on economics - free markets, unrestricted capital markets, privatisations etcetera.

“As countries like Brazil, India and China have asserted their financial power, Strauss-Kahn has adapted the modus operandi of the IMF away from its US Treasury roots.

“If he had announced a bid for the French presidency, he was probably would have been a few months away from leaving the IMF in any events.

“But it does focus minds on the debate over his succession, and it has been typical to carve up the IMF job for Europe whilst the World Bank President is an American. This arrangement is unsustainable, given the change in the balance of financial power.” [A]

Are such differences important enough to justify a 'honey trap'? Or was it a quick improvisation after some unexpected incident that was noticed by detectives or secret service people keeping an eye on him? In the West and especially in the USA, whatever once existed by way of an old-fashioned sense of honour has faded. Nothing much has replaced it in mainstream culture. Various 'alternative values' have so far failed to flourish: that was the success of Reagan and Thatcher. Perhaps they also believed their line of patter about restoring older values, or at least Thatcher probably meant it, though she also associated with a lot of doubtful characters, most notably Jeffrey Archer. Regardless, what you have now in the USA is a bunch of dirty little cheats with a line of sanctimonious patter that is a neat defence against morality

But that doesn't mean the whole thing was staged or invented. True, Mr Strauss-Kahn is rich enough to hire prostitutes, but for some men it is a point of pride to have 'conquests': paying for sex with a regular sex-worker does not count. And we already know that he was in the habit of harassing females.

He may also have been in a bad mood. He might have been in New York on some secret negotiation that did not go well: he is more normally in Washington. When he got the job – back in 2007 – it must have seemed a prize. Since then almost everything has gone wrong and he must be under a lot of pressure. Rape is just as often about power as sex, and since he was a rich man it would make sense as an act of power for someone who must be getting very frustrated at balancing rival financial demands in a vast and chaotic global economy dominated by greedy fools who understand little outside of their own area of expertise. For a frustrated man to take it out on some innocent woman would be all too typical.

It's not hard to construct a hypothetical chain of events that would fit the known facts. The chambermaid knocks to see if the guest has gone, Strauss-Kahn is in the shower and does not hear. He comes out, grabs her, does something sexual. Then pays her off: at the time she appears to have accepted. Then maybe someone persuades her to take it up: the police are encouraging. That would explain the odd contradictions in what's been reported so far.



We may have to wait till the trial to get the facts clear. If indeed there is a trial: I would be less than astonished if the issue somehow vanished and Mr Strauss-Kahn walked free after his main financial and political significance had ended. And I'm still hoping it ends the man's political career, as well as generating a lot of ill-will between the USA and France: just what we need now. I'd sooner the clowns of the New Right had another real crash rather than the soft-landing that Strauss-Kahn seems to have been arguing for.

### **Elections: Canada**

The recent General Election in Canada saw the Conservatives finally get an overall majority. This has been widely reported. But what may be more significant is that it also saw the Canadian Liberals collapse and be replaced by left-wing New Democrats. The Liberals fell from 77 seats to 34: the New Democrats rose from 37 to 103.

There has been talk about New Democrats working with the Canadian Liberals. It would be amazingly foolish of them to do this. They should view the Liberals as enemies, rivals whom they could hope to eliminate. The centre-right is bound to exist in some form or other, so the Conservatives are merely opponents, and likely to lose the next election if they fail to make an impact on the continuing decline of the Atlantic nations. And Canada has a First Past The Post electoral system, meaning that the two main parties are likely to squeeze out any rivals.

The election also hit the Bloc Quebecois, which is a broad front for Quebec's French-speaking separatists. They crashed from 47 seats to 4. Remarkably, the New Democrats largely replaced them, despite having previously always been weak in Quebec. Politics within Quebec has been mostly split between the left-wing Parti Quebecois and the Liberals. If the Canadian Liberals collapse, that might strengthen the Quebec Nationalists. Quebec's branch of the

Liberals has been either the government or the main opposition in the province for a long time.

### **Elections: Singapore**

In Singapore, the ruling party got five times as many votes as its nearest rival. The British media mostly reported this as a significant weakening: they only got 60% as against 40% for six main opposition parties. Since Singapore too has First Past The Post, they got most of the seats.

The most successful opposition party is the Workers' Party of Singapore, centre-left and featuring a tasteful yellow hammer on a red background as its logo. Its main idea is that Singapore, with its 'First World' economy, ought to have a 'First World Parliament', i.e. one in which there are several alternative parties of government. That strikes me as rather a weak argument: Europe is able to live with multi-party systems because it had an existing political culture in which most people would accept the outcome of elections as final. Also no European country has had the economic success of Singapore. France, West Germany and Italy had their best growth ever when the Christian Democrats were a permanent governing party in West Germany and Italy and France was given strong coherent government by De Gaulle. In the same era Japan had great success under unbroken rule of their centre-right Liberal-Democrats. They lost their secure grip on power when their Economic Miracle faltered. But the growth of more complex multi-party politics has not fixed anything.

**Elections: Britain's PR Referendum**  
'First Past the Post' commonly often gives voters a choice between voting for the candidate they most like and voting against the candidate they least want to see elected. It suits the two big parties fine: it inhibits smaller parties and break-away factions. A change would have suited the Liberal-Democrats, but they made a mess of their one big chance.

Somehow the 'pro' campaign failed to get across the matter of choosing be-

tween voting for the candidate you most like and voting against the candidate you least want. PR allows this, but the point got lost. The Tories fought cleverly, making it seem like some baffling mystery. David Cameron put it thus:

"Don't trade in a simple system that everybody understands. I think there's a fairness argument. Under our system, you vote once. Every vote is counted. Under alternative vote, some votes are counted more than once and I think that's wrong. And there's this effectiveness. I mean it may be an odd thing for a Prime Minister to say, but don't give up a system that allows you to chuck out an unpopular government. It was effective in 79. It was effective in 2010. It's a treasure we have to, as they say in America, throw the rascals out. And that may be odd for a Prime Minister to say, but I would strongly recommend a No vote." [J]

Viewing the leading Liberal-Democrats as Liberal-Democrats, they did a very poor deal for their party after the last election. They have demolished and perhaps destroyed the network of local Liberal-Democratic power built up over many years.

But is that the right way to see them? Viewing the top Liberal-Democrats as ambitious individual you might see it differently: they have made themselves part of the global network of Western power and are likely to stay part of it regardless.

Like New Labour, they have accepted that the financial world is the core of wealth in the real world. Not as a imperfect reflection of real material wealth that is created elsewhere. You don't need to be a socialist to understand that the money as such is useless, relevant only as a means to ease the circulation of the goods and services that people actually need. But the authentic traditionalist viewpoint that could see that much has pretty much withered and died, was killed off by the Thatcher – Reagan appropriation of their traditional notions and the redirection of those feelings towards money-worship.

## Elections: Scotland and Wales

Scotland will probably quit the UK in the next generation, whereas Wales will stay. The Scottish Nationalists have emerged as the governing party in Scotland. Sensibly, they are delaying an independence referendum, which polls suggest they would lose if it were held now. If Tory power looks solid in the UK as a whole, quitting will look much more attractive. And the Tories have every reason to help them, if they can do so without being blamed. Subtract Scotland and Labour would find it much harder ever to be re-elected.

Wales is a different case, unfortunately. The Welsh much more like a national minority within England than a coherent nation. The various parts of Wales are linked more closely to adjacent parts of England than to each other. Labour is being trusted to run the devolved government and the Welsh Nationalists have lost ground.

## Elections: West Bengal

One of the last electorally successful Communist Parties has just lost power after 34 years in power. This was the Communist Party of India (Marxist), who in the 1960s were the pro-Chinese wing of Indian Communism. Since then they seem to have lost their way:

“Those defeated included chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, a pragmatic young communist leader whose drive to acquire land for a huge industrialisation project had alienated Bengal’s traditionally militant peasantry and loosened the left’s strongholds in rural Bengal.

“How could a communist government ask police to fire on peasants like they did in Nandigram to set up a chemical industry. That has eroded their support amongst the rural poor and Mamata Banerji has gained by leading campaigns against the acquisitions,” said Bengal’s leading political sociologist, Pradip Bose.

“But many others say the urban Bengali gentry (called Bhadrалоks) were also fed up with the communists for not join-

ing the government in Delhi, even though they had at least two opportunities in the last 15 years.

“When left of centre parties formed a ruling coalition in 1996 and wanted the legendary Bengali communist leader Jyoti Basu to take over as prime minister, his party decided to stay out. Jyoti Basu described it as a historical blunder and that is what most Bengalis feel. So why should they vote for the communists?” said former communist lawmaker Saifuddin Choudhury, whose breakaway party - PDS - is now in alliance with India’s ruling Congress Party.

“The communists built up a formidable political party and were popular with the rural poor and industrial workers during their three decades of continuous rule in West Bengal.

“They also enjoyed the support of the influential Bengali intelligentsia - until Nandigram happened four years ago. After that, the cultural elite distanced themselves from the communists in protest of the police shootings that killed 14 farmers.” [C]

They’ve been defeated by a populist movement led by a woman who is currently working with the Congress Party and has in the past worked with the right-wing Hindu Nationalist BJP. Whereas the Communists have always been a national party, she has been part of the general trend towards regionalist parties in India’s huge states, themselves bigger than many European countries and culturally very diverse. Regionalism has been a growing trend:

“Banerji’s victory, marks the coming of age of Bengali regionalism.

“Within thirteen years of breaking away from the Congress and forming her own Trinamul party, she has marginalised the Congress in Bengal as much as the communists now. That’s a major achievement,” says political analyst Ranabir Samadhar.

“Gender expert Paula Banerji described Banerji’s stunning victory as a

‘demonstration of the political power of the Bengali women.’” (Ibid.)

She has defeated the left by sounding pretty left herself:

“Banerji also plans to promote inclusive development that benefits rural and urban poor by balancing allocations between agriculture and industry. She also wants to make governance more efficient - especially in terms of maintaining law and order in what has become a fairly violent state.

“I will continue to live like a commoner because I don’t like luxury. The support of my people is more important,” said Banerji, whose austere lifestyle appears closer to the old icons of the Bengal communist movement than their successors who had become corrupted by three decades of power.

“I am against the Left here but not against Leftism. I share the values of the old Left,” said Banerji.” (Ibid)

Can she make good? In their other strongholds, Kerala and Tripura, the Communists have lost one election and come back at the next. They hope now to do the same in West Bengal:

“Bengal’s communism was unique in that it grew among the people not through armed revolution. This was a party that grew by consensus by carrying with them all sections of middle class, rural and urban poor - even the gentry. But somewhere down the line, the arrogance of power led them to adopt narrow, sectarian politics and that is their undoing now,” says analyst Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhuri.

“Their only hope now is if Banerji, whose performance as India’s railway minister has not been overly impressive, fails in her position of governance.

“We are down, but not out. We will perform our role in opposition and win back the people’s trust,” said Bengal communist party leader Biman Bose.

“Bose points to the state of Tripura,

‘where the communists messed up and people brought us back. That will happen in Bengal,’ Bose said. ‘They went out of power in 1988 and came back to power five years later...ruling it all the way until now.’” (Ibid.)

But it is also moot how secure India’s multi-party politics really are. Congress dominated during the critical early years and proved an effective party. Now politics are becoming much less coherent. While rejoicing at a Communist defeat, the Economist magazine was worried by more general trends:

“Unpicking lessons from such state elections is notoriously tricky. An optimistic analysis is that Indian voters are growing less loyal to parties or leaders who claim a following based on who they are (through their caste affiliation, say), rather than what they do. Voters look less tolerantly on rulers who perform badly. They have returned incumbents—such as Nitish Kumar’s government in Bihar, a poor northern state, last year—who are good managers and bring better schools, hospitals and roads, or those who bring more stability, as in Assam. By contrast, poorly performing rulers, eg, in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, have been sent packing.

“Such a trend, if true, would be an encouraging sign of a maturing electorate. However, it is belied by another one: many voters also seem more smitten by populist individuals than by parties setting out coherent policies. For example, few in West Bengal can spell out what the energetic Ms Banerjee stands for. In Tamil Nadu Jayaram Jayalalitha, a former actress, wowed voters with promises of free rice and other goodies. They made her chief minister for the third time.

“By contrast, the strongest opposition party at the national level, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), picked up just 0.6% of all assembly seats returned in these polls. The BJP retorts that it was campaigning largely beyond its heartland (the Hindu ‘cowbelt’ in the north). But that, too, points to a discouraging fragmentation in Indian politics: politicians

and parties wildly popular in one state often fail utterly to appeal beyond their home regions. The BJP had pointed to success in Tamil Nadu’s neighbour Karnataka in 2008 as evidence that it could branch out southward. Only it and the Communists have in recent times tried to rival Congress as parties that can appeal nationally. Both did dreadfully this time around.” [D]

### Elections: Uganda

The USA inherited from Britain a system in which the results of elections were basically accepted, even when they might have been unfair. There was also always an undercurrent of violence: Henry ‘Light-Horse Harry’ Lee, a noted commander in the War of Independence and father of Robert E. Lee, was severely beaten and received injuries that caused his death a few years later while defending a newspaper editor attacked by a mob. A mob who were enraged by his criticism of the 1812 War with Britain, a war that gained the USA very little and could easily have been a disaster for them. Nearly half a century later, the Civil War in which Robert E. Lee gained such prominence was caused by a flat refusal by the Deep South to tolerate an elected President who was critical of slavery. It wasn’t anything Lincoln did as President: he had to wait months between winning the election and taking office, and the Confederacy was set up during that interval.

Somehow or other, the USA managed to take most of the violence out of politics. Violent rhetoric – such as claims of a ‘coup’ when peculiarities in a Florida ballot-paper gave a very close election to Bush Junior in the election of 2000 – has remained just rhetoric. But the influence on the rest of the world has been dreadful. They missed the chance to establish secure and peaceful politics after the Cold War: they preferred the short-term gains brought by the Colour Revolutions. They played with fire and now many parts of the world are burning, often quite against the wishes of the USA.

Uganda has had massive instability

for many years, including the rule of Idi Amin. The current president, Yoweri Museveni, is a four-term autocrat who has done reasonably well. The vote was definitely imperfect, but another bout of chaos would do the damaged country no good.

### Elections: Egypt

When the Arab Spring protests started, most Western commentators were thinking ‘Soviet Bloc 1989’. I was thinking ‘Iran 1979’. Back then, the Islamists won out in a revolutionary protest that began with a lot of Westernised elements who wanted more Westernisation. But ‘democracy’ means rule by the majority, and the majority was Islamist.

It looks very much as if the same will prove true in Egypt. It has already proved true in Iraq, but the Sunni / Shia and Arab / Kurd splits have so far prevented anything solid emerging. Egypt is much simpler, a large majority are Arab and Sunni. Mubarak was a weakened and discredited heir to the secular and socialist Nasserite tradition.

Western liberalism flourished in Europe after many decades of progressive authoritarian rulers modernising the society. In Iraq, Egypt etc. the process has been cut short, partly because of a Western belief that if progressive authoritarian rulers are removed, Western values will spontaneously emerge. What will actually emerge is likely to be something quite different:

“It’s hard to miss the new headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Cairo neighbourhood of Moqattam – six stories towering over the dusty street with the distinctive Qur’an and crossed swords symbol emblazoned on the stucco facade. The decor is a medley of parquet floors, crystal chandeliers, swagged velvet curtains and gilded furniture.

“In the lobby a team from the brotherhood’s fledgling TV station is interviewing a bigwig as a sharp-suited, clean-shaven aide hovers fussily.

“After 100 days we are sure the rev-

olution is on the right track,' beams Issam el-Erian, the articulate and experienced spokesman for the organisation known in Arabic simply as the Ikhwan. 'In a few months we will have a new parliament and then a new constitution for the new Egypt.' ...

'Erian and two other senior figures have resigned from the leadership to found the Freedom and Justice party (FJP) to compete in September's elections – Egypt's first free vote since the 1952 revolution. The new party and the 83-year-old Muslim Brotherhood have 'the same mission and goals, but different roles', he explains.

'Predictions range from the FJP becoming the dominant force in the new parliament to capturing around 20% of the seats because, the argument goes, in a multi-party democracy its old anti-regime appeal will be weakened.

'The brotherhood did not organise the Tahrir Square protests, but backed them when the regime was teetering. It is careful now to avoid appearing too ambitious or threatening. It says the FJP will field candidates for up to 50% of parliament and, crucially, none for next year's presidential race (though an independent candidate, Abdel-Moneim Abul Fotouh, does come from a reformist brotherhood background). 'It is not the time for decisions,' Erian added. 'This is the time to be united and move Egypt from dictatorship to democracy.'

'But Muntasser al-Zayyat, a prominent Islamist lawyer, believes the Ikhwan could end up controlling as much as 60% of parliament – because their secular and liberal rivals are divided and far less experienced than ex-members of Mubarak's now disbanded National Democratic party, who are likely to stand as independents in their old constituencies.' [F]

The Christian minority in Iraq suffered very badly after the fall of Saddam Hussein: a lot of them have left lands where there were strong Christian communities while most of Europe was still pagan. Egypt may end up as an even

worse case: the Copts speak a language descended from that of the Pharaohs and they were the strongest single force defining early Christianity, but now the Arab and Muslim majority see them as alien:

'Freedom is not for free, said a sign raised in Cairo's Tahrir Square during the revolution that overthrew Egypt's government. Since then, the price of greater freedom seems to have fallen disproportionately on the large Coptic Christian minority. Sectarian clashes, a dismal feature of Egyptian life for more than a decade, have risen alarmingly.

'The latest one, in the Cairo slum of Imbaba on May 7th, left 12 people dead, more than 200 injured and several churches smashed, with one burned to cinders along with Christian-owned shops and homes. The trouble began when a small group of Salafists—Muslims inspired by Saudi-style puritanism, supposedly harking back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad—marched on a church in response to rumours that a female convert to Islam had been kidnapped and was being held there. Local Christians surrounded the building to protect it. With police failing to act and crowds gathering, shots were fired. The mêlée lasted into the early morning.

'For months Salafist preachers had roused passions with similar tales of forced reconversions of women, which the ageing and equally conservative church leadership only feebly denied. The women in most of these cases appear to have resorted to converting to Islam to escape unhappy marriages, since the Coptic church bans divorce. It says they either never converted or sought sanctuary in the church to return to Christianity. The Salafists cite rules of Islam that forbid leaving the faith, and accuse the church of kidnapping and brainwashing their Muslim 'sisters'.' [G]

The state ought to uphold the right of women to get a divorce, but does not. So it becomes a battle between religious communities. Stories about kidnapped women could be easily discredited if they were total inventions, so I suppose there is some substance to it. And you'd expect

this ancient survival to be tenacious on its grip on its own identity in what was originally wholly its own land:

'In the centuries when Alexandria was a centre of Christian learning and Egypt the hinterland of the Christian faith, the Church in effect became the country's ruling institution. In the centuries after Islam's conquest, as most Egyptians converted to Islam, the Church still played a dominant role in Christians' lives, as a theological guide and a haven from a society that had become conspicuously and unremittingly Islamic.

'Egyptian Muslims have almost the opposite experience. Islam came to Egypt as the religion of its new rulers: Egypt rapidly became the most important province of the burgeoning Islamic empire and Cairo became the capital of the Fatimid caliphate and the base of three powerful Islamic states. Islam faced no theological confrontations in Egypt (though the Fatimids were Shia, Egypt was always Sunni). In effect, Egyptian Muslims, at least since the ninth century, have been the mainstream in an Islamic country. So Christians' self-perception – and their view of Egyptian society – has always been very different from that of Muslims.

'The second factor behind the recent violence is that the notion of Egyptianism as a collective identity has been severely weakened over the past six decades. The modern state was created in the early 19th century, when exposure to Europe triggered a social movement aimed at modernising education; the emergence of a constitutional monarchy; exponential increases in immigration; and a swelling of the middle class. The most popular political party in the early 20th century, al-Wafd, adopted a strictly secular political narrative. Egyptian resistance to British occupation was a national, not a religious, endeavour. Christians played prominent roles in government, art and the economy, and the era witnessed a refreshing and effervescent cultural ambience.

'The whole experiment came to an abrupt end. Arab nationalism, espoused by Egypt's legendary leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, steered the country away from

Egyptianism and immersed it in Arab socio-politics. The Nasserite variant of Arab nationalism was meticulously secular. He was sensitive to the sensibilities of the Christians. But by placing Egypt in the heart of Arab politics and culture – abandoning the individualistic identity and Mediterranean cultural outlook of its liberal age – he turned society towards Islam’s hinterland (the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant). Inevitably Islamism gained ground in the country’s socio-political life.

“The same period saw a notable withdrawal of Christians. Nasser’s socialist policies triggered waves of emigration to North America and Europe, led by wealthy Egyptians, including many once-prominent Christians. From the 1970s, political and militant Islamism began to spread, resulting in a conservative social code and, at times, violence against Christians. Since the Coptic Pope Shenouda III was consecrated in 1971, the Egyptian Church has once more become an active political player with special privileges and wide influence. Slowly but steadily, religious identities gained ground while Egyptianism fell back.

“The current tension reflects this history. Egypt’s 2011 revolution succeeded because it affixed itself to an Egyptianism for which its huge middle class is nostalgic. It would be a huge waste of potential and ambition if society fails to cling to that.” [H]

Nostalgia is no basis for effective politics. When Mubarak was under threat, I suggested that the protestors should let him go quietly and with dignity, preserving some continuity. It now seems that he and his sons will be put on trial. That effectively will criminalise the whole secular tradition.

Most Western commentators are still expecting a pro-Western outcome, ignoring the other big issue, general Egyptian distaste for the peace with Israel. But even without that, there is a basic incompatibility. At least one former neocon has seen it:

“Fukuyama made a powerful case

against his former neocon allies in his 2006 book *America at the Crossroads*. He still wants to ‘export American ideals’, but tells me ‘it ought to be done through soft-power instruments’. ‘In general,’ he says, ‘Americans are not very good at nation-building and not very good colonialists. Look at the impact of the United States on Latin America or the one colony we had, the Philippines. Those countries are still not doing very well. We stumbled into Afghanistan and Iraq, which are basically tribal societies, and most Americans have no idea of how a tribal society operates.’

“The mistakes of the Bush years were, he believes, a direct consequence of Reagan’s success in seeing off the Soviet Union in the 1980s, a high-stakes gamble that could have backfired and succeeded only because of the liberalising role played by Mikhail Gorbachev. ‘This minor political miracle happens – they take this very principled stand against a dictatorship, they’re not willing to compromise, and then the dictatorship collapses. That was their [the Republicans’] last experience of government, then you had the Clinton years, and what they were hoping for was a repeat of that in Iraq. You take a principled stand against a dictator, you depose him, and then you have a similar eastern Europe-style upwelling of support. But they should have realised that the eastern European situation was an unusual one. The roots were there. They were basically western countries that had been knocked off course by the Soviet Union, and it was natural that they should embrace western values and democracy, whereas Iraq, because of the Israeli-Palestinian situation and the whole history of colonialism, was never going to embrace the west.’” [E]

In a few years time, there might be a block of Iran, Iraq, Syria, radical Palestinians and Egypt ready to take on Israel again. That’s assuming that Israel goes on resisting efforts to force them to a peace that Arabs might find acceptable, and that seems almost certain.

It could also be the world’s first nuclear war. But when you are dealing with

people for whom an afterlife with Paradise and Hell is a solid certainty, nuclear holocausts are not such dreadful threat.

## Raiders of the Lost Bin Laden

Would photos of Bin Laden’s final moments have shown a very sick and feeble old man? Would photos of the USA’s triumph have looked not at all heroic? That’s one possibility.

In the immediate aftermath I thought about the other possibilities, including that this was not Bin Laden. I soon decided not. Even if the USA had had reports of his death, they could never be sure that these were true. So by claiming to have killed him, they would risk him appearing again on video, maybe holding one of the papers reporting his death. And though Bin Laden alive would be a general humiliation for the USA, it would rebound particularly against Obama. He’d be putting his reputation and political future in the hands of a large number of people who’d have to be involved in any ‘fix’. It would make no sense to do this at a time when he has an excellent chance of being re-elected anyway.

Soon afterwards it was confirmed by the Islamists that this was indeed Bin Laden, now viewed as a martyr and perhaps more useful as such. It feeds into the general ill-will between the USA and Pakistan:

“In a ten-minute television address, Obama left no doubt that US personnel alone were involved in the action that brought bin Laden to justice. ‘Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan,’ Obama said, adding, ‘A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability.’

“While Obama said ‘It’s important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding,’ he made no mention of any Pakistani military role in the operation. US officials in background briefing made it clear that no country, much less Pakistan, was informed of the operation.

“In fact, there was not even a word of thanks for Pakistan. Instead, Obama said: ‘Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations. And going forward, it is essential that Pakistan continue to join us in the fight against al-Qaida and its affiliates.’

“The finger of suspicion is now pointing squarely at the Pakistani military and intelligence for sheltering and protecting Osama bin Laden before US forces hunted him down and put a bullet in his head in the wee hours of Sunday. The coordinates of the action and sequence of events indicate that the al-Qaida fugitive may have been killed in an ISI safehouse.

“US analysts uniformly suggested that the Pakistani security establishment’s claim of a role in the operation is clearly aimed at ducking charges of its military’s possible role in hiding bin Laden. ‘This is hugely embarrassing for Pakistan,’ was a common refrain on US TV channels throughout the night...

“US officials have said for years that they believed bin Laden escaped to Pakistan after the American bombing campaign in Afghanistan. But Pakistani officials, including its former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, insisted that he was in Afghanistan, even as Afghan officials would angrily refute it and say he is in Pakistan. In the end, the Americans and Afghans were right on the money.” [M]

Obviously the neighbours would have noticed Bin Laden’s hideout as something quite out of the ordinary, and reported it to the police. Someone must have then decided to do nothing. Perhaps just wanting to avoid trouble: the current upsurge of Pakistan Taliban attacks were fairly predictable.

It also put Abbottabad on the map. Surprisingly, it is named after General Sir James Abbott, a British army officer in colonial India. This man also wrote a poem about his little city: a poem that’s so bad it’s almost good. In part it says:

‘I remember the day when I first came here

‘And smelt the sweet Abbottabad air

‘The trees and ground covered with snow

‘Gave us indeed a brilliant show

‘To me the place seemed like a dream

‘And far ran a lonesome stream

‘The wind hissed as if welcoming us

‘The pine swayed creating a lot of fuss”

Western visitors nowadays are very likely to be welcomed with a hiss, and maybe also bullets. And I’d say that Bin Laden has achieved his main aim, to generate massive antagonism between the West and Islam. That won’t end soon, and probably not until the Western hegemony fails and falls.

### **No More Superpowers?**

The USA and USSR were both able to reach far beyond their home territories. People in foreign countries were quite happy to line up with one or the other during the Cold War. This remained the case when the USSR collapsed: many countries and Europe especially were keen to have a Globalist Gang with the USA as recognised Boss.

This could never be the case with China. In a small way it applied under Mao after the Sino-Soviet split. But Mao’s attempts to revitalise Leninism failed, probably because Leninism had largely exhausted its historic liberating role and other possibilities had now opened up. China now is a rising nation-state, the world’s largest, one fifth of the global population. But this is likely to sink as other developed countries grow while China is running short of cultivable land and is over-populated. And China is too distant from most other cultures to form a Globalist Gang of its own, even if it wished to. Only Japan, Vietnam, Singapore and the two Koreas have much in common, along with Taiwan if you count Taiwan as a separate country. All of those have mixed feelings about Chinese power. All of them together are overshadowed by China in terms of population. Vietnam and Singapore have made a sensible choice in being part of ASEAN, a club which together is comparable to China or

India, though smaller.

China meanwhile is keen to learn the lessons from the USSR’s implosion. There was an interesting article recently in their on-line newspaper Global Times:

“The lessons from the failure of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) are valuable for China, which is experiencing reform today.

“Firstly, the party should not give up its leadership of the country during the reforms. The CPSU, though it had been plagued by corruption to a severe degree, could have been resurrected. But in the clamor of ‘limitless openness,’ the CPSU had lost its control of the intelligentsia, theory circles and the media.

“Secondly, reforming should not abandon the principle of public ownership as economic foundation. The socialist public ownership has determined the nature of socialism and guaranteed the people can manage themselves. It is also the most substantial part of the socialist system. As long as the position of public ownership is sustained, the foundation of socialist countries stays, no matter how the reforms proceed....

“Thirdly, reforming doesn’t simply mean denying previous leaders. Nikita Khrushchev repudiated Joseph Stalin in the ‘Secret Speech’ in 1956. And from then on the anti-Stalin movement lasted several decades in the Soviet Union, and led to the disastrous consequences of denying the history of the Soviet Union, and finally opposing the systems and goals of communism...

“Fourthly, the reform should not rely on external powers. The US never changed its goal of trying to ‘peacefully transform’ the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It took steps to put ideological pressure on socialist countries, while the leaders of the Soviet Union who supported reform took no precautions at all.

“Gorbachev cared about evaluation and praise from the US, and his efforts to promote openness and the so-called

‘cultural autonomy’ were all in the hope of obtaining US support.” [N]

Of course Gorbachev was looked after by the USA after his ignominious fall. Mubarak has been ratted on and will serve as a permanent reminder of the risks of relying on the USA.

### Price of a UK Soul

Thatcher attracted the support of small business people, but she and her heirs have not served them well. Small business people notice that the state stops them doing things, but not that it is their only possible protection against big business. Particularly the chain stores that are destroying smaller businesses because they buy in enormous quantities and can successfully demand lower prices from suppliers.

Books are one case. The existence of Amazon as an on-line service has been one element, but also the discounting of books had a big effect once it was legalised. The most popular and profitable books can be used as loss-leaders by the big chains.

Waterstone’s has been the big gainer, absorbing or destroying alternatives. Then Waterstone’s itself was swallowed by a bigger group, HMV, originally a music business. Now HMV is in trouble and Waterstone’s has been disgorged again, sold for 53 million to Russian billionaire Alexander Mamut. [K]

So what’s left of Britishness?

### Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery In Private

MPs are elected by convincing the voters that they are fit representatives. I personally would have no objection to a candidate who was gay, or a persistent womanizer, or a woman with lots of lovers. But if others feel differently, they have a right to know. That’s democracy, a system whereby the mob can usually exercise its beliefs, ideals and prejudices without actually causing a riot or a civil war.

I can not see how this extends to either sports people or business people, so long as they do nothing criminal. An adulterous footballer should not be a public issue: only his performance on the football pitch should count. (Or not count: I’d never previously heard of Ryan Giggs and do not care.) But a talent for football should not mean that your private life is open for public view. I suspect that most of those arguing for ‘press freedom’ would take a different view if the leak was about some private matter of their own or relating to one of their friends or relations.

Polly Toynbee has taken a sensible stand on this:

“Wondering if he was standing like Canute against the tide, the judge in the footballer injunction case rightly stood his ground yesterday. There is, he said: ‘No solid reason why the claimant’s identity should be generally revealed in the national media ... The answer is as yet in the negative. They would be engulfed in a cruel and destructive media frenzy.

“Sadly, that may become unavoidable in the society in which we now live but, for the moment, in so far as I am being asked to sanction it, I decline to do so ... It has not been suggested that there is any legitimate public interest in publishing the story.’...

“The strict injunction against anything being said about defendants in the Stephen Lawrence case is to stop the case collapsing: the media pushes the outside edge of contempt in many cases. Many injunctions about private lives are blackmail cases: to reveal the names of victims taking out injunctions would do all the damage the blackmailer intended – a blackmailer’s charter. If privacy is dead, what’s wrong with News of the World phone hacking anyway?

“The naturally amoral press spits blood at Twitter revealing secrets they cannot. But as the judicial committee said, ways ‘would be found to curtail the misuse of modern technology’. Those

who first leaked and re-tweeted names that broke injunctions could indeed be prosecuted – preferably not sent as press freedom ‘martyrs’ to jail, but fined mightily.

“Child porn on the net is censored, and its users prosecuted. The Human Rights Act, with its occasionally contradictory right to free speech and right to privacy, was drafted with strong press involvement, ensuring the privacy clause was precisely in line with the press code that is written by editors and ratified by the Press Complaints Commission. If the PCC were not a spineless industry body that turned a blind eye to practices like phone-hacking, privacy would be protected, since its own code says: ‘Everyone has a right to his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence including digital communications.’

“Never mind that the spirit and often the letter of the code is broken almost every day of the week, the fact remains that the HRA enshrines the British press’s own code on privacy. Now they write editorials justifying breaking that code on the grounds that almost anyone, one way or another, deserves to have their private life exposed.

“Footballers or the Formula One boss ‘should be role models’, as should any minor star, or often bystanders dragged into the periphery of some news story. And of course ordinary people should have equal access to privacy laws with legal aid. But these papers eagerly quote the granting of an injunction to Trafigura to stop the Guardian revealing its toxic waste dumping – oddly, at the time those papers barely covered that injunction: no sex, no celeb.” [L]

She might have added, continuous leaks about celebrities does indeed make them role models, but for exactly the things that the press is supposed to be campaigning against. I don’t take the campaigning seriously: reports of sex scandal meet the same needs as pornography, but have the demerit of involving real people who have no wish to be part of it.

As for the argument that the internet will leak it: how many people will actually see such a story while it is only on the internet? Also there are possible counters. Some of the celebrities might get together and organise a ‘White Noise’ defence. Hire a few eager teenagers to post wholly fictitious stories that randomly paired celebrities and destroyed the value of any authentic leak.

That would only work for as long as the big media refrained from picking up and authenticating the real stories. And creating a general social degradation, which Polly Toynbee rightly complains about:

“Envy, anger, hatred, desire to destroy are a poison poured into the ears of a public, while urging celebrity fixation. Put new celeb up, knock them down, often within days: the public is invited to join a steel-toed kicking, as if grouped around the playground bully. That’s the price of fame, say the hideous mob of paparazzi hounding celebs to madness.

“Maybe. But the greater social price is that we are made complicit. All of us are spectators in this brutishness, willy-nilly. Once the gossip is out there, we all get to know it, contaminated by its prurience and nastiness. The phoney moralising and loathing of rich stars comes from newsrooms where editors like Paul Dacre are paid millions, and whose politics decry high taxes or curbs on top earnings.

“Spreading jealousy taps into the social dysfunction of extreme pay inequality. Pressing everyone’s nose up against impossible lifestyles, editors like to stir envy, while diverting political impulse to personal revenge.” [M]

But what will be the long result? The right-wing media fancy themselves as conservative, but are mostly just nihilistic. A successful conservative or reactionary movement has to create a way of life that is enjoyable and satisfactory to most of those living within it. What’s been propagated since the 1980s is angry and dissatisfied. It flourishes by persuading people that alternatives are worse. That can’t last for ever.

## One Small Hop for a Yank

Fifty years ago, Alan Shepherd managed to boldly hop where Gagarin had been before. On 5 May 1961, a Mercury-Redstone rocket shot Alan Shepard to an altitude of 187km on a sub-orbital flight lasting under 16 minutes. [P] Possibly they could have got into space first, but there had been some previous embarrassment with rockets blowing up. They played safe and caught up gradually.

The USSR had developed giant rockets first, needing them to hit the USA with nuclear weapons whereas the USA had bases close enough for bombers to fly. The giant rockets were also suitable for space, but when it came to developing even bigger rockets to get to the moon, the USA succeeded with the Saturn rockets and the USSR failed.

After which, with some mythological aptness, Saturn ate its own children. Grand plans for going on to put men on Mars were perfectly possible, could have happened in the 1970s or early 1980s. But the cost would have been high and selfishness was on the rise, along with a cultural move away from science. Besides, robotic probes could do most of the important jobs, as with the brilliant Voyager missions to the outer planets.

The USA also went down a technological blind ally with the Space Shuttles, which tried to do too many jobs at once and did none of them well. We may in time see a genuine Space Plane, a vehicle that can use oxygen from the air to burn its fuel and thus be much more efficient. But for the time being, rockets are the name of the game.

## No Place Like Home (or not many)

“Sophisticated ideas about the formation and evolution of planetary systems go back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who in 1755 noted that the solar system’s planets all orbit in the same plane around the sun’s equator. This led him to the ‘nebular hypothesis’: that the sun formed as a great cloud of gas and dust collapsed

inward, and worlds coalesced in a spinning disc of material around its midriff. Looking to the heavens, Kant saw fuzzy spiral wisps that he interpreted as such nascent solar systems.

“We now know these are galaxies, not solar systems, but the nebular hypothesis has remained at the heart of our ideas about planetary formation. Four decades after Kant first proposed it, the French mathematician and astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace reformulated the theory in the precise, calculable terms of Newtonian gravity. Recently, computers capable of crunching through many millennia of world-making in a single afternoon have allowed us to model the process and produce a menagerie of planets like those in our neighbourhood.

“And so we came to believe that our solar system’s story was universal. ‘Politically, socially, religiously - it’s human nature to adopt the environments within which we live as universal norms,’ says Geoff Marcy of the University of California, Berkeley, the doyen of planet hunters who has more confirmed alien worlds to his name than anyone else...

“In 1995, Michel Mayor and Didier Queloz of the Geneva Observatory in Switzerland discovered a gas-giant planet with a mass similar to Jupiter’s in a scorching four-day orbit around the sun-like star 51 Pegasi (Nature, vol 378, p 355). Within a year, Marcy and his colleague Paul Butler, both then at San Francisco State University in California, had confirmed that discovery, and also found two more ‘hot Jupiters’. Later that year, they confirmed Latham’s discovery as a planet.

“It was clear we had ignored a fundamental rule of science. ‘We had been judging the cosmic diversity of planetary systems based on a sample size of one,’ says Marcy.

“If these were the first hints that our solar system was not normal, they were not the last. Other planets were soon caught breaking all sorts of rules: orbiting in the opposite direction to their star’s



spin, coming packed in close orbits like sardines in a can, or revolving on wildly tilted orbits far away from their star's equator (see diagram).

"There are many good reasons to believe that planets do form in circular orbits in more or less the same plane, as Kant had suggested. But it appears they do not always stay that way. Soon enough, theorists began to supply the necessary creation stories. Young worlds might drag against dust and gas yet to be hoovered up into a planet, losing momentum and spiralling inwards towards their star to be consumed or, perhaps, to become hot Jupiters. Others might tussle gravitationally with another member of their brood, with the loser being flung out into the void and the winner left in a disturbed, elliptical orbit....

"All this makes the status of our solar system increasingly clear. 'Our system is a rarity, there's no longer a question about that,' says Marcy. 'The only question that remains is, just how rare is it?'

"It is an opportune moment to ask: NASA's Kepler space telescope, launched in May 2009, promises a flood of new planets of all sizes. Early indications are that solar systems like ours are as elusive as ever. Take the system Kepler-11, revealed with great fanfare in February this year (*Nature*, vol 470, p 53). Its six transiting planets are between two and four times the size of Earth, and five of them would be within the orbit of Mercury. Based on their size and estimated density, all six worlds appear to be composed mainly of ice and gas, as if they formed far from their star.

"How they migrated inward so gracefully is a mystery. Any ancient convulsions, we had supposed, would leave migrating worlds' orbits out of kilter. But Kepler-11's architecture is proportionally flatter than a vinyl record - far flatter than the planetary orbits in our own solar system, which lie around the equator of our sun only to within about 5 degrees either way. A third of the candidate planets found by Kepler so far seem to reside in similarly pancake-like configurations,

implying a history even more sedate than ours." [Q]

If future discoveries confirm that our solar system is unusual, that might explain why we have never had alien visitors. It might be that only such rare solar systems have a chance of producing complex life and eventually a technological species. And perhaps most of those don't realise that chance. The Milky Way galaxy has 100-400 billion stars. Perhaps only a few million of those end up with rare solar systems like ours, and might be set aside to see what develops.

Science Fiction has tended to take models of invasion or colonisation from Earth's past. Since the middle of the 20th century we have broadly rejected the idea of conquest or of seizing land that belongs to others. Continuing disputes relate to overlapping claims, territories which a majority population thinks of as part of 'home' even though there is a minority population that thinks otherwise. Such disputes are not likely to be settled soon, but also they are not relevant to possibly intrusion by aliens. Quite likely we are being watched but left alone.

### Wild Weather

Earth humans are not currently making a good job of managing their own planet. Warning of climate change have been ignored or played down, but 2011 has so far proved to be another usual year. Or else part of a new norm which goes against previous experience:

"Last month was the UK's warmest April on record, the Met Office has said.

"The records, which go back more than 100 years, show much of the UK experienced temperatures 3 to 5C warmer than is normal for April.

"It was also the 11th driest month, with on average half the usual rainfall.

"But there was also great variation in the amount of rain. Parts of north-west Scotland saw about 110% of normal April rainfall, while parts of south-east England saw less than 10% of normal.

"The UK average temperature was

10.7C, exceeding the previous warmest April on record of 10.2C in 2007.

"Following a drier-than-average winter, the dry April followed a dry March which saw less than half of the normal rainfall falling across the UK.

"A BBC Weather Centre spokesman said: 'The UK-wide records began in 1910, but the central England temperature series goes back to 1659, making it the warmest April here for over 350 years.'" [R]

"The outbreak of tornadoes that ravaged the southern US last week was the largest in US recorded history, the National Weather Service has said.

"The three-day period from 25-28 April saw 362 tornadoes strike, including some 312 in a single 24-hour period.

"The previous record was 148 in two days in April 1974.

"The tornadoes and the storm system that spawned them killed at least 350 people in Alabama and six other states. It was the deadliest outbreak since 1936." [S]

This month there have so far been less tornadoes, but one particularly deadly strike at the town of Joplin. It has also been a particularly bad year for Mississippi flooding, among other things:

"Under orders laid out in acts of Congress from 1928, once water reaches a certain height or pressure, the corps commander is committed to certain responses - blowing up levees in Missouri, or opening up giant floodways in Louisiana - to reduce strain on levees around strategic areas.

"But some flood experts blame the corps for the very crisis it is facing now. They say it has lulled the public into a false sense of security about its ability to manage the Mississippi. Over the years, individuals and communities moved increasingly into flood-prone areas around the Mississippi because land is cheap, and because they were persuaded the risk of floods is low.

“It is becoming evident that the Army Corps of Engineers and other forecasters have underestimated the frequency of severe flooding along the Mississippi.

“We had a 500-year flood in 1993, a 70-year flood in 2001, and a 200-year flood in 2008. What blows my mind is that I just published this paper in 2008 and every year since then we have had another 10-year flood,’ said Robert Criss, a hydrologist at Washington University in St Louis. ‘The observed frequency of flooding is completely incompatible with the Army Corps estimates.’

“The forecasts at the time were based on a relatively short historic record.

“Snow and rainfall patterns change over time, altering the frequency and magnitude of floods. Climate change is also increasing the intensity of storms. Last April saw six times as much rain in the Ohio valley, which drains into the Mississippi, as in a normal year.”[S]

“April was a historic month for wild weather in the United States, and it wasn’t just the killer tornado outbreak that set records, according to scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“April included an odd mix of downpours, droughts and wildfires. Six states — Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia — set records for the wettest April since 1895. Kentucky, for example, got nearly a foot of rain, which was more than three times its normal for the month, NOAA reported.

“Yet the U.S. also had the most acres burned by wildfire for April since 2000. Nearly 95 percent of Texas has a drought categorized as severe or worse, exacerbated by the fifth driest April on record for the Lone Star state.

“Add to a record 305 tornadoes from April 25-28, which killed at least 309 people and the most tornadoes ever for all of April: 875. The death toll and total tornado figures are still being finalized.

“Much of the southern and eastern United States were near record hot for April, while northwestern states were cooler than normal. Overall, the month was warmer than normal for the nation, but not record-setting.

“The odd mix of massive April showers and bone-dry drought can be blamed on the cooling of the central Pacific Ocean, which causes storm tracks to lock in along certain paths” [T]

And we’re not yet even half-way through the year.

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## The Marriage Of Figura

England asserts herself over her satellites, Wales, Scotland, and with stealth, that manufactured acolyte, that sliver Northern Ireland, that on occasions pierces her side, caused by the politics of quicksand.

England asserts herself over her Muslims, and other ethnic scalps, while at Westminster Abbey there is polite asylum for those with power and wealth to play the game of war. Dressed in uniform the royal cad-dies.

England asserts herself, making sure, Germany remembers its 1918 dismembering, recalling the defeat of the Boers on the veldt, claiming victory for the WW2 encumber through second-hand history off-the-shelf, though rescued out of the Soviet embers.

England asserts herself through the Irish Times, (a would-be bride, blue as delft) noting that on Figura’s uniform shines the Harp of Ireland. (used by the mercenary Irish Guards)

With this sleight-of-hand the paper delights in its old canards.

Now England, in the guise of a monarch, seeks Ireland as her bridegroom.

The matchmakers at Leinster House appoint her beau, a eunuch, thinking he still has his heirloom, but he lost it in that `16 joust. It can only swell in pride, England’s womb, as it fights a war dedicated to a peace-park.

**Wilson John Haire. 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2011**

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# Parliament Notes

## Dick Barry

### Human Rights

On 9 May Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Browne told Labour's David Winnick that the Department's Command Paper on Human Rights and Democracy published in March 2011 covers 26 countries which "are among the countries where we have the most serious, wide-ranging human rights concerns and where the UK Government are engaged in promoting and protecting human rights". "They are", he said, (in alphabetical order): "Afghanistan, Belarus, Burma, Chad, China, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe."

This is an interesting group of countries, (which should now include Bahrain), listed alphabetically to avoid causing offence to those countries the UK regards as friends, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Although mere appearance on the list ought to raise a few eyebrows. The inclusion of Afghanistan and Iraq is surely an admission of failure on the part of the UK. While Syria and Yemen would suggest that there is more work for the UK to do once Libya is out of the way. Work that is unlikely to materialise without addressing Saudi Arabia. And the UK Government will do no more than shake its head in sorrow at the abuse of human rights there. The key question, however, is how precisely are the UK Government engaged in promoting and protecting human rights in all 26 countries? If the situation is as serious as Browne claims then it can be said that so far the UK has failed miserably. And what incentive is there for any of them to do the UK's bidding?

### Once More Unto The Breach....

On 9 May, and for the second time within two months, Labour used a Com-

mons Opposition Day to debate the NHS. Shadow Health Secretary John Healey, who initially supported the general aims of the Health and Social Care Bill, (H&SC Bill), moved the following motion: "That this House notes the growing concerns over the Government's handling of the NHS and the effect its policies are having on hospitals and patient care; and calls on the Government to uphold the Coalition Agreement promise to stop the top-down reorganisations of the NHS which have got in the way of patient care, to use the present pause in the progress of the Health and Social Care Bill to make fundamental changes, including dropping the damaging and unjustified market-based approach, and to concentrate efforts instead on achieving sound efficiencies, better clinical quality and improved integration of services."

It seems that Healey and Labour's leader Miliband have decided that there is political mileage to be gained from adopting a more hostile stance on the H&SC Bill. Labour's motion on 16 March simply called for the Government to "halt the implementation of the reorganisation and pause the progress of the legislation in order to re-think their plans and honour the Prime Minister's promise to protect the NHS." Now that there is a pause, but with nothing having changed since 16 March, Labour are calling for "fundamental changes" to the Bill. It is surely not unreasonable to suspect that Healey and Miliband are simply riding on the backs of the strong medical opposition to the Bill. In fact, during his speech Healey called in aid the Royal College of General Practitioners and other professional medical bodies.

"Today", he said, "the Royal College of General Practitioners warned the Prime Minister that his health Bill undermines our comprehensive health care system and will cause 'irreparable damage' to the core values of the NHS. So far Ministers have branded such criticisms as scare mongering, but people in the NHS

are already starting to see this happening. The Government's first act was to remove national waiting time standards - the patient's guarantee that they would be seen and treated quickly - which the Health Secretary described as 'clinically unjustified targets', but the patients do not see it that way, and nor do the surgeons. The president of the British Orthopaedic Association described the delays now being faced by patients as 'devastating and cruel.'

"The NHS Bill takes the break up of our NHS still further. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence decisions on what drugs or treatments patients should have on the NHS become optional for commissioning consortia, and for the first time since 1948, the Secretary of State will not be responsible for delivering a national health service or for defining its scope. In future, the power to decide what health services will be provided free at the point of need - as now - and what further services will be charged for will rest with the new commissioning consortia. That was the basis of the concern expressed today by the Royal College of General

Practitioners. These consortia will be able to meet and take decisions in private, and to outsource commissioning to private companies; but they will not even have a GP on their board - in fact, they will not need to have a board at all."

If Healey expected Health Secretary Andrew Lansley or Minister of State Simon Burns to address any of his points, he was to be sadly disappointed. Lansley focused largely on Labour's record in office, on the need to reduce bureaucracy, and on the £11.5 billion increase in NHS expenditure he claimed was happening under the Coalition. Lansley did, however, make two points worth commenting upon. His first point suggested that the events of the last few weeks have had an effect on his ability to see just what the H&SC Bill is about. He told Healey, "This

debate is supposed to be about the future of the NHS, but the right hon. Gentleman had nothing to say about its future. He wanted to talk only about politics and the Health and Social Care Bill.” Fancy that, a politician wanting to talk about politics. But seriously, the Bill IS about the future of the NHS. And Lansley had to talk about the Bill in order to “show how we will give the NHS a stronger future.”

Lansley’s second point concerned patient care. He told MPs, “Let me be clear: there will be substantive changes to the Bill to deliver improvements for patients. There is only one issue for me, however: will it deliver better care for patient? That is why we will pursue NHS modernisation and why we will stick to our principles. It is why we are listening to improve the Bill.” This statement is a clear admission that, as it stands, the Bill will not deliver improvements in patient care. And other than the changes required to deliver those improvements, it is also a warning that the Bill will remain largely intact. No other interpretation can be put on Lansley’s determination to “pursue NHS modernisation” and to “stick to our principles”

But what of the Lib Dem’s position on the Bill? Labour’s motion called for “fundamental changes”, in line with Lib Dem policy as agreed at its conference last October. Andrew George, Lib Dem member for St Ives, told Lansley that, “The issue remains one mentioned in the motion: the extent to which the policy in the Health and Social Care Bill is not just another top-down reorganisation of the sort that the coalition Government said they would stop and the extent to which the policy being driven through Parliament, on which a listening exercise is taking place, delivers what is in the coalition agreement.

The debate is about the extent to which the Bill reflects the coalition programme.” At this point Lansley was forced to remind him that the Bill largely reflected the coalition agreement. “My hon. Friend will know that the coalition agreement supports, in essence, all the principles of the Bill, with the exception of the specific consequences of the abolition of the strategic health authorities and primary care trusts. As with the whole of the Bill and its related measures, that

proposal was the subject of collective agreement and it flows directly from the belief, shared not least by him and his Liberal Democrat colleagues, that we need much stronger local accountability in the NHS.”

While George and most of his Lib Dem colleagues were not involved in drawing up the coalition agreement, they were in effect party to it and were happy to go along with it until Lib Dem grass root supporters began to carp. Lib Dem John Pugh had a slightly different slant: “Like nearly everyone else in the House, I do not disagree with the Bill’s objectives: more clinical involvement, less bureaucracy and more local accountability. Like everyone else, I am concerned not about its objectives, but about its likely effects. I have met no one who takes issue with the Bill’s avowed intentions, but I have met many who dread its consequences.” And other Lib Dem MPs expressed similar views to those of George and Pugh, yet not one of them joined Labour members in the lobby to support the motion. The motion was defeated by 53 votes, (231 to 284), with 34 Lib Dems voting with the Government, while 22 did not vote or were, more likely, absent. 1 Lib Dem MP acted as a teller. Once again, the Lib Dems have shown that they are putty in the hands of the Tories.

Dr Sarah Wollaston, newly elected Conservative member for Totnes, (she was the first, and so far only, MP to be selected by the use of the US primary system), spoke for the first time in a debate on the Bill. In a thoughtful speech, though one could take issue with her on some points, she expressed her concerns about it. Here is the full version. “I have no doubt that one of the main reasons I was elected to the House was because I promised to bring my clinical experience to bear on the health debate and to stand up for our NHS. I would therefore like to set aside party politics for a moment and give my personal take on the direction that I hope the proposed reforms will take and where we should go from here. At the heart of the Bill lie issues of choice, competition and clinical commissioning. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell) set out clearly the huge funding challenges that face the NHS. We have always had rationing in the NHS, but we are squeamish about

discussing it. In an ideal world with unlimited resources, unrestricted choice would of course be a good thing, but it is not deliverable. Because of the limited budget, we need to focus on getting the very best value while openly and honestly involving communities in how we do that fairly. If that happens locally, one’s person’s local commissioning becomes another person’s postcode lottery.”

“The central problem with unrestricted choice in the form of the ‘any willing provider’ model is that it forces commissioners to act as bill payers and has the potential to undermine good commissioning. What is the point of commissioners designing high-quality, locally responsive clinical pathways that deliver good value for money for the whole community if patients have a free choice of any willing provider and commissioners have no choice but to write the cheques?” At this point she was interrupted by Labour’s Chukka Umunna who asked about competition between teaching hospitals. She went on to say, “Of course, one of the greatest burdens on many hospitals is that of the private finance initiative, and I will come to the issue of training later. I am not opposed to competition in the NHS, but it should not be an end in itself. It can have a role in improving some services - take, for example, the provision of mental health services and talking therapies, on which I am repeatedly told that the voluntary sector delivers better results. If I were facing a long wait for an MRI scan, for example, I would not mind if it was provided by the private sector as long as it was free to me at the point of use as part of the NHS.”

“The point is that competition should only be used where there is evidence that it can deliver real benefits for patients and value for money for the whole patient community. If competition becomes and end in itself, that can actually increase costs and risk fragmentation. For that reason, I hope that as the Bill moves forward, there will be fundamental changes to the role of Monitor. The NHS cannot operate like a regulated industry, and I believe that concern about the proposed role of Monitor is the impassable barrier to co-operation from the professions, without which we will not achieve the great success that we need from these reforms. We must return to the original

promise of the reforms, which was about clinical commissioning and a focus on outcomes rather than targets. For years, commissioning has failed because decision making in primary care trusts has not been clinically led. The NHS has been dogged by illogical care pathways, top-heavy management and a target-driven mentality, often completely divorced from any evidence base. The idea that clinicians should be put at the heart of decision making is still very sound, and it has become divisive only because of the stipulation that GPs should hold all the cards and be the sole commissioners."

"Where clinical commissioning is already successful, that is achieved through a collaborative process with multi-disciplinary input. I hope that as a result of the Government's welcoming listening exercise, the call to broaden the membership of commissioning consortia will be heeded, along with the need for a more graduated and phased introduction so that the consortia are authorised only when they are ready. The same should apply to foundation trusts. They should take on functions only when it is right for that to happen. If commissioning consortia are to get the best results for their patients, they will need to focus on the integration of health and social care, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood said."

"I pay tribute to Torbay, which was at the forefront of moves that were widely applauded nationally and internationally, including by the King's Fund, and that achieved real results for patients, driving down unnecessary admissions and improving outcomes. The integration of health and social care is complicated to achieve, so perhaps Monitor could have a relevant role in it - not arbitrating in disputes about competition law, but driving down costs and facilitating integration. We know that splitting tariffs, for example, could benefit community hospitals. Again, that is complex to achieve, so perhaps Monitor could also help in that regard. For consortia to succeed, not only do we need to focus on the make-up of their boards, but they must be geographically local and, I am afraid, cater for geographically defined populations. Giving a free choice to register with any consortium risks encouraging consortia

to cherry-pick their patients."

One striking feature of the Bill is its sheer scope. All junior doctors will remember the fiasco of MTAS - the medical training application service. We currently have a successful model of deaneries in this country. I hope that we can retain them as the Bill goes forward, because they have a vital role to play in encouraging quality. Of course, they are not perfect, and they need to look at regional variants, but we should keep our deaneries. Speaking of quality, at present, PCTs play a vital role in maintaining what is called the performers list, on which all GPs have to be registered in order to practise in an area. As we move forward, we need to clarify who will take over that role. That is particularly important because we have a crisis with many doctors coming here, particularly from the European Union, who do not speak adequate English, as we saw in the case of Dr Urbane. We need to ensure that the person responsible for the performers list can get rid of this nonsense, so that all doctors have the necessary qualifications, clinical skills and experience, but have good spoken English. I welcome this listening exercise, which I believe is genuine, and I hope that the Opposition will engage with it constructively. The public's affection for the NHS is well justified. At its best the NHS is outstanding. Where that is the case, it is not competition that has delivered those good results, but a relentless focus on what is right for patients. We need to do the same in this House."

### **A National Health Service?**

On 16 May, one week after the debate on Labour's motion, David Cameron told an audience at Ealing Hospital how much he loved the NHS and how determined he was to protect it. He loves the NHS so much, he said, that he wants to change it, because "the fact is the NHS needs to change." He didn't actually tell his audience just what is wrong with the NHS that it needs to change. He simply set out the changes that he believes are needed to improve it; changes straight out of the Health & Social Care Bill. But at the same time, he said that, "at the beginning of last month, we decided we should pause, listen, reflect on and improve our NHS modernisation plans".

"We are listening", he said, "and we will make substantive changes to improve the reforms, based on what we hear". However, "I do not want to pre-empt what those changes will be". But he has been told, repeatedly, by all the leading medical professions just what is wrong with the Bill and what changes are needed. Yet, in spite of all the changes he believed were necessary, and which he set out in his speech, he claimed that "our NHS will be much like what we have today". Plus ç a change. Plus c'est la mê me chose.

According to Cameron there are two major issues that need to be addressed. One is the "problem of waste and inefficiency". The other is that "people are living longer" and at the same time "in many ways we are also becoming less healthy", placing increasing demands (and costs) on the NHS. On the former, Cameron & co. have stated that savings of £20 billion can be made. This is some £5 billion more than Labour had envisaged. But Cameron's words contained a hidden threat. "It's the way the system can encourage over-spending", he said. "If a hospital doesn't balance its books, year after year, then that hospital will be bailed out and subsidised by the surpluses taken from other hospitals which have kept within their budget. If there is one health authority that invests money into the prevention of diseases like diabetes and another that is poor at prevention, has poor quality outcomes and over-spends then money is snatched from the former to prop up the latter." But wait a moment. Isn't that why our health service is called a NATIONAL health service? Of course, underachieving hospitals need to improve, but it sounds as if Cameron believes that if they run out of money, which may not be due to inefficiency but to over-demand, they should be closed. And this is exactly what some hospitals have already been threatened with.

People are living longer, and many are becoming less healthy largely due to increased obesity. This is driving up demand and increasing the cost of new drugs and technologies. So what is Cameron's solution? He told his audience that "a world class health service demands these advances" in new drugs and technologies. But his answer is not to spend

more money. That is not an option for Cameron. "If we stay as we are, the NHS will need £130 billion a year by 2015 - meaning a potential funding gap of £20 billion." His solution is "to change and modernise the NHS, to make it more efficient and more effective - and above all, more focused on prevention, on health, not just sickness. We save the NHS by changing it." There's actually nothing new in what Cameron says. Labour began the process of change, including a greater focus on prevention, that Cameron wants to take further. And he now accuses them of having failed. But his changes carry a serious risk of failure. He told his audience that he wants "An NHS free from political control." The Health & Social Care Bill absolves the Secretary of State from all responsibility for the NHS. It will therefore no longer be a NATIONAL Health Service, but a service run by professionals in competition with each other. It will become, as Sarah Wollaston warned, a post-code lottery. If you happen to live in an area where your local hospital runs out of money, don't expect it to be bailed out by another with a surplus: it will close. That'll be life (and death) under Cameron & co.

### Tax Avoidance

Cameron could plug the funding gap of £20 billion in the NHS by bearing down much harder on tax avoidance. On 19 May, Treasury Minister David Gauke told Labour's John McDonnell that "HMRC's most recent estimate of the tax gap is £42 billion for 2008-09." Add revenue lost through tax evasion and the figure exceeds £100 billion. Gauke said that "The Government are committed to tackling tax avoidance and since May 2010 has set out their strategic approach and explained action being taken to put it into practice in the Budget document 'Tackling Tax Avoidance'. The Government have also shown their strong support for HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in its operational work by providing investment of £917 million over the spending review period to tackle avoidance, evasion and criminal attack with the objective of bringing in around £7 billion per year in additional by 2014-15."

However, it's well documented that Vodafone and other companies have been treated very leniently by HMRC

and have avoided paying their fair share of tax. It's also widely reported that the Barclay brothers, owners of the Daily Telegraph, and other holders of non-dom status, pay minimum tax, and are to give HMRC £25,000 a year as compensation for this. Scrapping non-dom status would bring in huge amounts of revenue. And the Barclay brothers and others, whose business is physically fixed in the UK, couldn't do anything about it. But Cameron and Osborne, like Blair and Brown, don't want to upset their business friends.

### Double-Speak

On 3 May the Foreign Secretary William Hague was asked by Tory backbencher Jason McCartney, if he would make a statement on the effectiveness of the Government's actions with respect to Libya. Hague's reply was a good example of British double-speak. "The UK", he said, "continues to take a leading role in international efforts to protect civilians in Libya. The case for action remains compelling. Gadaffi's regime persists in attacking its own people and wilfully killing its own civilian population." A clear understanding of that latter statement is that Gadaffi's primary target is the civilian population of the towns held by the rebels and not the rebel forces themselves, who may be holed up there. PNs has no way of knowing if this is the case. And Hague's information is gathered from the rebels themselves. The deliberate killing of civilians is a crime under international law. And if Gadaffi is guilty of it, he is an international criminal. But Britain itself is not entirely innocent in these matters. Remember Dresden?

Labour's David Winnick asked: "Considering the killing of one of Gadaffi's sons and his very, very young grandchildren, is it not the case that, despite the denials that have been made, the policy of NATO is now first and foremost regime change, and secondly to kill Gadaffi himself?" To which Hague replied: "We want Gadaffi to go, and virtually the whole world wants him to go - let us be in no doubt about that - but the incident to which the hon. Gentleman refers was an attack on a command and control location. NATO has increased the number of air strikes against the command and control functions of the Libyan regime,

which in our view is wholly legitimate within the implementation of resolution 1973, and such attacks will continue."

We have only the word of NATO military commanders and Hague that the attack was on a command and control centre. It may have been, but how are we, the public, to know? However, what is noticeably absent from Hague's statement is one single word of regret for the killing of civilians, in this case very young children, and his support for further attacks, regardless of the threat to civilian life. And comments further in the statement showed his contempt for the lives of Gadaffi's family or, indeed, any Libyan family which happens to be in the way of NATO air strikes. He said: "Whether individuals are targeted depends, of course, on how they behave, and whether they are part of command and control centres, and on where they are at the time. I do not think it is right to provide a running commentary on targeting, and nor is it militarily sensible to do so, and I therefore do not want to expand on my earlier answers." Hank Williams could have written 'Cold Cold Heart' specially for our Foreign Secretary.

### Shaking Hands With The Devil

While HM was in Ireland on what was regarded as a goodwill visit, the PM was in Britain extending a hand of friendship to a tyrant, currently engaged in slaughtering his own citizens. (No, it wasn't Colonel Gadaffi and yes, it's true, Britain has a history of slaughtering Irish citizens). Bahrain's Crown Prince, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa was reported to be "here on a mission to repair the damaged reputation of his dynasty." (Independent, 20 May). Bahrain is, of course, different to Libya. It is a UK ally, holding the Shia majority at bay lest they take control and line up with Iran against the West. Bahrain is also an ally of Saudi Arabia, the latter providing military assistance to quell the protestors. And nothing must be done or said to upset the Saudis; so Cameron shakes hands with the devil.

A week earlier, on 12 May, Senior Government Ministers and Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary, greeted Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, the chairman of the Libyan national transitional council (NTC)

in London. Foreign Secretary William Hague's statement to MPs on 13 May confirmed that the UK are in Libya until Gadaffi leaves or, more likely, is assassinated. It also suggested that a compromise, for example a divided Libya with Gadaffi controlling the west and the rebels the east, is not an option.

This is Hague's full statement: "In line with our assessment of the NTC as the legitimate interlocutor in Libya representing the aspirations of the Libyan people, the Government have invited the NTC to establish an office in the UK. This will enhance our existing relationship with the NTC, and better enable us to fulfil our commitment to protect civilians under threat of attack from the Gadaffi regime. It will help us to work more closely together on sharing information and formulating our policy towards Libya. This arrangement does not affect our position on the legal status of the NTC: the British Government will continue to recognise states, not Governments. The UK will also strengthen its position in eastern Libya when our new Permanent Head of Office in Benghazi John Jenkins arrives in the near future."

"In parallel to this, the UK will be a key contributor to the deployment of a multi-national team of experts to Benghazi. With the UN still unable to deploy, this team will conduct a stabilisation assessment, and advise and assist the NTC on meeting their longer-term needs. I also intend to provide further practical and material support to the NTC in the form of further communications equipment, bullet-proof vests and uniforms for the civilian police authorities. I also intend to provide support for the NTC's fledgling media and broadcasting operations.

As with all the material and advisory support we are providing to the NTC, this support is within the terms of UN Security Council resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya. This support has been requested by the NTC and will help them ensure that they administer a territory under their control to international standards and to protect the aspirations of the Libyan people. Her Majesty's Government remain resolutely committed to implementation of UN Security Council

resolutions on Libya and to supporting the Libyan people in determining their own future."

It's noticeable that Hague used the term "Libyan people" three times in his statement, without defining exactly who they are. One can only assume he means the Libyan people outside the areas controlled by Gadaffi's forces, for he cannot possibly know just who supports the rebels in Tripoli, for example. And he also cannot know how many civilians support Gadaffi. It seems that Hague regards Gadaffi's civilian supporters as non-citizens, whose views will be disregarded, should there be a post-Gadaffi Libya. One senses there is trouble ahead for the "Libyan people."

But one group seems to have a deep insight into Libyan public opinion. On 13 May, the International Crisis Group (ICG) issued a statement from Brussels in which, inter alia, it said, "it is virtually impossible for the pro-democracy current of urban public opinion in most of western Libya (and Tripoli in particular) to express itself and weigh in the political balance. All this, together with mounting bitterness on both sides, will constitute a heavy legacy for any post-Qadaffi government." And on NATO, it said, "Their repeatedly proclaimed demand that 'Qadaffi must go' confuses two quite different objectives. To insist that he can have no role in the post-Jamahiriya political order is one thing, and almost certainly reflects the opinion of a majority of Libyans as well as of the outside world. But to insist that he must go as a precondition for any negotiation, including that of a ceasefire, is to render a ceasefire all but impossible and maximise the prospect of continued armed conflict."

PNs agrees that Gadaffi's departure should not be a precondition for negotiation, and that negotiation is an essential alternative to the current military stalemate, but finds it difficult to reconcile the two ICG statements. If, as the ICG states, it is "virtually impossible for the pro-democracy current of public opinion" to express itself, how can it know that the opinion of a majority of Libyans is that Gadaffi "can have no role in the post-Jamahiriya political order"? If we are to heed the "opinion of a majority of

Libyans", assuming we can accurately assess that majority, as Hague appears to insist, then there would be no point in negotiations, and Gadaffi must go. But the ICG supports a ceasefire followed by negotiations, which involve Gadaffi. And there can only be one outcome: a divided Libya, which the rebels, and Hague, strongly oppose. So, it looks like it's going to be a fight to the bitter end.

## Military Melting Pot

The latest statement from Foreign Secretary William Hague on 16 May covered the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan; regions and countries in which the UK has a direct involvement because, as Hague told MPs, "Our security and prosperity in Britain are indivisible from those of other countries. We cannot seal ourselves off from dangers in other countries or prosper fully alone, and it is against our values - as, indeed, it is against our interests - to stand by while conflict and instability develop. That has been shown to be true time and again in the regions that we are debating today." But this can equally be said of almost any other country in the world, yet most of them are either not involved at all, or are involved to a minimum extent. One suspects that the UK's involvement has more to do with its history - it is a floating military machine, not a country - and a desire to protect its economic interests, than any urge to do good in the world. And Hague's speech, and those of most MPs who followed him, provided evidence of that.

Hague covered the full spectrum of policy on UK involvement, but focused largely on Afghanistan and Libya. On Libya he reiterated his view that Gadaffi must go and seemed to imply that that would happen sooner, rather than later. He told MPs that, "The Gadaffi regime is now isolated and on the defensive. It has lost control of large swathes of Libya already. The regime's military capability has been significantly degraded and £12 billion of its assets have been frozen in this country alone. NATO has conducted more than 3,600 sorties and more than 2,600 strike sorties since 31 March, destroying ammunition stores, armoured and other vehicles and surface-to-air missile launchers, while at sea 20 ships are now patrolling the central Mediter-

ranean under NATO command to enforce the arms embargo.”

But if Gadaffi is on the defensive and has lost control of large swathes of Libya, how is he able to continue slaughtering civilians as Hague and other MPs suggest? And if he stopped killing civilians, what then? That was the question asked by Tory backbencher Julian Lewis. He said, “Will my right hon. Friend reassure us that there will be no change in the mission - no mission creep? A no-fly zone can be successful in preventing civilians from being massacred - that is why I voted for it - but what would the Government do if it became clear that the air raids have succeeded in preventing that and that Gadaffi is desisting from threatening to massacre whole swathes of his own people, but that he is staying in place? Would we then call off the campaign because the threat of massacre had been reduced to the point that it did not need to concern us any more, or would we say, ‘As long as Gadaffi is in place, the campaign goes on’? That is where we might find ourselves in legal difficulties.”

Hague’s response clearly indicated that even if Gadaffi complied with the terms of resolution 1973, it would in no way affect NATO action. He has to go. It’s as simple as that. He said, “Of course it is open to Colonel Gadaffi to comply with resolution 1973, to end violence against civilians and to have a genuine ceasefire. President Obama and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear at the beginning what he would need to do in order to do that; he would need to disengage from battles in places such as Misrata, to cease using his forces against civilians who try to protest in Tripoli, and so on. So it is open to him to do this. It would certainly not bring to an end the enforcement of a no-fly zone, the arms embargo and so many parts of the UN resolution, but in that situation the position - the need to protect civilians from attack - would be different. However, Colonel Gadaffi does not do this, presumably because if he did he would no longer be able to maintain himself in power, as he relies entirely on force to keep himself in power. That is why the question of his being there and remaining in power is, in practical terms, intimately bound up with resolving the conflict.” With those words,

Hague admitted that there has been ‘mission creep’; that regime change, not the protection of civilians, is the overriding purpose of NATO.

That was Hague’s message to Gadaffi. But what of his message to the leaders of Bahrain and Syria, where hundreds of unarmed protestors have been massacred and thousands more imprisoned and tortured? On Bahrain he said: “We welcome the announcement in Bahrain that the state of national emergency will be lifted on 1 June and look forward to this commitment being met. We remain very concerned by the restrictions on freedom of speech and the reports of human rights abuses, including the widespread arrest of political activists and the severe charges brought against a number of doctors and nurses by a Bahraini tribunal. The Government of Bahrain must meet their human rights obligations and uphold political freedom, dialogue, equal access to justice and the rule of law. We also call on opposition groups in Bahrain to be prepared to enter into genuine dialogue.”

About Syria, he said: “This is our message to Syria, alongside our utter condemnation of the violence. Only meaningful reform that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people can provide peace and stability for Syria in the long term. The alternative - ever more violent repression - simply stokes up anger and frustration that will spill over in the future. On the point raised by the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr McShane), the European Union has already imposed a travel ban and assets freeze on 13 individuals in the Syrian regime, and on Friday we informed the Syrian ambassador to London that if the violence does not stop immediately, the EU will take further measures, including sanctions targeted at the highest levels in the Syrian Government. Alongside this action in the EU we are seeking a response from the UN Security Council in New York, where we are working to convince others that the Security Council must send an unequivocal message of condemnation of the situation and call for urgent political reform.”

### Still Fighting Old Battles

Defence Minister Andrew Robathan

told MPs on 16 May that, “Plans for the national event to mark Armed Forces day 2012 are being considered and a decision will be announced as soon as possible. In the meantime, I look forward to this year’s Armed Forces day on Saturday 25 June, including the national event, which will be hosted by Edinburgh. On the subject of honouring our armed forces, I think that the whole House would wish me to remind everyone that today is Albuhera day - the Middlesex day. Today is the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Albuhera, and that explains the naming of Middlesex day. The Middlesex Regiment subsequently became known as the Duke of Cambridge’s Own Regiment, which is particularly fitting this year.”

The Battle of Albuhera in the Peninsula War of 1811 had an indecisive outcome, and was noted mainly for the subsequent wider use of the term ‘Die Hard’. Colonel Inglis, commander of the 57th Regiment of Foot, later the West Middlesex Regiment, ordered all ranks to ‘die hard’, i.e. fight until the last. Given that they were expected to sacrifice their lives, come what may, the term ‘cannon fodder’ could equally have been applied to them. PNs mentions this, not to belittle the heroics of those involved, but to draw attention to our obsession with military battles and war, which we are not allowed to forget.

### The Short Answer Is Yes!

On 24 May, Plaid Cymru Member Jonathan Edwards, asked Armed Forces Minister Nick Harvey, “whether the British Military Mission to the Saudi Arabian National Guard trained any of the Saudi Arabian forces which were deployed in Bahrain.” This was Harvey’s circumlocutory answer: “The Ministry of Defence has extensive and wide-ranging bilateral engagement with Saudi Arabia in support of the Government’s wider foreign policy goals. The Ministry of Defence’s engagement with Saudi Arabia includes training provided to the Saudi Arabian National Guard, delivered through the British Mission. It is possible that some members of the Saudi Arabian National Guard which were deployed in Bahrain may have undertaken some training provided by the British Military Mission.”