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New Labour Sheds a Skin.

Ed Miliband has recently set out his stall as leader of the Labour Party in a speech at the party's conference. Does the speech mark a new departure in Labour Party policy? Undoubtedly some of the rhetorical flourishes look new, but when one looks closer at the substance it looks as if the New Labour serpent has merely sloughed off a tired old skin and now slithers forward in the same direction as before.

First, the rhetoric. Miliband does not fawn over investment and casino banks as was common practice under Blair and Brown. Now that it is safe to do so, he lambasts predatory banking and business practices and criticises Fred Goodwin, the disgraced former boss of RBS. This is like taking candy from a baby. He also talks about the 'public interest' without being too specific about what he means. This again feels like a departure from the rhetoric of the Blair-Brown era but without any indication of how he would describe and defend the public interest it is little more than empty words.

However, there is an enormous amount that stays the same. The militarism remains, with praise for British soldiers occupying Afghanistan and attacking its population, even though Miliband knows full well the war there is lost. Apparently it is quite alright for the Labour leadership to support a lost war and to countenance further civilian and military deaths and injuries in order to shore up the bankrupt policy of the US president. There was no mention of the Libyan aggression which he also supported. And that's about it as far as foreign policy is concerned. We wait with interest to see how long it is before Miliband starts to strut around with a poppy in the breast of his suit. Will he outdo Brown and Blair and start even earlier? Liberal Imperialism continues to be alive and well in the Labour Party.

Miliband still believes in 'Something for something', in other words in a society where a roof over your head and food in your hand is not guaranteed unless you can show that you tried to get work and failed. He spent a significant chunk of his speech praising the policies of Margaret Thatcher. He praised her anti-union legislation without discriminating between dif-

ferent elements of it, praised her council house sales and the abolition of a 60% higher rate marginal income tax. He also warned that many of the Coalition government's cuts would be irreversible under a Labour government. Trade unions were not mentioned although the inevitable 'hard working' people of Britain got their usual dollop of praise. Miliband, like Brown and Blair, is quite happy to accept union funding of up to 85% of Labour Party income and to promise nothing in return, not even a show of solidarity. Something for nothing indeed.

So is there any substantial change between the Miliband era and the Brown and Blair regimes? In order to reach a view it is best to look at the few concrete proposals that Miliband put forward. There are three:

to put a worker representative on pay remuneration boards of firms.

to oblige firms accepting government contracts to employ apprentices.

to reduce maximum student tuition fees from £9,000 to £6,000.

The first proposal is designed to ensure that excessive boardroom pay is curbed. A little reflection, however, suggests that this is an empty gesture. Even if a worker were appointed to such board through democratic means, his clout as a sole worker representative on a remuneration committee would be minimal. Worker representation at a substantial level on the main board, with responsibility for having a decisive say in all aspects of the direction of the firm would be a different matter. Even though centrist figures such as Will Hutton and Martin Kettle favour this approach, it was not mentioned by Miliband. Unfortunately there was no pressure from trade unions either, even though many of the one million or so Britons working for German employees do very often have the chance to elect a representative to the supervisory board of the parent company, alongside their German worker and union colleagues. Do British trade unions find this embarrassing? Why don't they ask for such rights in British firms and in foreign firms with substantial British workforces?

Second, the proposal that the government should ensure good practice by firms who win government contracts cannot be quarrelled with. But one would wish to see the substance of such a proposal before being too lavish with the praise. There is a mountain to climb before apprenticeship (as opposed to low level traineeships misleadingly called 'apprenticeships') in Britain becomes a significant route into skilled employment. But why stop there? Why shouldn't the banks that the British taxpayer owns be used to fund the British industry that Miliband claims is being starved by predatory banks?

Even better, such banks could make conditions relating to vocational education and industrial democracy conditional on loans, thus helping to fulfil 'Blue Labour' ambitions (L&TUR July 2011). It is truly amazing that even now Labour cannot bring itself to suggest using state-owned banks to fulfil social and economic objectives that are widely thought to be minimal conditions of economic revival in Britain. This is to be expected of the Tories who have more or less admitted that they are unwilling to make banks lend to firms engaged in productive activities. But at least the Tories have proposed direct lending by the state through the buying of bonds issued by firms. This may turn out to be a gimmick but it has more substance than anything that Labour has got around to proposing.

Ed Miliband's distinction between productive and predatory businesses looks pretty hollow when he failed to offer even a hint of the direction of policy that he proposes. He is as afraid as his predecessors were of having anything that looks like a policy for the direction of the country towards a more productive economy. He didn't go into why some businesses are productive and others are predatory.

Rolls Royce was praised without mention of the fact that the government still holds a golden share in that company, thus having the power to prevent predatory dismemberment by finance capital. He has no suggestion as to how productive business will get finance nor what conditions might be expected in return for such loans or bond purchases. There is no suggestion that it might be necessary to legislate in order to get firms

to provide better vocational education through the introduction of levy-grants or licenses to practice. Apart from some rhetorical changes we are still, in effect, saddled with the failed policies of the Brown-Blair years.

One has to wonder at the state of mind of the current trade union leadership. The leaders of the trades unions seem prepared to put up with no end of contemptuous treatment from the Labour leadership in exchange for substantial financial support from the unions. They have no policies to offer Labour in exchange for such support and seem content to go along with policies that further undermine the UK's economic base and their own membership base.

One final point. Miliband has offered a rather clever election bribe to students and their families through the reduction of maximum university tuition fees. This might well worry the Tories and is the kind of low politics they themselves indulged in with their claims that they would abolish inheritance taxes. He fails to mention that the £9,000 tuition fee idea came from a committee set up by Gordon Brown and that his 'something for something' philosophy applies to education as much as to anything else. Higher education is justified only because of the personal financial remuneration that it brings.

What was good enough for Miliband is evidently too good for today's prospective students. There is certainly a case to be made out for reducing the numbers going into higher education but that can only be done if quality alternatives are created that attend to personal as well as economic needs. And, as we have seen, Labour have no real proposals to do that.

Ed Miliband comes across as quite a plausible character, rather like Cameron. He may even get elected Prime Minister one day. But let no-one delude themselves that, on current showing, he will be much different from Tony Blair and Gordon Brown – the leader of one of Britain's three liberal parties. It is up to the trade union movement to stir itself and prevent this from happening.

The Labour & Trade Union Review

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Froggy

News From Across The Channel

A new Senate

The Senate, (the French Upper House of Parliament) has changed since the recent electoral results. The UMP government party has lost its majority to the parties of the left. This follows from socialist success at local elections. Senators are elected (in tranches of 50%) by a group formed by the members of town councils, departmental councils and regional councils, including 12 for the French abroad, plus MPs. The socialist party with the left has a majority in 21 of the 22 regions and 60 of the 100 *départements*. That gave the left a small majority in the Senate. This means that laws passed by the Lower House, with its government party majority, may not be passed by the Higher House.

De-industrialisation

The French online and video information site “Mediapart” lists hundreds of firms that have announced mass redundancies from October 2008 to January 2009, see “La carte de la crise sociale ©Mediapart.fr”. The site of the so-called “Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitalist” has a similar list, as does Wikipedia, in the French version only, under the entry “*liste de plans de licenciement en France*” [*licenciement* = redundancy]

Here are two recent examples of loss of jobs in industry in France, both in firms which are world leaders in their branch of activity, Lafarge and Arcelor-Mittal.

Lafarge is a French firm, world leader in building materials, cement, concrete, aggregates and plasterboard. It is present all over the world; two examples: it has recently poured concrete for two of the highest blocks of flats in the world, in Bombay, and in Canada, it is pioneering □zero energy□ pre-fab houses. In this multi-billion dollar environment, what place for a small ce-

ment factory in the Yonne département in east-central France which employs 74 people? It provides employment indirectly to another 70 people. It has made cement there since 1930 but Lafarge announced at the beginning of 2011 it wanted to close it, citing lack of profitability. The *département* has lost 1100 jobs since 2003.

Lafarge had some difficulty closing the Yonne factory. First it had to try and circumvent the government sponsored “Social Plan” or “Safeguard of Employment Plan” by making the unions sign a document allowing the movement of employees from site to site as an internal policy.

The “Social Plan” is compulsory under the Labour Code; it is a series of measures destined to soften the blow to employees, with redundancy packages, retraining programmes etc. When a firm announces a “Social Plan” it means it is going through the process of making mass redundancies, and this is how it is announced to the employees and in the media.

On 20 September, 11 employees of the Yonne factory, plus the mayor of the town where the factory is sited, started a hunger strike outside the glass fronted Lafarge headquarters in an elegant suburb of Paris. The result of 10 days of hunger strike? A compromise. 35 employees will be kept on, 34 re-employed and 5 retired; the furnace will be switched off at the end of March 2012 and industrial activity converted to crushing aggregate, until the plant can be sold off.

Arcelor-Mittal

The Mosel département in Northern France is a traditional steelmaking area. The industry has declined over the years

and the last steelworks have been bought by the giant Indian firm Mittal, hence the name of the last plant, Arcelor-Mittal. In 2008 Mittal was trying to close down one of the two plants in the area, against local opposition. Sarkozy happened to be visiting the district and the population was disappointed that he omitted to visit the stricken town. He was shamed into coming back a few days later, to give his support for the continuation of the steelworks. They have since closed, and now Arcelor-Mittal want to close down the remaining plant which has two blast furnaces; one furnace closed earlier this year, supposedly as a temporary measure and the second closed on 3 October, supposedly also as a temporary measure. However the unions have pointed out that no budget has been set aside for its maintenance and that without maintenance it will deteriorate irreparably; the union suspect the firm of wanting to keep only its cheaper to run sea board steel works in Fos (Marseille) and Dunkerque.

A project of carbon capture and storage using the CO₂ emitted by the plant had been devised to increase the plant’s economic potential. This sort of activity is part of Sarkozy’s great plan for boosting the economy, the green economy that is part of his programme. With the plant no longer emitting CO₂ since it no longer works, the project falls down.

1100 permanent employees have lost their job, 400 agency workers and 400 sub-contractors. The local socialist MP pointed out that the Mosel steel was of very high quality, due to the know how of the work force, and that the plants had a list of prestigious clients, and that cost should not be the only consideration when planning the future of the plant.

15000 people marched in the town, all the shops closed for two hours. The national day of action of 11 October will

see further action at the steelworks.

The future

What will the future hold for the employees of Lafarge and Arcelor-Mittal who are made redundant? The employees of Moulinex, a kitchen appliances firm which went bankrupt in 2001, were the subject of a whole page article in *Le Monde* on 4 October 2011. Ten years after the event, some still meet together in premises rented by their association of ex Moulinex employees. In 2006 the State statistics department said that only 19 people, out of 3800, were still “without a solution” to the problem of redundancy, that is, 0,9%. Astonished by this, the association made its own enquiries; out of 310 people contacted who replied, 150 said they were still without employment. According to a book entitled “*The unemployed of Moulinex*” (2011) the less well qualified, the older as well as women were the least likely to find another post. A study by a careers advice firm put at 31% the number of those who found employment after being made redundant by Moulinex.

The State did spend money on the problem, money which went to training and employment advice agencies, with little result; state money was also spent on benefits. Social measures have been estimated to cost 169 million Euros in 2006, plus 95 million in extra benefits. Moulinex needed 800 million Euros to stay afloat.

The State will go some way to compensate the victims of firms who make redundancies, but will not do anything to prevent the bankruptcies, although it could, from a financial point of view, and it will not do anything to prevent successful firms harming local communities who depend on their continuing business activity. But business is free to do what it considers most profitable. The workers only become the responsibility of the state once they become ex-workers. Politicians who talk about keeping France an industrial country, and yet embrace free trade, are in a contradiction. Saying “I want France to remain an industrial country” means “I want to put limits on the freedom of action of industrial firms” and “I want to facilitate the financing of industrial activity”. Unless politicians say that, they lie when they say they want

to keep France industrial.

The Socialists and redundancies

The SP programme addresses the question of factory closures. It calls for a State Investment Bank. One imagines the sort of bank that would have made available the 800 million Euros Moulinex needed. Not at all; it will be used to “anticipate, create networks, re-convert and relocalise”, in other words, do anything but provide serious finance to avert closure. In cases where firms, while in a position to pay dividends to their shareholders, still make redundancies, a socialist state will make the firm pay more for redundancy packages. In cases where the redundancies go against the firm’s interests, the state, under the Socialists, will help the workers take the firm to court. Well, you can’t accuse the Socialists of vague promises. They state clearly that firms will continue to have a free hand to destroy the social fabric of France, and the state will be there to patch up the injured. French workers, in one case after another, will continue to fight a piecemeal and lonely struggle to keep the nation as it was.

Discussion

A Reader Writes

There can be very little doubt that for the best part of thirty years the left, at least within Europe, has lost its way. Within the UK the once powerful trade union movement is a shadow of its former self. What with the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of the new right, socialist ideas have all but disappeared from mainstream politics. So, to coin a phrase, what is to be done. In the following discussion document **Joe Keenan** provides an analysis and, perhaps, some pointers of what should be done. If any of our readers would like to contribute to this discussion please send contributions to ltureview@gmail.com.

For quite a few years now I have been at odds with the editorial line of the Labour & Trade Union Review, most especially with its refusal to undertake any historically based investigation of the developing position of the British working class. This has led it to persevere to no positive effect with an altogether false

estimation of the value of parliamentary democracy and the party system as those now exist in Britain. The Labour & Trade Union Review has continued to assert the efficacy of a peaceful, parliamentary British Road to Socialism throughout all the years in which that possibility has been systematically dismantled. Neither

Peace nor Parliament are any longer to the sticking point of working class political activity and the Labour & Trade Union Review has simply failed to notice, or comment, or, indeed, review the process that has brought us here.

In a period when the British labour

and trade union movement has declined from the most powerful to the most ineffectual force in politics I would have expected a paper calling itself the Labour & Trade Union Review to be full of analysis of British labour and trade union matters. But not so. It has been full of, frequently very interesting, articles on matters Chinese, European, French and Palestinian but with very little independent reflection on the determinations of British working class politics.

Even more perhaps, in a period when the British labour and trade union movement has declined from the most powerful to the most ineffectual force in national politics, I would have expected the paper published by the Ernest Bevin Society to have at least considered how Ernest Bevin might have had something to do with the labour and trade union movement's rise to its former power. I would have expected some examination of how the British Left's rejection of Bevin and all his works might have contributed to the labour and trade union movement's subsequent plunge to the depths. But no. None of that. Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

Strangely, for the monthly paper of the Ernest Bevin Society, the Labour & Trade Union Review has carried very few substantial articles about Ernest Bevin. Over the past ten years there may have been one or two. More probably there were none.

And, as I've just indicated, the life and times of Ernest Bevin and his role in the working class's rise to social and economic dominance, to the brink of political power, is the key to understanding British politics as they have developed from the nineteenth, through the twentieth, down to this poorly begun twenty-first century. Without a clear idea of that history nothing at all is clear. The Bevin Society's Labour & Trade Union Review has little or no idea, clear or otherwise, about Bevin's life and times, his career or his legacy. And so nothing at all about British politics is clear to it.

And yet the Labour & Trade Union Review continues, every now and again, not in any deep or sustained fashion, to editorialise British working class politics. It doesn't know the history of the

British Labour & Trade Union Movement and so its editorial line is inevitably ahistorical. Political development that cannot be situated historically cannot then be traced through its life to any useful conclusion in the day and daily here and now. So such comment is dull and dead and useless; just this or that illusion plucked from some stream or other of consciousness and pinned to the page as drab ornament to trivial editorial endeavour.

A Theory Of The non-Production Of Theory

Forty years ago the British section of the very disorganised organisation within (or rather, among) which the Labour & Trade Union Review later began, accomplished a revolution in left-wing theory of the social history and political future of the British working class. That is to say, it ceased, in an apparently very theoretical manner, to bother about theory.

It provided itself with all the theoretical apparatus a bunch of, mainly working class, Marxist intellectuals could hope for, wish for, or need, to enable it to stop theorising about and start actually seeing the world around it. What it then saw it understood historically and explained polemically, and so was able to hold on to a Marxist vocabulary without being intellectually disabled by it.

That theoretical apparatus can be described in several ways; as a scaffold bridging the gulf between Marxist views of what the British working class should do and the reality of what the British working class had actually accomplished since the nineteenth century; as a safety net facilitating the political high wire act that the British & Irish Communist Organisation performed throughout the 1970s; as a security blanket for angst-ridden ideologues who were being taken on a roller coaster ride to the disturbingly real world.

It was all of those. What it was not was a body of ideas capable of theoretical development. Nor did we make any attempt to develop a rounded theory on the basis of it. The very idea was seen at the time as being ridiculous. The theo-

retical apparatus was just as theoretical as it had to be to enable itself to be sidelined. As theories go it went, by way of an altruistic suicide.

What the B&ICO was left with was a clear-sighted ability to observe the world around it, a critical facility for drawing relevant generalisations from observed fact and a practical capacity for developing appropriate lines of agitational polemic which structured a national discussion around the crisis of British capitalism into a campaign for workers' control which almost achieved its primary goals.

In the mid-1970s we almost succeeded in forcing the British trade union movement to accept responsibility for the strategic direction of the private sector of British industry. And we did that without benefit of numbers or money or a media presence. All largely because we were not burdened with theory.

Remnants of the apparatus that enabled the B&ICO of the seventies to rid itself of theoretical hangups can be found in various places today: in a kind of online-memorial to the late Professor Nina Fishman, in the politics which drove at least a section of the CPGB in its final years and in the politics of the Labour & Trade Union Review.

The online-memorial is available at <http://www.ninafishman.org/> and is stated to have been "...created by a group of her friends, colleagues and political collaborators not merely to honour Nina's memory but to collect together all her various writings into a single place where they can be a valuable resource for future political historians and activists."

What I would consider to be the core of the apparatus is there, two articles from The Communist of November 1972 (The British Road To Socialism) and March 1973 (The British Road To Socialism—A Reply To Criticisms) both written by Nina Fishman (or Nina Stead as she was then).

It seems ridiculous to me that any friends of Professor Fishman should republish those articles without a considered exposition of their context, or

indeed at all. They are intensely political articles, written to be wielded as weapons in an ideological war. There is nothing academic, nothing in the least professorial, about them. They are very much of their time and definitely do not stand alone.

In those articles Nina Stead/Fishman set out to establish a Marxist basis for the only form of working class politics which was at all practical at the time, towards a strategy for workers' control of industry. Their only purpose was to direct the attention of the consciously revolutionary wing of the British Labour Movement to a specifically parliamentary struggle that was entirely distasteful to it.

She set herself to attack and undermine all the most immediate of the sterile dogmas and romantic prejudices that made the British Left a useless waste of space. And in the precise polemical context within which her attack was launched, within the British & Irish Communist Organisation, it was overwhelmingly successful. Which is only to say that the arguments in those articles and the arguments which occurred around them succeeded in taking the British section of B&ICO out of the Left and launching it into a campaign for the legislative enactment of workers' control. The articles were not successful, or useful, sensible, or even coherent, in any other way.

About 15 years later Nina Fishman left the B&ICO to become a New Labour Professor. So far as I know, and unlike some other people I can think of, she left the B&ICO in a very final manner, put all that behind her and got on with becoming a successful English bourgeois.

I have no special quarrel with what Nina did while she was a member of B&ICO and no particular knowledge of what she did after leaving it. I very decidedly do have a quarrel with the unstructured remnants of her British Road articles which are rattling around like the old bones of a dead argument, getting in the way of what I'd like to think might be livelier things.

Marxism In The Progressive Movement

The British Road articles were un-sentimentally Marxist. They were Marxist both by reflex and research, without any of the nuanced flourishes that in those days made (and still, in these days, make) Marx interesting to an academic and a middle-class audience. And so the articles were instinctively "progressive", as Marx's political economy had been. That is how, forty years ago, they had to be. And they could not then, to be of use to the working class, have been other than they were.

But this is now. Forty years on there is only his descriptive analysis of capitalism in Marx and nothing at all in any of the Marxisms that is of any use at all to the working class.

As they had to be by way of being Marxist, both articles are clear that there are two great historical formations, the progressive and the reactionary, and clear also that "progressive" is the way for the working class to go. At no point is either progress or reaction defined. Nor are any particular reasons given for automatic identification of the working class interest with the progressive movement in history. It all went without saying. Forty years ago it all did indeed go without saying.

But this is now. Forty years on identification of the working class interest with the progressive movement in history cannot be taken for granted. Definitions and reason are the order of today.

In *The Communist Manifesto* (published in February 1848) Marx and Engels gave a broad sketch of the progressive movement as it was then developing in the humdrum day to day:

"National differences, and antagonisms between peoples, are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

"The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United

action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions of the emancipation of the proletariat."

The progressive movement in world history was, and still is, the engine of growth of that market economy which, triumphing first in England, was being spread throughout the world by force of England's exemplary arms. And the apotheosis of all market economy in the creation of a world market was "one of the first conditions of the emancipation of the proletariat"! So, the future of the working class lay in the first instance in the establishment of the world market that England was striving for.

Engels wrote in a footnote to the *Manifesto's* English edition of 1888 that, "Generally speaking, for the economic development of the bourgeoisie, England is here taken as the typical country; for its political development, France." Lenin was more expansive, writing in 1913 (in an article for the *Granat Encyclopaedia* which was published in 1918 as the pamphlet, *Karl Marx*) that Marxism is a synthesis of French socialism, German philosophy and English political economy. Both statements of the matter are fine, just so long as it is understood that the determining element in the synthesis was English political economy. Thus, when Marx wrote (in so many places, this is the formulation in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) that...

"At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."

...he was seeing English political economy coming into conflict with and breaking the fetters of European relations of production. The model of the development which is propounded for Europe in *The Communist Manifesto* is England's revolutionary commodification of land and labour which produced its degraded

and demoralised lump of a proletariat.

Europe was to be thrown into turmoil to rid its societies of all their pre-capitalist baggage, to free its markets and enslave its workforces. Really, a spectre was hunting Europe, the spectre of English Liberalism.

Thus in 1848, Marx and Engels called on German Communists to fight alongside the bourgeoisie "...when it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie". Not surprisingly, in 1849, the Prussian Government called on the British to expel them, but the then Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, Liberal Scion of a great Whig family, refused.

Can anyone say Lord John was wrong to protect Marxism, when we read Engels in 1881 writing for the English working class about its duty to the Empire:

"...democracy means the dominion of the working class, neither more nor less. Let, then, the working class prepare itself for the task in store for it—the ruling of this great empire; let them understand the responsibilities which inevitably fall to their share." (Labour Standard, July 23rd 1881)

Capitalism: English Born & Bred

The political economy which Marxism took as immutably given in the unfolding book of the world is nothing of the sort. It emerged out of the particular circumstances of the special times of a unique place.

Capital is an analysis in incomparable depth of the economics of England's progressive restructuring of its world as a resource to its will. But it doesn't see past the economic movement to the political will. England cannot be intelligibly grasped as a product of the operation of economic law, for that occurs only stage by inevitable stage. It has to be understood politically, as the contingent outcomes of conflicting (or converging, as the case may be) purposes.

I have sometimes thought that a

Capital written out of a similarly incisive analysis of 19th century French political economy would have been a very different and perhaps much more interesting book. But really, by missing out on the English will to realise the thing in the world, it could scarcely have touched on capitalism at all. There could have been nothing in it to so fiercely engage Lenin's attention and appetite. And we, in whatever different world we might then be living, would never have heard of it.

Capitalism red in tooth and claw is English by birth and breeding and red with the blood of England's victims, the first of which victims were themselves English.

The economic historian Karl Polanyi denied that his "The Great Transformation" was an historical work, because "what we are searching for is not a convincing sequence of outstanding events, but an explanation of their trend in terms of human institutions". But such an explanation I think is history enough to be getting on with. Particularly with this much history at its core...

"Market society was born in England...The nineteenth century, as cannot be overemphasized, was England's century. The Industrial Revolution was an English event. Market economy, free trade, and the gold standard were English inventions."

And later...

"To separate labor from other activities of life and to subject it to the laws of the market was to annihilate all organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one.

"Such a scheme of destruction was best served by the application of the principle of freedom of contract. In practice this meant that the noncontractual organizations of kinship, neighborhood, profession, and creed were to be liquidated since they claimed the allegiance of the individual and thus restrained his freedom..."

"It is the absence of the threat of individual starvation which makes primitive society, in a sense, more human

than market economy, and at the same time less economic..."

"Now, what the white man may still occasionally practice in remote regions today, namely, the smashing up of social structures in order to extract the element of labor from them, was done in the eighteenth century to white populations by white men for similar purposes..."

"Legal compulsion and parish serfdom as in England, the rigors of an absolutist labor police as on the Continent, indented labor as in the early Americas were the prerequisites of the 'willing worker.' But the final stage was reached with the application of 'nature's penalty,' hunger. In order to release it, it was necessary to liquidate organic society, which refused to permit the individual to starve."

The primitive accumulation of capital in the Tudor enclosures and dissolution of the monasteries, and the imperial plunder of nearly three centuries, and the second great enclosure movement of the late 18th. century, fuelled the industrial revolution in which all classes, categories and grades of human labour were consumed, commodified and recast as the proletariat, each atom of it the owner of its own labour power as of its own hunger and misery. And all of that the work of the progressive movement in its Whig phase.

Which progressive work Marx paid homage to in The Communist Manifesto, applauding the degradation of the well-fed peasant into the starving proletarian (from surplus flesh to surplus value?)...

"The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life."

English Genocide In Scotland

So far as the British component of Englishness was concerned, the next order of progressive movement business was the genocide of the non-anglo population of Scotland.

Before 1066 the English were busy in lowland Scotland. After 1066 the Normans were busier still. The feudal Kingdom of Scotland may not strictly speaking have been Norman, but it was a great deal more Norman than it was Gaelic. The progressive aspect of Scottish social development from its reformation and the union of crowns on was overwhelmingly a function of the region's English and Anglicised components. Not long after the genocide of the highland clearances it was commonly claimed that there were "no thorough-going pure Englishmen now left in Britain save among the so-called Scotch of the Lothians" (in this instance said by Grant Allen in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1880).

The English in Scotland (both the English English and the Scottish English) achieved there what they failed to achieve during the Great Hunger in Ireland: the physical extinction and removal by death and emigration of a sufficient proportion of the Gaelic people to secure the complete assimilation of the degraded remnant to English purposes. The nationalism of Salmond's SNP has its roots in those English purposes. It might be Parnellite or it might be Redmondite. It certainly is Liberal and Progressive.

One Or Two Or Three Parties

The two-party system into which English parliamentary politics tends to run has from its glorious revolutionary outset been a very fluid thing and a way of avoiding, rather than expressing, fundamental ideological struggle. The original titles of the parties, Whig and Tory, were insults which they came to take pride in. By 1834, following Peel's Tamworth Manifesto, the Tories had become the Conservative Party. In 1859 the Whigs became the Liberal Party. "Tory" has remained a term of progressive movement abuse since it was flung at the non-progressive, Disraeli, on the heels of his 1867 Reform Act which brought the working class into electoral politics. Disraeli drove the progressive movement to abuse by trespassing on its preserve, representing the working class interest to a reactionary purpose that would slow the growth of market economy. Its continued use in political journalism today is simply mindless.

Disraeli and the 1867 Act notwithstanding, English trade unionism developed under the patronage of the Liberal Party.

The rural idiots who were rescued by the progressive movement from a life without hunger were put to Hull and Halifax where in the hell of the new factory system they learned to organise or die. They simply had to learn to organise, as the condition of a struggle for life, or go down alone and passive into death.

The working class power which had its origin in Bevin's defeat of the Progressive Movement in 1931 provoked successive crises in the capitalist system from the sixties on. The inability of capitalism to resolve those crises and the inability of its industrial managers to organise production in the face of working class power led in the seventies to a real opportunity of a substantial measure of workers' control of British industry.

Organising for life they showed a capacity that could be useful to progress and they being useful, the Liberal Party, being broadminded about such things, was prepared to use them.

Political life could not be so comfortably managed that natural representatives of the working class moved efficiently into the Party's electoral machine. Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and others who failed to be adopted as candidates by local Liberal associations got together to form the New Liberal Party which was very much in the air in the 1880s and 90s. They called it the Independent Labour Party.

The ILP then was the largest of the Socialist Societies which, in February 1900, formed the Labour Representation Committee. Though the occasion of the LRC was a resolution adopted by the Trades Union Congress in 1899 calling for "a better representation of the interests of Labour in the House of Commons", a move to ensure that LRC candidates were members of the working class was overwhelmingly defeated in favour of an amendment moved by Liberal M.P. John Burns that candidates should be "men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour Movement". Burns complained that he was "getting tired of working class boots, working-class trains, working-class houses and work-

ing-class margarine" and 102 as against 3 delegates agreed with him.

That vote marked the birth of the Labour Party as a semi-detached element of the Progressive Movement. Looking back at 1900 in the light of the Liberal landslide at the 1906 general election, the most likely future for the LRC parliamentary intake of that can only have been to rejoin the Liberal Party and fully reconstitute the Progressive Movement. But the Taff Vale decision of the House

of Lords in July 1901 intervened to ensure that separation and the split in the Progressive Movement continued.

The Taff Vale decision made trade unions liable for damages in respect of industrial action. It required legislation to overturn which the Liberal Party could not accommodate. Increased support, affiliation and affiliation fees from trade unions, and the consequent block voting system, utterly changed the character of the Labour Party. What would have been, and probably for no great duration, a Liberal party of Socialist Societies became a real Labour Party, constrained to trade union purposes.

Years later, speaking for, if not exactly on behalf of, the general council of the TUC, Bevin told a Labour Party conference:

"Every one of us on the general council of the Trades Union Congress feels he has been let down. Our predecessors formed this party. It was not Keir Hardie. The Labour Party grew out of the bowels of the TUC."

The Rainbow Circle & 1931

So, ILP plans for a New Liberalism were frustrated at the outset, but they were not thereupon abandoned. The New

Liberal tendency in both the Independent Labour and the Liberal parties met regularly together in the Rainbow Circle, a discussion group which was set up immediately upon the formation of the ILP, precisely to co-ordinate the thinking and the plans of the separate sections of the sundered Progressive Movement. One of its founders was Herbert Samuel, who was leader of the Liberal Party in 1931. A member from almost the beginning was James Ramsay MacDonald of the ILP, who was leader of the Labour Party in 1931. 1931 was a crucial year.

In 1931 the two sections of the Progressive Movement attempted to address the failure of 1901 and reunite their scattered bodies. At a time of acute economic crisis MacDonald collapsed the Labour Government of which he was Prime Minister in the reasonable expectation that he would take a majority of the party with him into a National Government where all Liberals would coalesce as the Progressive Movement Reunited. But it didn't happen that way. Bevin (and Walter Citrine) overturned reasonable expectations and held the Parliamentary Labour Party pretty much together.

In August 1931 MacDonald lied to his cabinet in order to provoke a crisis vote which he won by a margin of one (in effect, Herbert Morrison's vote). He then acted as though he had lost the vote, resigned, and agreed to form an administration with the Conservative and Liberal Parties. Only four cabinet ministers and two non-cabinet ministers supported him and only 15 Labour MPs supported his new National Government. In the meantime Bevin and Citrine had all his supporters expelled from the Labour Party.

At the general election that followed MacDonald's National Labour Party won 20 seats. The Labour Party, led by Arthur Henderson, who lost his seat, was reduced to 52 seats (from 287 in the 1929 election). The Liberal Party itself split, with Herbert Samuel as leader of the official remnant. Altogether, the two wings, Free Trade and Protectionist, took 74 seats.

At this point the Rainbow Circle which had facilitated negotiations be-

tween its members who were leaders of the Labour Party and the Liberal Party, which had really only existed to create the circumstances of their negotiations, closed up shop.

The future belonged to Ernest Bevin, or fifty years of it did. And fifty years is a long, long time in politics.

Bevin's Legacy Won & Lost

Immediately following the fiasco of Liberalism's attempt to engross the Labour Party, Bevin, with the assistance of Citrine, used the TUC General Council to take the party in hand. The mechanism of this, by which General Council instructions were conveyed to the Party, was the hitherto innocuous National Council of Labour. Formerly the General Council, the PLP and the Labour Party National Executive had equal representation on this body. After 1931 the General Council appointed half the members, and controlled it utterly. Bevin served on the National Council of Labour from 1931 to 1937 and saw to it that, though it was officially consultative, its decisions were binding on the Party.

So far as policy was concerned; the Policy Sub-Committee of the National Executive (led in this period by Attlee and Stafford Cripps) drew up detailed programmes for a future Labour Government, but all within the general framework determined by the National Council, which is to say, by Bevin. So far as personnel was concerned; after 1931 the Labour Party was left with George Lansbury as Leader, and Clement Attlee as his deputy. In 1935 Bevin got rid of Lansbury, arranging to have him replaced by Attlee.

Attlee was Bevin's man in Parliament. Citrine was Bevin's man in the TUC. Between them, Bevin, Citrine and Attlee established the preconditions of the Labour Government of 1945 - 51 which began an explosion of working class confidence, living standards and organisational power that continued for some thirty years after Citrine's elevation to the peerage (1947) the death of Bevin (1951) and Attlee's retirement (1955).

Those thirty years saw the working out of Bevin's legacy. That period between the beginning of the fifties and the end of the seventies encompassed the absolute height of working class power in Britain. No peculiarities of the English political system, of its parliamentary democracy or civil society were responsible for this. It was achieved because Bevin had taken the Labour Movement by the scruff of the neck to drag it out of the clutches of the Progressive Movement. The Labour Movement then could operate within the party system and within Parliament purely because Bevin had left the Bourgeoisie with no other place and no other means to engage with it (short of civil war).

Unfortunately, as the Labour Movement thrived, surviving elements within itself of its origins in the orbit of English Liberalism, its left-wing, also thrived. And the natural frame of reference of the left-wing of the Labour Movement was the Progressive Movement.

The working class power which had its origin in Bevin's defeat of the Progressive Movement in 1931 provoked successive crises in the capitalist system from the sixties on. The inability of capitalism to resolve those crises and the inability of its industrial managers to organise production in the face of working class power led in the seventies to a real opportunity of a substantial measure of workers' control of British industry.

The Communist Party of Great Britain then used its influence in the Labour Party and the trade unions to sabotage the Bullock Inquiry into Industrial Democracy which Jack Jones and Harold Wilson had worked to establish. At the point of that great progressive achievement the leading CPGB ideologue, Eric Hobsbawm, announced in *Marxism Today* (September, 1978) that the working class had been in decline for thirty years and could not defend itself from its own resources.

This was the first thrust in a campaign to include these working class "remnants" in a Rainbow Coalition; in other words to reconnect the working class with the Progressive Movement. (And the Labour & Trade Union Review recently saw fit to defend Hobsbawm

from a trivial attack by some failed Lefties!)

Over the same period other elements of the CPGB engaged in a campaign with the National Union of Mineowners to draw that union and as many others as it could bamboozle into a foredoomed attempt at a General Strike. Hobsbawm had declared the theory of working class incapacity for successful action. His comrades worked to discredit and destroy all the very considerable working class capacity which in fact remained. After their success, the complete defeat of Scargill's Strike, they denounced the whole enterprise, which they both planned and supported, as Trotskyite adventurism. (And the Labour & Trade Union Review, which certainly should know better, recently described Scargill's Strike as a Trotskyite adventure!)

Three Or Two Or One Party

The Labour Party's accelerating drift into Progressive Movement Liberalism was a left-wing project. Its shock troops were the Marxism Today wing of the CPGB. Its leading theoretician was Eric Hobsbawm. The CPGB might appear to have collapsed in the effort, but really it is a matter of the effort having been so successful from its point of view that the CPGB cancer has metastasized, into grouplets and think-tanks and foundations too numerous to mention. The Progressive Movement is everywhere today, and everywhere is shadowed by the former CPGB in one guise or another.

The Social Democrats (the Liberal Party that was) is still a Liberal Party. The Conservative Party has been a Liberal Party for many years (and the more Liberal it has become the more the Liberal press has described it as Tory). The Labour Party under Blair became, and under Brown and Milliband, has remained, an aggressively Liberal Party.

There is no way back for the Labour Party. There is no Bevin to ride to the rescue. And even if there were some Bevin hidden in the wings, there is nothing in the trade union movement, which Blair rewrote in his own Liberal, Progressive Movement, image, for such a figure to mobilise in defense of the working class

interest.

All the formal attributes of the two party system of course remain in place. Parliament could not function in the absence of them. But it is all a sham; with no policy alternatives to generate conflict, party politics is an empty illusion. There is only the broad consensus of the Progressive Movement, that the working class is to be put in its place and kept there. The revenge of the Progressive Movement for 1901 and 1931 has been a long time coming. But it is complete.

Conclusion

Where does all this leave the Labour & Trade Union Review, if it wishes to return to its roots as a journal of the working class interest in British politics?

I can see only this as a policy for the L&TUR over the next few years. To set the one of the Theses on Feuerbach which everyone remembers on its head and, forgetting for the moment about changing the world, simply work to explain it.

The form of such explanation is necessarily historical. Historical in the straightforward sense of recovering the details of past transactions in order to better understand their structure, significance and meaning for the present. And historical also in the more complex, and more immediately political, sense of recovering for the working class its historical awareness of itself as an enduring community of needs, values and ambitions. The absolutely essential task in British working class politics is to restore to the class its consciousness of itself.

In the years since it defeated the common sense of the Labour Movement over Bullock, the British Left (led in the first instance by Hobsbawm and Jacques, Anderson and Nairn, for Marxism Today and the New Left Review) has plundered and destroyed the working class's historical sense which is the substance of its class consciousness. The Labour & Trade Union Review should organise its priorities to help recover at least some of that ground.

I can see no other way to make any kind of beginning to a defense of the working class that might be able in the

future to move on to a restoration of the social position it occupied only thirty years ago. The British Labour Movement no longer exists as an expression of the political and economic interest of the working class. The British working class no longer has any social form of expression of its political and economic interest.

And so the recent riots in England are the only form of oppositional political activity open to young and vigorous elements of the working class. They mark a crude and elemental way of protesting the Progressive Movement's uncontested rise to clear "hegemony". But sooner crude rejection than passive acceptance.

I have seen effete internet lefties describe the youths who went out to fight the market economy which has trashed and dehumanised them as "lumpen". A passage from The Communist Manifesto has been quoted against their destructive activities:

"The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue."

By 'reactionary' Marx and Engels meant acting in opposition to the spread throughout the width of the world and the depth of daily life of market economy. Such reaction today is the only content a proletarian revolution can conceivably have. We have to work to inform that reaction; to provide the historical framework for a reactionary politics to bring the working class back to an idea of a future for itself and its children. There is nothing else to be done. And no other way to do it.

If you would like to take part in this discussion please sent to ltureview@gmail.com.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

Why the Euro crisis is superficial

The only thing worse for Core-Europe than staying in the Euro would be leaving the Euro, or letting it break up. By 'Core-Europe', I mean the original six members of the European Union: France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Belgium. With hindsight, it might have been wiser for them to have formed a Euro Area based just on those six, or even without Italy. The other current members (Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain) include the main sources of crisis. Telling them to wait a decade or two might have been wiser: the absence of the well-performing members might not have mattered any more than the fact that Sweden and the Czech Republic have so far stayed out. But having let them in, the long-term cost of letting them leave again would far exceed any possible benefit.

Economic liberalism means that the rich can get their money out of an economy quickly and easily, leaving behind financial voids that ordinary people would have to fill. Greece might have been wiser to stay out of the Euro, but any attempt to leave would wreck their economy. And not just the economy.

People seem to have forgotten why the European Union was originally created. It resolved the long-standing quarrel between France and Germany by largely merging their interests. Britain's rise to global dominance in the late-18th and 19th centuries was aided by a long-term patters of France and the larger Germany states balancing and frustrating each other. This continued till as late as the rise of Hitler: there were many in the British ruling class who felt that the Great War had left France too strong. Germany after the Great War might have been split back into the different elements that Prussia had forcibly united in 1870. France wanted this but Britain prevented it, showing that the ruling class, at least, knew that what they'd said about Prussian Militarism was nonsense.

Hitler was able to overturn the Versailles limits on German power because he knew that Britain was not going to act and France would not act alone. How he knew this is an interesting question: logically he must have been told by British 'insiders' who were high enough up to be able to speak with confidence and be believed. But the British ruling class has proved very good at keeping its most important secrets.

The original European Economic Community and its later expansions were allowed because of the Cold War. West Germany and East Germany were there as rivals, and one Anglo fear was that they might reunify as a neutralist state. This was a fear

even though it would have ended any possibility of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe: it would have created a solid line of neutral or non-aligned states between the two main blocks. It's moot if a Soviet invasion of Western Europe was ever a real possibility, but the threat let the USA push in everywhere and break down every tradition that stood in the way of its commerce.

Britain was let into the European Union against the far-sighted concerns of de Gaulle. Britain was let in under Edward Heath, who was a mix of Traditional Tory and European Christian Democrat. As leader of the Tory Party, Heath was willing to speak of the 'unacceptable face of capitalism' and was ready to share power with the Trade Unions. Sadly, his path wasn't the one that Britain followed. He believed in social harmony, and asked that the Trade Unions help restore it. Cheered on by most of the left, the Trade Unions said no and defended Free Collective Bargaining. They also refused to opt for Workers Control when it was offered to them by the Labour government that followed Heath's defeat. They were utterly unready for Thatcher undermining the post-1945 norms by appealing to a mix of selfishness and a desire for national unity among the bulk of the working class. To this day, they have not really learned this lesson. Britain's best hope may be that the USA will decline enough and get extreme enough to rupture the strong bonds of Anglo culture that currently keep us tied to them as a weak little back-up.

The European Union might have developed more smoothly had Britain never joined, or had Thatcher taken Britain out of it, which was always Thatcher's impulse. Instead the European Union was seduced by Economic Liberalism. Most of the European Union also chose after the ending of the Cold War to become back-up in the USA's bid for global hegemony. The massive financial bubble that built up and the crisis created by its bursting in 2008 has not so far shifted this view very much.

The current crisis has little to do with the productive economy. Deficits in state spending are the proper way to copy with an economic downturn. The problem is caused by a stratum of radical-rich who shift their money freely and try to avoid sharing in the economic pain that was caused by them in the first place.

The Atlantic countries are currently suffering from an overdose of Economic Liberalism. Non-Communist East Asia suffered something similar in 1997, and has maybe learned its lesson. China meantime saw how Russia was humiliated and suffered economic decline after surrendering to Western values after 1991. The USA remains dominated by Plutophile Libertarianism, with most Democrats including Obama accepting its basic beliefs. But maybe Core-Europe is reacting against, with a

Tobin Tax at last on the agenda.

Cameron has spoken against a Tobin Tax. If Ed Miliband really takes seriously the left-wing noises he has been making – he probably does not, but there is always a chance – if he believed his own words he should come out as champion of a Tobin Tax, demand to take the UK out of the whole global mess of speculative and parasitic finance. Threats by financiers to quit to UK would be meaningless if the rest of Europe were no more congenial, and if tax havens were boycotted as parasites on productive industry.

Labour needs to strongly assert that the era 1950-1975 was indeed a ‘Golden Quarter-Century’, at least economically and in terms of providing a decent living to anyone willing to do an honest day’s work. Reforms in the 1980s should have been primarily aimed at restoring and updating it. Instead the New Right decided that pre-1914 capitalism was the ideal system that we should strive to return to.

The following table shows GDP per head for seven very different countries, as a percentage of the 1950 level. [A]

	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975
France	120	143	178	221	251
West					
Germany	149	199	237	279	310
UK	113	125	141	155	171
USA	114	118	140	157	170
China	131	153	161	178	199
India	110	122	125	141	146
Japan	144	207	309	506	590

The big successes were France, West Germany, China and Japan. The most remarkable of these was China, which had failed to grow at all in the 110 years since it was opened up to global capitalism by the Opium Wars. Mao tripled the economy, but the population also grew, so it was just under a doubling of wealth per head for his period of rule. But this was managed with very little outside aid, none at all after the Soviet Union pulled out in 1959. It was also managed with the ever-present threat of an invasion by either the Soviet Union or else by the USA fronted by Taiwan. Allowing for this, China un-

der Mao was the star performer of the Golden Quarter-Century. It is absurd that Westerners now believe it to have been an era of failure.

Showing GDP per head also gives a more accurate picture of the performance of the USA, which has lots of fairly empty land to fill and could afford to let in immigrants, nearly doubling its population between 1950 and 2000, from 152 million to 282 million. With strict immigration controls and a high standard of living, the USA has also been able to attract vast numbers of skilled and well-educated immigrants, whereas in Europe it has mostly been cheap and unskilled workers. Despite which, the USA has been constantly losing its relative advantage.

Now let’s look at the dismal quarter-century of New Right dominance. Showing the same countries (apart from Germany re-united from 1990) and GDP per head as a percentage of the 1975 level, the figures are:

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
France	115	120	130	140	157
Germany	118	126	132	142	154
UK	109	120	139	147	167
USA	114	127	142	150	173
China	122	174	213	304	392
India	105	120	146	171	214
Japan	118	135	166	175	186

Both Japan and the Atlantic countries are suffering a New Right Blight. France, Germany and Japan are no longer overtaking the Anglo powers, but only because they are doing much worse. All of them suffering from an overdose of Economic Liberalism, though politicians use each successive crisis as an excuse for further doses.

You could say that China and India gained economically from a dose of Economic Liberalism – though the social costs have been considerable. Of course China and India before the 1980s were much more state-dominated than Western Europe ever was, and this remains the case in China. Whatever about that, the figures show that France, Germany and Japan were badly hurt by economic liberalism, while the UK and USA suffered a definite slowing in growth.

Of course those GPD per Head figures are what it means for the society as a whole. In each of those countries, the richest 1% has made much bigger gains. It would be very interesting to see these charts by ‘decile’ within each country from 1950 to 2000, from the poorest 10th to the richest 10th. This is something the TUC could do, or any Trade Union with a decent research department. I think you’d find that the poorest deciles in China were making steady progress since 1975, and so had little reason to be discontented with the central government. And that the position of the lower deciles in the West were shockingly low, with the Top Decile in the West achieving Japanese-style increase for themselves alone. I suspect that Japan would appear as mostly messed up, intimidated into damaging economic policies and having also let financial speculation and property speculation run out of control when they were at the height of their success.

A Feral Elite

A lot of Western protest at New Right policies seems to credit the elite with being a coherent body of Superior Persons with some well-worked-out plan for global domination. This gives them far too much credit for breadth of vision. Each is smart on his or her own little area. When it comes to the wider world, they are a pack of fools. The disastrous involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan shows them up as fools. The decline and fall of Russian Liberalism – and the consequent ruin of whatever prospects existed for political liberalism in People’s China – shows just how shallow and narrow they are. The economic explosion of 2008 shows that each of them prefers to play the game for personal advantage, with little interest in defending a common class interest.

John Major in his unexpectedly successful campaign that won him the 1992 General Election make a ‘classless society’ one of his slogans. The left reaction was inept – they should have pointed out that this particular slogan came from the Communist Manifesto, and that it had also the aim of Moderate Socialists for many decades in the face of Tory defence of privilege. But it was in many ways a true promise: the privilege nowadays act

as a bunch of disconnected individuals, not a class with a strong interest in keeping the society stable and contented.

A proper elite would take steps to make the discontented content, rather than devising arguments to prove that the losers in a fast-changing society should be content with failure as a fair reflection of their inferiority. Keynes in his day was much smarter, seeing that a ruling class had to be seen to look after everyone if it was to survive. He didn't like the working class as such, saying after a visit to the Soviet Union:

"How can I adopt a creed which, preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish proletariat above the bourgeois and the intelligentsia who, with whatever faults, are the quality in life and surely carry the seeds of all human advancement?..."

"I can be influenced by what seems to me to be justice and good sense; but the class war will find me on the side of the educated bourgeoisie." (A Short View of Russia, written in 1925)

Despite not liking the working class and wishing them to stay docile, Keynes could read the lessons of what happened in the 1920s and 1930s. The mass of the population in Europe was disorientated by new politics that had emerged from the Great War. In the 1930s, they were justly angered when they found that their welfare was not being looked after. Understandably, they turned to radicalism of the right or left, as did many intellectuals.

The intelligent reaction, the reaction chosen by Keynes and others, was to make sure that ordinary people's welfare was looked after within the existing system. A minority went the other way, insist that 'economic failures' had no rights at all, and should reverence their Natural Superiors. This was broadly the view of Hayek, Milton Friedman and Ayn Rand, with Ayn Rand being the teacher of Alan Greenspan, the man who steered the USA into the 2008 crisis. Some version of this doctrine – that Inferior Persons should be treated severely and forced to face up to their own hopeless lack of worth – is believed by many of the current crop of managers. They push the politicians,

who have to sugar-coat the message to get elected but seem also to see this as the correct answer. It began within Toryism, but under Blair it also captured the Labour Party.

A study of history should tell you that people neglected by a society will damage that society, even at the cost of their immediate economic advantage. But the New Right has produced a mass of flatterers who re-work history to boost the nonsense, and then treat outbreaks of nihilism and rioting as utterly unexpected. Find nothing alarming in the fact – noted by many British employers – that the product of Late Leninism make much better workers than the generation that grew up under Thatcher and New Labour.

The New Right doctrine pushes the idea of the Manager as Superman. My own observation is that they are generally fools outside of their own narrow area of expertise, where they are undoubtedly skilled. A broad thinker mostly won't be any good at managing, and nor will anyone who is easily distracted by things outside of their immediate area of concern. Business managers and mostly skilled at controlling and shuffling known elements. The best of them are also good at guessing the right answer from unclear facts. The process has elements similar to both chess and bridge, but is probably more like bridge. With certainty, the whole process is much more complex. Very few managers can succeed outside the area they were raised in. None have much of an understanding of the wider world and how to keep it in being.

Managers after 1945 were scared and kept a low profile. Global Communism was a threat, so they were happy to be modest. In the 1980s they stopped being modest, but this is increasingly appearing as an error.

What has developed since the 1980s is a mess. Ordinary people are not empowered or looked after, but are given grossly inflated expectations and encouraged to blame the state for anything that goes wrong. The poor are privately classified as worthless by the rulers, especially if honest. Criminals are sometimes romanticised, though not if they get too

close and are disrespectful. And when the whole mess blows up, as it did in this year's riots, that is a wholly unexpected outbreak of evil.

The two most radical forces in the world are money and warfare. They are mostly used for selfish ends by people who are not radical at all. People who complain bitterly about the predictable results of their own actions. Of course they can always shift blame. There are always plenty of journalists and historians attracted to visible power and inclined to praise it mindlessly rather than examine it critically.

The Decline and Fall of Russian Liberalism

If you blunder, lie about it and try to blame someone else. This is current business morality, and is great for individual careers. It also explains the substandard performance of the West after the big social shifts of the 1970s and 1980s. And it is very relevant to the West's loss of Russia, which was very keen to be a partner after the Soviet collapse.

Keen to be a partner, not content to be a victim or subordinate. The West ratted on most of its deals, including pushing NATO right up to the Russian Republic's borders when there was no need for NATO even to still exist. Bad economic advice led to a shrinkage of the Russian economy and a sharp rise in the death-rate. Sudden vast fortunes were made, but most of them by some sort of trickery and without benefit for the rest of the society.

Yeltsin allowed all this, but realised eventually that he had been cheated. So he stepped down and put Putin in charge, after which a recovery began. Now it seems that Putin is going to get elected President once again:

"Russian President Dmitry Medvedev says he decided not to run for a second term because Vladimir Putin is both more popular and more authoritative.

"It did not mean next year's election result was predetermined, he said in a first interview since Prime Minister Putin revealed their plan to swap jobs.

"Mr Putin's bid to return to the top

post he held between 2000 and 2008 has angered the country's weak opposition.

"But Mr Medvedev told Russian TV new faces would 'renew' the government.

"It will be a pivotal renewal of the government - a government consisting of new people. This is fundamentally important," he said.

"Mr Medvedev had previously criticised 'stagnation' in the Russian political arena, which is heavily dominated by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, saying it is damaging to both ruling and opposition forces.

"But United Russia has approved Mr Putin's proposal that Mr Medvedev heads the party list for December's parliamentary elections and become prime minister after the presidential poll...

"The country's small liberal opposition has greeted the prospect with dismay, while Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin - who had hoped to take up the prime ministerial role - resigned after a public row with Mr Medvedev.

"Critics have included former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who warned that Russia risked 'wasting six years' with Mr Putin in charge." [B]

The West is still fond of quoting Gorbachev, the man who inherited a sickly superpower and left behind a massive failure. Putin is liked because things haven't got any worse under his rule. And the small liberal opposition is small because it had its turn in power and produced nothing except weakness. It seems likely that it will remain split, something that is being blamed on Kremlin machinations, but it has always been a weak and fragmented movement.

At least one Western commentator has more or less seen this:

"As Russians see it, their country faces the Catch-22 of all emerging markets, only more so. Russia needs to modernise and yet all the tools of modernisation are in the hands of those who want to boss it around. It thus gets offered a choice between backwardness and the position in the world Brussels and Washington deem appropriate.

"It is in this light that the cynical reshuffle revealed at the United Russia party conference last weekend is so sig-

nificant. President Dmitry Medvedev and prime minister Vladimir Putin will swap jobs. Mr Medvedev will lead the legislative ticket in December. Mr Putin will run next March to reclaim the presidency that he handed over in 2008 in order to dodge term limits.

"While the manoeuvre is legal, it is not how successions are supposed to work in advanced democracies. That, in fact, is its big selling point. Mr Putin wanted it understood that 'an agreement over what to do in the future was reached between us several years ago.' Flouting western norms has made Mr Putin by far the most popular politician in his country, as similar actions have for Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

"Le Monde calls the United Russia arrangement 'a new stage in the fossilisation of the regime'. This too condescending. The Putin-Medvedev deal is a sobering sign not just of what has gone wrong with Russia, but of what has gone wrong in the west.

"Mr Putin's poll ratings are roughly twice as high as his party's, and he has won them by addressing real problems. Some of these are internal, such as epidemic alcoholism or the ever festering insurgency in Chechnya.

"But Europe and the US are not without blame for Mr Putin's rise. A botched, my-way-or-the-highway programme of privatisation left the country with a corrupt plutocracy. Nato's moralistic adventure in Kosovo humiliated Russia and its Serbian allies unnecessarily. The western resentment of Mr Putin's regime has something in common with the European resentment of Israel: he is a living, breathing monument to their historical culpability.

"The means by which Mr Putin solved these problems were rough. He broke the oligarchs by locking up the most eloquent and independent among them, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. He re-established a Russian sphere of influence by reducing Grozny to rubble and invading Georgia. His government is suspected in the murders of crusading journalist Anna Politkovskaya in Moscow and of dissident former FSB agent Aleksandr Litvinenko in London.

"The west can deplore these things, but it cannot ignore the reality of Russian

sentiment. Even many of those who dislike Mr Putin believe he saved the country from the dismemberment and servility that the west had planned for it. 'Putin is more liberal in his views than 80 per cent of the Russian population', the Russian novelist Victor Erofeev wrote this week. 'The liberal resources of Russia are laughably small and get smaller all the time.'

"These resources are getting smaller because the engine that generates them, western prosperity and prestige, is functioning poorly. Distrust of democratic capitalism tends to happen not when people get mean or impatient, but when democratic capitalism produces lousy results. There is nothing specifically Russian about this. It is happening in the west, too. Peter Orszag, former White House budget director, recently treated readers of the New Republic to a complaint about 'legislative inertia' and suggested that Americans 'jettison the Civics 101 fairy tale about pure representative democracy'. In a recent essay on the excellent Eurointelligence website, the Euro-MP Sylvie Goulard called for replacing José Manuel Durão Barroso with someone less distracted by national prerogatives. 'We do not need 17 national 'golden rules', wrote Ms Goulard, 'but one impartial iron fist to ensure that commitments already undertaken by all the member states are respected.'

"We should not assume that Russia is doomed to isolation and reaction. If Mr Medvedev has been a mere stalking horse for Mr Putin, then his feints towards the west - not vetoing Nato's Libya operation in the UN Security Council, for instance - take on more significance. There may be liberalising tendencies in Mr Putin's camp. His speech last week provided hints about diversifying Russia's natural-resource-dependent economy. President Barack Obama's US-Russian 'reset' assumes greater trade with Russia. So does German chancellor Angela Merkel's renunciation of nuclear power, making her country more dependent on Russian natural gas. Mr Putin has put his country on a separate path. Whether this is something to credit him for or accuse him of, it has exposed his country to fewer costs, fewer dangers and less embarrassment than his

detractors think. [C]

Births in China

“A campaign encouraging women in China to give birth in hospital has cut newborn deaths by half, says a study in *The Lancet*.

“Researchers from Beijing and London found that babies born in hospital were two to three times less likely to die in their first month than those born at home.

“The study analysed 1.5 million births between 1996 and 2008 in China.

“Some experts said other factors could have played a part in the findings.

“Since 2000, China has been promoting hospital delivery, and nearly all babies are now born in hospital except in the poorest regions.

“A team from Peking University and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine used data from China’s Maternal and Mortality Surveillance System to examine trends in neonatal mortality by cause and socioeconomic region.

“The results showed that deaths in neonates (within the first month of life) fell by 62% over 12 years up to 2008.” [D]

That’s fine in itself. But falling infant mortality is a continuation of what happened under Mao, who inherited a poor and stagnant and unhealthy country. According to the official UN figures, all of Asia has made progress since World War Two and the end of colonialism. But China has been the biggest success.

Libyan End-Game

After a successful military operation, Britain offers a dole-queue fit for heroes for many of those who took part in the NATO intervention. Cuts have become such an article of faith that the military can not be exempted. Yet what Britons may suffer will be mild compared to what may await the ordinary people of Libya. One visitor reported how ethnic differences that were contained under Gaddafi have now become lethal:

“I had wanted to travel south from Tripoli to meet old friends from a desert

expedition years before.

“I had also wanted to look into stories I had been hearing about conflict breaking out in Ghadames between the town’s mixed Arab-Berber population and the Tuareg.

“The two populations have lived together, sometimes uneasily, for centuries.

“Gaddafi’s use of the Tuareg as local enforcers during the revolution had stirred up these divisions. Now that the town had risen up and expelled them, reprisals were in the air.

“‘The Tuareg can never come back here,’ one Ghadamsi told me in Tripoli. ‘Not after what they have done in the last six months.’

“Our car was forced off the road just outside the oasis by 16 Tuareg armed with Kalashnikovs.

“They hauled us out of the car, forced us onto the ground, tied our arms behind our backs, blindfolded us and drove us into the Sahara.

“The following morning, they told us we were going to be killed unless Tuareg prisoners held in the town were released by noon.

“The deadline came and went.

“While I was being questioned, they said the Ghadamsis had robbed, set fire to and bulldozed their houses, killed the sheikh of the Tuareg and slaughtered all their animals.

“Twenty-four hours after we were taken, Taher’s wife and two-year-old son - together with an old man kidnapped two days earlier - were released with me. They kept hold of Taher...

“According to the local town council, our 20-something kidnapers were the remnants of the Tuareg Kataib. This was a local militia used by Gaddafi to suppress the uprising in Ghadames, which began on 20 February, three days after the revolution kicked off in Benghazi.

“They had taken to their task, we were told, with gusto, rounding up suspected rebels, imprisoning them and beating them severely with electrical cables.

“Bloodshed had been limited compared with the fighting in other Libyan towns and cities - a total of four people had been killed - but the abuse of power

by a minority of the town’s Tuareg had shattered relations between the two populations.

“Abdul Wahab, a former prisoner, showed me photos of his back, a mass of pink welts.

“‘I’m really sorry about what’s happened with the Tuareg,’ he said. ‘We were born together, we lived together and worked together. Everything’s changed now.’...

“This ancient heart of the oasis - somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 years old - was once one of the great centres of Saharan trade...

“The Tuareg were an integral part of this age-old desert commerce.

“They ran what today would be called a protection racket, offering their services as guides and armed escorts to caravans passing through areas under their control. Any merchant who declined the offer ran a real risk of having his caravans plundered by Tuareg.

“A small part of the Ghadamsi Touareg, diehard Gaddafi loyalists, have returned to armed banditry again.

“The consequences of this aggression are potentially catastrophic for this small desert town of 12,000.

“Many Tuareg who had nothing whatsoever to do with their fellow tribesmen’s brutality, intimidated by the backlash, have already fled their homes.” [E]

Blame Gaddafi? Even without the bitter civil war, it seems likely that multi-party politics would have split apart ethnic groups that had lived together fairly peacefully. It’s happened in many parts of Africa, and also in Sri Lanka, with political parties flourishing by specialising in the grievances of one group against their neighbours. The worse things get, the better for those particular political parties. That is also what happened in Former Yugoslavia, and the whole of Middle-Europe has seen a rise in prejudice against minorities, especially Jews and Gypsies. A global problem, really.

There is also probably a tribal element in the fierce resistance by Sirte. The supposed humanitarian aspects of Western aid are being ignored when it comes to crushing the last resistance:

“Fierce fighting for the besieged Libyan city of Sirte has left people there

in desperate need of medical aid, says the International Red Cross.

“People are dying in the main hospital because of a shortage of oxygen and fuel, the ICRC said.

“Libya’s transitional authorities called a two-day truce on Friday to let civilians leave, but the ICRC team said fighting was continuing...

“Several rockets landed within the hospital buildings while we were there,” the leader of the ICRC team, Hichem Khadhraoui, told AFP news agency.

“We saw a lot of indiscriminate fire. I don’t know where it was coming from,” Mr Khadhraoui said.

“Staff at the hospital told the Red Cross that people were dying because of a lack of oxygen and fuel for the generator, he said.

“Gaddafi loyalists have been putting up stiff resistance in Sirte since the troops supporting the National Transitional Council (NTC) began their assault several weeks ago.

“On Friday, the NTC troops captured the airport. Forces from the east and west of the country are moving against the city and are trying to launch co-ordinated attacks against the Gaddafi loyalists in the city centre.

“But they are reluctant to mount a full scale assault to avoid civilian casualties.” [F]

It is also odd that there are two separate and uncoordinated attacks on the two strongholds of Sirte and Bani Walid. Some doubt as to whether the anti-Gaddafi forces will hold together once they’ve destroyed the last strongholds of their common foe. A major element has been Islamist, people that the West had used Gaddafi to keep down, before the sudden decision to back the ‘Arab Spring’ without thought for the consequences:

“Libya’s Islamist groups ‘will not allow’ secular politicians to exclude or marginalise them in the intensifying battle for power in the post-Gaddafi era, the country’s most powerful Islamist leader has said.

“Abdel Hakim Belhaj, head of the Tripoli Military Council and founder of a jihadi group that was later disbanded, appears to be firing a shot across the bows of liberal, western-backed rivals after ne-

gotiations over broadening the rebel administration foundered.

“We must resist attempts by some Libyan politicians to exclude some of the participants in the revolution,” Belhaj writes in the Guardian. “Their political myopia renders them unable to see the huge risks of such exclusion, or the serious ... reaction of the parties that are excluded.”

“More than a month since Tripoli fell to rebel brigades backed by Nato, the National Transitional Council (NTC) has failed to expand to be more representative, generating a sense of division and drift about the future that western diplomats and many Libyans admit is worrying.

“It is now clear there will be no deal before the liberation of the whole country is formally declared. That requires the defeat of Gaddafi loyalists in the deposed leader’s coastal hometown of Sirte, where heavy fighting continued on Tuesday. In Bani Walid, south of Tripoli, there is a stalemate. ‘Consultations have led to a decision to postpone the formation of a government until after liberation,’ NTC member Mustafa el-Huni said in Benghazi. The scale of the political challenge ahead is enormous in a country that has not held an election since 1952 and is just emerging from 41 years of dictatorship.” [G]

That sounds like stalling. It would be quite easy to broaden the membership of the National Transitional Council to reflect the range of people who did the fighting. But would that perhaps make the Islamists too strong? Or allow them to advance as the only people with a coherent idea in the current muddle?

I don’t know if there’s an Islamic equivalent for turkeys voting for an early Christmas. But it seems to me that the secularist and feminist elements involved in the Arab Spring will turn out to be just that.

Afghan Failure

“The top Afghan official in charge of seeking peace with the Taliban, ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani, has been killed in an attack on his home in Kabul, an intelligence source said.

“The assassination on Tuesday was the latest in a series of high-profile killings of prominent Afghans and complicates the government’s attempts to negotiate with insurgent leaders.

“A source in Afghanistan’s NDS intelligence service said Mr Rabbani had been killed while meeting members of the Taliban who had joined reconciliation talks.

“The source said it appeared that one of the Taliban figures had managed to smuggle explosives into the gathering.” [H]

At the time, I took it as a hint that the Taliban expected to win without the need to negotiate. Things have since got more complex, with everyone denying the killing was theirs. Still, it does look like there will be no deal before the West is scheduled to leave.

Meantime Jonathan Steele has been taking a wider view, asking what is and is not possible in Afghanistan:

“Armed opposition to the government in Kabul long pre-dated the arrival of Soviet troops in December 1979. Every one of the Pakistan-based Afghan mujahideen leaders who became famous during the 1980s as the Peshawar Seven and were helped by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China had gone into exile and taken up arms before December 1979, many of them years earlier. As Islamists, they opposed the secular and modernising tendencies of Daoud Khan, [the Afghan PM] who toppled his cousin, King Zahir Shah, in 1973.

“Western backing for these rebels had also begun before Soviet troops arrived. It served western propaganda to say the Russians had no justification for entering Afghanistan in what the west called an aggressive land grab. In fact, US officials saw an advantage in the mujahedin rebellion which grew after a pro-Moscow government toppled Daoud in April 1978. In his memoirs, Robert Gates, then a CIA official and later defence secretary under Presidents Bush and Obama, recounts a staff meeting in March 1979 where CIA officials asked whether they should keep the mujahideen going, thereby ‘sucking the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire’. The meeting agreed to fund them to buy weapons....

“The reality is the Afghan mujahideen did not defeat the Soviets on the battlefield. They won some important encounters, notably in the Panjshir valley, but lost others. In sum, neither side defeated the other. The Soviets could have remained in Afghanistan for several more years but they decided to leave when Gorbachev calculated that the war had become a stalemate and was no longer worth the high price in men, money and international prestige. In private, US officials came to the same conclusion about Soviet strength, although they only admitted it publicly later. Morton Abramowitz, who directed the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the time, said in 1997: ‘In 1985, there was a real concern that the [mujahideen] were losing, that they were sort of being diminished, falling apart. Losses were high and their impact on the Soviets was not great.’....

“One of the most common promises western politicians made after they toppled the Taliban in 2001 was that ‘this time’ the west would not walk away, ‘as we did after the Russians pulled out’. Afghans were surprised to hear these promises. They remembered history in rather a different way. Far from forgetting about Afghanistan in February 1989, the US showed no let-up in its close involvement with the mujahideen. Washington blocked the Soviet-installed President Mohammad Najibullah’s offers of concessions and negotiations and continued to arm the rebels and jihadis in the hope they would quickly overthrow his Moscow-backed regime.

“This was one of the most damaging periods in recent Afghan history when the west and Pakistan, along with mujahideen intransigence, undermined the best chance of ending the country’s civil war. The overall effect of these policies was to prolong and deepen Afghanistan’s destruction, as Charles Cogan, CIA director of operations for the Middle East and south Asia, 1979–1984, later recognised. ‘I question whether we should have continued on this momentum, this inertia of aiding the mujahideen after the Soviets had left. I think that was probably, in retrospect, a mistake,’ he said...

“The key factor that undermined

Najibullah was an announcement made in Moscow in September 1991, shortly after a coup mounted against Gorbachev by Soviet hard-liners collapsed. His long-time rival, Boris Yeltsin, who headed the Russian government, emerged in a dominant position. Yeltsin was determined to cut back on the country’s international commitments and his government announced that from 1 January 1992, no more arms would be delivered to Kabul. Supplies of petrol, food and all other aid would also cease.

“The decision was catastrophic for the morale of Najibullah’s supporters. The regime had survived the departure of Soviet troops for more than two years but now would truly be alone. So, in one of the great ironies of history, it was Moscow that toppled the Afghan government that Moscow had sacrificed so many lives to keep in place.

“The dramatic policy switch became evident when Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of one of the mujahideen groups, was invited to Moscow in November 1991. In a statement after the meeting, Boris Pankin, the Soviet foreign minister, ‘confirmed the necessity for a complete transfer of state power to an interim Islamic government’. In today’s context, the announcement could be compared to an invitation by Hillary Clinton to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar to come to Washington and a declaration the US wanted power transferred from Karzai to the Taliban.

“The move led to a wave of defections as several of Najibullah’s army commanders and political allies switched sides and joined the mujahideen. Najibullah’s army was not defeated. It just melted away”. [J]

What’s puzzling is that the West didn’t try turning Najibullah’s government into its own agent of modernisation in Afghanistan, perhaps with a few extras to make it look like a broad coalition. They were the only people serious about introducing Western values, initially in their Soviet version, but after Russia abandoned them they would have been flexible. It happened in some Middle-European countries that ex-Communists became the most effective reformers. But I suppose it was beyond the capac-

ity of the US imagination to realise that the local Communists and radicals might be the least alien element in a very alien society.

As things were, the welfare of women was ignored until it became convenient to cite as a reason for a new intervention:

“A year after the Taliban seized power, I interviewed UN staff, foreign aid workers and Afghans in Kabul. The Taliban had softened their ban on girls’ education and were turning a blind eye to the expansion of informal ‘home schools’ in which thousands of girls were being taught in private flats. The medical faculty was about to re-open for women to teach midwives, nurses, and doctors since women patients could not be treated by men. The ban on women working outside the home was also lifted for war widows and other needy women.

“Afghans recalled the first curbs on liberty were imposed by the mujahideen before the Taliban. From 1992, cinemas were closed and TV films were shortened so as to remove any scene in which women and men walked or talked together, let alone touched each other. Women announcers were banned from TV.

“The burqa was not compulsory, as it was to become under the Taliban, but all women had to wear the head-scarf, or hijab, unlike in the years of Soviet occupation and the Najibullah regime that followed. The mujahideen refused to allow women to attend the UN’s fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995. Crime was met with the harshest punishment. A wooden gallows was erected in a park near the main bazaar in Kabul where convicts were hanged in public. Above all, Afghans liked the security provided by the Taliban in contrast to the chaos between 1992 and 1996 when mujahideen groups fought over the capital, launching shells and rockets indiscriminately. Some 50,000 Kabulis were killed...

“Underage marriage is common across Afghanistan, and among all ethnic groups. According to Unifem (the United Nations Development Fund for Women) and the Afghan independent human rights commission, 57% of Afghan marriages are child marriages – where one

partner is under the age of 16. In a study of 200 underage wives, 40% had been married between the ages of 10 and 13, 32.5% at 14, and 27.5% at 15. In many communities, women are banned from leaving the house or family compound. This leads to a host of other disabilities. Women are not allowed to take jobs. Girls are prevented from going to school. In the minds of western politicians and the media, these prohibitions are often associated exclusively with the Taliban. Yet the forced isolation of women by keeping them confined is a deep-seated part of Afghan rural culture. It is also found in poorer parts of the major cities.” [J]

Goodness and choice

“In the grand scheme of things Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are normally thought of as good guys. Between them, they came up with the ethical theory known as utilitarianism. The goal of this theory is encapsulated in Bentham’s aphorism that ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.’

“Which all sounds fine and dandy until you start applying it to particular cases. A utilitarian, for example, might approve of the occasional torture of suspected terrorists—for the greater happiness of everyone else, you understand. That type of observation has led Daniel Bartels at Columbia University and David Pizarro at Cornell to ask what sort of people actually do have a utilitarian outlook on life. Their answers, just published in *Cognition*, are not comfortable.

“One of the classic techniques used to measure a person’s willingness to behave in a utilitarian way is known as trolleyology. The subject of the study is challenged with thought experiments involving a runaway railway trolley or train carriage. All involve choices, each of which leads to people’s deaths. For example: there are five railway workmen in the path of a runaway carriage. The men will surely be killed unless the subject of the experiment, a bystander in the story, does something. The subject is told he is on a bridge over the tracks. Next to him is a big, heavy stranger. The subject is informed that his own body would be too

light to stop the train, but that if he pushes the stranger onto the tracks, the stranger’s large body will stop the train and save the five lives. That, unfortunately, would kill the stranger.

“Dr Bartels and Dr Pizarro knew from previous research that around 90% of people refuse the utilitarian act of killing one individual to save five. What no one had previously inquired about, though, was the nature of the remaining 10%.

“To find out, the two researchers gave 208 undergraduates a battery of trolleyological tests and measured, on a four-point scale, how utilitarian their responses were. Participants were also asked to respond to a series of statements intended to get a sense of their individual psychologies. These statements included, ‘I like to see fist fights’, ‘The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear’, and ‘When you really think about it, life is not worth the effort of getting up in the morning’. Each was asked to indicate, for each statement, where his views lay on a continuum that had ‘strongly agree’ at one end and ‘strongly disagree’ at the other. These statements, and others like them, were designed to measure, respectively, psychopathy, Machiavellianism and a person’s sense of how meaningful life is.

“Dr Bartels and Dr Pizarro then correlated the results from the trolleyology with those from the personality tests. They found a strong link between utilitarian answers to moral dilemmas (push the fat guy off the bridge) and personalities that were psychopathic, Machiavellian or tended to view life as meaningless. Utilitarians, this suggests, may add to the sum of human happiness, but they are not very happy people themselves.” [K]

The answer to the ‘Trolley Problem’ should be that killing an innocent is quite a bit worse than allowing five innocents to die. People are not ‘gain-beasts’, calculating everything by its usefulness or its commercial price. People are more willing to sacrifice one for five when it is a question of switching a set of points so that the trolley hits one rather than five. This is not seen as murder, and the notion that it is not murder is defensible, unlike the case of throwing someone off of a

Incidentally, once you decide that ‘utilitarianism’ is only a pale reflection of reality and not some deeper truth, it is perfectly possible to imagine a situation in which an entirely sane and normal individual might switch the points so that the trolley hits five rather than one. In fact a whole cluster of situations, with the choice rousing various degrees of sympathy or condemnation. I’ll explain this later on, if you can’t work it out for yourself.

Before that, what are the factors controlling violence in a real society? Are things getting better or worse?

“On July 22, 2011, a 32-year-old Norwegian named Anders Behring Breivik opened fire on participants in a Labour Party youth camp on the island of Utoya after exploding a bomb in Oslo, resulting in 77 dead, the worst tragedy in Norway since World War II.

“English philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously argued in his 1651 book, *Leviathan*, that such acts of violence would be commonplace without a strong state to enforce the rule of law. But aren’t they? What about 9/11 and 7/7, Auschwitz and Rwanda, Columbine and Fort Hood? What about all the murders, rapes and child molestation cases we hear about so often? Can anyone seriously argue that violence is in decline? They can, and they do—and they have data, compellingly compiled in a massive 832-page tome by Harvard University social scientist Steven Pinker entitled *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Viking, 2011). The problem with anecdotes about single events is that they obscure long-term trends. Breivik and his ilk make front-page news for the very reason that they are now unusual. It was not always so.

“Take homicide. Using old court and county records in England, scholars calculate that rates have plummeted by a factor of 10, 50 and, in some cases, 100—for example, from 110 homicides per 100,000 people per year in 14th-century Oxford to fewer than one homicide per 100,000 in mid-20th-century London. Similar patterns have been documented in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. The longer-term trend is even more dramatic, Pinker told

me in an interview: ‘Violent deaths of all kinds have declined, from around 500 per 100,000 people per year in prestate societies to around 50 in the Middle Ages, to around six to eight today worldwide, and fewer than one in most of Europe.’ What about gun-toting Americans and our inordinate rate of homicides (currently around five per 100,000 per year) compared with other Western democracies? In 2005, Pinker computes, just eight tenths of 1 percent of all Americans died of domestic homicides and in two foreign wars combined.

“As for wars, prehistoric peoples were far more murderous than states in percentages of the population killed in combat, Pinker told me: ‘On average, nonstate societies kill around 15 percent of their people in wars, whereas today’s states kill a few hundredths of a percent.’ Pinker calculates that even in the murderous 20th century, about 40 million people died in war out of the approximately six billion people who lived, or 0.7 percent. Even if we include war-related deaths of citizens from disease, famine and genocide, that brings the death toll up to 180 million deaths, or about 3 percent.

“Why has violence declined? Hobbes was only partially right in advocating top-down state controls to keep the worse demons of our nature in check. A bottom-up civilizing process has also been under way for centuries, Pinker explained: ‘Beginning in the 11th or 12th [century] and maturing in the 17th and 18th, Europeans increasingly inhibited their impulses, anticipated the long-term consequences of their actions, and took other people’s thoughts and feelings into consideration. A culture of honor—the readiness to take revenge—gave way to a culture of dignity—the readiness to control one’s emotions. These ideals originated in explicit instructions that cultural arbiters gave to aristocrats and noblemen, allowing them to differentiate themselves from the villains and boors. But they were then absorbed into the socialization of younger and younger children until they became second nature.’”

[L] I’d say the argument on homicide is more solid than the one about war. Modern societies can field much bigger

armies than used to be possible – even send most men of military age off to war. Still, the influence of civilisation remains valuable.

And sacrificing five for one? A mother saving her child might well do that. Or a man or woman for their beloved. And in racist societies, it would be acceptable and even admirable to save one person of a superior race for five lesser persons. Or in an isolated community struggling for survival, you might save the only trained doctor at the expense of five individuals without special skills. All of these are the complexities of real life.

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The Political Levy: In Or Out?

On 9 September Tory MP Andrew Griffiths asked Communities & Local Government Under Secretary Robert Neill, “which of the trade unions recognised by (a) his Department and (b) its public bodies charge a political levy on staff trade union subscription fees; whether the political levy may be deducted at pay roll level; and what the policy of his Department and each public body is on informing staff joining such unions of the right to opt out of payment of the political levy.” (Griffiths posed the same question to Ministers of other Government departments). Neill’s reply, however, suggested that he was either ignorant of the law on payment of the political levy or he deliberately misled Griffiths and other MPs present.

After producing a table which showed the organising unions in his Department, Neill said: “With the exception of Valuation Tribunal Service and Ordinance Survey all the organisations (in the Department) shown offer the facility to deduct subscription fees through payroll if requested. Notwithstanding, given departmental resources are used to facilitate the payment of union subscriptions including the political levy, direct from the DCLG payroll (under the so-called ‘check off’ arrangements), I appreciate there is a broader public interest in scrutinising this matter. In that context, as an illustration, I observe that PCS campaigning leaflets, handed out within my Department, do not inform DCLG staff of their statutory right to opt-out of the political levy when they join, and they correspondingly are signed up to have their union membership fee deducted direct from their DCLG pay packet. Such a collection of the political levy is clearly not a transparent practice. The consideration of the right to opt-out cannot be an informed choice or decision if individuals are simply not informed of their rights.”

In 2010, the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills published a booklet titled ‘TRADE UNION FUNDS. A guide for trade unions, their members and others.’ Page 8 of the booklet has a section headed “Contracting out” of the political fund.’ It says, “If its members vote to set up a political fund, the union

must immediately inform all of them that: (a) each member has a right to “contract out” of paying the political levy; and (b) a form with which they can claim this right is available on personal application to, or by post from, the union’s head office, any branch office, or from the Certification Officer.”

Now Neill said that the PCS leaflets were “campaigning leaflets”, which suggests they were leaflets outlining the benefits of union membership, not recruitment leaflets which non-members would sign as a declaration to join the union. He says that (on observing the “campaigning leaflets”) “they are correspondingly signed up to have their union membership fee deducted direct from their DCLG pay packet. Such a collection of the political levy etc.” Here Neill is implying that union membership and payment of the political levy are one and the same. The political levy is an addition to the membership fee and the law is clear on “contracting out.” Any staff member of the DCLG who joined the PCS, or any other union with a political fund, must be informed of his/her right to contract out of the political levy.

If the PCS leaflet incorporated a membership form, then Neill is right. It should have made clear that the potential member new member can “contract out.” But it is unclear as to whether it was a campaigning leaflet, as Neill described it, or a recruitment leaflet. The distinction is important. The BIS leaflet offers further advice on contracting out. ‘A member wishing to “contract out” is not obliged to use an official exemption form. He may complete and send to his union a form which he has drawn up himself (whether it is typed or handwritten) provided that the form follows the outline in Figure 1 or has the same effect. Whatever form is used, it is essential that the member sends it to the union if the notice is to be effective.’ The leaflet also says that a member may “contract out” at any time, but if the union’s political fund has been set up more than one month then the exemption takes effect from the beginning of the next calendar year.

Silence Of The Arms

The Defence Security Equipment International exhibition (aka Britain’s Arms Fair) was held in London on 13 September. Invitations were extended to 63 countries, 14 of which are defined as “authoritarian regimes” by human rights groups. Countries that were invited included Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Since February this year scores of mainly Shia citizens have been killed in peaceful demonstrations by Bahrain’s military, and many more imprisoned and tortured, including doctors and nurses who tended to the injured and dying. A search of Hansard for 11 August, when Parliament was recalled for one day and for the nine days between 5 and 15 September, failed to uncover a ministerial statement on the arms fair or a question from a backbench member.

May Day, May Day!

There was a time when Tory MPs believed that the UK had too many public holidays. Their main gripe seemed to be that lost working time was bad for business. But no longer, it seems. So far this year we have had three Private Members’ Bills calling for a public holiday to celebrate one event or another. In the L&TUR February issue PNs reported that Nadhim Zahawi’s Bill proposed an annual public holiday in England to celebrate St George’s Day. And the July/August issue revealed that Claire Perry called for the Monday after Remembrance Sunday to be a public holiday in the UK. So, not to be outdone by her colleagues, another Tory, Eleanor Lang brought in a Bill on 7 September to ‘designate Monday 15 June 2015 as a bank holiday in the United Kingdom to mark the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta...’ However, aware of possible opposition to yet another public holiday, she proposed that the 15 June should replace the traditional May Day bank holiday. Now, only a Tory MP would propose that May Day should be shelved, albeit for one year only. But what were Labour MPs Graham Allen, Helen Goodman and Jack Straw thinking about when they gave

their signed support to the Bill? In addition to the 3 Labour members all the other sponsors were Tories. The Bill will receive its second reading on 25 November.

Can We Bank On It?

In his statement on the final report by the Independent Commission on Banking – the so-called Vickers Report – Chancellor George Osborne set out the four major recommendations of the report to reform the UK's banking system. But first he told MPs that, "We are fundamentally changing the system of regulation and tackling the debts, but the bail-out for banks is the element of the crisis that has, justifiably, caused the most anger. It is an affront both to fairness and to the very principles of a market economy. It is not available to any other sector of the economy, and nor should it be. It breaks the principle that those who take risks should face the consequences of their actions. As a result, it played an important role in encouraging the excessive risk-taking that caused the crisis." But Osborne has consistently said, and many people have believed him, that it was the last government that caused the crisis. Now he says it was "excessive risk-taking." And is he saying that the banks shouldn't have been bailed out? It wasn't the bail-out that caused the most anger – the public were relieved that their savings had been rescued. It was the reward of failure – huge bonuses to the bankers – that incurred public anger. If Osborne believes in a market economy free from government assistance and intervention then PNs looks forward to the withdrawal of all hidden subsidies to British based companies. And we'll see what happens to investment and jobs.

The most important of the recommendations which, according to Osborne, the Government have welcomed "in principle", is the introduction of a ring fence around retail banking. On this, the report says, "the objective of such a ring-fence would be to isolate those banking activities where continuous provision of service is vital to the economy and to a bank's customers." But ring-fencing is not enough. Banks need large cushions to withstand losses. The second of the report's recommendations deals with this. Osborne again: "large retail ring-fenced banks should have equity capital of at least 10%. It also recommends that retail and other activities of large UK banking groups should both have primary loss-absorbing capacity of at

least 17% to 20%, including long-term debt that can be written off, so that unlike the last time both shareholders and bondholders bear losses, not the taxpayer." The third recommendation is "the introduction of depositor preference", which would "bolster the scheme by ensuring that other bank creditors were subject to losses first when a bank went bust, minimising the cost to the scheme and ultimately to the taxpayer." Finally, the report recommends greater competition in the banking sector. Osborne told MPs that "We will consider which changes can be in the existing draft Financial Services Bill and which will need a new Bill." Any changes to the banking system will have to be fully completed by 2019.

Speaking for Labour, Ed Balls welcomed the report and its four major recommendations, but was concerned about the extended time-table for implementation. Drawing attention to the current crisis he said, "None of these reforms can help the thousands of small businesses that are currently struggling to access the credit they need. As the Bank of England has confirmed, net bank lending to business is not rising, but falling. It is down £4 billion in the most recent figures, despite the Chancellor's toothless Merlin deal with the banks. Will the Chancellor agree today to ensure that state-owned banks increase their lending in the coming months? Will he act now to have greater transparency on pay and bonuses and repeat the bank bonus tax for a second year? Will he recognise that rising unemployment and a flatlining economy will further depress confidence and small business borrowing until he changes course and adopts a Plan B for growth and jobs? Today's report provides some of the answers to the pressing problems we face; it is time the Chancellor woke up to the rest."

A number of other members also expressed concern about the lack of lending to small businesses. Labour's Chuka Umunna drew Osborne's attention to the ineffectiveness of Project Merlin. "The Chancellor has referred to Project Merlin, which is generally regarded as a fairly ineffectual agreement, not least because, according to Bank of England figures, net lending to small and medium-sized enterprises has contracted month on month. Across the House, we can agree that it would be undesirable for politicians to seek directly to run the banks in which we have a public stake, but surely that should not preclude the Chancellor asking United Kingdom Financial Investments Ltd

to ensure that the banks change the culture that they exercise towards SMEs. When was the Chancellor's last discussion with UKFI about that?" Osborne's reply proved Umunna's point about Project Merlin's ineffectiveness. "I talk to UKFI all the time, and one of the things I talk about is ensuring that the banks in which we have a public ownership of shares are meeting the Merlin targets. I congratulate Lloyds, which has changed its operations and advertising campaigns and has tried to encourage small business lending." (my emphasis). If the best Lloyds can do is to try to encourage lending to small business then Osborne has an uphill task. Project Merlin is not working, but all the Chancellor can do is hope.

The final word should, perhaps, be given to Claire Perry, Tory member for Devizes. Remember, this is a Tory speaking. "May I urge the Chancellor, when faced with the inevitable whinging from banks saying that they are considering leaving the United Kingdom, to bear it in mind that the UK retail business is unbelievably profitable, and to say that banks that want to leave should exit their business or be invited to do so?"

Italian Journey

A Special relationship

La Repubblica, the Italian daily newspaper, carried two interesting features in September. On 6 September, a report by Enrico Franceschini headed 'Blair padrino delle figlie di Murdoch' (Blair godfather to Murdoch's daughters) began by suggesting that Blair's refusal to criticise Rupert Murdoch over News International's phone-hacking appeared to be proof of the debt Blair owed to Murdoch for the crucial support he had been given in three successive general elections. But the writer asserted another reason to link what he referred to as "this strange couple" (i.e. Blair and wife Cherie) to the Murdoch empire. "Blair", he said, "secretly became the godfather to the two youngest daughters of Murdoch, according to a report in the US edition of Vogue magazine. And the baptism allegedly occurred in the Jordan river, at the point at which it is said John the Baptist baptised Jesus."

Franceschini's report is based on similar reports that appeared in the Guardian and Daily Telegraph, but it is nevertheless revealing. Italians are interested in the Mafia and

its activities. The term is used in a general sense here as Mafia refers specifically to the organisation in Sicily, but operates under different names in various regions of Italy. Blair was described as “Il Padrino”, the Godfather, in the British press. This clearly delighted La Repubblica. Franceschini, acknowledging that it alluded to the film of the same name, referred to a presumed concealed friendship, based on reciprocal favours; in a word “mafiosa”, between Blair and Murdoch. But now, the “omertà”, conspiracy of silence, has been broken. Not by Blair, but by the wife who recently exacted punishment on her husband’s attacker in a House of Commons’ Committee room.

In Praise Of Wealth

The other feature was an article on 11 September by the Financial Times journalist John Lloyd, formerly of this parish, who, one understands, is a regular contributor to La Repubblica. Lloyd’s article ‘La metropoli piu glamour priginiera di una gabbia donata’ (The most glamorous metropolis is a prisoner in a golden cage) was a reasonably clear description of the activities of the City of London’s financial centre and the benefits that accrue to those who work within it. Here is a flavour of what he wrote. “The liberal financial reforms of the end of the 80s have given us a flood tide of foreign banks and financial institutions or fiscal regimes, with Americans at their head. These were institutions or regimes largely favouring the rich. In the wealthiest areas: Chelsea, Hampstead, Kensington, Richmond, Wimbledon – but also in the perennially expanding suburbs and the ‘home counties’ around London, there is ample choice of prestigious residences at elevated prices. It is true that the wealthy constantly threaten to move to more indulgent financial regimes which won’t undermine their wealth. But, at the moment London’s financial regime is less onerous than New York’s.”

Lloyd went on to say a few uncritical words about the remunerations of top executives and the growing gap between those at the top and the working and middle classes, but he couldn’t contain his admiration for the rich and “people of talent and great entrepreneurial skill.” His final paragraph revealed all. “In fact,” he said, “London is a prisoner in a kind of golden cage. It needs the rich, needs people of talent and great entrepreneurial skill. It also needs these people to establish themselves in London, at least in one of their

residences. Because it is these rich people who make their wealth which is then redistributed and cascaded through the system, to their employees and their contacts. They also create wealth through the purchase of material goods and also obviously, the good that they bring to the companies and institutions they head. However, now they are gradually ceding some of their power to other countries, but they continue to keep their fascination with wealth and luxury. And that will carry on. And in the end it will go well for the majority of us, if things remain as they are now.” But as if conscious that he could be accused of condoning free market, unregulated capitalism, Lloyd told his readers that, “The economic theory of capitalism ensures that the excesses of the free market are self-correcting, that they balance themselves. But, even if this is actually true, it is keeping us waiting rather too long.”

Stop The War I Want To Get Off

Tony Benn and Lindsey German plus a young student, possibly Iranian, addressed a Stop The War Coalition meeting in Ealing on 3 October. Around 60 people packed a small church hall to hear German and the student condemn the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the NATO – i.e. British and French – air strikes on Libya. And they asked, reasonably, why it’s possible to find money to fight wars, but not to fund vital public services. As is normal at such meetings, the air buzzed with emotional rhetoric. And dubious statistics relating to the costs of Britain’s military adventures were thrown out, unchallenged. Is the ‘war’ in Afghanistan really costing the taxpayer almost £5 billion a year?

One cannot question the sincerity of those present but, as Lyndsey German herself admitted, convincing the non-believer, i.e. the Government (and, one might add, the opposition) is a Sisyphean-like task. It’s going to take time, but time is not on the Coalition’s side. Afghanistan and Libya today. Tomorrow? Who knows? But we can be certain that now he has tasted “success” in Libya, Cameron will be looking to poke his nose elsewhere. But it won’t be another invasion. They’re so passé. Like the western goodie in the white hat, he’ll be riding to catch the baddie who’s threatening to kill the innocent. And all the saints in Murdoch’s heaven will bless his name.

Tony Benn, Stop The War’s President, looks remarkably well for a man of 86. He retains his sense of enthusiasm for peace and justice. But it’s a pity he laces his talk with so much hyperbole. He is fond of history and so inevitably we were treated to a trawl through the events of the last 100 years or so which led to war and, in some cases, its disastrous consequences. He reminded the audience that the First World War was followed by Communism in Russia and Fascism in Italy/Germany. He spoke briefly about international law and the United Nations, quoting with some difficulty the opening words of the UN Charter. And he had a few harsh words to say about Blair’s tenure as PM. Blair, however, is history. It would have been more interesting to have heard his views on Ed Miliband and the odious Jim Murphy, who wants Labour to be the party of the military.

How Long Can You Maul The World Before It Hits Back

Mourn your victims while making more victims.

Once cannon blasted spear in dark countries then home to wife/children that century, blood-lust and treasure right up to the brim.

You could not follow sailing ships and horses across those oceans, rain-forests and plain.

Knighthoods, buckets of medals for campaigns, presidents, prime ministers endorses.

Then they forged the AK-47, fertiliser and plastic explosive, cheap airline tickets to fly the heavens, the fake passport, the disguise persuasive, the Monroe Doctrine that led to 9/11.

Them and us in warfare now cohesive.

Wilson John Haire.

It's A Fact

In the last 6 years the Ministry of Defence has paid BAE Systems a total of £18.6 billion. Yearly totals are £2.4 billion in 2005-06, £2.7 billion in 2006-07, £3 billion in 2007-08, £3.3 billion in 2008-09, £3.9 billion in 2009-10, and £3.3 billion in 2010-11. The 2010-11 figure is provisional and will be finalised in late September. (Written Parliamentary Answer 5 September 2011.)

Over the last 14 years there has been a substantial increase in the number of GPs and qualified nursing staff. In 1997, there were 28,046 GPs (excluding retainers and registrars). By 2010, this had increased to 35,120. The number of qualified nursing staff, including health visitors and school nurses, increased from 318,856 in 1997 to 410,615 in 2010. (Written PA 5 September 2011.)

Total spending, at 2011-12 prices, by the Department for Work and Pen-

sions on social security benefits increased from £131.5 billion in 1997-98 to £157.3 billion in 2010-11. While spending on benefits, principally child benefit, for the working age population fell from £67.3 billion in 1997-98 to £54 billion in 2010-11, it increased for the non-working age population from £67.8 billion in 1997-98 to £103.3 billion in 2010-11. (Written PA 5 September 2011.)

The median equalised weekly household income for pensioners in the UK increased from £241 in 1998-99 to £347 in 2010-11. The number of state pension recipients in Great Britain increased from 10,126,800 in March 2000 to 11,403,370 in February 2011. (Written PA 8 September 2011.)

The number of jobs created by Foreign Direct Investment from EU member states increased from 10,249 in 1997-98 (FDI from 14 member states), to 12,532 in 2010-11 (FDI from 26 member states.) The number of

jobs safeguarded by FDI fell from 18,881 in 1997-98 to 14,104 in 2010-11. (Written PA 15 September 2011.)

In the last 5 years, 2007 to 2011, the M-O-D has spent a more than £125 million on leasing drones from Israel. In 2007, the number of hours flown by drones was 4,180. By 2010, this had increased to 14,698. Up until September 2011, the number of hours flown was 10,392. The Hermes 450 Unmanned Air System (UAS) is operated by the British Army under a service provision contract awarded to Thales UK in 2007. The UAS assets are provided to Thales UK by Elbit Systems, a company based in Israel. (Written PA 15 September 2011.)

Note. The average cost to the taxpayer of a question for written answer is estimated at £239. In the financial year 2010-11, there were 46,825 written answers at a cost of about £11.2 million.

End of a warlord

THE assassination of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani by a suicide bomber on September 20 is the latest high-profile terrorist incident in Afghanistan. In the last couple of months, leading Afghan political figures and senior government officials have been successfully targeted by the Taliban.

In the middle of July, President Hamid Karzai's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was the strongman of Kandahar, perished in a hail of bullets. The killer was the head of his trusted security detail. A few days later, Mohammed Jan Khan, a top presidential adviser, was killed in Kabul. Ghulam Haidar Hameedi, the Mayor of Kandahar, was eliminated on July 27. He was a close ally of Wali Karzai. Mohammed Daud Daud, the police chief in charge of northern Afghanistan and the commander of the elite 303 Pamir Corps, was killed in a Taliban bomb attack on May 28. President Karzai himself has survived four serious assassination attempts so far.

John Cherian

The success rate for the Taliban this year has been chilling. From 2001 to 2010, only a handful of Afghan leaders died at the hands of the resistance. But this year, the situation seems to have changed dramatically. It is obvious from the figures that the Taliban and its allies can now choose their targets at will. The recent Taliban operations reveal indirectly that the group has infiltrated the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and the security services. In the past three months, the Taliban has launched three big attacks on important targets inside Kabul, using suicide bombers and commandos with rocket-propelled grenades.

After a suicide attack in January 2010, the United States Army had set up 25 security checkpoints, together dubbed as "the Ring of Steel", around the capital. The security zone was manned by 800 officers of the Kabul city Police Command Battalion. The

Taliban has been adept at circumventing the Ring of Steel, no doubt aided and abetted by sympathisers in the Afghan security services. As it is, Afghan Army soldiers and police personnel have been routinely turning their guns on their American patrons. According to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) figures, between March 2009 and June 2011, 57 foreign troops were killed in 19 attacks.

At the time of his demise, the 71-year-old Rabbani was the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council. The council, formed with much fanfare last year, was trying to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban on behalf of the Afghan government. President Karzai had made the signing of a peace deal with the Taliban his highest priority. The Barack Obama administration had given its tacit support to the move. But the Taliban, according to all available evidence, has so far refused to enter into meaningful talks with the U.S.-supported government in Kabul. It has repeatedly stated that serious talks can

only begin after the U.S.-led occupation forces leave the country.

Besides, the choice of Rabbani was a controversial one as he was the former leader of the Northern Alliance, which was at war with the Taliban until the time the Americans invaded the country. Rabbani was also known to be close to Iran and India. The two countries were major supporters of the Northern Alliance. Pakistan, always wary of India's growing clout in Afghanistan, never really trusted Rabbani. One reason why Karzai chose Rabbani was to get the support of the leaders and the warlords of the erstwhile Northern Alliance for his ambitious plans to bring peace to Afghanistan.

Initially, Rabbani took his job seriously. The Peace Council was provided with a large amount of cash by the government – \$200 million according to reports in the Western media. He crisscrossed Afghanistan in a bid to establish contacts with lower-level Taliban leaders and sympathisers. He travelled to various capitals, including Washington, New Delhi and Teheran, to keep the governments informed about the progress being made in the reconciliation bid and to establish contacts with exiled Afghans. Earlier in the year, the Afghan government had claimed that senior figures in the Taliban had started talking with the Peace Council. It later turned out that the key person negotiating on behalf of the Taliban was an impostor who took the Afghan government for a ride. In recent weeks, Rabbani had started criticising the Taliban openly saying that the group would never agree to negotiate in good faith.

Esmatullah, the suicide bomber who killed Rabbani, had said that he represented the "Quetta Shura" (the Taliban leadership headed by Mullah Omar). According to reports, the Afghan President, who was in New York, had urged Rabbani to meet urgently with Esmatullah, who had been staying in Kabul as the guest of the High Peace Council for over a week. The assassin could walk in to meet Rabbani with a bomb hidden in his turban.

With the U.S. downsizing its troops rapidly, Karzai is in a hurry for some sort of a rapprochement with the Taliban. He cut short his official visit to the U.S., where he had gone to attend the annual United Nations General Assembly meet, after hearing of Rabbani's death. While addressing a joint press conference with Obama, Karzai emphasised that Rabbani's "martyrdom" would not deter his government from the quest for peace. Obama described the death of Rabbani as a "tragic loss" and said that the U.S. remained

committed to "creating a path where Afghanistan and its people can live in freedom and safety and in security and prosperity".

But the putative peace talks could now be put on the back burner. Senior politicians and warlords identified with the Northern Alliance have been heaping insults on the Taliban after the assassination of Rabbani, saying that negotiations should not have begun in the first place. Now they are urging their supporters to start preparing for a military confrontation with the Taliban once again. The influential Tajik minority may distance itself further from the Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul.

The Taliban has denied online that it was responsible for the assassination. The U.S. and the Afghan government are hinting at the involvement of a group that is aligned with the Taliban. Washington had blamed the Haqqani group for the 20-hour siege of the U.S. embassy and the NATO headquarters in Kabul in early September. Admiral Mike Mullen, the U.S. military chief, told the media that he could not confirm that the Haqqani group was behind the killing of Rabbani. All the same, U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta told the visiting chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Shuja Pasha, in the third week of September that he wanted Islamabad immediately to crack down on the Haqqani group, which has strong support in North Waziristan along the border with Afghanistan. Panetta went on to threaten "operational steps" against Pakistan if it did not stop supporting the Haqqani group.

Admiral Mullen, in his meeting with Pakistani Army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in the second week of September, demanded immediate military action against the Haqqanis. On September 22, he told the U.S. Congress that the Haqqani group was the "veritable arm" of the ISI.

Washington and New Delhi allege that there is a nexus between the Haqqani group and the ISI. President Karzai too has made similar allegations on various occasions. The Indian government blames the Haqqanis for the July 2008 attack on its embassy in Kabul that killed 41 people and another car bomb attack outside the embassy the next year. Officials in Islamabad, on the other hand, say that Washington is unable to come to terms with the resurgence of the Taliban and is trying to pin the blame for its military and political setbacks on Pakistan.

Rabbani, a former warlord, rose to fame fighting against the Communist-led government

in Afghanistan which had come to power in the late 1970s. In December 1979, the Soviet Union despatched a force in response to an SOS from the beleaguered government in Kabul. Washington almost immediately started arming and training the fundamentalist "mujahideen" (holy warriors) for a war against the progressive Najibullah government which was intent on land reforms and the emancipation of women. The U.S. found a useful ally in Rabbani, the leader of the Jamaat-i-Islami Party.

Another favourite was the Haqqani group, led by the father-and-son duo of Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin, which was specially trained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and supplied with lethal hand-fired Stinger surface-to-air missiles via the ISI. The journalist Steve Coll, in his well-received book *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden* wrote that the CIA and the ISI "came to rely on Haqqani for testing and experimentation with new weapons systems and tactics". CIA officers, according to Coll, regarded Haqqani "as a proven commander who could put a lot of men under arms at short notice". He had the "CIA's full support".

After the Mujahideen victory and the takeover of Kabul, Rabbani gained an unsavoury reputation as a power-hungry politician. In the bloody upheaval that followed the collapse of the Najibullah government, it was Rabbani who emerged as the President of Afghanistan by virtually seizing power. Rabbani was President from 1992 to 1996. He was not accepted by many of the other American-financed and trained warlords, mainly from the dominant Pashtun clans, after he forcibly took over the presidency. Thousands of innocent Afghans perished when Rabbani was at the helm as the mujahideen warlords clashed frequently over turf, money and power.

After being driven out of Kabul by the Taliban in 1996, Rabbani became the nominal leader of the Northern Alliance. The military leader of the Northern Alliance, which comprised non-Pashtun ethnic groups, was the more charismatic Ahmad Shah Masood. Masood was the first Afghan leader to fall prey to a suicide bomber. He was killed on September 7, 2001, two days before the terror attacks on the U.S.

The two events may not be connected, but the U.S. support for the mujahideen, followed by the invasion of Afghanistan, has definitely impacted on South Asia with a devastating effect. For the Americans, the impending Taliban takeover of Afghanistan could be a case of the chickens coming home to roost.