

Labour & Trade Union Review

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The Coalition's False Promise.

Until the present, this magazine has not commented on higher education policy. Other matters vital to the interests to wage and salary earners have seemed more directly relevant. However, we cannot ignore the fact that well over 40% of eighteen year olds will expect to go into higher education. The proportion of the workforce who are graduates is currently 16% and will rise steadily over the coming years. The number of graduates produced has risen from less than 10% in 1970 to over four times that number at the present time. Successive governments have encouraged this trend, and, especially since Blair, they have emphasised the financial returns available to someone with a degree compared with someone who does not possess one. Various large sums, well over £100,000 before tax over a working lifetime are bandied around as a so-called graduate premium in the labour market. Since 1998 the government has virtually obliged universities to charge fees, currently at around £3,300 per annum, with loans funded by the government.

From 2012 however, the government proposes that universities will be obliged to charge the full cost of tuition for university courses, ranging from £6,000 to £9,000 per annum. The government will withdraw 80% of the teaching grant that it currently makes available to universities. It is important to note that this is not a cost saving measure, certainly not in the earlier years of the scheme when 'deficit reduction' is the order of the day as a stated Coalition priority. The state will have to provide massive up front loans to students of between £20 and £27 thousand per student in order to finance this. Loans will only

be paid back on incomes of over £21,000 per annum and will in any event be written off after thirty years. A default rate of 30% (the current figure for the more modest loans that now apply) seems wildly optimistic. This is yet another example of the 'never waste a good crisis' principle that the Coalition has been so adept at using in order to justify withdrawing the state from many activities in which it has previously been involved. The Liberals, who support this, are particularly culpable because in opposition they never adopted the principle that the state should not pay for university tuition and their excuse of financial necessity is obviously spurious. It was hoped that most universities would charge towards the lower end of this scale but it now appears that nearly all will charge at or near the £9,000 maximum. No university will want to look like a second rate cheapskate in the market for students and, in any event, will want to receive as much 'free money' from the state as it can.

This is a fiasco on an astonishing scale for the coalition. The bill for financing these loans could be £1 billion per annum greater than originally envisaged. The amount available for loans will be reduced unless the government covertly increases it, thus making a university education much more expensive for the state than it now is. Otherwise some universities will close, with devastating political consequences, as they are of economic and symbolic importance in their localities. Universities will be spending about £6,500 on tuition, £900 on bursaries and will be pocketing the balance. At the same time, they are supposed to be providing 'value for money' for the 'customer'; that is, the student. So the 'customer' will be repaying £27,000 at commercial interest rates over a thirty year period for a 'product' that actually cost the university £19,500. A student averaging earnings of £23,000 per annum over 30 years will still owe £17,000 at the end of that period according to the calculations of accountants.

This will be a difficult 'sell' for universities once students and their parents wake up to the situation. But it will also be a difficult sell for the government which set up this situation. It will also have to explain the colossal write-offs on these loans

to the electorate. But the situation is actually much worse than this, as the idea that there is a 'graduate lifetime earning premium' is largely a fraud and is increasingly being recognised as such. It is a classical example of playing around with statistics to get the result that the government wants, rather like the salesman for a dodgy financial product.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, the figure is an average taken by aggregating projected graduate incomes and dividing by the number of projected graduates. The median figure, that is the figure in the middle of the income distribution is much less, due to the distorting effect of the relatively small number of extremely high earning graduates from elite universities in the City and other lucrative places of employment. Second, it is a projection into the future ('future performance may not reflect past performance') and there are very good reasons to suspect that the future will not be as good as the past for graduates.

Third, a lot of the 'premium' will be the relative advantage that graduates will enjoy over non-graduates, not because they need their degree to do the job, but because their degree is a positional advantage that provides an easy means of selection for employers faced with a large number of applicants for each job. Even if we were to make the extremely generous assumption that the economy of the future will provide 20% of employment opportunities as jobs which require a degree, it is likely that more than half of the graduate workforce will not require one to do their jobs.

It is very interesting to compare the UK with Germany, a highly successful economy that depends on a highly qualified workforce for its success in both manufacturing and services. In 2007, 23% of Germans entered the workforce with a degree or lower higher education qualification; the equivalent figure for the UK was 37%. It is pretty clear that the production of masses of graduates is not necessary to economic success or, indeed, to creating a relatively fair society.

Finally, and perhaps most devastatingly, countries such as China and India are rapidly developing their graduate workforces. They will produce individu-

als just as highly skilled and qualified as those in the UK and US and global communications will allow much middle class work in engineering, accountancy and finance, law and advertising to be done much more cheaply in developing countries. 'Much more cheaply' means 'four of five times more cheaply'. The trend for graduate incomes in the UK and the US to stagnate or decline, that has now been evident for some time, is likely to accelerate. The globalisation of the economy and the short term quest for 'shareholder value' at any price will lead to job insecurity and declining incomes for graduate employees across the developed western world.

It is quite plausible to see a world in twenty years time in which low earning graduates burdened with debt, are unable to buy houses or afford to raise families, while many, although by no means all of those without degrees may be struggling even more. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a colossal fraud is being perpetrated on young people, with a tinge of blackmail thrown in ('don't get a degree and you'll find it difficult to get work'). Expanding higher education is an easy fix for any government that lacks the guts to oblige employers to provide decent vocational education and up their own demand for skills. It keeps young people out of the labour market for a few years and doesn't upset employers.

However, it provides little benefit to the economy and loads households with even more debt than they have already while imposing huge costs on the taxpayer. It will be very interesting to see how angry and politically restive the middle class will become as the full scale of the fraud gradually becomes clear to them. Needless to say, apart from some hypocritical bleating from the sidelines, the Labour Party is signed up to this agenda and actually set up the Browne Review on which the Coalition has based its own policies. If Ed Miliband was as concerned about the 'squeezed middle' as he pretends to be, this would be the starting point for a major policy review which looked at the relationship between education and economic policy in a clear-headed and realistic way. Fat chance of that from the Labour Party.

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Ulster, the next Paradis fiscal

Thirty years ago, living in La Rochelle, I came across the quaint French term '*Paradis Fiscal*'. Loosely translated, it means *Tax Haven*. The next Assembly aims to provide the Ulster business sector's '*silver bullet*' of reduced, 12.5% corporation tax rates. Under the nomenclature "Enterprise Zone" this provides for *Paradis Fiscal* status, supported by all Executive parties including, oddly, Martin McGuinness's Sinn Féin.

The world contains several main tax haven 'blocs'. First, a European zone including Switzerland, Monaco, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Andorra, Portuguese Madeira and the Netherlands, where Bono – whilst berating western taxpayers to boost African aid – shifted his tax affairs. America conducts a second sphere of influence, operating at Federal and wider levels. Delaware, Nevada and Wyoming are all low cost secrecy havens. Florida traditionally offers banking shelter to Latin America's oligarchs and financial elites. From the US Virgin Islands, Marshall Islands and Liberia reaching to Panama forms an outer ring under US protection.

The third, and main, tax haven bloc radiates from the City of London.

For many years, the City's financiers have facilitated industrial scale tax evasion. Barack Obama identified the 34 worst offending tax havens in sponsoring the 2008 Stop Tax Haven Abuse Bill presented to US Congress. Nine are under direct British control, such as Anguilla, Bermuda, Virgin Islands, Cayman, Gibraltar, Isle of Man and Jersey. A further fifteen are former colonies where British influence remains strong such as Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize,

Mark Langhammer

Cyprus, Malta, Dominica, Grenada, Hong Kong and Singapore. The City remains the true epicentre of empire. Northern Ireland will be next to join. The surprise is that McGuinness, who knows this in his bones, has been seduced by such economic Redmond-ism.

The UK tax gap tops £120 billion per annum in tax evaded, avoided and uncollected. Most is by super-wealthy individuals and global corporations. Some avoidance is legal, but only in the sense that slavery, or apartheid, were legal. Retrieving even half this tax would, alone, transform the UK deficit problem.

The evidence of low Irish corporation tax is that "*brass plate*" companies are enticed, but simply to do behind Dublin Georgian doors what they can't do at home. "*Lichtenstein on the Liffey*", Vince Cable called it. The ICTU's research document "*Pot of Gold or Fools Gold*" demonstrates that financial or "portfolio" investment in the Republic vastly outweighed productive inward investment.

Our 'Enterprise Zone' may artificially induce transactions to Belfast. It is less likely to assist indigenous growth. Fly-by-night companies with no intention of creating real jobs, may set up glass suites in Titanic Quarter. They will solely park profits before moving them swiftly to other tax havens. Head Offices may transfer here, but with no employment other than for jobbing solicitors and accountants. Artificial transactions, like 'repackaging of goods' (with minimal labour content) will shift profit to and from Northern Ireland. The tax avoiding companies likely to locate here are risky businesses,

beside which de-Lorean would seem innocent.

And the evidence? The Varney report has rubbished the notion, as has Tax Research UK. Only 4% of Northern Ireland companies pay the current 28% rate. The Azores judgement makes implementation high-risk for the Executive. No job creation arguments or criteria have been articulated for the policy. The Economic Reform Group is the main strong supporter. Likewise, the large accountancy firms, all implicated in the 'legal' tax avoidance game, have voiced strong support. As Mandy Rice-Davies might have said "*They would say that, wouldn't they*".

And if the tax take reduces, who pays? The PAYE sector, the "squeezed middle", including those whom I represent – teachers, classroom assistants, librarians, and technicians.

The most important feature of tax secrecy jurisdictions is always the same – that local politics is captured by financial services. Our politicians should concentrate on closing loopholes – not opening new avenues for evasion. It's time for Martin McGuinness and colleagues to reconsider *Paradis Fiscal* status for the North.

Mark Langhammer is member of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Putin on Russia's Recovery

“There is no alternative”, said Thatcher. Actually there were plenty, but the Soviet collapse of 1989-91 made her policies and Reagan's seem vindicated. Despite the massive crisis of 2008, Western Europe remains locked into the deadly dogmas of Neo-Liberal thinking. Cherish finance, engage in small wars all round the world, view public expenditure as wasteful, scorn manufacturing and view education as perhaps a waste of time.

Mean time the fast-growing economies of BRICS are taking a different line. The West is baffled, particularly at the switch-over in Russia, which after 1991 was for a time a complete convert to Neo-Liberal. That this was because Neo-Liberal *failed* is not something that occurs to them. Putin is viewed as a freak because he takes a world-view that would have been shared by both centre-left and centre-right in Western Europe before Thatcher.

Russia had an efficient fast-growing economy under Stalin. This was what made it a vital ally for Britain and the USA in World War Two. Poland in 1939 had collapsed in a few weeks, and Poland back in 1921 had scored a decisive victory over Soviet Russia. During the Nazi invasion, the Russian winter certainly helped, but the key factor was the ruthless industrialisation that Stalin carried through. Without it, Nazism would most likely have won World War Two, or at least have emerged as the dominant power. In such a world, it is likely that Britain would have hung onto its Empire. It is likely the USA would never have given up its official racism and segregation, which actually lasted till the 1960s despite the pressing need for Third World allies. And it is likely that equality for women and a tolerant attitude to sex would have developed more slowly,

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if they had developed at all. Up until the 1960s, the Soviet Union and global communism were the main supporters of such notions and conservative resistance was extremely strong.

In 1941, when Britain and the USA saw that Russia was surviving, and when Hitler helpfully brought the USA into the wider war by declaring war after Pearl Harbour, the three powers made a deal to split the world. Germany would be broken. The West also accepted that Poland and most other European countries east of Germany would become subordinate to Russia: never mind that Poles were officially allies and that many of them were still fighting as part of Western armies. It was also assumed that China would remain a US dependency: Stalin actually stuck to this, but the Chinese Communists were strong enough to win on their own.

After Stalin, there should have been a relaxation, but without any apology for the past. (Just as Britain and the USA have seldom apologised for actions that were definitely crimes by modern standards.) The post-Stalin leadership should have done something like what happened in China after Mao, which Western experts continue to sneer at even as China goes from strength to strength. Instead Khrushchev sowed confusion, by first denouncing Stalin as a criminal and then using tanks to suppress an uprising in Hungary that was a predictable result of the ideological chaos he had caused. And Lenin continued to be above criticism, which meant that a partly socialist system in the USA and Western Europe was denounced as capitalist and deserving of revolutionary overthrow. But Stalin's highly successful economic sys-

tem was treated as something that must be urgently reformed, without much regard for the consequences.

The various reforms carried through by Khrushchev, Brezhnev and finally Gorbachev tended to slow growth and produced a comfortable stagnation. When the USSR fell, Western advice was to end the comfortable stagnation by mass privatisation, which of course led to a lot of wealth being looted and moved to Western bank accounts. The economy shrank and life expectancy slumped. Russia then seemed ruined and was dismissively called ‘Upper Volta with nuclear weapons’.

Putin was put into power by Yeltsin after Yeltsin seeming realised that he'd blundered. Putin quietly went back to normal politics and economics and revived Russia's shrunken fortunes. The West has found this intolerable ever since it realised what was happening. Their big mistake was not to launch a ‘Marshall Plan’, foreign aid and a state-orientated economic policy of the sort that restored Japan and West Germany after World War Two. Policies that made them firm allies of the USA and won the Cold War. But to Neo-Liberal ideology, it was unacceptable to suppose that there was anything good about Keynesian policies just because they worked. Or anything bad about their own let-things-drift notions just because they were failing.

With Russia secure as part of BRICS, Putin is sensibly ignoring them and using Keynesian methods to help Russia ride out the current crisis. In his *Annual report to the State Duma on government performance in 2010*, he explained what was being done.

“The global economy is now gradually recovering; that is a fact. But the con-

sequences of the crisis turned out to be so serious that they have provoked social tensions in many countries and whole regions of the world. Furthermore, the situation is becoming unstable in entire regions, which can lead to unpredictable consequences. You have probably heard that the outlook on the US government debt has been downgraded. Professionals say this is most likely an election move, in this case, by Republicans. One way or another, it will have a negative effect on the global economy.

“The lesson all of us should learn is that economic and government weakness and susceptibility to external shocks inevitably threaten sovereignty. We all know very well that – let’s admit it openly – if you are weak, there will always be someone who will be eager to advise you on where to move, which policy to pursue and which development path to choose. These seemingly friendly and unobtrusive recommendations may look good, but in point of fact they camouflage diktat and gross interference in the affairs of sovereign states. We are perfectly aware of this...

“Russia is a social state by constitution, and we shall never ever go back on our social commitments, whatever happens, whatever the circumstances; the government can guarantee that.

“Now let us look at what we have actually accomplished over this very difficult period. Having come through severe economic shocks with a budget deficit, over the past two years the country has nevertheless provided 250,000 apartments to military servicemen and WWII veterans free of charge. It has met its targets in repairing dilapidated and hazardous housing and re-housing residents in better accommodation. You know that we set these targets before the crisis hit, when the economy was experiencing peak growth. We did not abandon these plans, we fulfilled them, despite it all: touching, in one way or another, the lives of as many as 10 million Russians.

“As you know, work pensions were increased by 45% in 2010. We organised the construction of 38 perinatal centres and other high-tech medical centres across Russia, and continued to pursue

far-reaching demographic programmes. We have indexed all the benefits people received under these programmes, including maternity capital – as we promised we would when we formulated this programme.

“Government spending on education increased 50% compared with pre-crisis 2007, and federal allocations for civilian science and research more than doubled. Economic growth resumed in July 2009; in 2010, the country’s GDP grew 4%, showing the highest growth rate of any G8 country.

“In 2010, Russia’s recovery from the crisis continued amid major natural disasters and catastrophes, an unprecedented drought, and heatwave and wildfires. Think back to the 1930s, when the drought was less serious than last year’s but it produced devastation on a huge scale, including famine and enormous loss of life. We did not allow anything even remotely resembling those events to take place again....

“Ladies and gentlemen, looking at key performance indicators for 2010 one can see that the crisis retreated almost in all sectors, including industry, banking, real estate and the labour market. Profits of Russian companies surged by more than 40% in 2010 and investment in fixed capital rose 6%. Russian stock markets have become world growth leaders and their capitalisation reached \$1 trillion by the beginning of 2011 and increased by an additional \$100 billion by April 1, 2011. Our stock markets showed the best yearly performance among all BRICS countries. The best yearly performance.

“Banks are again stepping up loans for the real sector. Russia’s loan portfolio grew by 13% in 2010, which is a better performance than in most G20 states. Certainly, the growth in 2006 and 2007 was significantly higher. At the same time, the threats were also more serious, including the so-called bubbles. So, 13% is a fairly good performance, particularly in current conditions. In February 2010, the average interest rate for a commercial borrower with a good credit rating stood at 12.7% and fell to 8.7% by February 2011. There are different interest rates for different purposes, for different borrowers but I’m referring to

the average rate.

“This all is the best evidence that we were absolutely right to provide massive support for banks during the crisis.

“I would like to emphasise once again that back then the government was protecting Russia’s fiscal and financial system rather than certain bankers or individuals so that the 1998 situation did not happen again. Back in 1998 the system collapsed and regular people, the bank account holders, had to pay for the government’s failed financial policy....

“Russia’s industrial production grew by 8.2% in 2010 and processing industries experienced an even higher growth of almost 12%. Machine engineering sector took the lead with a 25% increase. Nearly half of the GDP growth in 2010 was due to the good performance of manufacturing, which is a high value-added industry. Labour productivity went up 3.1% last year, as I said citing available data, but the adjusted figure I received this morning is 3.4%. This means the structure of the economy is gradually changing, becoming more effective, and this process should be strengthened, of course.

“It should be said that the current favourable situation in the commodities market, meaning hydrocarbons, does not mean we can relax. The oil boom we are now witnessing has only highlighted the need for accelerating the transition to a new model of economic development.

“I’d like to remind you that before the crisis we could increase the export of commodities and attract affordable loans abroad. These sources once played a considerable role in our economic growth, but they have become considerably constrained now. Not that they have disappeared, although some say they have. No, they have not disappeared, but they have decreased; that is a fact. Therefore, we should now rely on the domestic market, the dynamic development of the non-commodity sectors, quality investment and high business activity. We should employ the momentum of recovery growth to ensure an innovative direction and to boost structural changes in the real economy and in the employment market...

“I am confident that we should initiate a new wave of Russian industrial technological development and create an environment for attracting long-term ‘smart’ investment and innovative technology to the country. This is the only option, the only alternative, if we want to ensure the competitiveness of our human resource potential and bolster the demand for it.

“You must remember that the effects of the economic downturn were most visible at auto plants, which were halting their conveyors. That was really troubling because Russian automakers employ about 600,000 people, and another 3 million people work for related companies. Along with their families, you can imagine how many people that could affect. We certainly could not leave them without support.

“During the recession, when automobile production in Russia slumped by 60%, the government provided unprecedented support to the industry. Throughout 2009 and 2010, the industry received a total of 170 billion roubles of federal funds under various programmes. As a result, the production of cars more than doubled in 2010; the production of trucks surged 74.5% and buses by 23.6%.

“In the past twelve months – since April 2010 – Russia’s auto industry grew by a double-digit figure every month. Vehicles assembled in Russia accounted for 70% of all automobile sales on the domestic market.

“I remember how I had to fight a host of protests and complaints against supporting Russian automakers. But who else should we support? Foreign producers? The industry is up and running now, introducing new technologies, and all international brands are here...

“Let me repeat, it is our goal to set up full production cycles inside the country, from R&D to manufacturing components and commercial production. This is a matter of principle, because it is the only way to create well-paid jobs, and maintain local technology, engineering, design and production at a high level.

“We plan to improve and refine our customs policy so as to promote the development of high-tech production in

Russia on the one hand, and, on the other, so as to avoid creating barriers to the import of unique equipment, which is not and will not be produced in Russia in the near future.

“We need to correctly identify where our priorities lie. In some cases it may be more efficient to buy available licences and goods abroad: this could yield rapid results. If we have accumulated good ideas and can create our own breakthrough products, we need to invest in their development....

“We will exploit all the benefits of integration as we pursue our goal of furthering Russian industrial and economic development. Esteemed colleagues, 2010 was the year that saw the ‘birth’ of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The unified customs tariff and the joint Customs Code have both come into force....

“The re-equipment of the Russian Air Force and air defence systems will become a priority aspect of the Armed Forces’ short-term development. Air-defence brigades are already receiving new S-400 surface-to-air missile systems. Production of the S-500 surface-to-air missile system will begin in the future. This system can support air defence, missile defence and destroy targets in near-Earth space....

“I would like to emphasise a very important point here. In the coming decade, we will need to almost completely rearm and re-equip our armed forces. There has been a lot of speculation recently as to who is going to receive the state contracts worth trillions of roubles. I am absolutely convinced the modern weaponry for our army and navy can and must be supplied by the Russian defence industry.

“Obviously, certain technology and weapons types can and probably should be purchased abroad. But we need to understand that nobody will sell us the most advanced and latest generation technology, just as we by no means export everything we have. This is standard international practice.

“Secondly, we need to make every effort to achieve the leading positions in key areas of defence technology in major

weapons systems.

“And finally, the third, and probably the most important point is that the budget funds earmarked for defence projects should not go abroad. The bulk of these resources should be spent in Russia and fuel our industry and science to create new high-tech and high quality jobs. That is the way we intend to act, let there be no doubt about it.

“I would like to emphasise once again that a strong defence industry, nuclear industry, rocket industry – these are our competitive advantages inherited from previous generations, for which we are very grateful to them. And we are determined to strengthen and further develop these sectors.

“Ladies and gentlemen!

“We need to depoliticise these issues. We inherited this from the Soviet Union and we are proud of it. A low bow to those who designed these systems. We will work on their further development...

“Millions of people work in the public sector. The work they do benefits the entire population, and of course, we must support them and we will certainly continue to do so. About 5.3 million children were born in Russia over the last three years. And the annual rise in the number of births was 35,000 children, on average.

“The growth in life expectancy is a very important indicator. In fact, it is perhaps the best telling indicator there is. Life expectancy today is 69 years on average. This figure was 65 years in 2005, thus from 2005 to 2010 it has increased by four years...

“We presented the programme of the new government to you in this hall practically three years ago. We had a more difficult time than we had expected. We had to promote development and fight against the crisis at the same time by protecting the economy and the welfare of our people. We had to uphold everything that had been done in the social sphere, education, and healthcare and restore and strengthen the potential for growth step by step.

“Now we have every reason to say that the national economy has made a post-crisis breakthrough. This is the foundation on which we have formed our modernisation agenda and drafted large-scale plans for economic and social progress.

“The government will do everything in its power to allow the economy to continue its steady upsurge and will likewise continue to work for the growth of the prosperity of Russian families. In doing so, we have been invariably guided by a fundamental principle: to listen to the people and work in their interests. And we will not forego it.”

Though he doesn't call it Keynesian, that is substantially what it is. Not particularly left-wing, but free of the Neo-Liberal ideas spread by Reagan and Thatcher. Treat education and science as sources of wealth. Trade with foreign countries but never become dependent on them. Be ready for a major war – the USA is getting more and more adventurous and foolish as its power decays, and who knows what idiot will be in the White House in 2013 or 2017?

Apart from the military build-up, everything he's doing and planning could be sensibly done by a government in Britain, or in Ireland, or in any part of Western Europe. Instead essential state functions such as health, education and pensions are attacked for the benefit of 'fancy finance' that has gone well beyond the sensible and necessary role of banking in a money economy.

The full speech – nearly 27,000 words in English translation – can be found at [<http://government.ru/eng/gov/priorities/docs/14898/>], and at [<http://www.voltairenet.org/article169560.html>]. 'Voltaire Net' is mostly in French but does have some interesting articles in English.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel

The Socialist Party election manifesto.

The Socialist Party have published their election manifesto.

First impressions are not good: it is too long (28 pages, of which 19 close typed); it has too many sentences that don't mean much or else express pious wishes “we will fight for, we will encourage, we will discourage”, meaning, “we would like, if it was possible and they let us”. It uses, at its maximum enthusiasm, Republican rhetoric that Sarkozy himself uses, e.g. Defend industry! Labour must be as well rewarded as Capital! Vive la République!

The word “Republic” stands for a France that was independent, defended its industry, ensured the security of its citizens, had a network of public services and owned valuable national assets.

The population, with Sarkozy and some in his party, regards this Republic ambiguously, both, negatively, as a thing of the past (archaic, as Sarkozy says) and as something positive (it kept jobs in the country). The Socialist Party is also ambiguous, but for the purposes of the Manifesto, it is more Republican than not. Unfortunately, they don't go further than being Republican, and their rhetoric, as a consequence, is not more inspiring than Sarkozy in Republican mode.

The Socialists are severely hemmed in by reality in what they can propose; they have to act within the E.U., and act against international finance. In this respect they say they want to reform Europe so that the interests of France can be protected, and they say they want to constrain finance and make it serve industry. Let us look at this defence of industry against finance.

It is foremost a defence of industrialists and employers, rather than a defence of workers, except in the sense of

providing employment. Without industrial employment, there are no industrial workers. This defence will work mainly through a change in taxation, to the advantage of employers and the detriment of shareholders.

Featuring as number one of thirty proposals, is the creation of a State Investment Bank to help finance industry; this bank will be made up of existing finance bodies and regional funds, listed in small print in a footnote in the main text. It will finance research and development (another of Sarkozy's big ideas in his State loan scheme) in Small and Medium firms.

Other measures tend to make it easier for employers to take on staff and harder for them to use redundancies to reduce costs. Other State measures will act as unseen subsidies by making the cost of living cheaper (rent control and social use of utilities profits, social housing building programme).

[Comments are in square brackets]

Employers at the moment pay social insurance charges based on the wages paid, amounting to 80% of a worker's wage, to be paid on top of the wage. (This is a combined worker/employer contribution). With the socialists in power, employer tax will be based on value added, which means sales, instead of wages. This switch/exoneration depends on employers respecting conditions to do with training, health and safety, no excessive use of short-term contracts, sex equality.

[This could encourage employers to take on more employees, but another consequence seems to be that there will be a huge shortfall for the State in Social Insurance payment, in particular pensions.]

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Corporate tax, now of 33%, will be reduced to 20% for firms that reinvest 100% of their profits, and increased to up to 40% for firms who put paying dividends first. [But what firm reinvests 100% of its profits? One that is not financed by shareholders?]

These are measures to support firms and therefore employment, but there are also measures to stop compression of labour costs being used as a way of increasing profit; so redundancies will cost more to the employer, in firms that pay excessive dividends or buy up their own shares. Redundancies not justified by economic difficulties will attract penalties in the shape of refunds of state aid.

The state will stop subsidising overtime, which made overtime cheaper than employing more people. [The State subsidy for overtime was introduced to dilute the 35-hour week.]

The wage bill will be reduced further by limiting top wages to not more than 20 times the minimum wage in firms that have State involvement; in other firms, “the general assembly of shareholders will fix the ratio, by voting on a proposal by the board of directors and taking into account advice from the works council”.

Bonuses will not exceed fixed income.

Fighting finance

Managing an industry will thus be made more attractive, while on the other hand making money out of money will be made less attractive, by being taxed as ordinary income. At the moment income from dividends etc is taxed less than income from work. Profits received by shareholders, as well as bonuses and stock options, will be taxed as normal income tax.

Bright young people will be “encouraged” to study engineering instead of finance [strong taxation of financial gambles might stop that being just a pious wish.]

Banks and financial institutions will

pay 15% extra corporate tax.

The revenue from the extra banking levy will go to financing distributive, pay as you go, pensions (as opposed to individual savings “pots”). Pension funds will not be encouraged. The pension system will remain distributive [although there are ambiguous formulations on this subject].

Inheritance tax will go back to pre 2007 levels.

Tax breaks that are not socially and economically useful will be reconsidered.

[This last means that the Socialist Party is not committing itself explicitly to removing the famous cap on tax (the tax shield, *bouclier fiscal*) of 50%, which some even in the UMP, Sarkozy’s party, want removed as iniquitous.]

Fighting finance at European level

This is where the Manifesto loses conviction, since the Socialist Party does not have a free hand there. We are not alone, we are told, there is the European Socialist Party that will fight with us and for us in Europe, but who has heard of it? What daring deeds is it famous for?

Anyway, it will help us to:

Create an EU level rating agency.

Set up Eurobonds to finance industries of the future

Separate banking activity into deposit and investment banks.

Fight tax havens.

Fight for the 0,05% tax on financial transactions (the principle of which has already been mooted in the European Parliament in March 2011). [In the 30-point summary at the end of the document it says, “We will set up this tax; in the smaller print body of the text it says, “If we can manage it”.]

Raise tariffs against products made in conditions that do not respect inter-

nationally agreed social, health and environment norms, if multilateral negotiations do not give results. [This means goods from China, and it means Europe imposing tariffs which will damage European exports, which some European countries will not accept.]

Conclusion

A recent opinion poll (24/4/11) gives Marine Le Pen 35% of working class voting preference, against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, 17%, Nicolas Sarkozy, 15%. Other possible socialist candidates also score poorly: Martine Aubry (16%), Ségolène Royal or François Hollande (both 15%). Let us leave on one side the question of who was interviewed as counting as “working class”, and the question of abstentions, and the love of the media for a shock horror National Front story. One reason for the popularity of the National Front is their stated intention to fight globalisation and keep jobs in France.

The Socialist Party is in competition for votes with the National Front. In that situation its relation to Europe is a handicap because it has to acknowledge the dependence of France on Europe, and that sounds weak and unpleasant, whereas the National Front can sound strong by rejecting Europe. People might doubt whether this rejection is realistic, but those who lose their jobs through the ‘modernisation’ of the economy will have nothing to lose by believing in unrealistic promises.

There is more in the programme than in this brief report. There are worrying aspects, like the personalisation of social insurance, ‘national solidarity’ to look after the very old (‘aged persons in a situation of loss of autonomy’), and especially, not having the courage to put up the top level of tax. Some are pleased that the programme is not anti-nuclear, but calls for an end to dependence on nuclear power **and** oil. One good thing would certainly be the repeal of the law on the reform of local government. This promise would be implemented, since the Socialists are strong at local level.

Comments from readers would be welcome.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

Fighting Fragments In Libya

No serious political movement should be dependent on outside forces, particularly if it intends to rebuild the state rather than just hijack the existing state structures.

The rebels in Libya seem never to have had any coherent notion beyond hijack what exists. Only the Islamists might have a definite idea, and they are sensibly laying low for now. 'Anti-corruption' and 'anti-tyranny' have time and again proved to be useless slogans, used to throw out existing rulers in favour of a new crowd who soon become every bit as corrupt and tyrannical.

There was a certain amount of sense in a no-fly zone, if it really was the Libyan air force that made the difference. But it wasn't. The initial announcement seems to have encouraged the rebels and they pushed along the coastal road as far as Sirte, Gaddafi's home town. NATO bombed Sirte, enraging the locals who seem to be solid for Gaddafi.

"Sirte is of unique importance to the regime, both as a garrison and for what it represents. Once a poor village, it is now a city of 130,000 people, showered with money and privileges during most of Colonel Qaddafi's 42-year rule. In 1988 he moved many government departments and the country's rubber-stamp parliament there from Tripoli, the capital. In 1999 he proposed it as the administrative centre of a 'United States of Africa'. Western reporters in Sirte say its people's declarations of devotion to the colonel and their willingness to fight for what they have are sincere.

"That makes things tricky for the coalition. It cannot claim to be protecting local civilians when attacking government forces defending Sirte. But its commanders argue that the colonel's troops remain a legitimate target in Sirte since they still threaten civilians elsewhere." [A]

The tide of battle turned and the rebels lost again a lot of what they had won. They also showed a lack of skill and an unwillingness to learn:

"Weapons alone do not make a fighting force. It requires discipline, command and the knowledge of how not only to take, but to hold, ground.

"The rebel army has little of any of these. Zeal, they have in spades. But the rest is sadly lacking.

"Events of the last 24 hours have only exposed how giving them extra weapons is unlikely to be enough to drive them on to

Tripoli, especially if training is not provided in how to use them as most in this ad-hoc army have little if any military experience.

As Gaddafi forces went back on the offensive - raining munitions down on the most western of the small towns that the rebels had seized over the weekend - the revolutionaries quickly retreated in increasing panic and disarray.

"Yesterday this was seen in Nawfaliyah and Bin Jawad. Today there are reports they are pulling out of the key oil installation at Ras Lanuf and, in one claim, that Gaddafi's men are even advancing on a similar installation in Brega.

"In Bin Jawad the scene was one of utter chaos and confusion. One moment the revolutionaries were preparing to storm forward, the next rockets and shells started falling and the pickup trucks were turning tail with those still on the street running after them to be pulled on board.

"A few hours later they were back and claiming the recapture of the coastal town. There was just time for a revolutionary flag to be hoisted before the rockets came again and the same scene of disorderly flight.

"No one thought to prepare defences. In Iraq I watched US Marines obsessively digging holes every time they secured a new stretch of land.

"In Bin Jawad there was no such forward thinking so when the attack came there was no cover or defences, leaving little choice but to run. The road east was soon clogged with retreating vehicles.

"The revolutionaries know that they have a problem. Mustafah Sacuzay, who has been placed in charge of military training, was blunt in criticising their failure to establish 'secondary defences' and 'support the front line with more fighters' so that when those at the front broke the withdrawal could be stabilised." [B]

That was written on the 30th March. Very little has changed since then, except the rebels have maybe got even more chaotic. The magazine *Prospect* reports signs of this:

"I saw a murder one afternoon in central Benghazi. The victim was a tall, heavily built man in his thirties wearing jeans and a grey sweatshirt... The victim was a local man irritated by the sound of shooting in his apartment block doorway, where

the killer had stood firing aimlessly in the air: a regular pastime in the city. He had asked the gunman to go elsewhere. Instead, the man shot him three times in the head and throat and then fled, pursued by passersby. Over the next two hours, the victim's family seized the killer's brother and a friend, who was blind, as hostages. Then two pickup-loads of rebels tried to storm the apartment to release the men but were driven off by heavily armed family members and residents. Guns and rage determined the outcome, not law. I left without seeing it end after the fury became too much to endure...

"That week, dropping by the military headquarters to interview a rebel commander, I watched two groups of fighters embroiled in a mass punch-up. In the melee, the only bullets fired were in the air. That could easily change...

"The restaurant, almost empty, was suddenly 'secured' by half a dozen gunmen acting as bodyguards for three important guests: Christopher Prentice, the former British ambassador to Iraq, and two other British officials. I presumed their mission, which involved meeting the PTNC in Benghazi, had been secret or at least low key. We ignored each other, until one of their bodyguards rested

his Kalashnikov on his shoe and accidentally blew a hole in his foot. A scramble followed as the others rushed him to hospital, leaving Prentice and colleagues without protection. The debacle—its comedy, embarrassment, good intentions and hopeless amateurishness—seemed the perfect symbol for relations between rebels and their foreign allies." [AG]

How do the rebels think they are going to win? They think that NATO will do it for them. But NATO has re-discovered what they should have known from the stalemate in Iraq from 1991 to 2003: air power can destroy but not create. Nor is it likely they can send in troops: the war is already seriously unpopular:

"A new opinion poll shows Americans have mixed reactions about U.S. military involvement in Libya.

"The poll, conducted by an independent U.S.- based research group, found that 47 percent of Americans believe the United States was right to carry out airstrikes in Libya. Thirty-six percent said it was the wrong decision, and 17 percent had no opinion." [C]

That compares with 63% who initially supported the invasion of Iraq. [D]

It is similar in Britain: a majority of Britons supported the Iraq war, despite the huge protest march against it. Most of the former war-supporters now accept that it was an error, and there is much less enthusiasm for the Libyan venture:

"A third of people in the UK think going to war in Iraq was justified, but six in 10 believe it was a mistake, a BBC survey suggests.

"When the war began four years ago, two-thirds of Britons backed involvement, but the poll shows a marked decrease in support....

"A similar BBC/ICM poll in 2004 suggested that 46% of Britons were in support of the war and 48% thought British troops needed to remain in Iraq.

"However, by 2005, a third of people wanted British troops to leave Iraq immediately, a survey for BBC Newsnight suggested." [E]

"A poll for BBC News suggested that two-thirds of people believed Britain's military involvement in Libya would go on for some time...

"Some 38% of people thought the UK

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 sui-

cide 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

and its allies were right to carry out air strikes, while 35% said it was the wrong decision.” [F]

It could get worse. Britain has deployed its Eurofighters – now renamed Typhoons – and proudly showed a video showing them destroying two Libyan T72 tanks. But were the tanks a suitable target? A report in the *Daily Telegraph* says that the target was “believed to be an abandoned tank park”. [G] The T72 was a 1970s Soviet model and came in several versions, some of them rather poor. Another source said of the attack:

“The video appears to show a T-72 tank neatly parked, stationary and unmanned: the target was plainly not in use... Many Libyan armoured vehicles are old and not serviceable due to lack of parts and servicing...”

“It thus becomes fairly plain that in order to carry out this week’s small-scale attacks, the RAF must have resorted to measures such as pulling weapons instructors out of training units, disrupting the future personnel pipeline and quite possibly delaying the arrival of a proper, sustainable corps of Typhoon pilots capable of all tasks.

“And the service has done all this, seemingly, in order to blow up a couple of abandoned, probably unserviceable 40-year-old tanks (most likely the T-72M ‘monkey model’, as the Russians term the inferior kit they export to despised nominal allies).” [H]

Meantime in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain etc.

The situation keeps changing. Just now (26th April), the Yemeni leader has agreed to leave on terms: the opposition initially thought about holding out for complete surrender, but now seems to accept this. The Syrian leadership has dug in and may be ready to kill any number of protestors, now that limited forms have been rejected – but a protestor-made clip shown on Channel 4 News showed people throwing rocks at a tank and getting away with it. Much less reported by the West, there has been a massive and seemingly successful crackdown in Bahrain, with doctors punished

for treating wounded demonstrators. And the USA is now calling Libya a stalemate, which it plainly is.

It’s been said that Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt are the only Arab states that are coherent enough to hold together: all of the others might fragment. Several probably will. Morocco is currently under control of its traditional ruler. Tunisia and Egypt are heading gradually for elections which may greatly strengthen the Islamists, and maybe also the left in Tunisia.

Iraq seems determined that US troops will leave on schedule, by the end of this year.

Major blow-ups are almost certain to happen, probably resulting in a Middle East that is more Islamist and much more hostile to Israel.

Israel missed the chance to secure a stable peace in the 1990s when the USA was dominant and all of its opponents demoralised. They could have allowed a Palestinian state that would have kept the peace and might have had legitimacy in the eyes of most Arabs and Muslims. Instead they tried to take chunks of West Bank territory, which was too much. Now, probably, there will be no peace. By humiliating those Arab regimes that were fairly Western in their outlook, and then by making it clear they would be discarded if they ever got into trouble, the West and Israel are aiding the rise of an Islamist movement that seems willing to contemplate the immense destruction that would undoubtedly accompany another Arab war with Israel.

Elections

The Ivory Coast is still recovering from the civil war sparked by its election, and which needed direct French military intervention to resolve. The candidate who probably got the most votes is now in power. But the sectarian split remains, with the Christian south feeling it has lost control of its own country.

Nigeria also saw an open split between its Muslim north and Christian south, with the Christian candidate winning. But there was rioting and the deli-

cate balance of power was put at risk.

In Hungary, there are protests after an electoral alliance that indisputably won a two-thirds majority in the 2010 election chose to use its power to rewrite the Hungarian Constitution, which had been a modified version of the Communist-era constitution. The new constitution represents centre-right and Christian values, but that’s what the electorate opted for.

One idea that was briefly floated and then dropped was the idea of giving mothers an extra vote on behalf of their children. [L] It may be tried as a separate law.

The Anglosphere takes the view that competitive elections should be compulsory, but also that there is something badly wrong when this process does not produce two large parties which both support global-Anglo values. This is a broadly foolish idea and is visibly failing.

Amidst some rather muted commemorations of the USA’s 1860s Civil War, I’ve not seen any consideration of how a free electoral process and a free press could have produced such a devastating conflict. Or how about half of the original states could get so committed to the idea of slavery that they fought a war to defend it, under a Confederate constitution that had several clauses upholding it, and was otherwise much like the original 1787 Constitution. [M]

One hundred and fifty years ago, two bad causes met on the battlefields of North America. The Confederacy made a reasonable claim to self-determination, but the main motivation was the extension of slavery westward into new lands. The North was willing to live with slavery in the South, many Northern politicians were ready to see it extended and tried to award Kansas to the slave-owners. The failure to deliver Kansas plus the election of a committed anti-slavery candidate was the trigger. It wasn’t anything Lincoln had done: the initial secession and setting-up of the Confederacy happened in the long months between Lincoln being elected and him actually succeeding the previous President. His idea was just to limit

the possible expansion of slavery in the territories. During the war he tried to persuade the non-seceding slave states to abolish slavery gradually, allowing it to last until 1900. Only when moderate offers had been rejected did he go for abolition, and then only in the seceded states. Total abolition was possible only because most former slave states were under military occupation and not allowed to block the relevant constitutional amendment.

Anglo attempts to impose their current political system on the rest of the world have largely failed, mostly because Britain and the USA only made this system operative after many decades of painful evolution and some failures. (Britain failed to accommodate the Irish Catholics and the issue remains live in Northern Ireland.)

Multi-party elections allow people to express their spontaneous feeling. But unless there is a very strong political culture to contain them, what people spontaneously do is quarrel and split.

The notion that all will be well in the Arab World if they just have multi-party elections is amazingly naive. I expect to see it fully disproved in Tunisia and Egypt over the coming months.

BRICS in the wall

China has so far avoided the trap that the USSR under Khrushchev blundered into. They have resisted suggestions of a ‘G2’, China and the USA getting together to decide about the world.

About half the wealth of the world and maybe one quarter of its population has been permanently aligned with the USA since the end of World War Two. Some states have dropped out of the alliance and others have joined.

The USSR should not have tried to set itself up as an equal alternative. It should also not have imposed its own system on Middle-Europe. Despite which, it was a useful balancing factor against the huge US alignment, which inherited most of the wealth and cultural dominance generated by Western European Imperialism.

Currently, lots of states see China as

a useful counter, while still much weaker and a long way from being equal to the global alignment of USA, the European Union and Japan.

‘BRIC’ was a term coined by a Goldman Sachs economist, to cover the fast-growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. It has since become a political club, and this year invited South Africa as a new member.

“For now, summits of the world’s rising powers, such as the one that concluded Thursday on the Chinese island of Hainan, remain a side show. Markets didn’t move with the grumpy words the emerged from the meeting, and the

	% of global wealth	Population	% of global population
USA	19.78	313,232,044	4.47
EU	20.02	501,064,211	7.16
Japan	5.83	126,475,664	1.81

Western media gave it little of the attention that it lavishes on gatherings of the world’s (for now) dominant economic powers, the G7.

“But the BRICS, as the grouping is now known after South Africa joined Brazil, Russia, India and China for this week’s summit in the resort city of Sanya, came across Thursday as a willing challenger to the West’s long-standing leadership on global political and economic affairs. One day in the not-too-distant future, they’ll have the economic heft to back up their different vision of how things should be run...

“The five countries collectively account for 40 per cent of the world’s population. Their combined economic output accounted for 18 per cent of the global total last year, but that share is growing fast and is expected to pass the G-7’s output by 2035.” [J]

China by itself is 20% of the world’s population and somewhere between 10% and 14% of the world’s economy. Realistically it can never expect to be more than a fifth of the world’s wealth or population, far too little to dominate without strong allies. BRICS provides those allies, for as long as China’s aims are modest. Bringing in South Africa has also

been rational: there may be other larger developing economies, but South Africa links to the rest of Africa, just as Brazil links to the rest of Latin America. South Africa has political usefulness and an attitude independent of the West. Other apparent candidates like Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea or Saudi Arabia are economically similar but are broadly supportive of the US-led hegemony that BRICS is challenging.

The United States, the European Union and Japan are currently a fairly strong alliance and represent about 46% of the world’s wealth, enough to dominate *for now*. But they are also less than 14% of the world’s population.[K] Exact figures

are:

Since the world is tending to equalise, this hegemony has a limited life and is already much weaker than it was. It could well be ended by Europe deciding that a US-dominated world has not really worked and that US-orientated European leaders have not really delivered. That has already happened in Latin America. A disastrous end for the current round of intervention in the Arab World could be the trigger.

China Returns To Equality

“China has vowed to raise the wages of Chinese workers by 15 percent annually, in an effort to reach a double figure by the end of its 12th Five-Year-Plan period (2011-2016), Yang Zhiming, vice-minister of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) announced Monday.

“The government stipulated that the wage increase must go in line with the increasing rate of a company’s revenues, and more efforts will be made in controlling exorbitant salaries of CEOs and general managers in state-owned enterprises (SOE).

“The growth of the minimum wage will be raised by at least 13 percent on average every year, based on the minimum wages in different regions of development in the nation. Yang pointed out that 13 provinces and municipalities have raised the minimum wage by 22.8 percent on average so far this year.” [N]

This seems to be another rejection of the Neo-Liberal attitude that was influential in the initial post-Mao era.

“China is to lift the exemption threshold for personal income tax payments in an effort to redistribute the spoils of rapid growth and reduce a widening wealth gap.

“The level at which Chinese citizens must pay income tax will be raised from Rmb2,000 (\$305) a month to Rmb3,000, the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

“Raising the threshold to this level will cut the number of taxpayers by about 50m to 350m and reduce government tax revenue by about Rmb99bn.

“The change, which is likely to come in the second half of the year, is one of several policy initiatives intended to alleviate poverty and reduce growing income disparity.

“Other policies include a promise to raise average wages by 15 per cent a year and so double average wages by the end of 2015. The government has been increasing statutory minimum wages over the past year and intends to build 35m units of low-income housing over the next five years.

“The government also has plans to lift its official poverty line from the current income level of \$0.50 a day to \$0.63.

“This would more than triple the number of people officially living in poverty from 27m to 100m, all of whom would be entitled to rudimentary but improving government welfare assistance. Even after the change, China’s poverty line will be lower than global benchmarks.

“The United Nations standard for extreme poverty is less than \$1.25 and

the standard for relatively poor is \$2 a day or less,’ said Hu Xingdou, professor of economics at the Beijing Institute of Technology. By the UN’s measure, some 254m Chinese – or one in five of the population – still live in extreme poverty.” [P]

Chinese are poor, but their standard of living is rising quite fast, and now internal inequalities are being targeted. Perhaps the newly rich are looking at trouble elsewhere and deciding that it’s wise to pass on more of the benefits. Of course most people would have seen their own incomes grow very fast. A contented population would allow the basic balance to be maintained, including quite a lot of unofficial protectionism:

“European businesses have accused China of having a public procurement system which excludes foreign businesses and encourages corruption.

“‘The regulatory framework for government procurement in China is a drag on efficiency and innovation for the Chinese economy as a whole,’ the European Chamber of Commerce in China said in a study to be published on Wednesday.

“‘This represents a missed opportunity the size of the South Korean economy for European business in China’.

“The criticism about accessibility to the Chinese public procurement market, which is estimated to be as big as Rmb7,000bn (\$1,072bn) comes as Beijing is preparing another proposal for its long-delayed accession to the Government Procurement Agreement, a group of 40 World Trade Organisation members who allow each other’s companies equal access to their public contracts.

“The chamber said rules that exclude foreign businesses from public contracts continued unabated in provincial and local government procurement despite Beijing’s pledges to end the practice.

“China triggered an outcry from foreign business in late 2009 when it announced that only products with Chinese-owned intellectual property and brands would be eligible for government procurement contracts.

“Following widespread criticism, Beijing suspended that policy. However, the European Chamber said that due to Beijing’s decentralised system of government procurement, the practice had continued for the majority of public contracts issued by institutions outside the central government. The report says a core problem lies in having two different laws on government procurements in China.

“A relatively small range of contracts – such as office equipment and the car fleets of central government ministries – fall under the government procurement law. But the vast majority of what are commonly defined as public contracts in other countries – such as public infrastructure contracts and state-owned enterprise tenders – are governed by the bidding law, which offers much less clarity on eligibility requirements for suppliers.” [Q]

But this sort of ‘openness’ would have prevented China moving up the ladder of industry, producing its own sophisticated products that might initially be worse and more expensive than foreign goods. In the long run it will pay off.

There is also no danger nowadays of China coming under serious pressure to change. The US economy is way out of balance and is increasingly retreating from manufacturing in favour of finance. This lasts only for as long as foreign countries buy their debt, China in particular. And China is expressing doubts:

“The two biggest foreign holders of US Treasuries appear to be taking diverging views of Standard & Poor’s stark warning on the US debt rating.

“S&P on Monday cut its outlook on US debt – which maintains the top triple A rating – from ‘stable’ to ‘negative’ for the first time since it started rating the US 70 years ago.

“While Japan played down concerns about US creditworthiness after the decision, China’s foreign ministry on Tuesday urged Washington to protect investors in its debt. ‘We hope the US government will take responsible poli-

cies and measures to safeguard investors' interests,' it said.

"The Chinese government has repeatedly called on Washington not intentionally to debase its currency and to protect the interests of foreign investors in its bonds.

"China's foreign reserves increased by \$197bn in the first quarter to \$3,050bn, exceeding the symbolic \$3,000bn mark for the first time. The reserves are the world's largest by far and although their exact composition is regarded as a state secret, about two-thirds are believed to be invested in US dollar assets." [R]

Japan has tied itself to the global hegemony led by the USA. China with BRICS has created an alternative.

India – Not So Open

The Neo-Liberals in the West seem to have bounced back from the near-disaster of 2008. Despite having needed state power to save the financial system, they got the blame shifted to general government expenditure. Items such as health, education and pensions are being attacked as wasteful, while gambling banks are left alone. And there is a continuing drive to push into fresh areas, including the Republic of India. As *The Economist* explains:

"Most Indians do their shopping at the millions of kirana shops, small independent outfits that are often not much more than a hole in the wall, manned by the owner and maybe a relative, or from handcart hawkers and street vendors. These microbusinesses sell a limited range of goods, in tiny quantities. They are far too small to negotiate good deals with their wholesalers, who are themselves a pretty inefficient bunch. But the majority of Indians, especially in rural areas, shop with them—or send their servants to shop—because kiranas give them credit and are prepared to deliver even the smallest order to their homes. And because they often do not have any choice.

"Indian policymakers have talked about reforming the retail business for the past two decades, with little to show

for it. The most obvious, but most politically sensitive, reform would be to scrap the ban on foreign direct investment (FDI) by multi-brand supermarket chains such as America's Walmart and France's Carrefour. (Single-brand retailers such as Nike or Reebok can own a 51% stake in their Indian outlets and multi-brand retailers can open wholesale warehouses, as long as they do not sell directly to consumers.)

"Ending the ban is fiercely opposed by the millions of kirana owners and their dependents, who are an important electoral constituency of the Hindu nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party*. However, the party is not in power at the moment and the ruling Congress party did make encouraging noises by publishing a detailed discussion paper on the benefits of liberalisation last summer. It noted, for example, that heavy investment by big supermarket chains may be the best way to create an efficient 'chill chain' in India, to keep food fresh from the farmer's field to the shopper's basket, and thus cut the terrible waste of food caused by the absence of such facilities: perhaps a quarter or more of fruit and vegetables is lost, compared with a tenth or less in countries with better cold storage and transport." [S]

But what would be the social effect? The spread of supermarkets in the UK has undermined a class of small shopkeepers who had very traditionalist values. Most right-wingers fail to connect this with the decay of traditional values that they cherish. This was the link that Marx spotted and explained in the *Communist Manifesto*. And it has continued to be valid even while socialism is in eclipse as an ideology: traditional values decay as traditional economic structures are undermined. But then as now, *The Economist* spreads false assurance:

"Retailing employs more than 30m Indians, so some fear social unrest if the admission of foreign chains puts small shops out of business. But given India's rapid growth there is plenty of space for supermarkets to expand without killing small stores... Indeed, the tiddlers would be better off buying their supplies from foreign supermarkets than from the inefficient, costly middlemen they rely on now. In any case, such worries are

greatly outweighed by the potential benefits to Indian consumers: lower prices and better quality, choice and nutrition. Economists in America talk about the beneficial 'Walmart effect' that the ubiquitous cheap chain has had on curbing prices. Indians, as they fret over soaring food costs, might find such a thing a god-send." [T]

Maybe the Indians should reform their distribution system. What they should not do is open up to foreigners and lose control of their own lives.

It's Not Paranoia: They Are Out To Get You

"In the 1991 Gulf war Iraq's armed forces used American-made colour photocopiers to produce their battle plans. That was a mistake. The circuitry in some of them contained concealed transmitters that revealed their position to American electronic-warfare aircraft, making bomb and missile strikes more precise. The operation, described by David Lindahl, a specialist at the Swedish Defence Research Agency, a government think-tank, highlights a secret front in high-tech warfare: turning enemy assets into liabilities.

"The internet and the growing complexity of electronic circuitry have made it much easier to install what are known as 'kill switches' and 'back doors', which may disable, betray or blow up the devices in which they are installed. Chips can easily contain 2 billion transistors, leaving plenty of scope to design a few that operate secretly. Testing even a handful of them for anomalies requires weeks of work.

"Kill switches and other remote controls are on the minds of Western governments pondering whether to send weapons such as sophisticated anti-tank missiles, normally tightly policed, to rebels in Libya. Keeping tabs on when and where they are fired will allay fears that they could end up in terrorist hands. Such efforts would not even need to be kept secret. A former CIA official says the rebels could be told: 'Look, we're going to give you this, but we want to be able to control it.'...

“Farinaz Koushanfar, a DARPA-funded expert at Texas’s Rice University, says microchip designers would like to be able to switch off their products ‘in the wild’, in case the contractors that make the chips produce some extra ones to sell on the sly. She designs ‘active hardware metering’ chips that, in devices connected to the internet, can remotely identify them and if necessary switch them off.

“An obvious countermeasure is to keep critical defence equipment off the net. But that is only a partial solution. Chips can be designed to break down at a certain date. An innocent-looking component or even a bit of soldering can be a disguised antenna. When it receives the right radio signal, from, say, a mobile-phone network, aircraft or satellite, the device may blow up, shut down, or work differently.

“Old-fashioned spying can reveal technological weaknesses too. Mr Lindahl says Sweden obtained detailed information on circuitry in a heat-seeking missile that at least one potential adversary might, in wartime, shoot at one of its eight C-130 Hercules military-transport planes. A slight but precise change in the ejection tempo of the decoy flares would direct those missiles towards the flame, not the aircraft.” [W]

There’s also the matter of the mysterious failure of most of Argentina’s Exocet missiles in the Falklands War. France made them: France most likely told the British how to make them ineffective.

Of course that’s just military hardware. Nothing for the ordinary individual to worry about. Maybe.

“Security researchers have discovered that Apple’s iPhone keeps track of where you go – and saves every detail of it to a secret file on the device which is then copied to the owner’s computer when the two are synchronised.

“The file contains the latitude and longitude of the phone’s recorded coordinates along with a timestamp, meaning that anyone who stole the phone or the computer could discover details about the owner’s movements using a

simple program.

“For some phones, there could be almost a year’s worth of data stored, as the recording of data seems to have started with Apple’s iOS 4 update to the phone’s operating system, released in June 2010.

“Apple has made it possible for almost anybody – a jealous spouse, a private detective – with access to your phone or computer to get detailed information about where you’ve been,” said Pete Warden, one of the researchers.

“Only the iPhone records the user’s location in this way, say Warden and Alasdair Allan, the data scientists who discovered the file and are presenting their findings at the Where 2.0 conference in San Francisco on Wednesday. “Alasdair has looked for similar tracking code in [Google’s] Android phones and couldn’t find any,” said Warden. “We haven’t come across any instances of other phone manufacturers doing this.” [X]

That’s assuming it isn’t cunningly hidden in the hardware, of course,

I always felt that modern electronics and the internet would strengthen the state against individuals, and that the proper answer was to insist on civilised norms. A lot of which were swept aside after 9/11 in the name of anti-terrorism, with legislation that was left vague enough to allow it to be applied to almost anyone, not just fanatics intent on mass slaughter. Notoriously, ‘anti-terrorist’ laws were used against Iceland in a purely financial matter during the banking crisis. My suspicion was that the elite in the Anglosphere were thinking of global control, including repression at home. Except that so far, two or three small countries have proved too much for them. I don’t like the resistance movements in those countries, but they do seem to represent majority opinion there, which is what democracy is supposed to mean. And the future of the world depends on the current wave of globalisation failing.

Nepal: Red Government

After a Maoist insurgency that de-

stroyed the traditional system, Nepal had democratic elections that saw the Maoists emerge as the biggest single party. It also showed what an utterly diverse place Nepal is: many languages and ethnic groups, and a whole host of incompatible political parties.

The Maoists were initially part of the government, along with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), which is actually a centre-left party and commonly known as the UML. This got rid of the monarchy and lasted until the Maoist Prime Minister tried to sack the Nepali army chief after he refused to incorporate Maoist fighters in the army, something that had been agreed as part of the peace deal. The President overruled this, so the Maoists went into opposition and a government was formed by the UML and the Nepali Congress. This failed to work: when one Prime Minister resigned in June 2010 it proved impossible to elect another. Or impossible until the UML made a deal with the Maoists which put the UML back into government and gave them the Prime Ministership. [Y] On this basis they may be able to write a constitution and hold new general elections.

And then what? The Maoists got 30% of the vote in 2008, well ahead of any other party. It seems likely that a new election would give them a much bigger share of the vote, perhaps an overall majority and perhaps the two-thirds majority that would let them re-write the constitution as they saw fit. This is one possibility that is being complained about:

“The UCPN-M [Maoist] supremo is confident that this government can give logical end to the peace process and introduce the new constitution in time even if the NC {Nepali Congress} remains outside the government. This is a hint that the two parties, by keeping aside the NC, are going to introduce the new constitution.

“On the issue of integration of the UCPN-M PLAs, the two parties in the government have already agreed to constitute a separate security force and integrate the UCPN-M combatants in the new force...

“The real design of the UCPN-M is to bring under control or make weak the government security organs and civil service by remaining in the government. To please India and the USA, the UCPN-M will accept the parliamentary model of democracy and accept the constitution as well.

“However, the hidden agenda of the UCPN-M is to accept the parliamentary modality and go for general elections with the intention of gaining two-thirds majority and then amending the constitution by introducing a communist model. As there has been a secret agreement between JN Khanal and Pushpakamal Dahal for handing over power to Dahal after the introduction of the new constitution, the UCPN-M will get the chance to hold the general elections. In the elections, UCPN-M has the aim to grab two-thirds majority, the strength which will be needed for amending the constitution. The party has already developed the plan for continuously running the country for at least another 20 years.” [Z]

As I said earlier about Hungary, democracy means the people getting what they want, not what the Anglosphere thinks is good for them.

One other interesting little detail. It seems Christianity is taking off in Nepal, having previously been banned. It has an appeal to those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy

“The Church in Nepal has grown steadily, and by some estimates evangelical Christians are now almost 2% of the population. Though there has been more religious freedom since 1991, proselytising is still illegal. Christian publishing is permitted.” [AA]

“Before 1991, the number of Christians in this Hindu-dominated country was estimated to be around 50,000. Then, a new constitution was adopted following pro-democracy protests that led to a limited multiparty democracy under the monarchy.

“The new constitution retained an existing ban on conversions but also eased some of the restrictions on religious freedom. Consequently, police and State officials stopped prosecuting Christians

who engaged in evangelising.

“This led to sudden spurt in the growth of Christians in Nepal, and it is estimated that there are now more than 800,000 Christians in 6,000 independent church congregations among the country’s population of 29 million people.” [AB]

Guantanamo: No Rule Of Law

Laws were made for excellent reasons, usually to prevent things that would suit the would-be lawbreaker but would be bad for the whole society in the long run.

The USA has always had the attitude that laws shouldn’t really apply to them, and also that non-white foreigners didn’t really matter. After successfully tilting the balance of power in Afghanistan back towards the northern warlords, they scooped up a collection of prisoners who were described to the world as dangerous al-Qaeda terrorists. And a new category was invented, ‘unlawful combatants’, whom it was decided should have neither the rights of regular criminals nor the rights of prisoners of war.

If they had been viewed as criminals, they should not be held without evidence that would stand up in court. (Or even a seriously biased military tribunals.) If they had been viewed as prisoners of war, they can be held without specific evidence of guilt but should have been treated decently. Torture is illegal and immoral in either case, and the results also tend to be rubbish, with people making up whatever the torturer wishes to hear.

The prisoners were also dumped at a special prison created within the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base on Cuba. The base was leased from Cuba in 1903 and the US has hung onto it in the face of Cuban demands that it be handed back. It is also viewed, by some legal jiggery-pokery, as being outside U.S. legal jurisdiction, meaning that prisoners there had no rights. The legal profession – which in the last analysis never forgets that it is an arm of the state and not the upholder of legal abstractions about justice – has so far gone along with this. Even when it turned out that a lot of the captives had

merely been foreign sympathisers with the Taliban, there was no pressure to apply normal judicial rules.

“Judge Silberman showed sympathy for counterterrorism analysts who erred on the side of caution. In an ordinary criminal case, a judge may vote to overturn a conviction on evidentiary grounds even if he is virtually certain the defendant is guilty, Judge Silberman wrote. With a potential terrorist, he said, the stakes are different.

“‘When we are dealing with detainees,’ Judge Silberman said, ‘candor obliges me to admit that one can not help but be conscious of the infinitely greater downside risk to our country, and its people, of an order releasing a detainee who is likely to return to terrorism.’” [AC]

“Files obtained by the whistleblowing website Wikileaks have revealed that the US believed many of those held at Guantanamo Bay were innocent or only low-level operatives.

“The files, published in US and European newspapers, are assessments of all 780 people ever held at the facility.

“They show that about 220 were classed as dangerous terrorists, but 150 were innocent Afghans and Pakistanis.

“The Pentagon said the files’ release could damage anti-terrorism efforts.” [AD]

“The Guantanamo files are among hundreds of thousands of documents US soldier Bradley Manning is accused of having turned over to the WikiLeaks website more than a year ago.” [AE]

Treatment of Bradley Manning has also broken all of the norms. The whole ‘anti-terror’ campaign has backfired badly on the USA, destroyed whatever sympathy the world felt after 9/11 and made them look like blundering bullies. Which indeed is just what they are.

The Space Age and the Space Race

April 12th saw the 50th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin’s pioneering trip into space. It is being duly celebrated around

the world, [AE] though not much in Anglo countries. It was a key event in the Space Race, which culminated in the USA's successful moon landings from 1969. After which the focus switched to automatic probes: the USA could have gone on to Mars in the 1970s if the will had been there, but it was not.

The reasons go back to the origins of the original Space Race.

In the 1940s and 1950s, people knew that space flight was coming soon. A group of German enthusiasts led by Wernher von Braun led the field with rocketry that was planned for scientific purposes but got easily transformed into the V2 missile program. With the separate development of atomic weapons, people knew that long-range missiles would be significant. But for the Soviet Union it counted more: the USA had bases near the Soviet Union and could hit almost anywhere, whereas the USA was out of reach without an intercontinental ballistic missile. The Soviet team who developed this realised that such a powerful rocket could *also* be used to put a small satellite into orbit. Thus Sputnik 1 in 1957, suddenly making the USSR seem superior technically to the USA.

It was actually an illusion. The Soviet Union had had to concentrate on very big rockets. The USA hadn't previously bothered and needed time to adapt. President Eisenhower correctly saw that satellites as they existed then were of little military significance, but public opinion in the USA thought otherwise and there was pressure to match the Soviet achievement. Several existing rockets were stretched beyond their normal capabilities in the hope of launching a satellite, and duly blew up in a burst of embarrassing publicity. They finally managed to get Explorer 1 into orbit in 1958. But 1958 also saw the creation of NASA, with Eisenhower correctly seeing the need to concentrate effort. NASA took time to pull things together, but was boosted by President Kennedy's decision to go all out for a moon landing. Meantime things rather came apart in the Soviet Union. They did however come close to scooping the lunar landings by an automatic return of moon-rocks. This actually happened a

few months after the first lunar landing, but was a pointer to the future. People in space are very expensive and accidents are global tragedies. Since the original aim was to look good, there was excellent reason to scale back.

After the moon landings, almost all of the serious space science has been done by robotic probes. This should continue to be the case: the same investment that could get people to Mars and back – or possibly get them killed or harmed for life by prolonged low gravity – could also send a whole fleet of automatic probes that could discover much more.

The International Space Station is an impressive achievement but not really very significant. The next stage is likely to be space tourism: there have already been tourists but soon they will have their own space rockets produced mostly to cater for them. A space hotel might also be possible, existing just because there are rich people who would pay millions to spend a few days there.

Meantime the space shuttle is being retired. It was a technological dead-end: it turned out to be much easier to produce a rocket that will work fine for its one and only flight, and return the crew or cargo in a small re-entry capsule. Things were much riskier with a heavy spacecraft that must be launched many times and land in a gliding path that can all too easily go wrong.

Evolution Prevented By Competition

Most of the history of life is about changelessness, not evolution. A relentless struggle for existence produces creatures good at winning that particular struggle, *not* creatures that can open up new possibilities.

Creating novel creatures turns out to be relatively easy, provided that they are free from competitive pressures. This happens on islands, with rare and interesting creatures like the finches and giant turtles of the Galapagos Islands. And it can also happen in isolated lakes:

“Michael Bell has his children to

thank for his discovery. Back in 1990, they were getting restless as he was driving past Loberg Lake in Alaska. Bell, a biologist who studies the evolution of sticklebacks, had not planned to collect any fish, as the native sticklebacks had been exterminated in 1982 to improve the lake for anglers. ‘But we saw the lake, and we had to do something,’ Bell says.

“To Bell's surprise, they found that marine sticklebacks had recolonised the lake. This in itself was not all that unusual: marine sticklebacks can live in fresh water, and most freshwater species are descended from marine ones that colonised streams and lakes as the ice retreated at the end of the last ice age.

“But there was something odd about these sticklebacks. Ten thousand years on from the ice age, freshwater sticklebacks are quite different from their sea-going ancestors. The most obvious change is loss of armour plates, which seem to take longer to develop in fresh water. In lakes, lightly armoured fish may outgrow and outcompete fully armoured fish.

“This trait was assumed to evolve slowly, over thousands of years, so Bell was surprised to find that some of the fish he caught in Loberg Lake had fewer plates. In 1991 he asked a friend to collect some more fish. Sure enough, more had lost their armour.

“Bell, who is based at Stony Brook University in New York, began collecting sticklebacks every year. Each time, he found more lightly armoured fish. By 2007, 90 per cent were of the low-armour form. Far from taking millennia, the trait had evolved in a couple of decades...

“More examples keep turning up. A species of fish in a lake in Nicaragua has split in two in only 100 years. The new variety has evolved a narrower, pointier head and fatter lips, ideal for nibbling insects from crevices. The original variety has sturdier jaws and extra teeth to crack snail shells. Lab studies suggest the strains do not mate with each other even when put together, which would mean they are on their way to becoming separate species...

“As the list of examples grew, Kinnison and his colleagues began to pull them together and look at what they tell us about evolution. ‘We started to realise that maybe this was not the exception, that this was the norm.’

“In fact, he now argues that the term ‘rapid evolution’ is misleading, because it implies evolution is normally slow. Instead, he and his colleagues prefer ‘contemporary evolution’.

“Nowadays, most biologists with a background in evolution appreciate this, Kinnison thinks. Of course, proving that contemporary evolution is the norm in a world of millions of species is a challenge. To those who remain sceptical, though, Kinnison’s response is simple: ‘Take a look.’

“If rapid evolution really is the norm, how come fossil and genetic studies suggest it is slow? The answer may be that new species and traits not only evolve rapidly, they also disappear fast too and do not leave their mark on the fossil or genetic record...

“Put it all together and the picture of evolution that is emerging is radically different to the way most people envisage the process. As Kinnison puts it, the popular view of evolution is upside down. People think evolutionary changes are imperceptible in the short term but add up to big changes over millions of years. In fact, the opposite is true. It now appears that organisms evolve very rapidly in response to any changes in their environment, but in the longer term most evolutionary changes cancel each other out.” [AF]

So much for the ‘struggle for existence’. A fierce struggle produces nothing very new. Spectacular new advances tend to occur on the margins. The ancestors of all land-walking tetrapods were a minor group of fish. Mammals emerged after the death of the dinosaurs from a collection of obscure little creatures that had no mattered before. Humans evolved as part of a minor group of primates, the apes, which on the whole had lost out to the smaller and more versatile monkeys.

I don’t think it’s that different in human culture. People long ago found the

benefits of leaving some people alone to do whatever may interest them: most achieve nothing much but just a few achieve something spectacular. Science sprung from this habit and remains dependent on it.

Bewitched: Television From a Lost Era

April 16th saw the death of television writer Sol Saks, chiefly noted as creator of the long-running US comedy series *Bewitched*. I remember watching it on British television back in the 1960s. And I was struck by my memories of the cheery confident attitudes it showed to the supernatural, a big contrast to the edgy violent mood you find in later US television.

It’s been said that the series owes a lot to a 1942 film called *I Married A Witch*. I’ve seen that too, and I’d say that the changes in concept were small but crucial. Jennifer in *I Married A Witch* starts out with evil intentions: she is the classic ‘bad girl turned good’. Samantha in *Bewitched* is very different, an entirely nice well-meaning person, reluctant to use her powers and sometimes slow to spot hostility or bad intentions. Jennifer starts out working with her father on a scheme of vengeance: when she rejects this he tries to imprison her, only to fail and end up imprisoned by her. In *Bewitched*, a major theme is relations with Endora, Samantha’s mother. She dislikes this marriage to a normal human, but the two of them are clearly close and you’re confident that neither of them could ever hurt the other. Which provides an underlying logic to the fact that she will play pranks and try to break up the relationship but never go too far. It is also highly comic, reversing expectations by the daughter being responsible and the mother prone to pranks and foolish actions. And it also touches more on a real-life phenomenon in the USA, the children of immigrants or minority groups wanting to wholly integrate and their parents not liking it.

The ending of *I Married A Witch* lays the groundwork for a sequel, but there was no sequel, despite low production costs that made sequels much easier than nowadays. It wasn’t that great a film, and according to the IMDb the actress who

played Jennifer behaved badly and offended the rest of the cast.

Bewitched ran from 1964 to 1972, apparently with a new actor as Samantha’s husband when the original had to quit because of back problems. I didn’t see those, nor the spin-offs, but it was a grand success. So much that a rival network tried a copy with *I Dream of Jeannie*, with Larry Hangman as the male lead as a very different character from JR in *Dallas*. Jeannie is a genie whose role is a kind of hybrid of Samantha and Endora: she tries to do good but also plays pranks. It didn’t have the same success.

The influence of *Bewitched* may even have reached into *Star Trek*. The gentle well-meaning Deanna Troi from *The Next Generation* is given an overbearing and embarrassing mother with whom she also has a strong bond. That was Lwaxana Troi, played by Majel Barrett, widow of *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry. Both of them are members of a non-human species, but Deanna is half human has adapted to human ways. Lwaxana makes a point of being different and upholding her own traditions, though not in her choice of husbands. That relationship worked well as a source of comedy and drama, with Lwaxana brought back several times and becoming the most popular non-cast character apart from Q. I think she was also the only non-cast *Star Trek* relative seen more than once, apart from Spock’s father and maybe also his mother.

What’s also notable is that the USA nowadays has become edgy and unhappy and could not think about the supernatural as flippantly as *Bewitched* does. Despite vast material wealth, it is a society at the end of its tether. Something may snap soon.

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Parliament Notes

Dick Barry

Double Up!

St George will have been disappointed to have learned that this year his day was celebrated on 2 May, rather than 23 April. This was because, as a Written Answer from Church Commissioner Tony Baldry on 5 April revealed, "To celebrate St George's day on Holy Saturday would not be appropriate because Holy Saturday is the traditional time of reflection and contemplation for Christians before the celebrations of Easter Sunday." But why should a Government Minister decide what is or is not appropriate for Christians? Surely that is a matter for the Christian churches to decide? However, unfortunately, this is what happens when a country has an established Church. But the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, was in disagreement with the Minister. Baldry told MPs, "The Archbishop of York has been calling for all Churches and Government buildings to fly the St George cross on their flagpoles on both 23 April and 2 May. He has written to all Departments asking them to observe both 23 April and 2 May, to ensure we have a double celebration this year."

But not only did the Ugandan-born Archbishop want a double celebration this year, he also expressed his support for St George's day, or the nearest working day to it, to be declared a public holiday. Baldry quoted him as having said, "As someone who loves St George, I have long campaigned for us to have a special holiday where we can celebrate our patron saint and all that is great about our wonderful nation. There is so much to love about England. Why can't we put aside one day a year where we can wave our English flag of St George, sing songs about our proud history and maybe even drink a pint of English real ale with our friends." It's perhaps understandable that a fervent Christian like the Archbishop of York can love a semi-mythical figure like St George. But if George had been a real person,

and there is reasonable evidence to suggest he may have been, what exactly would we celebrate about him and England? When he was around there was no England. And if he had arrived at a part of what is now England, being a Roman soldier it would have been with an invading Roman army.

A Healthy Sign?

In contrast to men, women openly discuss health issues with family and friends. It is regrettable that men are reluctant to do so. Women are also more likely to care for their health than men and consequently seek medical advice more regularly. Breast cancer is the third most common form of cancer (lung cancer being the most common). Most women regularly check for breast irregularities while taking a bath or shower and their commitment has resulted in an NHS programme that currently calls all women between 50 and 70, registered with a doctor, for screening every 3 years.

The NHS estimates that this saves 1,400 lives a year. Because women promote personal health more enthusiastically, breast cancer attracts more attention and publicity than most other cancers. But what about the type of cancer that specifically affects men? Until recently, prostate cancer was the great unspoken topic among men. It now seems however that men are beginning to discuss it more openly. The last government's targeting of particular age groups with Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) tests has helped. It is accepted that the tests are simply a means of determining that there may be a problem. Further investigation is required, usually a biopsy, before one can be reasonably certain that there is a problem.

As more men undergo a PSA test, more cases of prostate cancer are diag-

nosed. A Written Answer for 5 April revealed the registrations of newly diagnosed cases of prostate cancer by age group in England for the years 2004 to 2008. It also indicated the one year and five year survival rates. But a letter accompanying the information from Stephen Penneck, Director General for the Office for National Statistics, struck a note of caution about survival rates. Penneck said, "For some cancers, five-year survival figures are interpreted as 'cure rates'. However, some prostate cancer tumours progress very slowly and may not cause symptoms or death. Patients diagnosed with these types of tumours are monitored in the first instance, rather than being treated with a view to being 'cured'.

For these reasons, five-year survival from prostate cancer is not the same as 'recovery' or 'cure'.

Most diagnosed cases of prostate cancer occur in men over the age of 60, with the majority affecting men between the age of 70 and 79. The figures show a high but steady rate between 2004 and 2008. In 2004, there were 20,958 newly diagnosed cases (9,294 for 60-69 yr olds, 11,664 for 70-79 yr olds). In 2005 there were 20,394 cases (9,322 for 60-69 yr olds, 11,072 for 70-79 yr olds). 2006 recorded an increase to 21,434 cases (9,722 for 60-69 yr olds, 11,712 for 70-79 yr olds). A further increase occurred in 2007 when 21,549 cases were diagnosed (9,949 for 60-69 yr olds, 11,600 for 70-79 yr olds). And 2008 recorded 21,529 new cases (10,100 for 60-69 yr olds, 11,429 for 70-79 yr olds). There is in addition a worrying increase in newly diagnosed cases in men under the age of 50. In 2004, 206 cases were diagnosed. This rose to 229 in 2005, 250 in 2006, 237 in 2007 and to 284 in 2008. Rates for men between 50 and 59 remained just above 3,000 a year for the years 2004 to 2008. It should be noted, notwithstanding Penneck's note

of caution, that the one year and five year survival rates for all age groups up to and including 70-79 yr olds remain high, at more than 90% for one year survival and between 85% and 90% for five year survival.

NHS Reforms: Reflection or Retreat?

A natural break or pause in the progress of the Health and Social Care Bill was announced on 4 April by Health Secretary Andrew Lansley. Lansley told MPs, "Our desire is to move forward with the support of doctors, nurses and others who work in the NHS and make a difference to the lives of so many of us, day in and day out. However, we recognise that the speed of progress has brought with it some substantive concerns, expressed in various quarters. Some of those concerns are misplaced or based on misrepresentations, but we recognise that some of them are genuine. We want to continue to listen to, engage with and learn from experts, patients and front-line staff within the NHS and beyond and to respond accordingly. I can therefore tell the House that we propose to take the opportunity of a natural break in the passage of the Bill to pause, listen and engage with all those who want the NHS to succeed, and subsequently to bring forward amendments to improve the plans further in the normal way."

Of course Lansley didn't admit that the "natural break" was forced upon him by the fierce opposition to the Bill throughout the medical profession and among the general public. He promises to "continue to listen to, engage with and learn from experts, patients and front-line staff within the NHS and beyond and to respond accordingly." Really? Responding accordingly, having listened to, engaged with and learnt from experts within the NHS, means either scrapping the Bill and starting again from scratch, which is what the BMA has called for, or making radical changes to the Bill, as the RCN has demanded. And every other professional medical body supports one or the other of these alternatives. The experts have expressed their opinions on the Bill, but the bulk of their concerns have gone

unheeded, and nothing that Lansley said on 4 April will alter this. Lansley's "natural break" is nothing more than a holding tactic until the local elections and AV referendum are out of the way and summer is upon us. And this point was made by Labour's Diane Abbott on 26 April. She told Lansley, "The Secretary of State will be aware that if the Lib Dem MPs were seriously opposed to this reorganisation, they could have voted against it on Second Reading - so how can he expect the public to take these discussions and the listening exercise seriously? Are they not just a device to get the coalition through the May elections, and is he not determined to get away with as little substantive change as he can manage.?" Lansley, of course, disagreed.

In the meantime NHS staff, GPs, consultants, nurses and admin personnel are already preparing themselves for a new NHS regime. Labour's Clive Efford drew attention to this when he said, "Throughout the country changes are taking place. Now he says that he is going to be listening. If so, we can anticipate some more changes. Will he therefore instruct everyone in the NHS who is currently restructuring on the basis of the Bill to stop that restructuring until we know exactly what the Government intend to do." Lansley's reply proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the natural break in order to listen, engage and learn will not result in any substantial changes to the Bill. He told Efford, "No, I will not, because we are very clear about the strategy and the principles of the Bill."

Shadow Health Secretary John Healey, who appears to have had a change of heart about the Bill in recent weeks, described its position accurately. He said, "This is not just a problem with the pace of change; simply doing the wrong thing more slowly is not the answer. It is not just a problem with presentation. In fact, the more people see the plans, the more concerned they become about them. That is why there is growing criticism of the Tories' plans for the NHS - from doctors, nurses, patients' groups, NHS experts, the Health Select Committee, the Lib-Dems and peers from all parties in the House of Lords. I have to hand it to the Health

Secretary: it takes a special talent to unite opposition from Norman Tebbit and MC NxtGen. That is why Labour has been saying that the reorganisation requires a root-and-branch rethink and that the legislation requires radical surgery." Naturally, Lansley disagreed. Which suggests that he is not looking to make substantial changes to the Bill.

One would not discern from listening to Tory MPs that the doctors 'trade union', the BMA, was opposed to the Bill. On the contrary, they claim that doctors are keen supporters. For example, Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) said, "As the Secretary of State may know, I still have a faint link with the NHS and medicine in general. The GPs I have met in my constituency and elsewhere are very much in favour of the proposals. In contrast, the complaints are circular letters that have been well organised. Does the Secretary of State agree that GPs will be devastated if there is any reversal and backtracking?" And Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) told Lansley, "My right hon. Friend will know that many GPs are very excited by the opportunity that his reforms will give them to serve the needs of their local communities even better. Can he assure those GPs that he has no plans to water down that strengthening of their pivotal role in the national health service?" Finally, Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon): "I congratulate my right hon. Friend on engaging and listening. We have all received the 50 or so e-mail circulars from constituents who are concerned, but that does not reflect the evidence on the ground. GPs in Shipston in my constituency are absolutely passionate about the reforms and want to engage fully with them."

There is no mention of the BMA's opposition to the Bill in the above comments. It's as if it doesn't exist, or perhaps those Tory MPs believe it doesn't truly reflect the views of GPs. But it's hard to imagine the BMA expressing solid opposition to the Bill if most GPs support it. And Lansley appeared to agree with his backbenchers, which rather suggests he intends to ignore the BMA. Nor was there any reference by Lansley or any Tory backbencher to the RCN's deep concerns about the

Bill. A little over a week later the RCN voiced these concerns strongly at its annual conference. 97% of delegates supported a motion of 'no confidence' in Lansley's management of the NHS reforms and for radical changes to the Bill. Lansley was also roundly condemned for speaking to a gathering of 60 nurses, rather than to the whole conference. The nurses have spoken and there is therefore no need for further consultation with them. Lansley knows what they want, but he has no intention of delivering it. And, of course UNISON, which represents 400,000 NHS staff, including nurses, will be likewise ignored.

The Only Way Is Up

The coalition Government launched its strategy to improve social mobility on 5 April. In a statement to the House of Commons the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg told MPs, "While our most urgent task is to sort out the nation's finances, our overriding mission is to take real steps towards a fairer society. To us, a fair society is an open society, one in which everyone is free to flourish and rise regardless of the circumstances of their birth. That is why the promotion of social mobility is the principle objective of the coalition Government's social policy. It is simply unacceptable that so many of our children have their life chances shaped by the circumstances of their birth."

On 29 April William 'Wills' Windsor married Catherine 'Kate' Middleton in Westminster Abbey. The happy couple and any offspring will not have to concern themselves with how they can be free "to flourish and rise regardless of the circumstances of their birth", for they already sit at the top of society precisely because their life chances have been shaped by those very circumstances. While at the bottom of the pile, hundreds of thousands of parents and their children continue to struggle to flourish and rise due to the circumstances of their birth. And it is this gross inequality that is at the heart of the problem the Government wish to solve. To be fair to Nick Clegg, he did acknowledge this without, of

course, referring to William and Kate and the rest of the family. A family that, although privately filthy rich, live on state benefits, though in their case they are termed something different.

Clegg went on to say, "Gaps in development between children from different backgrounds can be detected even at birth. By the age of five, bright children from poorer backgrounds have been overtaken by less bright children from richer ones - and from this point on, the gaps tend to widen still further. That is why we are taking a life-cycle approach to social mobility, an approach where we seek to remove the obstacles to mobility at each stage of an individual's life - hence our new entitlements for free pre-school care for all two-year-olds from disadvantaged families and our pupil premium designed to narrow attainment gaps in the school years. Then we are creating an extra quarter of a million apprenticeships to boost mobility in the labour market, and opening up higher education so that children from all backgrounds can have the chance to go to university and end the scandal whereby the one in five children who are eligible for free school meals make up less than one in 100 entering Oxford and Cambridge." Clegg ended his statement by saying, "In a fair society, ability trumps privilege, and that is the society that the Government want to build." Which rather suggests that Clegg and co. ought to investigate why former pupils of public schools, which incidentally benefit from charitable status, take up a hugely disproportionate number of places at Oxford and Cambridge.

In response, Labour's Harriet Harman drew Clegg's attention to the Government's record to date and how it impacts on social mobility. She said, "I am afraid the Deputy Prime Minister gave up the right to pontificate on social mobility when he abolished the educational maintenance allowance, trebled tuition fees and betrayed a generation of young people. When I heard that he was going to launch a commission on social mobility, I thought it was April Fools day. In just 10 months this Tory-led Government have launched an assault on opportunities for young

people, especially the poorest. Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the new Office for Fair Access has no teeth? It is presiding over soaring youth unemployment, so why have the Government abolished the future jobs fund? For many young people, mobility now means a bus down to the job-centre. Families with young children are feeling the squeeze, so why have the Government cut tax credits? The first few years are vital to a child's prospects, so why have they cut Sure Start?"

An astonished Clegg accused Labour under Blair and Brown of having thrown money at a problem without actually achieving positive results. Which is a neat way of justifying the Government's policy of spending less through targeting resources at means-tested families and individuals, with a cut-off point that leaves thousands of previous income recipients struggling to make ends meet. Clegg told Harman, "Under Labour, in the last 13 years spending more than doubled in cash terms from £300 billion in 1997-98 to over £600 billion in 2010, yet social mobility did not increase at all.... We are trying to tackle this difficult dilemma: increased public spending does not, in and of itself, increase opportunity and social mobility. That is the serious question which I hoped she would engage."

A reasonable point, but Clegg was later forced to draw back a little from this by Labour's Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East). Gilmore reminded Clegg of the time-lag between spending and its effect: "Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that dealing with social mobility needs a long-term plan? I, and many of my generation, were the beneficiaries of a great deal of help with social mobility as a result of the post-world war welfare state, created when the national debt was extremely high. Changes in social mobility in the last decade are far more likely to be influenced by the policies of the previous 20 years, when the Deputy Prime Minister's coalition partners were in power. Does he therefore agree that it is far too early to be able to reach a judgement on the previous Labour Government?" Clegg agreed with

Gilmore up to point, but continued to insist that Labour failed to make progress on social mobility. He told Gilmore, "Of course, to a certain extent, the hon. Lady is right to say, as I conceded earlier, that it is difficult to paint a detailed picture of something that is slow moving and for which we need more evidence. However, there is a lot of evidence to show that there is no correlation between a significant increase in social mobility and a significant increase in public spending. In cash terms, public spending more than doubled over the past decade, but there is precious little evidence that social mobility increased likewise."

This a disingenuous argument and is also bad economics. He recognises that improvements in social mobility occur over a long period. But what else can one make of his comment that "it is difficult to paint a detailed picture of something that is slow moving", if it is not an admission that more time is required to form a judgement on the previous Government's record? Yet he insists on judging it in an unfavourable light. And Clegg must know that a doubling of public spending does not, indeed cannot, result in a doubling of social mobility, yet he implied that it ought to have done so under Labour. Is Clegg arguing that spending less will achieve better results? It would appear that that is what he believes, but he is fortunate to have the cloak of the deficit to cover his real thoughts.

Yemen : Where Camkozy Fear To Tread

Cameron and Sarkozy have declared their intentions in Libya. Under the guise of protecting civilian lives, and it appears that it's only rebel civilian lives they are concerned about, they are taking sides in a civil war. The rebels are a rag, tag and bobtail outfit and would have been wiped out weeks ago if British and French aircraft had not come to their aid. No one knows who they are or what they want, apart from the removal of Gadaffi, which just happens to coincide with Cameron's and Sarkozy's aims. But the question that immediately springs to mind is: if Cameron and Sarkozy are genuinely

concerned about civilian lives, why have Britain and France not come to the aid of civilians in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen? This becomes doubly puzzling in the case of Yemen, for on 31 March Foreign Secretary William Hague told MPs, "The situation in Yemen is fragile and serious. Over 50 protestors were killed and hundreds wounded in Sana'a on 18 March. In a statement on the same day I expressed my utter condemnation of violence and called for those responsible immediately to cease this brutal reaction to protests and to be accountable for their actions." Well, Hague's condemnation and demand for a cessation of violence had no effect. President Saleh simply declared a state of emergency, giving him further reason for suppression. How many deaths of innocent Yemeni protestors will it take before Britain and France, or indeed the marines of the US Fifth Fleet anchored off the Yemeni coast, go to their rescue?

The following day, 1 April, Labour's Keith Vaz, who was born in Aden, spoke at length about Yemen. Expressing concern about the situation there he said, "As the House knows, Yemen is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its gross national income is only £659.35 per capita, and 47% of its population live on less than \$2 a day. It has an elected President, a House of Representatives and a shura council that share power. We talk about the need for the countries of north Africa and the middle east to begin the process of reform, but I believe that Yemen has already begun it. It could well be that Yemen is perhaps the most democratic of all the countries of the region. Yemen is situated at a key point on the Saudi Arabian peninsula. It is strategically placed above the horn of Africa, and lies across one of the most utilised international shipping routes in the world. Its security and stability, and the maintenance of the same, is of paramount interest to the region - and, I believe, to the world - and is also in the interests of our country. Yemen has become an active al-Qaeda base. In fact, it is reputed to be the most active base in the whole of the middle east. It is therefore critical to address the issues

in Yemen before it becomes another Libya."

With those comments Vaz explained clearly why Britain (and France) will not get involved militarily in Yemen. When Britain's direct interests are at stake, some human lives are expendable. Vaz admitted that "Up to 28 March, there were 170 confirmed deaths and more injured", but this did not move him to propose military intervention. He told MPs that, "What is critical about this debate, however, is the need to act - and to act as quickly as possible." And how did Vaz propose Britain should act quickly? "I want Prime Minister Cameron to ring President Saleh over the weekend. I urged him to do that on the last occasion when he made a statement to the House." He also asked for "three wise people to be sent to Yemen now: someone acting as an envoy from the United Nations, someone acting on behalf of the EU, and someone acting on behalf of Britain." And he warned that, "there is a risk that if we do not arrange that, the country will slide into civil war. Then people will ask, as they do about Libya, what we can do to stop the massacre of individual people - not by one side or the other, because there is no question of that happening. There is no similarity to what the President of Libya is doing. However, there is a similarity in terms of what might happen in the end." Vaz ended his rather confused speech by urging the Government "to act now before it is too late."

But sadly for Vaz and tragically for the Yemeni protestors, his words fell on stony ground. On 23 April the official Saba news service reported that in a speech to the military and students, President Saleh claimed the protestors want to "drag the area to a civil war and we refuse to be dragged to civil war." And so, the repression continues.

Libya : A Convenient Scapegoat

Parliament went into recess on 6 April and returned on 26 April. On 4 April, Foreign Secretary William Hague updated MPs on developments in (North) Africa and the middle east. It was the fourth statement/update

since the first statement by the Foreign Secretary on 17 March, which made passing reference to Egypt and Tunisia but focused largely on Libya. The 17 March statement was followed by a debate on UN Security Council resolution 1973 on 21 March and a statement on 24 March. Since the update on 4 April the, now, NATO-led military operation in Libya has reached a stage of stalemate. Although Hague denies this and insists that progress is being made. Neither the rebels nor Gaddafi's forces have gained a clear advantage and it looks as though Gaddafi could remain in power at least for the foreseeable future, with the final outcome a partitioned Libya. This is not what Britain and France in particular desire. There were demands from some MPs before 26 April for a recall of Parliament to debate what they believed to have been 'mission creep' on Britain's part. But Cameron and Hague turned a joint deaf ear.

In his 4 April update, Hague told MPs, "As I explained to the House last week, we are not engaged in arming the opposition forces. We are prepared to supply non-lethal equipment that will help with the protection of civilian lives and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Given the urgent need of the interim transitional national council for telecommunications equipment, the National Security Council has decided this morning to supply it with such equipment." But if Britain is not arming the opposition forces, who is? They appear to be reasonably well armed and not all of their arms have been taken from Gaddafi's forces. As Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are the only Arab states supplying aircraft to support the no-fly zone, they may also be supplying other military equipment to the opposition forces. Hague denied that Britain was involved in military assistance to anti-Gaddafi forces, but it has since been disclosed that UK military advisers are operating in Libya. There are no 'boots on the ground' so far, but military advisers could be a prelude to this. It happened in Vietnam in the early '60s; and in agreeing to deploy Predator drones in Libya to back up the rebels, the USA may be making the same mistake it made 50 years ago.

Hague also referred to other 'hotspots' in the region. He said, "Elsewhere in the region, we remain very concerned about the political situation in Bahrain. It is vital for the future stability of the country that the Government and leaders from all communities work together to reduce sectarian tension and to create the conditions in which a national dialogue can lead to real political reform. In Yemen, attempts at agreeing a political transition have repeatedly stalled or failed. There is an urgent need for steps to meet the legitimate demands of the Yemeni people and we call on President Saleh to engage with the opposition and with the protesters in a way that meets these aspirations and avoids violence. We are deeply concerned by further deaths and violence in Syria. We call on the

Syrian Government to respect the rights to free speech and peaceful protest. We call for restraint from the Syrian security forces and for the Syrian authorities to investigate the deaths of protesters and bring those responsible to account through a fair and transparent process. We note the announcement of certain reforms and believe that meaningful reforms that address the legitimate demands of the Syrian people are necessary and right."

While Hague remains 'deeply concerned' about the situation in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, his words of comfort and support will do nothing to alter matters. He told MPs that, "The United Kingdom believes that the people of these countries must be able to determine their own futures and that the international community must be bold and ambitious in supporting those countries that are on the path to greater political and economic freedom. That is why across the region we stand for reform not repression, and why in Libya, supported by the full authority of the United Nations, we are acting to save many lives threatened by one of the most repressive regimes of them all." But not, alas, in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, where hundreds of unarmed protesters have been, and continue to be, imprisoned, murdered and

tortured by state security forces. Being 'bold and ambitious' in their case goes only as far as calling for dialogue that leads to real political reform, and for the avoidance of repression and violence on the part of the Governments in those countries. It was put to Hague by Labour/Co-op's Andrew Love during the debate on 17 March that the UK and the west should be consistent in upholding democratic rights and human rights principles. Hague agreed. 'Perfidious Albion', indeed.

On 26 April, Parliament's first day back following the Easter recess, MPs were given a further update by the Foreign Secretary. Referring to Libya, he told MPs that, "On military matters, since NATO assumed full control over all military operations on 31 March, more than 3,500 sorties and 1,500 strike sorties have been conducted. This action has seriously degraded Gaddafi's military assets and prevented widespread massacres planned by Gaddafi's forces." Among Gaddafi's assets was one of his residences bombed by NATO aircraft. Was this an assassination attempt, as some believe, or was the real target military communications equipment, as military commanders insist? Assassination of Gaddafi, or a large-scale deployment of NATO troops on the ground, appears to be the demand of Labour's former Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth. He told Hague, "Fear is growing that, although we are doing enough to keep this operation going, we are not doing enough to bring it to a successful conclusion. If stalemate or de facto partition are unacceptable, and if the people cannot be properly protected while Gaddafi is in place, surely we need to make enough effort, now that we are engaged in this operation, to bring it swiftly to a conclusion, and to bring to an end the suffering in Libya. Surely that means doing more than is currently being done."

But Hague had a different view of matters. He told Ainsworth, "I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern. However, when he says that the situation needs to be brought to a conclusion more rapidly, he is really calling for a military effort that is very different in its scale and in its nature.

I would say to him that that would not be in accordance with UN resolution 1973. The large-scale use of ground troops, for instance, would not be in accordance with the resolution. Whatever we do, it is vital to keep the legal, moral and international authority that comes from working within the United Nations resolutions. I must therefore resist his demands for a more rapid or overwhelming military solution to the situation. We have to continue to intensify the pressure on Gaddafi through diplomatic, economic and military channels, but we must stay within what is legal and internationally supported.” Fine words butter no parsnips. Hague is relying on continuing pressure from three angles until Gaddafi caves in and agrees to a ceasefire and talks on Libya’s future. But as Hague and others have made it clear that Gaddafi must go, what would be the point of his participation in talks, should he agree to a ceasefire? One suspects that Hague agrees with Ainsworth, but is constrained by his understanding of UN resolution 1973. Perhaps he has another, more flexible, resolution in mind.

On Bahrain and Syria, Hague adopted an entirely different attitude. Speaking about Bahrain he said, “Although the immediate situation in Bahrain is calmer, there continues to be credible reports of human rights abuses. I urge the Government of Bahrain to meet all their human rights obligations and to uphold political freedoms, equal access to justice and the rule of law. Dialogue is the way to fulfil the aspirations of all Bahrainis. I urge all sides, including opposition groupings, to engage with each other.” And on Syria he said, “As I said earlier today, we condemn utterly the violence and killings perpetrated by the Syrian security forces against civilians who are expressing their views in peaceful protests. That violent repression must stop. President Assad must order his authorities to show restraint and to respond to the legitimate demands of his people with immediate and genuine reform, not brutal repression. The emergency law should be lifted in practice and the legitimate aspirations of the people met.” And what effect has Hague’s finger wagging had? None whatsoever. The Bahraini King and Syrian President can ignore Hague,

safe in the knowledge that his finger wagging will go no further.

PNs must give the final word to that redoubtable Tory backbencher Sir Peter Tapsell, who suggested that getting rid of Gaddafi may simply be the end of the beginning. “May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that it may be over-optimistic to assume that the civil war in Libya will cease when Colonel Gaddafi departs the scene? As he knows, the estrangement of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica dates back to the Punic wars, which is why in 1956 Ernest Bevin wanted to restore Mussolini’s single Libya to its two historic entities. Moreover - if you will bear with me a moment longer, Mr Speaker - we could impose an immediate partition on the country by air power alone. That would enable us to remove by sea those rebels on the coastal strip who found themselves on the wrong side of the dividing line, before they were massacred by the inland tribes.”

Disagreeing with Tapsell, Hague said, “I do absolutely take my hon. Friend’s point about the Punic wars and the historical division between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, but I have to say that I do not think that that is the solution in this particular case, in the 21st century. All the people we have spoken to in the transitional national council are very much committed to the territorial integrity of Libya as a whole. The country could not be so easily partitioned as my hon. Friend might think, in that there is strong support for the opposition forces throughout Libya, including in the west, in cities in the western mountains and in Misrata. The people of Misrata do not want to be taken away to the east; they want to stay in their own city, with their rights being respected and their lives being preserved. There is no simple east-west division in Libya now, in contrast to what has happened in previous centuries or, indeed, in previous millennia.” Hague’s views on the future of Libya is based on what he has been told by the rebels. However, PNs has a feeling that the wise old owl Tapsell will prove to be right.

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