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Mindless Violence

Over the last twelve years, our country, the UK has attacked at least four states with whom we have had no quarrel: Serbia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya. We connived at the terror bombing of another two (Lebanon in 2006, Gaza in 2009). At least two of these countries have been ruined with enormous loss of life, with no apparent benefit for their populations. At the time of writing, Libya seems set on the same course. Our governing élite, including the three major political parties, take great pride in these acts. Yet they claim that they are against ‘mindless violence’ such as was seen on the streets of England in August.

It has to be admitted that young men do often enjoy indulging in antisocial behaviour and in destroying things. In a well-organised society these impulses are kept in check through stable family and community structures, together with well-understood and well-maintained routes from adolescent irresponsibility to adult responsibility, such as apprenticeship. Where adult authority is withdrawn from the world of young men, they will, as is their nature as ‘pack animals’, tend to form their own structures of authority and community which are perceived to be hostile to the world of sober adult responsibility. David Cameron should know all about this through his own participation in ‘mindless violence’ as an erstwhile member of the Bullingdon Club (a gang for very posh young men) in Oxford, whose hobby was, and continues to be, the trashing of restaurants in drunken orgies. Nick Clegg, not to outdone, indulged himself in burning down university greenhouses in Germany while drunk. Neither claim to feel any empathy with this August’s perpetrators of ‘mindless violence’, although they appear to have been precisely the type of irresponsible young men who, according to themselves, merit exemplary punishment. They do not even have the excuse (although they claim it is no excuse) of coming from underprivileged backgrounds.

Some rightwing commentators such as Peter Osborne have traced a link between the irresponsibility of Britain’s power élite, engaging in dangerous financial speculation and tax avoidance on the one hand and the irresponsibility of the poor and unemployed young in burning and looting their own neighbourhoods on the other. There is, on this account, a link between the example set by the ruling circles of the society which is then emulated further down the food chain. Other rightwing commentators, such as Janet Daley, point to the destructive effects of what they call ‘liberalism’ in destroying a sense of responsibility and community. In our view they are both right. What matters at the top of society sets the tone for what happens lower down. Thuggishly attacking other countries and abusing the public good in one’s own sends a clear message to the rest of society that this is admirable behaviour.

David Cameron is fond of attacking the British Muslim community for living apart from the rest of Britain. In fact this community has acted with great fortitude and responsibility during the recent riots and has prevented much worse happening, particularly in Birmingham. Cameron and Clegg are members of a privileged and self-perpetuating bubble social group, more or less completely insulated from the lives of the people in the society which they govern – hence their lack of comprehension and empathy for what goes on in it. Cameron has even had the gall to call for ‘muscular liberalism’ to force these communities into the British mainstream. We have had plenty of ‘muscular liberalism’ both home and abroad for 30 years and it has been largely responsible for many of the woes with which we are now beset.

We are a society saturated in liberalism. We have three liberal parties, two of which are in a governing coalition, the third offering the coalition unconditional support for their violent activity abroad and little dissent from the substance of their domestic policies. Liberalism has, for the last thirty years, dominated our view of human motivation. Human beings, we have been told *ad nauseam*, are self-interested rational beings motivated to consume as much as possible for as little work as possible. We are encouraged to think of ourselves as consumers in all aspects of our lives, including education. Education,

on this view, is something that you pay for in order to have done to you rather than something for which you take part responsibility for. Furthermore, you get someone to educate you in order that you can increase your possibilities as a consumer. This is a view held by the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal parties. Alternative views get short shrift in the face of the orthodox views of the political and financial elite, despite the temporary 'Blue Labour' aberration (L&TUR July 2011).

Liberalism is scornful of the social ties that bind the generations together. Since the Thatcher governments of the 1980s, the care and concern that Britain has had for its younger generation has been eroded. The careers service has deteriorated, good quality apprenticeship has largely disappeared in many areas of activity where it was an important route into adulthood, phoney vocational qualifications have been promoted, the youth labour market has diminished and many of the occupations that gave communities a sense of dignity and a livelihood have been wantonly destroyed. Unfortunately, British trade unionism has, all too often, connived in this destruction and is currently ill placed to suggest remedies for current problems.

Under the coalition this process has accelerated. The already pathetic careers service has just migrated online, a real slap in the face for any young person who might have hoped to seek the advice of an experienced and benevolent adult. The Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year olds is about to be diminished to a shadow of what it was. Youth facilities across the country are being withdrawn. The number of 16-24 year olds who are not in employment, education and training stands at near 1 million and over 20% of this age group are unemployed. There is plenty of evidence that companies do not wish to employ British youth because of their poor educational achievements and would prefer migrant labour. Going to university will mean the acquisition of debts of around £50,000 as a result of a reckless social experiment in putting into effect the consumerist economic model in our higher education system. No other Northern European country has done anything like this nor acted with such reckless disregard for the welfare of their

young people. If parts of England have descended into a 'state of nature' – a category beloved of liberal political theory, then that is a reflection of the reality that the 'social contract' between these communities and the rest of society has broken down, mainly because the ruling elite has withdrawn responsibility for their welfare.

The doctrine of consumerism has also delivered young people into the hands of large companies in search of easy profits, exploiting immaturity and weakness as a means of selling their goods. Cheap alcohol, clothes and electronic gadgets have been promoted as indispensable to any kind of social status. Parental, school and community authority is relentlessly undermined by companies wishing to sell more. The coalition seems to be perfectly at ease with this state of affairs – after all, the atomised consumer always has the choice of whether or not to consume, regardless of peer and advertising pressures.

The creation of disaffected, poorly educated, unemployed, apolitical and consumption oriented youth, plagued with false promises and diminishing opportunities, is also the creation of a powder keg of nihilistic social unrest which can be sparked by random events such as the apparent street execution by police of a suspected gangster, and quite possibly, by events less significant than that. The bleating of politicians of all parties contrasts with a complete lack of will to tackle the increasingly complex set of interrelated problems that makes Britain such a lousy place to bring up children and young people. Until the parties look as if they really wish to make headway with poor education, consumer culture, a low skill labour market and youth unemployment, they deserve to be treated with contempt. They will also need to address their own offending behaviour of attacking other countries if they wish to be taken seriously as advocates of peaceful ways of resolving disputes.

This journal sees little prospect of any of this happening as long as our politics is dominated by an unholy trinity of liberal political parties. We will continue to chart and comment on the decline and disgrace that they bring to our country.

The Labour & Trade Union Review

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A Global Recession – err Really!

Peter Whitelegg

Europe is at this moment receiving more bailouts than the lifeboats on the Titanic. Greece being the biggest so far, with Ireland and Portugal bringing up the rear. Italy is now causing some serious concern. Somewhat further afield the American economy is in a state of economic paralysis with some of its states resembling Greece and its budget deficit increasing. Here in the UK politicians of all hues exclaim the reality of a global recession. Our economic problems are not just of our making, they belong to the world. We are just a tiny part of a great interlocking economic juggernaut which is slowing down. Err really!

Just a cursory glance at the growth figures for last year (2010) would tend to dispel this generally accepted view. The UK's economic growth has stagnated over the last two quarters, apparently this is down to the twin British obsessions of the weather and royalty, and not economic fundamentals.

The USA's economic performance is also on the slide. Recent figures for 2011 show second quarter growth was only 0.3%, with first quarter growth even worse at 0.1%. Full year figures for 2010 show the same general trend. Recent revised figures indicate the US growing at around 2.3% while the UK was a paltry 1.2%, with France only marginally better at 1.4%.

With large chunks of the European economy feeling the whip hand of a full blown recession, one would be forgiven for thinking that the whole of Europe is in crisis. The figures don't seem to bear this out. For a start, Germany grew at a reasonable 3.5%, Poland at an even better, 3.8%. But the star of the European economies must be Sweden, growing at

a whopping 5.5%.

But I digress.

The interesting aspect of these figures is not the decline in western economic performance but the growth figures from other parts of the world. Admittedly some areas show a patchy performance, Africa for instance. Even here things are not nearly so bad as you would expect. Botswana, Nigeria and Ethiopia, have growth rates above 8% with Zimbabwe growing at around 9% (I wondered why the Brits had gone quiet on that front). Even Libya was growing at 4.2%. This of course has now come to an abrupt stop because of western imperial intervention.

The real story must be the strong growth in both South America and Asia. South America, with the exception of Venezuela, experienced almost universal growth. Paraguay leading the way with growth of around 15.3%, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay all having growth rates above 7%.

Asia is much the same story. We all know of the extraordinary growth of economies such as India and China. But there are others. Most of the central Asian "Stans" are growing above 6%, Vietnam at 6.8%, Thailand 7.8%, and for the purposes of the argument I will include Turkey in Asia, Turkey at 8.2%.

I'm well aware that growth figures alone don't tell the whole story. Many of these countries will be growing from very low base levels. Other factors such as wages, literacy and life expectancy all need consideration. Many of these countries will require huge investment in services and infrastructure.

But these figures would tend to suggest the economic slowdown is primarily located in those countries where finance capital is the dominant economic driver. Countries that are either producers of primary commodities or have significant manufacturing or industrial capabilities are doing well enough. We may well be in the grip of the worst recession for a generation, it's quite possible it will get worse in the months to come but, one thing is certain, it's not global.

1	Qatar	16.30	2	Paraguay	15.30	5	India	10.40
3	Singapore	14.50	4	Taiwan	10.80	8	Sri Lanka	9.10
6	China	10.30	7	Turkmenistan	9.20	10	Zimbabwe	9.00
9	Congo,			Republic of the	9.10	13	Uzbekistan	8.50
11	Peru	8.80	12	Botswana	8.60	16	Turkey	8.20
14	Uruguay	8.50	15	Nigeria	8.40	19	Ethiopia	8.00
17	Afghanistan	8.20	18	Maldives	8.00	22	Dominican	
20	Yemen	8.00	21	Thailand	7.80	24	Zambia	7.60
25	Republic	7.80	23	Laos	7.70			
	Belarus	7.60						
155	Kiribati	1.80	156	Serbia	1.80	157	Netherlands	1.70
158	Sint Maarten	1.60	159	Angola	1.60	160	Cuba	1.50
161	France	1.50	162	New Zealand	1.50	163	Portugal	1.40
164	United Kingdom	1.30	165	Italy	1.30	166	Lithuania	1.30
167	Slovenia	1.20	168	Hungary	1.20	169	Cayman Islands	1.10
170	Montenegro	1.10	171	Cyprus	1.00	172	Dominica	1.00
173	Macau	1.00	174	Cocos			(Keeling) Islands	1.00
175	Iran	1.00	176	Iraq	0.80	177	Bosnia and	
	Herzegovina	0.80	178	Saint Lucia	0.80	179	Macedonia	0.70
180	El Salvador	0.70	181	Bahamas, The	0.50	182	Faroe Islands	0.50
183	Norway	0.40	184	Tonga	0.30	185	Bulgaria	0.20
186	Tuvalu	0.20	187	Fiji	0.10	188	Cook Islands	0.10

189	Samoa	0.00	190	Trinidad and		Tobago	0.00	
91	Spain	-0.10	192	Latvia	-0.30	193	Marshall Islands	-0.30
194	Barbados	-0.50	195	British		Virgin Islands	-0.60	
196	Equatorial Guinea	-0.80	197	Korea, North	-0.90	198	Montserrat	-1.00
199	Ireland	-1.00	200	Jamaica	-1.10	201	Romania	-1.30
202	Kyrgyzstan	-1.40	203	Croatia	-1.40	204	Grenada	-1.40
205	Saint Kitts			and Nevis	-1.50	206	Venezuela	-1.90
207	Greenland	-2.00	208	Madagascar	-2.00	209	Saint Vincent and	
	the Grenadines	-2.30	210	Iceland	-3.50	211	Antigua and	
	Barbuda	-4.10	212	Greece	-4.50	213	Haiti	-5.10
214	Puerto Rico	-5.80	215	Anguilla	-8.50	216	San Marino	-13.00

Stop Coddling the Super-Rich

Published: August 14, 2011

By Warren E. Buffett

OUR leaders have asked for “shared sacrifice.” But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched.

While the poor and middle class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks. Some of us are investment managers who earn billions from our daily labors but are allowed to classify our income as “carried interest,” thereby getting a bargain 15 percent tax rate. Others own stock index futures for 10 minutes and have 60 percent of their gain taxed at 15 percent, as if they’d been long-term investors.

These and other blessings are showered upon us by legislators in Washington who feel compelled to protect us, much as if we were spotted owls or some other endangered species. It’s nice to have friends in high places.

Last year my federal tax bill — the income tax I paid, as well as payroll taxes paid by me and on my behalf — was \$6,938,744. That sounds like a lot of money. But what I paid was only 17.4 percent of my taxable income — and that’s actually a lower percentage than was paid by any of the other 20 people in our office. Their tax burdens ranged from 33 percent to 41 percent and averaged 36 percent.

If you make money with money, as some of my super-rich friends do, your percentage may be a bit lower than mine.

But if you earn money from a job, your percentage will surely exceed mine — most likely by a lot.

To understand why, you need to examine the sources of government revenue. Last year about 80 percent of these revenues came from personal income taxes and payroll taxes. The mega-rich pay income taxes at a rate of 15 percent on most of their earnings but pay practically nothing in payroll taxes. It’s a different story for the middle class: typically, they fall into the 15 percent and 25 percent income tax brackets, and then are hit with heavy payroll taxes to boot.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, tax rates for the rich were far higher, and my percentage rate was in the middle of the pack. According to a theory I sometimes hear, I should have thrown a fit and refused to invest because of the elevated tax rates on capital gains and dividends.

I didn’t refuse, nor did others. I have worked with investors for 60 years and I have yet to see anyone — not even when capital gains rates were 39.9 percent in 1976-77 — shy away from a sensible investment because of the tax rate on the potential gain. People invest to make money, and potential taxes have never scared them off. And to those who argue that higher rates hurt job creation, I would note that a net of nearly 40 million jobs were added between 1980 and 2000. You know what’s happened since then: lower tax rates and far lower job creation.

Since 1992, the I.R.S. has compiled

data from the returns of the 400 Americans reporting the largest income. In 1992, the top 400 had aggregate taxable income of \$16.9 billion and paid federal taxes of 29.2 percent on that sum. In 2008, the aggregate income of the highest 400 had soared to \$90.9 billion — a staggering \$227.4 million on average — but the rate paid had fallen to 21.5 percent.

The taxes I refer to here include only federal income tax, but you can be sure that any payroll tax for the 400 was inconsequential compared to income. In fact, 88 of the 400 in 2008 reported no wages at all, though every one of them reported capital gains. Some of my brethren may shun work but they all like to invest. (I can relate to that.)

I know well many of the mega-rich and, by and large, they are very decent people. They love America and appreciate the opportunity this country has given them. Many have joined the Giving Pledge, promising to give most of their wealth to philanthropy. Most wouldn’t mind being told to pay more in taxes as well, particularly when so many of their fellow citizens are truly suffering.

Twelve members of Congress will soon take on the crucial job of rearranging our country’s finances. They’ve been instructed to devise a plan that reduces the 10-year deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion. It’s vital, however, that they achieve far more than that. Americans are rapidly losing faith in the ability of Congress to deal with our country’s fiscal problems. Only action that is immediate, real and very substantial will prevent that doubt from morphing into hopelessness. That feeling can create its own reality.

Froggy

News From Across The Channel

French Warren Buffetts

The French government is under pressure to increase tax on the rich. The pressure comes from its own ranks (the UMP party), from the Centre, as well as from the Left. It also comes from some of the rich themselves, sixteen of whom signed a letter in the *Nouvel Observateur* (25.8) to that effect. One prominent name is that of Maurice Levy, who is in advertising. Unlike Warren Buffett, however, they are only calling for a one-off hike (just for 2 years) and of “a reasonable amount”, so as not to frighten off capital investment or increase tax evasion. Buffett on the contrary made the point that investors did not stop investing when tax on capital gains was high.

So, how much to tax the rich? Proposals range from a little to slightly more. 1% on incomes over 1 million Euros (30 000 people affected). Alain Minc, one of Sarkozy’s advisers, suggested 0.5% on incomes over 150 000 Euros, rising to 4 or 5% over a million Euros.

The militarist Greens

The Green presidential candidate, Eva Joly, made a fool of herself on the

Job one for the 12 is to pare down some future promises that even a rich America can’t fulfill. Big money must be saved here. The 12 should then turn to the issue of revenues. I would leave rates for 99.7 percent of taxpayers unchanged and continue the current 2-percentage-point reduction in the employee contribution to the payroll tax. This cut helps the poor and the middle class, who need every break they can get.

But for those making more than \$1 million — there were 236,883 such households in 2009 — I would raise rates immediately on taxable income

occasion of the 14th July celebrations in Paris. She said that it should no longer be a military display, but a march past by ordinary citizens, the young, students and senior citizens, celebrating their common values. So far, so eccentric, but also so laudable. A Western politician not in thrall to the military! Wonderful. Hope did not last long however, as, when she was attacked for these remarks, she quickly reassured everyone that she was not anti-military, indeed she supported the intervention in Libya.

Is there any significance in the ferocity of the criticisms against her by a number of prominent personalities, including the Prime Minister, Fillon, who accused her of not being French (she has double nationality, French and Norwegian)? Are they afraid her opinions might become popular? It is more likely that they are courting popularity among the voters, who like military displays.

French militarism

Sarkozy is playing the military grandeur of France card. On 19 July he addressed a ceremony at the Invalides (the grand palace which houses the tomb of Napoleon) to honour the six French

in excess of \$1 million, including, of course, dividends and capital gains. And for those who make \$10 million or more — there were 8,274 in 2009 — I would suggest an additional increase in rate.

My friends and I have been coddled long enough by a billionaire-friendly Congress. It’s time for our government to get serious about shared sacrifice.

Warren E. Buffett is the chairman and chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway.

soldiers killed in Afghanistan the week before.

There is talk of having a ceremonial reception of bodies of soldiers killed in France’s “external operations”, and a monument. The French are copying the British again, but don’t have the language quite as practised yet. The reporter on France Inter talking about the proposed monument said it would be a monument to 625 soldiers killed “since the Algerian War”. Sensible propaganda would avoid mention of that war. In the same programme, to the question, what did the six soldiers die for? the answer was “to bring civilisation and democracy to Afghanistan”; the British know you can claim to bring democracy, or human rights to the rest of the world, but certainly not “civilisation”, a word which reminds people of imperialist propaganda.

The French President on the world stage.

The French President is trying to play an international role; this goes down well with his electorate and reminds people that the president has the exclusive prerogative to deploy military forces abroad; he is Commander in Chief of the armies, and has the nuclear codes. In the Ivory Coast this year Laurent Gbagbo was scotched by French military forces. Then Sarkozy led the intervention in Libya, for which he got unanimous support in the French Parliament. Martine Aubry congratulated him publicly.

Now that after a tremendous effort on the part of NATO, France, Britain and the US (more than 7000 bombing sorties; equipping the anti-Gaddafi forces) it looks as if the Gaddafi regime is beaten, the French president comes out of it well in the opinion polls. The Socialist presidential hopeful Francois Hollande praised the success. Radio

reports quoted from the streets of Tripoli the population saying “Merci Sarkozy, Thank you Obama”. A huge hoarding displayed in Benghazi and reproduced in *Le Monde* shows a beaming Sarkozy and the words “Thanks France”. No mention of Britain. *Le Monde* reported that the BBC had set two FM radio stations in Benghazi, but nothing is made of that.

The madness of the President

This should have been the title of a full page article in *Le Monde* of 24 August. The real title was “Nicolas Sarkozy’s War”. A large photo shows the President below deck on the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, in the centre of a group of Navy personnel, with the Captain to his left. The War in Libya is his war, he was personally involved in starting it because of his personal animosity towards Gaddafi, whose “propaganda” claimed that Gaddafi covertly financed Sarkozy’s presidential campaign, and also that Sarkozy had his eye on Libyan oil.

In 2007, at the time of the Bulgarian nurses affair, when Sarkozy’s then wife visited Tripoli on several occasions and claimed the glory of their liberation, Sarkozy had the ambition to “tame the mad dictator”. The US diplomatic service noted this ambition, as revealed in a Wikileaks obtained US telegram of January 2008. This said that Sarkozy thought it was worthwhile to try and change bad guys like Gaddafi. However, this did not last. Gaddafi was not signing the contracts he was expected to sign, and he was not buying the Rafale plane and other armaments France was hoping to sell.

Sarkozy involved himself in the running of the war, sitting down with military chiefs to plan attacks. He meant to “do for Benghazi what Mitterrand did not do for Srebrenica”: “without France, the city of Benghazi, one million strong, would today be wiped off the map”. Advisers report that Sarkozy is working for the glory of France and that he thinks that the liberation of Tripoli would be like the liberation of Paris in 1944. Then there were 40 million Petainists, then overnight 40 million Gaullists. The same will happen in Tripoli, the popu-

lation will reject Gaddafi overnight and espouse who? unanimously.

Le Monde, a militarist newspaper

Le Monde printed this article, with its nonsense comparison between the liberation of Tripoli and the liberation of Paris in 1944, and between the population of France in 1944 and the population of Libya in 2011. It doesn’t attribute these opinions to Sarkozy, but to some of his advisers. One of his advisers is the so-called philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, who is on the supervisory board of *Le Monde* (see this column of April this year). Bernard-Henri Levy, trendy media personality, got on the phone to Sarkozy from Libya and persuaded him that attack was the only response to what he was seeing.

Bernard-Henri Levy is famous among other things for being photographed cowering under sniper fire in the former Yugoslavia, in a photo later shown to be posed (people near him were walking around normally). Last year, he supported some of the argument of one his books on a philosopher, a hitherto undiscovered Botul, who asked deep questions regarding sexuality and Kant. His philosophy, named after him, was of course Botulism, and it was the creation of a *Canard Enchaîné* journalist.

Levy thus claimed to have read works which did not exist. He was exposed, but this episode did not stop him, it was just added to a list of errors in his other publications. His book praising the United States, for example, was described by the *Economist* as “the worst book on America”. His book on the assassination of Daniel Pearl was heavily criticised by experts and by Pearl’s own family.

He is widely considered as an impostor, or at least as a shallow and dishonest writer. This is the calibre of adviser Sarkozy is relying on. And judging by this article on Sarkozy’s war, non objective, badly informed, historically ignorant journalists write in *Le Monde* today. *Le Monde*, with its new financial backers and new editor, Erik Izraelewicz, seems to have ceased aiming at at least an appearance of objectivity.

Libya

We learn from France Inter on the day of the first reported fall of Tripoli (22.8), from an expert in North African affairs, that the victorious side will have to pay back NATO “indirectly” for its contribution to their victory, and that this will weigh on the Libyan economy. On the other hand, Libyan markets will be mouthwatering (the French term, just as crude, was “alléchants”, alluding to the licking of lips). The expert then said: “We help a people get rid to a dictator, and make a profit at the same time, what is wrong with that?” Two days later we learn on the same radio station that 250 000 Egyptians, as well as 500 000 Moroccans working in Libya fled because of the troubles and are now swelling the ranks of the unemployed in their respective countries.

For their part, the Chinese and the Italians are asking if their pre-war contracts will be honoured by the new government. Libya was one great construction site before the NATO intervention. The French, at least those who listen to France Inter, not a minority station, therefore know all that, and they know that the “rebels” are not democrats but a mixed group of opponents to Gaddafi, a group who could not muster the strength to do anything by themselves.

Put together with awareness of the disaster of Iraq, all this should lead people to realize that the likelihood of this ending well for the people who live in Libya is very small. But Western citizens who support this disaster in the making seem to be mesmerised by the idea of “bringing democracy” to a beleaguered people. In the past France brought Christianity to the people of Africa, then it brought civilization, now it brings democracy. Different words, but the same fig leaf. And it really works.

This brings to mind the time of the Algerian war, when the government fighting against Algerian independence also garnered unanimity; anti colonialism was never a popular stance, when resources are at stake.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M Williams

9/11 – terror came home to roost

There was nothing worthy or noble about what the USA was doing in the world in 2001. With the Soviet collapse of 1989-91, they had a unique opportunity to create a world in which loose talk about International Law would actually have meant something. If they didn't like the existing structures – the UN and other bodies – they could have proposed something different and probably got it. Not many people respect the UN, and it has been largely forgotten that it was the United States that made it look ridiculous by manipulating and undermining its efforts in the Congo. The idea of scrapping the UN and absorbing it into some better-designed world body would have been very feasible.

But the USA in 1991 was seeking domination and perpetual superiority, not order or justice. They wanted to be able to criminalise any government that annoyed them, while making sure their own people were untouchable. They wanted to be confident that any government they liked was also safe, no matter what it had done.

There was also a US view that any government that dared advance socialism must be attacked, even if it had been duly elected through regular multi-party elections. That had, after all, been the policy throughout the Cold War, and also before the unavoidable alliance with the Soviet Union in World War Two. Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were able to build up power and break such International Law as existed, because both Western Europe and the USA saw them as useful against both Communism and Socialism. No one except a few left-wingers boycotted the Berlin Olympics in 1936, even though Hitler had already replaced conventional multi-party politics with personal dictatorship and had made Jews officially inferior and non-citizens.

Everything done by Nazi Germany was fine up until 1938, when the bulk of the British ruling class suddenly realised that Churchill was right to see Hitler as a peril. They became anti-Fascist only when they realised that Hitler was intending to overthrow Britain's global power rather than being content to be the strongest power within Continental Europe. And it seems that the splitting of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of the Czech portion was the tipping point: that at least is the standard story that people told after the event, to explain why most of the Tories and Liberal before then had favoured co-existence with Hitler and even some help for Hitler. My assumption is that it was not because splitting Czechoslovakia was unusually morally bad, but because they were a defiance by Germany of the system of friendly co-existence that Chamberlain had thought he had established with the Munich Agreement.

The Czechoslovak government that Chamberlain bullied into accepting the Munich Agreement was Moderate Socialist. The country had a large and legal Communist Party, and it

had made a treaty with the USSR that would have ensured they helped defend Czechoslovak if France were willing to do the same. Of course the Czechoslovak mainstream was in no sense pro-Communist: the Czech Legion, formed from Czech and Slovak prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian Army who had switched over to fight alongside the Tsar's army, had been an important anti-Bolshevik force during the Russian Civil War. But on the whole, it was too leftist for Britain and Chamberlain

The USA successfully stifled socialism in its internal politics, and after World War Two it took up the global crusade against socialism. The Cold War gave an excuse for this, and also necessitated an alliance with some Moderate Socialists and also some left-wing nationalists who favoured elements of socialism but could be signed up to the anti-communist cause. But with the USSR fallen, it became clear that the USA intended to attack all varieties of socialism wherever it got the chance, regardless of democracy or legality.

This was one aim, and US interests might have been advanced better if it had been given priority over the USA's other long-term aims. But there was also an irrational attachment to Israel, which in both Britain and the USA goes well beyond those countries' relatively small Jewish populations. The first half of the Christian bible is all about the wars of ancient Israel, while Arabs and other Muslims were major enemies when Latin-Christian Europe was forming itself into a new civilisation that was very different from its Classical-Roman roots. Latin-Christian Europe had to fight for survival against Islamic expansion, and then struck back with the Islamic concept of Jihad or Holy War incorporated as 'Crusade'. Crusades are a flat contradiction of the version of Christianity that had grown within the Roman Empire and which eventually captured it under Constantine the Great and his successors. But 'Crusade' is an important concept to many Christians in the USA today. Most Europeans now view the Crusades as an error and maybe an embarrassment, but the USA has gone a very different way.

In the USA (though not in Britain, as far as I know) determined support for Israel extends to a large block of right-wing Christians who are not at all fond of Jews, including some who see Israel's expansion as a necessary precondition to the Last Judgement, in which any Jews who fail to convert to an approved brand of Christianity will go to hell, along with all other non-Christians regardless of personal merit. Europeans may see the idea as crackpot: in the USA it has significant support among voters that Republican candidates have to cultivate. And since ambitious Democrats mostly have to cultivate the powerful Jewish lobby, unthinking support for Israel gets imposed on almost all candidates for office in the USA's complex political system.

There were two basic errors in the USA's post-1991 political

strategy. I speak here of *technical* errors, not moral errors, which would be too numerous to list. But the key *technical* errors were

a) The demand that Russia follow New Right economic dogma rather than being given generous aid in a new Marshall Plan (which was proposed by a minority).

b) The failure to curb Israel when Yasser Arafat was willing to co-exist with Israel and settle for a small Palestinian state.

Both decisions represented victories for the New Right vision, as against the more realistic views of what remained of the Old Right and functional conservatism. When it came to saving a handful of well-connected financial institutions in 2008, billions were found easily enough. Support for Russia in the 1990s would have been a much better investment: it might have set US dominance on a firm basis for decades to come. The attitudes that most Russians had inherited from Soviet times were not so different from those of the USA. They included a commitment to imposing one or other version of Modernism on the rest of the world, and a general belief that the specific values of Europe were the world's best.

Alienating Russia was the most foolish thing the USA did in its 'Very Short American Century'. But even today, most of them see it as an explicable outbreak of weirdness among the Russians, who are denounced as wholly to blame.

Letting Israel carry on undermining Arafat, incorporating the West Bank and carry on squeezing the Gaza Strip was also a major error. Not even good for Israel in the long run: a peace settlement accepted by Arafat might have been accepted by most Muslims, whereas any deals made now will be seen as betrayals. In the long run, the views of 20 million Jews globally are unlikely to outweigh the views of 1.4 billion Muslims. Globally, the balance is tipping towards China, India, Brazil and Japan, states that have no strong feeling about Jews but which might well be willing to see Israel abolished in order to conciliate the Muslim fifth of the global population. Within the

Arab world, power is passing to Islamists, people who would be much less scared than the secular rulers about Israel's well-known possession of atomic weapons. Atomic weapons are not that useful against armies: they are formidable as city-killers, but an Islamist might figure that God would take care of the dead and that an Israeli nuclear annihilation of a few Arab cities would advance the cause of Global Jihad.

Israel should have helped Arafat to consolidate his Palestinian state rather than undermining him. The USA should have had a strong leader who could have demanded that Israel do just that, on pain of losing US support. But multi-party democracy makes it much easier to go with the flow and cater to popular emotions and prejudices.

While there were plenty of reasons to dislike and distrust Arafat, a sensible calculation would have been that it was either Arafat or someone much less to Western taste, or else to weak to deliver anything or influence wider Muslim opinion. The New Right were convinced that they knew better: if a firm line was taken with these people, they would fall into line with Western wishes. (Exactly the same calculation was taken in Iraq and Afghanistan, and is the logic behind abandoning Mubarak in Egypt, going to war to topple Gaddafi in Libya and seeking to overturn Assad in Syria.)

Through vanity and incompetence, the USA lost the 1990s and was already in trouble before 1991. It seems that al-Qaeda mounted the mission especially to provoke the USA, because Islamism was generally marginal and was kept under by secular nationalism and conservatism Islam.

“‘Brand America’, in a political sense, has become toxic all over the World. Once upon a time, people in the Muslim world looked at America and Western Europe as their role models. They aspired for their own countries to be Muslim Capitalist democracies, with varying degrees of Islam thrown in to satisfy the religiosity of the masses.

“But a combination of long standing support for Israel, Desert Storm/Iraq '91, and the 10 year-long War of Terror – Af-

ghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan – has diminished the standing of the United States and its allies across the whole world.” [D]

On the BBC, at least, we have had repeated 'human interest' stories, showing the individual victims of the fall of the Two Towers and the pain their relatives still feel. This is real enough – but so are the sufferings of those bombed by the USA, both before and after 9/11, who are far more numerous. So are the sufferings of those hurt in various conflicts since 1991 that the USA either did nothing about or may have actively encouraged. And most of those suffer in a war they could have done nothing to prevent/ Those who died in the Two Towers of the World Trade Centre would almost all have had some part in the USA's misbehaviour in the 1990s.

The USA wasted the 1990s. By 2001, the dominant New Right elite had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Bush Junior saw it as a great opportunity to finish off Saddam Hussein. No one who knew Arab politics could suppose that Saddam and al-Qaeda were anything except bitter enemies, irreconcilable rivals for the future of the Arab world. But since the US public confused the issues, the US could finish its unfinished business in Iraq, where Saddam had survived repeated efforts to spark a successful internal revolt. There was also a belief among the elite that US policies had gone wrong in Russia because the Russians had been foolish or disobedient. If the geniuses of the New Right were given a free hand to reconstruct Iraq, they could turn it into a shining example of the benefits of obedience to US values.

(These same geniuses oversaw the selection of a new flag for Iraq, which included two thin horizontal lines that were justified as representing the two rivers of Mesopotamia, but which gave the flag an unhappy similarity to the flag of Israel, the only other flag I know of that has two thin horizontal lines.[E] The flag was hastily withdrawn, but meantime the reconstruction of Iraq was being bun-

gled and vast amounts of money were legally looted by US Contractors, given jobs that would normally be state-run but which were assigned to contractors by the geniuses of the New Right, who knew from their textbooks that anything run for profit must be much superior to anything run by the state. A working businessman would have taken it for granted that anyone you hire will rip you off unless you watch them carefully: but if anyone in the Occupation Administration knew that, they must have preferred to profit rather than to warn.)

Before the invasion of Iraq, there was the issue of Afghanistan, where Bin Laden and the core of al-Qaeda had taken refuge. This was seen as a pretext for the Afghan War, another opportunity for the geniuses of the New Right to show their immense talent for nation-building.

The initial demand to hand over Bin Laden and suppress al-Qaeda was not flatly rejected by the Taliban. They were interested in imposing their own version of Islam on Afghanistan: they were ready to co-exist with the USA. They simply demanded that the USA follow what the Taliban saw as proper procedures to show that Bin Laden had been genuinely involved in the attack on the Two Towers, which would also mean he would have forfeited the right to sanctuary that the Taliban had granted him. (Something also fundamental to the tribal culture that the anti-Soviet resistance was based within and which the Taliban have incorporated in their new hard-line Islam.)

Had the USA gone through the proper procedures and the Taliban courts had then asserted that Bin Laden was not guilty, they would have forfeited a lot of support, because no one seriously doubted that he was very much involved. By being more patient and respectful of alien customs, the USA could then still have gone to war and looked much better in the eyes of the rest of the world, especially the Muslim world. But being patient and respectful of alien customs would also have been a very un-American thing to do: even left-wing US citizens are mostly unable to do this.

The idea that the USA should treat

others as equals and respect their differences was just one of the things that most of the New Right saw as weak and unnecessary, an encouragement to disrespect and disobedience. Imposing unquestioning compliance with US demands was one of the key values of the Very Short American Century

Had the USA gone through the Taliban's version of Islamic Law in order to secure Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, they might actually have achieved this in 2001 (rather than taking till 2011 to get Bin Laden and facing an al-Qaeda that seems stronger than ever).

Everything that was done in Iraq and Afghanistan – everything that was *not* done in the case of Israel – has convinced an increasing number of Muslims that the USA is their enemy. This seems not to have got through to most US politicians.

Turkey, Egypt and Israel

Turkey is the only Muslim nation that has had any military success in the 20th century against Europe and its offshoots. Israel counts very much as a European and US offshoot, even though it has incorporated some Jews from Arab countries. Israel has been the last Western power to display the sort of superiority that the West once regarded as normal and excellent.

Europe's military rise began with the Spanish conquest of the New World, tiny armies defeating huge empires in the New World. But that did not apply in the wider world: the Spaniards fought on very even terms with the expanding Ottoman Empire. In East Asia they encountered states that were more populous and in many ways more sophisticated than Europe. In East Asia the Spaniards mostly behaved themselves, though in the 16th century they managed to take over the Philippines, which lacked a single strong indigenous state. Meantime the Portuguese held Taiwan (Formosa) for a while, but were thrown out of it by the last Chinese still fighting for the deposed Ming Dynasty. The Chinese Empire under the Manchu Dynasty was the strongest dynasty ever, and before the 19th century it was treated

with great respect.

In the 18th century, Europe still had no huge advantage, but the Dutch were able to become dominant in what is now Indonesia – another territory with many small states. The British and French fought a war within the disintegrating Mogul Empire and showed that European troops could defeat much larger numbers of troops native to India, even when they had much the same weapons. With hindsight, we can see that a shift in consciousness had occurred within Western Europe, changes that included the rise of science, the rise of industry and the rise of philosophies independent of the Christian religion. No such shift occurred elsewhere until much later.

The 19th century was the heyday of European dominance. The Ottoman Empire was largely pushed out of Europe, and survived because Britain and France fought the Crimean War on the basis that the Ottoman Empire should keep most of its Balkan possessions. In India, Britain became dominant throughout the subcontinent and was also able to defeat a rebellion by one section of the 'Sepoys', the troops native to India who had been trained in European warfare. India was only gradually adapting to the new modes of thought developed in Europe, and the Sepoys in the so-called Indian Mutiny had no better idea than to try to restore the Mogul Emperor, who was lukewarm about the idea. They let themselves be besieged in Delhi by a much smaller European army, mostly because the various commanders could not form a unified force to attack in a co-ordinated manner. The British had time to gather troops and crush them.

Britain also showed that its navy could dominate the coasts of China and intimidate that vast but decaying Empire. Japan too was intimidated into opening up to trade, and in the Second Opium War in the 1850s a joint European army was able to march on Beijing and burn the famous repository of arts that was the Summer Palace. (Condemned at the time as barbarism by many in Europe, including Victor Hugo.)

A significant change occurred in the 20th century: the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 showed that non-Europeans

could match European military might, and could do so while retaining much of their own culture. Meantime the Ottoman Empire, now largely expelled from Europe, managed to rally itself under the Young Turks. They had wanted to stay neutral in the Great War, but Britain picked a quarrel with them and declared war on the basis of some doubtful clashes with the Russian in the Black Sea. But Britain no longer had the same advantage: the attack on the Dardanelles failed and an attempt to seize Mesopotamia and its oil ended with the surrender of a British Army, one of only a handful of surrenders by an entire army in British military history. Despite which, the defeat of Germany allowed the victors to break up the Ottoman Empire and seize most of the Arab territories as European colonies, with one chunk of Greater Syria designated Palestine and ear-marked for Jewish settlement, while another chunk with a Christian majority became Lebanon. But meantime Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) rallied the Turks as a new nation-state on their core territory. He himself was born in Salonica, then an ethnically mixed city with a Jewish majority and more Turks than Greek, now Thessalonica and almost wholly Greek. He accepted the loss of Ottoman territories, including his native city. He rallied Anatolia and then defeated an invading Greek army to secure the whole of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace, and also ensured that Istanbul would remain Istanbul and not go back to being Byzantium or Constantinople. He faced down the British Empire and made them accept this.

European dominance had become wobbly but was not lost. In China in 1927, the Kuomintang lacked the nerve to take on European powers that ruled the core of Shanghai and chunks of other cities, and freely deployed warships on the Yangtze (A situation that was actually restored after World War Two until the Chinese Communists ended it by shooting and disabling the British warship *Amethyst* and then decisively defeating some other British warships that tried to rescue it.) Chinese history would surely have gone differently had Chiang Kaishek had the nerve to stand up to the European powers in 1927, but he didn't. It was left to the Japanese, bogged down in a brutal invasion of China, to deploy their navy and the rest of their armies against the Western powers in East Asia

and show they were not so difficult to defeat. The change in the balance was shown by the fall of Singapore in a few days to a Japanese force that had less than half the numbers of the defenders. The Japanese also humiliated the USA at Pearl Harbour, but they lacked oil and in the end their war-machine was defeated more by lack of raw materials than by defeat in battle.

The Korean War began as a mostly Korean conflict, but with US forces finding that they had no significant advantage over the North Koreans. They did show better grand strategy, landing huge numbers of reinforcement, getting behind the North Korean lines and driving them back to nearly the Chinese border. There was an apparent lack of concern at the possibility of Chinese intervention, yet it could be that some people in the USA thought this would be fine and would allow them to conquer China and restore to power the docile Kuomintang. What they had *not* expected was that the Chinese Peoples Army would knock them back hundreds of miles, as actually happened. They were baffled that 'Chinese laundrymen' should be able to do such a thing to first-class US and British troops.[Q] They eventually managed to explain it away by blaming US politicians for not allowing them to expand the war into China itself. They ignored the initial matter of being knocked back hundreds of miles: they learned nothing and forgot nothing and made almost exactly the same errors in Vietnam.

Meantime Israel fighting the Arabs was the one bright spot for believers in Western superiority. A lot of them didn't much like Jews, but they preferred Jews to Arabs and the ability of Israel to defeat much larger and better-equipped Arab armies was impressive. It was much more that the Arabs had managed only a superficial copy of Europe's new thinking, whereas European Jews had been part of it since the 18th century. Forming a new army and a new state, they were unburdened by the weight of tradition and the oddities of peacetime armies, they were a very efficient army indeed.

But there were limits. The Egyptians did learn, up to a point, enough to achieve some military success in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Egypt made peace in 1979. But with the failure to settle the Pales-

tinian question, that peace might come unstuck.

Israel correctly saw the perils of the fall of Mubarak in Egypt, but then failed to react sensibly. The recent storming of the Israeli embassy was provoked by a failure to apologise for killing some Egyptian soldiers in a border clash. They have now also alienated Turkey, their most dangerous possible enemy, by refusing to apologise for an attack on a sea convoy. They seem to have re-created the situation before 1973, enemies who are militarily dangerous

Israel's supporters will say those states are inherently unfriendly, which is true. But not unfriendly enough to wage war, so far. Failing to apologise is sheer pride, a notion that these are inferior peoples and it would be demeaning to treat them as equals. This isn't going to work.

What makes a human feral?

Socialism is eclipsed among the Atlantic nations. But functional conservatism is *dead* among those same nations,

Ordinary people nowadays are much less likely to identify with others in the same situation as themselves. It is very much 'look out for Number One', grab any small advantage for yourself and ignore calls for sacrifice.

Back in 1981, a television drama called *Boys from the Blackstuff* showed how traditional working-class culture was breaking up under the pressure of rising unemployment. One remark stuck with me: "unemployment had made everyone worse". That's the right way to see it: they were imperfect to start with but they have got worse. The latest round of riots involved much worse behaviour than was seen in the 1980s round of riots, looting and burning of ordinary people's shops and homes as well as attacks on rich impersonal chain-stores.

The rioters strike me as being 'Rebels Without A Clue'. Those who go to jail will come out 'networked' to the criminal underworld, of course. But what they were protesting about was unclear, if indeed they were protesting. I doubt that many were on the TUC's 'March for the Alternative', most of them are scatty and

selfish.

What you have now is something that might be called Classless Capitalism. From the 1970s there has been a loss of class signals. You find plutocrat workers in sports and entertainment, sometimes even in business. The Punk generation were part of it: there was some notion of radical values, but most of them very easily became money-orientated. It was said at the time that whereas the Hippies were mostly the next generation of the elite and trying to 'drop out', Punks were rather more trying to 'drop in', and broadly succeeded. There was a loss of the once-significant distinction between weekly or monthly pay, the vanishing of pay packets with real cash. The Industrial Working Class and its traditions have been weakened, but what gets commonly called bourgeois or respectable values have perished. Thatcher undoubtedly thought she was restoring them, but that was not the actual effect of her policies.

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]

It was in this spirit that the post-1945 reforms were carried out. A fast-expanding economy needs the state, and also a state that actively encourages the process, not just permitting it. (Marx and Adam Smith were both wrong on this.) Britain's rise to global power was never brought about by pure capitalism. Elements resembling capitalism are found as far back as the ancient city-states of Mesopotamia and it tended to be sluggish, often parasitic.

In Britain, it was the Labour Left

that broke the connection between the Labour Party and the bulk of the working class. They seemed to think it was OK to replace them by school teachers etc., people from what had always been viewed as the 'Professional Classes', people who had a salary but were on a level with small property and sometimes with the ruling class. This left the party isolated, the lack of organic connection meant that some quite sensible ideas did not get through. A lot of them also showed themselves mostly hostile to workers controlling things for themselves, notably the rejection of Workers Control.

This led on to a moral collapse, New Labour give business interests whatever they asked for. Yet despite the rhetoric, society became more collectivist and the state more intrusive. Only in the new phase it was all optimised for business interests and a rhetoric of individualism was favoured.

The 1970s onwards also saw a sleazy liberation of family life. The two ideas fitted: the state was not fit to manage the economy, morality is impractical and burdensome. It's a pity, but it is also no good crying over lost roads. When Europe splits from the USA – which I think inevitable in the long run – things might start to change very fast. Because as I said, there is no functional conservatism left.

The Tottenham Riot and the Looter Revolution

Since the 1987 riots at Broadwater Farm, most of Britain's Afro-Caribbean minority has been getting much more integrated. It seems that Broadwater Farm is one of the exceptions. Mark Duggan, the man whose shooting by the police sparked the whole thing, was definitely in possession of a gun and was probably planning revenge for the killing of a cousin and close friend. It seems he was also well-liked in his own community: I see no contradiction in that. Community politics with firearms included.

What's bizarre is that the police shot him dead when he didn't even have his gun available to fire, never mind threaten anyone with it. And that the police shot one of their own, and then gave mislead-

ing reports so that it sounded like it had been a shoot-out with Duggan. Why they did all this is a puzzle that may become clearer after the inquiry. Certainly, Duggan's family had plenty of grounds to protest.

A peaceful march was mishandled and led to a riot. But unlike earlier riots, there was random destructiveness. Ordinary families living above shops that were burnt are now homeless. It also seems that the police are refusing to let them return to whatever is left of their homes, they sealed off the area. And that seems unreasonable, they might have asked for proof it was their address and / or had a police officer go with them. But increasingly the police seem to see it as their business to repress everything when there is any outbreak of violence. Despite official talk, they are apt to view the public as potential enemies. Nice work, Thatcher!

That was Saturday. Sunday was fairly quiet, but BBC News, at least, went over almost 100% to reporting the matter. Their headlines mentioning only three other topics: the latest stages in the financial crisis, a Briton killed by Afghans and several Britons attacked and one killed by a polar bear several days ago. (Similar young men tragically killed in road accidents seldom get a single mention outside of local news.)

The BBC also seem to have perfected the art of talking at length without saying very much. I had to check newspaper reports to confirm that it had begun from a small peaceful demonstration. I was interested because a couple of weeks earlier, I had been taking another look at my 1987 article *Trickles of Blood*. This was about the Broadwater Riot of 1985 and some later violence. And I was thinking it had held up OK, though I had supposed it was mostly of historic interest. The Afro-Caribbean community had mostly integrated, and was also losing its distinct identity through intermarriage. Hindus and Muslims are largely remaining distinct, but only the Muslims have been alienated by the West's behaviour since the Soviet collapse.

Those were my thoughts on Sunday. But it seems other people were noticing the interesting fact that the Tottenham

rioters had got away with massive looting, with the police seemingly unable to stop it. Maybe some of them had also been following the Arab Spring and other cases where demonstrators seemed able to overthrow a modern state.

Oddly, one Chinese report was almost prophetic. Mostly it was paying back Britain for talking up trouble in China and other places. They said:

“If it had happened somewhere else, the chaos would have been given a name, such as ‘chrysanthemum revolution.’ Instead, it was described as overnight violence followed by looting in local media.

“Probably the only logic is since the chaos happened in the UK, the reaction to it by British media was more muted.

“What happened in London on Saturday night had all the elements that stimulate the media: an allegedly unarmed man was killed by police, justice-seeking crowd, angry protestors, police vehicles set afire and confrontations between demonstrators and police.

“No ‘oppression’ took place of course, police were simply doing their duty. According to a statement from 10 Downing Street, the police and public faced ‘aggression,’ and the property damage that occurred was ‘unacceptable.’

“British media are neither deeply troubled by the ethnic tension in London, nor are they interested to guess the impact it will have on authorities.

“No human rights organizations expressed their concerns about the conditions residents of north London are experiencing.” [A]

In London itself, some people realised how serious it was getting:

“I am appalled, dismayed and horrified by the level of destruction that took place. I wouldn’t defend the indefensible; however I would like to provide an insight into the mindset of someone willing to burn down their own neighbourhood as I believe that on this point, little has changed since the disturbances on Broadwater Farm 26 years ago.

“To behave in this manner young people have to believe they have no stake in the neighbourhood, and consequently no stake in wider society. This belief is compounded when it becomes a reality over generations, as it has done for some. If the riots at the weekend and the disturbances around London today have come as a surprise to the police and that wider society, the warning signs have long been there for those of us who engage with black youths.

“First, looting comes from the belief that if you cannot get equality and cannot expect justice, then you better make sure that you ‘get paid’. ‘It’s all about the money!’ is the motto of too many young black men, who have given up all hope of attainment in a white man’s world. This is an absolute belief for those looting at the weekend – born not only out of their experiences but their parents’, too. They want to follow the rappers and athletes who live ghetto-fabulous lifestyles based on natural talents, as opposed to learned skills. They can’t see that coming through education: those who live on estates generally survive from one wage packet to the next. Sadly this mindset also makes it easier to legitimise the selling of drugs, as that too ‘brings in the money’.

“Another sign was when they allowed themselves to be referred to by the n-word. They weren’t simply seeking to reclaim a word. They were telling the world that they were the offspring of the ‘field negro’, not the trained ‘house negro’ from slavery days. The field negro’s sole intent was to escape, and maybe even to cause a little damage to the master and his property.

“A third obvious sign of major discontent was the creation of gangs and the start of the postcode wars. Yet all of these signs were largely unheeded by wider society: all perceived to be a black problem. It’s black kids killing black kids, so it’s our problem to address.

“On Saturday, instead of imploding and turning inward and violent among themselves, as they have been doing for the past decade, the youths exploded. The trigger may well have been the killing of Mark Duggan and the insensitive treatment of his family, but this has been brewing for some time. The government

cuts – especially the withdrawal of EMA; the new barrier of tuition fees; and rising youth unemployment have all added to their sense of isolation and lack of a stake in society.

“Beyond all this, the Met also has to explain to the people of Tottenham just how it allowed this to happen. Since the 1990s I have engaged with the Met and gained a working knowledge of some of its operational processes, and I know of none that can be described as ‘let’s just leave them to it’. The police seemed intent on protecting the police station, leaving everything north of it free for the rioters to loot or destroy.

“More cynical community members suggest the Met might have been playing politics. The more the police stood off, the bolder the youths became. Some question whether disturbances mean police can turn to government, and dare it to cut their numbers in a time of civil unrest. But I believe that just as they bungled the operation to arrest Mark Duggan, and bungled the way they broke the news, they bungled it again.” [B]

I’d agree with that. Of course the rioters are uncivilised, often callous and brutal. But who made them so? Young people in the 1960s were nothing like as bad, if we protested it was for a cause we believed in.

Thatcher successfully spread greed, suspicion and mistrust. You sowed the wind, now you reap the whirlwind.

The Looter Revolution began on Monday, and at the time I noticed nothing. I was back at work and everything seemed normal, no one I met was interested in what had happened in Tottenham on Saturday. Only in the evening did we learn what had been happening in some cities, though nowhere near me. It was mostly pure looting, plus maybe some people taking the opportunity to attack the police.

No one questioned the current government’s right to rule, nor would anyone want a new election just now, when it would probably boost the Tories. So the solid and normally peaceful elements you’ve seen in some overseas protests were missing and it was all broadly

criminal.

On a small e-mail discussion group, I commented at the time:

“Day Five of the process. It began Saturday, seemed isolated on Sunday but then flared up on Monday.

“Similar things have been happening for decades [across the globe]. The exact form depends on whether there are large numbers of solid citizens who are ready to fight the police, which sometimes brings down governments. If not, it gets shaped by criminals who find it an opportunity.

“Which Labour minister was it who celebrated looting in Baghdad after Saddam was overthrown?

“It is bad because it has been greedy and careless of people’s lives. From Day One, it was noted that shops had been set on fire even though it should have been obvious that people lived in flats above. Most of them quite poor, no one chooses a flat like that if they can get anything better. And a lot of the trashed shops have belonged to families, probably part of the ‘working poor’.

“If there were a few thousand organised hard-line leftists able to organise the mass of discontented young it might be different. There is no such prospect. It is conceivable that some hard-right organisation might profit, except all of them are committed to racism and the rioters were mostly racially mixed. They might conceivably organise the white section of the discontented youth, but they have been mostly inept so far and will probably continue to be so.

“In the IT department where I work, there were people talking half-seriously about shooting the rioters. Yesterday [Tuesday] I heard people saying that if someone had a problem with the police they should fight the police, not ordinary people. Nothing has happened near us so far, but people can work out what might happen.”

That’s when I started labelling it ‘The Looter Revolution’. It spread from London to many English cities, nowhere in Wales or Scotland despite rather

greater poverty on the ‘Celtic Fringes’. It was also mostly white and sometime split along existing lines of community antagonism.

And then it all died down. It was very good it did die down: the half-serious talk about shooting the rioters might have led on to something much worse.

A successful revolution requires a vastly more coherent and disciplined movement than a radicalism that tries to change the world while accepting existing state structures as at least an interim reality. If that’s too much for you, going for an *unsuccessful* revolution is obviously stupid, though emotionally attractive to some people.

One big problem in the 1970s was loose talk about revolution by people who were in no way ready to become serious revolutionaries. It was big talk and helped mess up the chance of real reforms.

Murdoch’s Crumbling Empire

Murdoch’s only positive contribution to the global media has been to exterminate the *News of the World*, always the bottom feeder of mainstream British journalism. If the product was popular, so was opium and so are heroin and crack.

The Times was another matter, it once stood for something substantial. Its decline began before Murdoch, but he took the process further. Not that he was some isolated corruptor of a good system. Dozens of mainstream films and television programs have glorified behaviour that was almost as dirty as what *News of the World* did

“*Chef Arrested After Sensational Discovery Than Making Omelettes Breaks Eggs*”. How did people think the stories were unearthed? What did they think ‘Investigative Journalism’ was actually about.

No doubt more things will soon be brought to light ‘in the land of Murdoch where the shadows lie’.

Nepal: slow progress

Nepal has a new Prime Minister, Baburam Bhattarai. He comes from the Maoists, the largest party, and has been described as a rival to Prachanda, the top leader. His government has a majority thanks to the support of several small Madhesi parties who are based in the south of the country. The second and third largest parties in parliament after the Maoists are the Nepali Congress and the Moderate-Socialist “Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist.” They both have decided to sit in opposition. [F]

Conciliating the Madhesi parties seems a good idea. Nepal is an amazingly diverse place, but they are maybe the most distinctive. They might feel more at home in the Republic of India. But if Nepal is to survive it has to bridge that gap.

He’s also made one good gesture, going for a home-made produce when selecting an official car:

“New Nepalese PM Baburam Bhattarai has spurned the opportunity to travel in a luxurious car and has instead chosen an unglamorous vehicle assembled in Nepal.

“Dr Bhattarai, who was sworn in on Monday, has chosen an unfancied Golchha Mustang as his official vehicle.

“Not to be confused with its namesake in the US, the Mustang is made from parts imported from India and China. Fewer than 1,000 have been sold in Nepal.

“His decision to choose a Nepalese-made vehicle has won praise from the media.

“Ideally suited to Nepal’s pot-holed roads, the competitively priced Mustang has none of the luxurious trappings of previous prime ministerial vehicles.

“Its unostentatious reputation, however, makes it perhaps the ideal choice for a Maoist prime minister who has said that one of his top priorities is the eradication of poverty.” [G]

Does God hate Texas?

Summer 2011 has been mild in Britain, a cool year by modern standards. This year it has been the USA and especially Texas that has got the really bad weather.

“As the east coast of the US drowns in diluvial rains, a heatwave continues to scorch Texas, killing crops and drying up reservoirs, including this one in San Angelo State Park. In Lake Nacogdoches, the drought has exposed a piece of the space shuttle Columbia, which broke apart over Texas in 2003.

“Meteorologists say the drought and heatwave appear to be the lingering effects of the La Niña that lasted from last summer to last spring. In 19 out of the past 20 La Niñas, storm clouds travelled across the northern US, bypassing Texas and its neighbours and putting them at risk of drought.

“This year, the pattern has been amplified by a constipated jet stream, similar to that which triggered floods in Pakistan and fires in Russia last year. The jet stream normally pushes weather from west to east, but sometimes its conveyor-belt action sticks. When this happens, weather systems stay put and people below can suffer the same conditions for days, if not months, on end.

“Right now, a large high-pressure dome is parked above Texas and neighbouring states, says Gerald Meehl of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, bringing clear skies and high temperatures.

“However, Martin Hoerling of the Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder says neither phenomenon can explain the extreme rainfall on the east coast.” [H]

That was mid-August. Since then the east coast has been hit by both an earthquake and a hurricane, though you might call both of those bad luck. Or you might have made something of the odd fact that these disasters happened just as Gaddafi was being driven out of Tripoli, but widespread superstitious feeling in the USA seems also to be invulnerably

smug and sure of itself.

“Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a candidate for president of the United States, not so much stepped into -- but rather charged straight -- into the global warming controversy when he suggested that theories of man-made global warming constitute a hoax.

“The National Journal reports that Perry discussed the matter at an event in Bedford, N.H. Perry responded to a question about whether doubts about man-made global warming had caused skepticism of regulation in general. Global warming advocates have called for draconian regulations to inhibit the production of carbon dioxide they claim traps heat and thus causes global warming.” [J]

That's with Texan weather breaking all previous records for drought and heat. The more things go wrong for the New Right, the more they cling to their ideology.

If things go wrong for Obama, Perry could be running the USA by January 2013. And hasten its decline, I assume

China urged to adopt capitalism

“China may be famous as the workshop of the world, but one Hong Kong lingerie maker has found Thailand a more alluring destination, as companies increasingly shift production to countries with lower wages.

“Top Form International, which supplies companies such as Walmart, which supplies Walmart and several US department stores, has been forced to face a new reality in China as workers increasingly demand higher wages.

“Sitting in his Hong Kong office across the border from Guangdong province, Michael Austin, Top Form's chief financial officer, says the company is seeing wage increases of 20 per cent every year.

“China's policy is double wages in five years. We expect it to be shorter than that.”

“After the minimum monthly wage in Shenzhen, the special economic zone just across the border from Hong Kong, was raised from Rmb1,100 to Rmb1,320 (\$207) in April, the company speeded up plans to reduce its sewing workforce to 400, down from 1,000 a few years ago. The Chinese government also increased the minimum wage nationwide following a series of suicides last year at Foxconn, the electronics contract manufacturer.

“Top Form's bigger challenge, however, is the demographic change under way in China. The cohort of young workers entering the workforce is declining every year. Selective female foetus abortions because of China's one-child policy and a societal preference for boys has created the perverse effect that there are fewer women working in China's factories. Factory owners in southern China report that the ratio of factory workers is now 60:40 male to female, whereas it used to be predominantly female.” [K]

China has ignored outside advice and is concentrating on looking after its own people. Deng's promise was always that while 'some would get rich first', others would follow later. This is being done, not as fast as I'd like, but fast enough to be worth supporting. Not being tied to market dogmatism and being fairly well protected from financial storms by its unconvertible currency, China is doing quite nicely.

Which doesn't stop some Western experts telling them that they should change at once. It is now being admitted that China never really did allow capitalism, it was always a Mixed Economy and the state has continued to dominate. As the magazine *The Economist* put it:

“At one end of the spectrum are the giant state-controlled enterprises in industries which the government considers 'strategic', such as banking, telecoms or transport. Such firms may have sold minority stakes to private investors, but they operate more or less like government ministries. Examples include China Construction Bank, a huge backer of infrastructure projects, and China Mobile, a big mobile-phone carrier.

“Next come the joint ventures between private (often foreign) companies

and Chinese state-backed entities. Typically, the foreign firm brings technology and its Chinese partner provides access to the Chinese market. Joint ventures are common in fields such as carmaking, logistics and agriculture.

“A third group of firms appears to be fully private, in that the government owns no direct stake in them. Their bosses are not political appointees, and they are rewarded for commercial success rather than meeting political goals. But they are still subject to frequent meddling. If they are favoured, state-controlled banks will provide them with cheap loans and bureaucrats will nobble their foreign competitors. Such meddling is common in areas such as energy and the internet.

“A fourth flavour of Chinese firm is fuelled by investment by local government, often through municipally owned venture-capital or private-equity funds. These funds typically back businesses that dabble in clean tech or hire locals.” [L]

The Economist also says “big state-backed enterprises crowd out small entrepreneurial ones. They gobble up capital that China’s genuinely private firms could use far more efficiently, amassing bad debts that will eventually cause China big trouble” (Ibid.) This is based on the deep-down belief that the best thing in life is money. The same spirit that led *The Economist* to support neglect of Ireland during the 1840s potato famine, which was maybe the moment that Britain lost any real prospect of forming a stable world empire. A state that does not look after its own people will find itself weak in the things that matter.

Well-Bred Humans And Smiling Apes

The classical Darwinian view of human evolution was of superior persons separating themselves off from the rest, who eventually died out. But it seems it wasn’t like that at all.

DNA evidence now indicates that humans outside of Africa interbred with Neanderthals. And the ancestors of Melanesians interbred with some East

Asian relatives of Neanderthals known as Denisovans who have been found in the Altai mountains, just west of Mongolia. Before that, it seems that the ancestral humans who later emerged from Africa and spread to the whole world had interbred with some unknown proto-humans in Africa.

“Our species may have bred with a now extinct lineage of humanity before leaving Africa, scientists say.

“Although we modern humans are now the only surviving lineage of humanity, others once roamed the Earth, making their way out of Africa before our species did, including the familiar Neanderthals in West Asia and Europe and the newfound Denisovans in East Asia. Genetic analysis of fossils of these extinct lineages has revealed they once interbred with modern humans, unions that may have endowed our lineage with mutations that protected them as we began expanding across the world about 65,000 years ago.

“Now researchers analyzing the human genome find evidence that our species hybridized with a hitherto unknown human lineage even before leaving Africa, with approximately 2 percent of contemporary African DNA perhaps coming from this lineage. In comparison, recent estimates suggest that Neanderthal DNA makes up 1 percent to 4 percent of modern Eurasian genomes and Denisovan DNA makes up 4 percent to 6 percent of modern Melanesian genomes.” [M]

It seems humans in the last 100,000 years absorbed several other populations. Red hair – a distinctive feature of some north-west Europeans, including myself – may have come from one of the Neanderthal populations. And it seems we got some extra immunity to disease from them.

A long time before that – nearly two million years ago – there was a near-human in South African that’s been given the name *Australopithecus sediba*. It had a small brain, but a brain that already had a human shape. A good grasping hand, so it could probably make stone tools. It may have had something like a human face and perhaps could smile.

It has been suggested that this creature and not the species called *Homo Habilis* was the true ancestor of *Homo Erectus*, the ancestors of all later almost-humans including Neanderthals and mainstream humans.

“One lineage of *Australopithecus* almost certainly led into the first member of our own genus called *Homo*, and from then eventually emerged modern humans.

“But some of them are side branches, and we’re trying to work out which ones are and which ones aren’t - and that’s why this finding is so important. In many ways, these fossils are the ‘smoking gun’ just before the emergence of our own genus.’

“And Professor Chris Stringer, from London’s Natural History Museum, told BBC News: ‘This isn’t the end of the story. What may be happening is that there were several australopithecine forms all evolving human-like features in parallel as they turned to meat-eating and tool-making and moving greater distances.’ [N]

But is it really a single ancestral line and various extinct sub-branches? The near-humans may have been hybridising all along. There have been puzzles before: a creature called *Kenyanthropus* or ‘flat-faced man of Kenya’ that lived more than three million years ago and had some features of later humans but lacked others found in other near-humans who lived elsewhere. Mixing may have concentrated the best features that made up later humans.

Also on the fossil front, a new variety of cheetah has recently been found:

“Cheetahs might have been the bloodiest killers at one of the oldest known sites for humans, leaving behind more carcasses than any other predator there, scientists find.

“That evidence comes from the discovery of the remains of what is now billed as the largest cheetah known, and is now extinct....

“As to whether cheetahs might have hunted the ancient humans that lived at

Dmanisi, ‘I don’t think they really belonged to the spectrum of prey of these cheetahs, but you never know if there were confrontations over kills,’ Kahlke told LiveScience. All in all, these findings help shed light ‘on the context of the landscape our ancient relatives interacted with.’” [P]

There is only one surviving species of cheetah, and these are known to have gone through some sort of evolutionary bottle-neck, so that they have very little genetic diversity. Thinking about this I formed a wild hypothesis, was this species of cheetah partly tamed in the very early stages of humanity? Used as dogs were later used, perhaps before any humans encountered the ancestral wolf-dogs? If it were so, I’d suppose that it was an association of hunters, with the big cats never fully safe or tame and eventually they went back to the wild, replaced by dogs. Much later humans took in small cats that were safe and use-

ful when it came to saving stored grain from rats and mice.

It’s all speculation. But cooperation and hybridisation seem to be as much a part of biological history as competition and extinction.

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Libya

When is regime change not regime change?

In a written answer in Dáil Éireann on 14 April 2011, Foreign Minister, Eamon Gilmore, said:

“Calling for Colonel Gaddafi to relinquish power does not amount to actively seeking regime change” [1]

That remark is beyond parody. If the Qadhafi regime is no longer in power in Libya, the regime will have changed. So when, earlier in his answer, he said that “Colonel Qadhafi and his family should surrender power and leave the political stage in order to allow the Libyan people to peacefully determine their future”, he was seeking regime change – and arrogantly deciding on the Libyan people’s behalf that their future must exclude Colonel Qadhafi and his family.

Libyan Foreign Minister, Abdul Ati al-Obeidi, was quoted in the Guardian on 20 April 2011 as saying:

“The US, Britain and France – sometimes those countries contradict themselves. They talk about democracy, but when it comes to Libya,

they say he [Qadhafi] should leave. It should be up to the Libyan people. This should not be dictated from any other head of state. It is against the principle of democracy.” [2]

Minister al-Obeidi should add Ireland to his list of countries that contradict themselves.

(Gilmore was replying to an interesting question from Fine Gael Deputy, Eoghan Murphy, who asked for “details of all those Heads of State outside of the European Union that the European Council has formally called on to step down”. Currently, it seems that Colonel Qadhafi is the only one that the EU has called on to step down.)

Who do they think they’re kidding?

In their letter to various papers on 14 April, Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy were also reluctant to use the phrase “regime change”, while saying they wanted regime change. They wrote:

“Our duty and our mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1973 is to protect civilians,

and we are doing that. It is not to remove Qaddafi by force. But it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Qaddafi in power.” [3]

Who do they think they’re kidding? Of course, they are trying to “remove Qaddafi by force”.

They have been attempting to destroy as much of Qadhafi’s armed forces as possible; they have been giving air support to the armed rebellion against his regime; they have admitted to supplying non-lethal equipment and training to the rebel forces (they haven’t so far admitted to supplying arms); they have now got boots on the ground, albeit in limited numbers.

One could be forgiven for thinking that they want the rebellion to succeed in overthrowing the Qadhafi regime by force with their help.

NATO Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, once foolishly took the provisions of Resolution 1973 about protecting civilians literally and suggested that NATO would be pre-

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Parliament Notes

Dick Barry

MPs' Pensions

In the last issue of L&TUR, (July/August), PNs reported that MPs' pension scheme would be reformed in the light of changes to other public sector schemes. At the time no details were available and this remains the case, but on 14 July the Leader of the House Sir George Young announced the next step in the Coalition's plans for reform. In his statement to the Commons Young told MPs, "The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, which achieved Royal Assent in April 2010, conferred powers on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) to determine hon. Members' salary and pensions, independently of the House. The independent determination and administration of these matters is a crucial part of the process of restoring trust in Parliament, and any decision to defer the move to independence will result in MPs continuing to determine their own remuneration, which the House has firmly rejected. Additionally, the Independent Public Services Commission, chaired by Lord Hutton of Furness, was established in June 2010, and published its Final Report on 10 March 2011. We have consistently made clear that parliamentary pensions must be reformed in the light of the Commission's findings and subsequent application to other public service schemes. There is no case for MPs being treated differently from other public servants on this issue."

"As the next step, I will table a motion before the House rises for the summer recess. This will invite the House to support the approach to public service pension reform set out in the Final Report of the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission. The motion will propose that IPSA should introduce a new pension scheme for MPs by 2015, informed by the Commission's findings, and their subsequent application to other public service pension schemes. In recognising the case for an increase in pensions contributions made in Lord Hutton's interim report,

the motion will invite IPSA to increase contribution rates for hon. Members from April 2012 in line with changes in pension contribution rates for other public service schemes. The motion, which will be debated, will also reassert the importance of independent determination of MPs' remuneration. Subsequently, I will commence the relevant sections of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, transferring all responsibility for MPs' pensions to IPSA. This approach is similar to the one followed for MPs' pay, where the House resolved to freeze pay, before the relevant commencement order transferred responsibility to IPSA. Once responsibility for MPs' pensions has been transferred to IPSA, MPs will have finally relinquished the power to set the terms of their own remuneration."

This is a significant, and long overdue, change in the terms and conditions of MPs' pay and pension scheme. So significant as to merit widespread media coverage. Understandably and rightly, the MPs' expenses scandal was given huge coverage, but media reports of the proposed pay and pension reforms were conspicuous by their absence. One reform missing, however, is a limit on the age of MPs. The current position is that there is no limit. The oldest Member at 81 is Sir Peter Tapsell, and there are a number in their 70s. It is said in defence of this that Parliament needs men and women with experience of its workings. That may be so, but clinging to a parliamentary seat well into old age denies young, talented, men and women the opportunity to serve as an MP. In recent years there has been strong support to get more women into Parliament. This has had some success, but not as much as one would hope. With the average age of an MP at 50 there is now a need for more young people in the House.

Footnote. Sean O'Grady, Economics Editor for the Independent, made the following interesting point about public sector pensions in the 18 July issue. "Public

sector pensions, though expensive by any standards, are not, properly speaking 'unsustainable' as ministers have sometimes claimed. In fact, they are due to fall as a proportion of national income long term, from 2 per cent to 1.4 per cent, the OBR confirming the findings of the Hutton report. The gross cost may be £1.33 trillion at today's prices, but that is not so large on a half-century view, and is in any case highly sensitive to marginal movements in long-term interest rates (anyone's guess). Thus, the OBR admitted that £260 billion of the 'increase' in the notional bill for public service pensions since 2010 was purely due to the fall in interest rates. Suffice to say that public sector pensions, unfair and unjust as they arguably may be, are a bit irrelevant to fiscal sustainability. They will fall anyway, because of past reforms to them, the current pay freeze on state employees and planned redundancies by 2015."

Will The Cap Fit?

Sajid Javid, newly elected Tory MP for Bromsgrove, was given leave on 12 July to bring in a Bill, "to set a legal cap on the amount of outstanding net Government debt as a percentage of gross domestic product; and for connected purposes." In his opening remarks he referred to sovereign defaults in Mexico, 1994, Thailand and Indonesia, 1997, Russia, 1998, Argentina, 2001, and, more recently, in Iceland, Greece, Ireland and Portugal. And, predictably, he claimed that "Had we not had a change of Government 14 months ago, we could have been engulfed in a sovereign debt crisis of our own", conveniently forgetting that Brown and Darling had taken robust steps to tackle the economic crisis before leaving office, steps that were endorsed by the IMF and other economic bodies. What is more, he said, "Although the coalition Government have restored fiscal probity, it would have been far better if we had not been taken to the brink in the first place."

And in Javid's mind it was the last Government alone that took us to the brink. And not just the last Labour Government, but all Governments because they take no heed of what the markets are telling them. This is what he said about markets: "Some Governments, however, are determined to learn the hard way that the markets will impose a limit on state borrowing, just as they do on individuals and companies. The recent bail-outs of Greece, Ireland and Portugal show what happens when Governments ignore that fundamental truth, and act as though investors had no choice but to buy their bonds. Clearly, market discipline is not enough to hold back reckless state spending. By the time the market itself says no, it is too late." In Javid's world markets are always in total control and bear no responsibility for what happens to national economies.

He went on to say, "Despite the Government's efforts, Britain's inherited economic problem is such that it will take at least another four years to eliminate the structural budget deficit. As a result, net national debt will peak at 71% of GDP in 2014. The coalition Government have not shied away from tough decisions and have embarked on a major programme of public sector reforms, but what is to stop a future Government reverting to unrestrained borrowing? A debt cap is no guarantee against fiscal irresponsibility, but it will certainly make it harder for politicians to rely on their favourite ruse of 'Buy now, pay later'. Although my Bill would leave it to the Treasury to set the cap level, I think that fixing it at about 40% of GDP would be appropriate. There is nothing particularly significant about that figure, but, given my 20 years of experience, I believe it would be a sensible place at which to begin the debate." But buying now and paying later is what makes the economy go around. It's what most of us do on a daily basis. Hasn't he heard of credit cards? And if his Bill allows the Treasury to set the cap level, what is the point of it? However Javid is right on one point: there is nothing particularly significant about his proposed cap of 40%. As long as his Bill cedes power to the Treasury, the Government of the day will set the cap level.

Labour's John Mann speaking against the Bill drew Javid's attention to

a number of figures on the political right who rejected the idea of a cap on net Government debt. Mann said, "I am sure the hon. Member for Bromsgrove would love to pray in aid some of the past figures of the right, such as Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Winston Churchill, but unfortunately for him there is only one politician whom he can pray in aid on the proposition of capping the national debt, and he is a Labour politician; or rather, he was a Labour politician who switched sides. His son was once the MP for Bassetlaw, and his name was McDonald: Ramsay McDonald. At that time, a failure to understand basic economics led to the formation of a national Government and to John Maynard Keynes having to rescue those who were stuck in the failed logic of the gold standard and everything that emanated from that. A similar constraint on Government action was rejected between 1980 and 1984 by Ronald Reagan, who in fact did exactly the opposite. Such a constraint was also rejected by Margaret Thatcher between 1979 and the end of the 1980s. Although she did many things wrong, she did not accept the fundamental concept and she failed to shrink the state."

"Such a constraint was also rejected by Winston Churchill, and that example is perhaps the most relevant. Can we imagine being sat here in 1939? Luckily, Keynes had by then won the argument against Ramsay McDonald and the Labour traitors who formed the national Government on the flexibility of economic policy. Hitler was determined to invade this country, as well as the rest of Europe, and we were required to spend to defend ourselves. Can we imagine our being hamstrung by a requirement to change legislation to allow this country to spend money from the public purse in order, rightly, to defend ourselves? Now we see the shaking of heads by those on the Government benches, because the argument has been lost - I will demonstrate precisely why they have lost the intellectual and economic argument. In 1999, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, Mr Brown, decided to pay off some of the national debt. Which bits was he paying off? He was paying off national debt from the Napoleonic wars, which went back nearly 200 years, to a time when, again, there was a national crisis and a

wise Government determined that this country should spend to defend itself. So, we see the naivety of the would-be Reaganites and Thatcherites, who are, in fact, McDonaldites. They would restrict our ability to act at times of crisis on the economy, they would reject the wisdom of Keynes and they would opt purely for the logic of Milton Friedman adopted and tried out in 1973 in Chile - the people there were the only ones after Ramsay McDonald to attempt this economic philosophy. That is what the motion proposes."

Javid's Bill had the signed support of Frank Field (Labour), Mark Garnier (Conservative), Matthew Hancock (Conservative), Joseph Johnson (Conservative), David Laws (Liberal Democrat), Andrea Leadsom (Conservative), Jesse Norman (Conservative), John Redwood (Conservative), David Ruffley (Conservative) and Nicolas Soames (Conservative). The Bill was read the First time on 12 July 2011 and is to be read the Second time on Friday 20 January 2012.

NHS Savings

Government Ministers continue to insist that large savings will be made in the NHS as a result of the changes proposed in the Health and Social Care Bill. On 12 July Minister of State Simon Burns told Labour's Valerie Vaz that, "The Treasury had sight of the impact assessment published alongside the Health And Social Care Bill, which estimated savings of about £5 billion by 2014-15, and £1.7 billion a year thereafter. A revised impact assessment will be published as the Bill progresses." Burns went on to say that, "The money for the new structures - NHS commissioning board, the clinical senates, the local commissioning groups and Public Health England - will come out of the existing allocations.....and as a result of improving and cutting wasteful inefficiencies and bureaucracy, we will actually be saving significant sums. Administration will be cut by a third, so that we can invest all the savings in front-line services." Here we have an example of an estimate accepted as a hard fact. But what if the estimate proves to be wildly optimistic as has happened so often in government?

Again, Sean O'Grady commented on this in the Independent of 18 July when he wrote, "Ring fencing the NHS is one thing, but much of the Government's strategy depends on the Health Service finding implausibly large efficiency savings and the rest from its reforms, whatever they may be. As to the importance of this, we have the word of Stephen Nickell, one of the three wise men running the OBR and a distinguished Oxford economist: 'Health service productivity is the biggest single factor on the sustainability of the public finances.' O'Grady again: "According to the OBR's most pessimistic projections, if the demands on the NHS grow as fast as they have recently, and productivity fails to keep up, as it usually has done, NHS spending will rise so fast that it will push the national debt to over 200 per cent of GDP by 2060 - not just sustainable, but ruinous." And in that event a **real** saving of £5 billion over the next five years and £1.7 billion thereafter will be unable to save the NHS.

Price Explosions

Even with the best will in the world Government Ministers are powerless to do anything about rising domestic energy prices. And the energy regulator Ofgem has proved to be a toothless tiger, unable to control the rapacity of the big six utility companies. On 7 July Energy and Climate Change Secretary Chris Huhne was asked whether he had had discussions with the companies about domestic energy bills. Huhne told MPS that, "Energy and Climate Change Ministers and officials regularly meet energy suppliers to discuss market issues, and this afternoon I will be hosting an energy summit for small, non-big six suppliers, to discuss the barriers they face to competing in the market, with a view to making it as easy as possible for them to enter it." Thus Huhne neatly dodged the question of rising domestic energy bills, knowing that a major cause is the market dominance of the big six suppliers, who account for some 99 per cent of customers. He would like to find ways of making it easier for small suppliers to enter the market, but knows that this is a difficult, long term aim. His current advice therefore is that customers should

switch suppliers. But what is the point of this when the big six effectively operate a price cartel?

Lib Dem Jo Swinson commented that, "The big six seem very quick to put prices up, but they act much more slowly to reduce their prices when wholesale prices fall. There are alternatives out there, such as the social enterprise Ebico, which supplies energy on a not-for-profit basis. What more can the Secretary of State do to make customers aware that they do not need to stick with the big six if they are being ripped off?" Huhne evaded the issue of the effect of changes in wholesale prices on the retail price of electricity and gas. "The key", he said, "is to get people to act. At the moment 99% of people are with the big six, and they are very unlikely to look at alternatives and to switch. If we can get more people to look more comprehensively on a regular basis at alternatives, substantial savings can be made, and we can drive greater competition, we can simplify bills, we can bring new entrants into the market, we can make sure that Ofgem is keeping that market under review and we can give the best possible deal to British customers." Yes, customers should look for a better deal, but there are a number of reasons why few customers switch suppliers. A major obstacle is the lack of easily accessible information about the best available tariffs. And even where information is available many customers, particularly the elderly, find it difficult to understand. And those that do switch often find that the reward has not been worth the effort.

Two days after MPs questioned Huhne about domestic energy bills it was reported that British Gas had announced price rises of 18% in gas and 16% in electricity with effect from 18 August 2011. This followed price increases by Scottish Power in July of 19% in gas and 10% in electricity, from 1 August 2011. And on 5 August E.ON announced increases of 18.1% in gas and 11.4% in electricity. Scottish & Southern Energy raised gas prices by 18% and electricity prices by 11%, with effect from 14 September. While Npower raised the price of gas by 15.7% and electricity by 7.2%, to take effect on 1 October. The rises were blamed on a 30% increase in

wholesale gas prices this year. Only eDF of the big six have not announced a price rise, offering instead a package that fixes prices until the end of 2012. But one would be advised to look carefully at the terms before taking up the offer.

On 10 August the Guardian commented that "Although wholesale energy prices have risen significantly this year, they are still down about a third from their peak in 2008, while average domestic energy bills have risen to record levels." It will be interesting to see over the next few months whether there are any changes to energy prices. As crude oil prices fall - in July delivery prices for September were \$85 a barrel, and they could fall to below \$80 in the coming months from a high of \$100 plus - it will be difficult for energy suppliers to maintain prices at their new levels. But if the increased price levels remain in place it is estimated that a further 1.3 million households will be pushed into fuel poverty. Fuel poverty kicks in when at least 10% of income is spent on energy bills. In 2009, the latest year for which figures are available official estimates showed there were 5.5 million households in fuel poverty.

Electricity Market Reform

A few hours before his 'grilling' on energy price increases on 12 July, Chris Huhne outlined his plans for reform of the electricity market. He began with the following risible observation: "Since privatisation in 1990, our electricity market has served us well, delivering reliable, affordable electricity...." Reliable? Has Huhne forgotten the power failures in the 1990s, when large areas of England were without electricity for days due to the inability of the companies to deal swiftly with the problems? Affordable? Customers were promised lower prices following privatisation, but in fact, apart from the early years when they were reduced to attract investors, they have increased practically year on year. He then went on to sound a warning about future energy bills. "Over the next decade", he said, "around a quarter of our existing power stations will close, threatening the security of our electricity supplies. Some £110 billion of invest-

ment is needed to replace those plants and to upgrade the grid. That is twice the rate of investment of the last decade and the equivalent of 20 new power stations. At the same time, demand for electricity could double over the next 40 years as the population increases and as we increasingly turn to electricity for heat and transport.”

Here is Huhne’s warning: “None of these challenges can be met for free. We will have to pay to secure reliable, clean electricity for the future and we cannot ignore the long-term trends in electricity prices. Increases in wholesale costs and the carbon price are likely to lead to higher bills in future, even without factoring in the huge investment in new infrastructure that is needed. It is vital that we put in place market arrangements that deliver this investment as cost-effectively as possible. The current electricity market simply is not up to the job and cannot deliver investment at the scale and pace we need.” Now this is a damning indictment of the electricity market that Huhne had earlier said had served us well, delivering reliable, affordable electricity. Why is it that this market, in Huhne’s words, is “not up to the job” and “cannot deliver investment at the scale and pace we need”? When electricity was nationalised by the post-war Attlee Government, money was found to build an industry that became the envy of the world. And this was at a time when coal and steel also became publicly owned and the NHS was founded. Certainly, they were years of austerity for the bulk of the population, but, through social ownership, a Government dismissed as a failure by Blue Labour’s founder Lord Glasman, laid the foundations for the relatively prosperous 1950s. Oh, what need there is for a government of such ilk today!

Huhne’s electricity market reform consists of five key elements. First, a new carbon price floor, announced in the last budget, to put a fairer price on carbon and providing an incentive to invest in low-carbon generation. Secondly, a new system of long-term contracts to remove uncertainty for investors and consumers. Thirdly, an emissions performance standard to send a clear regulatory signal about the amount of carbon that new fossil-fuel power stations can emit. Fourthly, a new contracting framework for capac-

ity, changing the way we secure back-up electricity. Fifthly, transitional arrangements to be put in place to ensure that there is no hiatus in investment while the new system is set up.

Huhne claimed that “Alongside action by Ofgem to improve liquidity, the reforms will boost competition within the market” and “will achieve our aims at least to the consumer, with bills for households and businesses likely to be lower and less volatile over the period to 2030 than if we had left the market as it is.” So, having warned electricity customers that they face higher bills as wholesale costs and the carbon price increases, he is now saying that the reforms will mean that prices will be lower than forecast. But the big question is: who will pay for the projected £110 billion investment programme, if the market is not up to the job of doing so? Why, the consumer of course. Simples!

Open All Hours

Launching the Coalition’s Open Services White Paper on 11 July David Cameron boldly claimed, “Right across public services we’re putting you in charge like never before. and because we’re doing that, open public services are going to mean, quite simply, more of what you want.” This short statement encapsulates Cameron’s concept of the Big Society. Little did he know at the time, but less than a month later thousands took him at his word, took charge of the streets, and grabbed what they had constantly been told they should have, but couldn’t afford. And Cameron’s reaction was to condemn their behaviour as “completely unacceptable.” It was, but it was also understandable in the context of what had happened in Tottenham only a few hours previously, and of the culture of avaricious capitalism that has grown without restraint within the lifetime of many of those who looted and rioted.

Financier Sir Ronald Cohen, recently appointed Chairman of the Big Society Bank, appeared to support this view in the Independent of 19 August where he was quoted as saying, “When I saw the

rioting I connected it with the fact that life is getting tougher for a lot of people and they might be feeling society is not fair as it should be. It sounds now as if there was also an element of hooliganism and gang behaviour, but it is not an either/or situation.” But Cameron in his most populist mood, asserts that it is. And if society is broken, as Cameron often remarks, how will his proposals to reform public services help to fix it?

Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Letwin provided a little insight into this in his statement to the Commons on 11 July. He opened up with such a glowing tribute to public services that it left one wondering if he was actually describing the UK’s public services and, if so, just what is broken that needs to be fixed. “Public services”, he said, “save lives, rescue people from disease and ignorance, and protect people from crime and poverty.” Gosh, this sounds like a description of public services in the third world rather than the UK. He went on, “Much of what is done by our public services is fantastic and they are among the best in the world, but we can do even better.” Of course we can, but not if spending is cut to the bone.

But Letwin told MPs how we can do better: “The central point is that when public services are not up to scratch, those who are well off can pay for substitutes, but for those who are not well off, there is no opportunity to pay for substitutes. We need to give everybody the same choice in and power over the services they receive that well-off people already have.” So Letwin and, presumably, Cameron believe, for example, that the very best in education should be available to all. And, as spending cuts mean that only Eton, Harrow, Winchester et al can offer this, the ‘feral’ children of London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester will have the choice of attending one of those schools or going to a local academy or comprehensive. Like hell, they will.

According to Letwin the Coalition’s principles are clear: “They are choice, decentralisation, diversity, fair access and accountability. We will increase choice wherever possible; power will be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level; public services will be open to a diverse

range of providers; we will ensure that there is fair access and fair funding for all; and services will be accountable to users and taxpayers.” All of this sounds strangely familiar. Didn’t Labour under Blair and Brown begin to decentralise services and open them up to a range of providers, while promising fair access and funding?

There is, however, a big question hanging over the current proposals. Where a public service is taken over by a private provider, how will it become accountable to users and taxpayers? In what sense, for example, are private providers of services like Capita, G4S and Serco accountable to users and taxpayers? Letwin seems to be implying that services provided by central or local government are not accountable. But it is not accountability that Letwin and co. are concerned about, but ownership. They just don’t like public ownership. And they know that private companies are in a much stronger position than charities and community groups to take over ownership of services. Diversity of choice and ownership is fine in theory, but the reality is different.

Labour’s Glenda Jackson put this succinctly when she asked; “Is this White Paper the somewhat unfortunate offspring of the Minister’s previous passionately held ambition to privatise the world and the first Thatcherite attempt to take away power from local authorities, which resulted in all in-house services being taken away from local political power and brought absolute chaos for those who were dependent on those services? As he has clearly not learned from those previous mistakes, how can he possibly guarantee that the same chaos will not ensue once this White Paper goes through?”

And Labour’s Nick Raynsford put his finger on an area of potential conflict. “The right hon. Gentleman made a lot in his speech of the potential for local community groups to take over assets of community value and seize control of planning in their areas. He will be aware that there are communities in various areas of the country - I would remind him of the route of High Speed 2 - that are not necessarily in favour of development and may wish to use enhanced powers to

stop it. He will also be conscious that the Chancellor said in his budget speech that in such instances of national economic development interest, the default planning position should be to say yes. Who will prevail in a conflict between a community wanting to stop a development and the Chancellor wanting to proceed?” Letwin’s reply indicated that while local people will have a say in housing development for example, they will not be allowed to block a major project such as a new nuclear power station or high speed rail link.

A Very Wicked Month

The House of Commons was recalled on 11 August to allow MPs to debate the disturbances that began in Tottenham, North London, on 6 August, and which spread to a few other London districts and to a handful of other English cities. If August is a wicked month, as the title of Edna O’Brien’s 1965 novel implied, then August 2011 was a very wicked month, as MPs stated in their finest moral tones. And the media, indulging in its customary bout of hysteria, rubbed its collective hands with glee. That there was no looting or rioting in Scotland or Wales, except for a minor incident in Cardiff, or large areas of England, including the whole of the North East and Yorkshire, was deemed not to be newsworthy. Nor was the fact that 99.9% of the 1 million or so 11 to 19 year olds in London did not loot or riot. To his credit, Labour’s Mike Gapes did point this out, but it was dismissed as a minor detail. And of the hundreds of MP’s contributions in two separate debates, led David Cameron and Teresa May respectively, that lasted more than seven hours, only two attempted to deal with the causes of the violence.

For David Cameron: “It is criminality, pure and simple - and there is absolutely no excuse for it.” And many MPs described it as “mindless.” To act mindlessly is to act without intelligence. But the looting and rioting had a specific purpose, which suggests a degree of intelligence. Granted, it was not at the level of former Etonians and Oxonians. It was at a street intelligence level that enables ‘feral’ youth to survive. Cameron attempted to explain something of the background to the events: “Initially,

there were some peaceful demonstrations following Mark Duggan’s death and understandably and quite appropriately the police were cautious about how they dealt with them. However, this was used as an excuse by opportunist thugs in gangs, first in Tottenham itself, then across London and other cities. It is completely wrong to say there is any justifiable causal link. It is simply preposterous for anyone to suggest that people looting in Tottenham at the weekend, still less three days later in Salford, were in any way doing so because of the death of Mark Duggan. Young people stealing flat-screen televisions and burning shops - that was not about politics or protest, it was about theft.”

So, according to Cameron the Tottenham police were cautious about how they dealt with the peaceful demonstrations following Mark Duggan’s death. But this is to see the events purely through the eyes of the police. The Duggan family were clearly upset, if not angry, when they first heard about their son’s death through the TV news. The normal procedure is for the police to inform the family first. So one can imagine the effect on them when they, and millions of other viewers, heard of the death via the TV. And the peaceful demonstrations Cameron refers to took place outside Tottenham police station where the Duggan family and friends had gone to ask for an explanation. They were kept waiting for five hours before a senior police officer spoke to them. If that and the death of a family member, who may have been the victim of a ‘shoot to kill’ policy, is not enough to arouse anger, then it’s difficult to know what is. There is a long history of conflict between the police and the black ‘community’ in Tottenham. The initial looting and rioting, which seems to have been organised by gangs, may have been sparked off by Mark Duggan’s death, but it then escalated through the use of social networks and saturated TV coverage. It became opportunistic theft and violence, but its roots are deep and stretch a long way back.

Cameron was clearly incensed by the looting and rioting and he made a feeble attempt to put it in context. “Finally”, he said, “let me turn to the deeper problem. Responsibility for crime always

lies with the criminal. These people were all volunteers; they did not have to do what they did, and they must suffer the consequences. But a crime has a context, and we must not shy away from it. I have said before that there is a major problem in our society with our children growing up not knowing the difference between right and wrong. This is not about poverty; it is about culture - **a culture that glorifies violence**, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities.” (my emphasis).

The culture of violence in British society has existed since time immemorial. There has been periodic looting and rioting over the centuries. And England, then Britain, has been engaged in war in one form or another for at least 1000 years. What would we do without a war to fight? Cameron glories in this. His class has recruited young people like those in Tottenham and elsewhere to fight their wars. Many hundreds of thousands of young working class men (and women) have died defending ‘their’ country. And in recent years they have died in Iraq and continue to die in Afghanistan, wars based on lies. Wars which Cameron supported. And it was Cameron, along with Sarkozy, who was gung-ho over the prospect of bombing Libya. War, and the violence that it creates, is portrayed as exciting and glamorous. Look at the recruitment adverts for the army directed at young British men. Join the army and be a real man, is their subliminal message. The working class needs no lectures from Cameron, or any other politician, about a culture that glorifies violence. The working class didn’t create the culture, but it continues to suffer from its effects more than Cameron and his.

Apart from Cameron’s feeble effort to put the events into context, only two other MPs did so. One was Caroline Lucas, the Green Party member for Brighton Pavilion. The other was Tottenham’s Labour MP, David Lammy. The following are key extracts from his speech. “The events of last week started with the death of Mark Duggan, one of my constituents, during a police operation. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, there were reports of an exchange of fire between Mr Duggan and the police. We now know that two shots were fired and that they

both came from police weapons. A grieving family and my constituents deserve to know the truth about what happened that night. IPCC investigation must be thorough; it must be open; and it must be seen to be independent. Other serious questions need answering. Why did the Duggan family first hear about the death of their son not from a police officer, but when the news was broadcast on national television? Why, when they arrived at Tottenham police station to ask questions and to stage a peaceful protest, were they made to wait for five hours before a senior police officer was made available to them? Why, when that peaceful protest was hijacked by violent elements, were a few skirmishes allowed to become a full-scale riot, with far-reaching consequences? Mistakes have been made by the Metropolitan police, and this must be subject to a full inquiry.”

Lammy went on to condemn the looting, rioting and violence that followed. And he agreed with Conservative Andrew Selous that fathers should accept more responsibility for their children, neatly connecting it with a wider culture of violence: “I certainly agree that this is the major issue this country must confront, but ‘Grand Theft Auto’ culture that glamorises violence must also be confronted; a consumer culture fixated on brands that we wear rather than who we are and what we achieve must be confronted; a gang culture with warped notions of loyalty, respect and honour must also be confronted. A civilised society should be policed not just by uniformed officers, but by notions of pride and shame and of responsibility towards others. Although that is true, there is another side to the story. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister warned that those involved in the rioting were risking their own futures. I am afraid the problem is far greater than that. Those lashing out - randomly, cruelly and violently - feel that they have nothing to lose. They do not feel bound by the moral code that the rest of society adheres to; they do not feel part of the rest of society. We cannot live in a society where the banks are too big to fail, but whole neighbourhoods are allowed to sink without trace. The problems of those neighbourhoods have not emerged overnight, but the events of the last week are a wake-up call.”

Chickens

Where do you think your children are tonight. Maybe out down the High Street with a light.

How long will it be before they come home. Irresponsibility allows them to roam.

Remember when they were called feral rats. Seemed to prefer hoods to banker’s top hats.

When they come home will you keep their *presents*. Something valuable gone without consent.

Their mugshots could appear in the tabloids. Will you grass kith-and-kin while still annoyed.

Mrs Obama, please don’t take fright. Your son burnt down Afghanistan last night.

Mrs Sarkozy, answer the question. Did your *filis* in Libya cause combustion.

Mrs Cameron, it’s you son again. He and pals play drones as an arcade game.

Better take your hands off me, dickhead. Be content Tottenham has but one dead.

The Hague is only for little people. Our judge is high above the steeple.

Wilson John Haire.

It's A Fact

Between 1981 and 2010 there were 6,024 fatalities on Britain's motorways. The highest number, 287, occurred in 1987. The lowest, 118, in 2010. In 1981 there were 1,541 miles of motorway. By 2010 this had reached 2,225 miles.

(Written Parliamentary Answer 5 July 2011).

Data from the Households Below Average Incomes for 2009-10, show that in England, after housing costs, the proportion of pensioners in relative poverty was 16% in both rural and urban areas. Coincidentally, 16% of the population of England is aged over 65.

(Written PA 14 July 2011).

The number of reported domestic violence incidents in England and Wales in 2006-07 was 671,374; in 2007-08 @ 674,756; in 2008-09 @ 766,047; and in 2009-10 @ 793,526.

(Written PA 18 July 2011).

Numbers of people eligible for a bus pass in England from mid 2008 to mid 2010 were 11,324,200 in mid 2008; 11,541,100 in mid 2009; and 11,746,500 in mid 2010.

(Written PA 18 July 2011).

At November 2010, 9,776,260 people in England were in receipt of the state pension; in Scotland there were 1,009,040; and in Wales 636,200.

(Written PA 19 July 2011).

In 2010, 84% of public sector employees were members of workplace pension schemes. This represents 6.2 million employee jobs. In 2010, 36% of private sector employees were in workplace pension schemes. This represents 6.6 million employee jobs.

(Written PA 11 August 2011).

pared to bomb rebel forces, if they were threatening civilians. That was the wrong message. He said it only once.

What is authorised in Resolution 1973?

There has been a lot of media chatter about what actions by NATO are authorised under Resolution 1973. Arming the rebels? Providing forward air controllers to the rebels to identify targets for NATO bombers? Training the rebels? Putting foreign troops on the grounds? Targeting Qadhafi? Academic lawyers and politicians have given their various opinions ad nauseam.

But, the truth is that if you are a veto-wielding member of the Security Council, as the US, UK and France all are, you can make a Security Council resolution mean what you want it to mean, because, even if you stretch its meaning way beyond credibility, you are immune from sanction by the Security Council for doing so – since you have a veto.

Remember, the US/UK claimed Security Council authority for invading Iraq in March 2003 in Resolution 678 passed in November 1990 for the very different purpose of expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

Of course, there may be a more general political price to pay in claiming authority way beyond the obvious meaning of a resolution.

Perhaps, Russia and China, who allowed 1973 to pass by abstaining in the Security Council, will be less inclined to sit on their hands in future. But, it is absurd for them to be complaining, as they have been doing, that US, UK and France have been acting beyond the terms of the resolution. It's even more absurd for South Africa, which voted for 1973, to be complaining. The US, UK and France were always going to interpret the resolution as authorising whatever they think is necessary for the rebellion to succeed in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime.

Stalemate

Up to now, they have been pinning their hopes on destroying Gaddafi's forces from the air and giving air support to the rebel forces in the Benghazi area as a means of achieving regime change. However, the rebel forces don't show much sign of becoming effective. The US, UK and France seem to be strangely reluctant to arm them, even though the arms embargo imposed by Resolution 1970 was specifically cancelled in Resolution 1973 in the context of taking action to protect civilians. Could it be that they are worried that arms they supply might eventually fall into the wrong hands?

At the time of writing (24 April 2011) a military stalemate exists. The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, has admitted as much. The best way to protect civilians and minimise civilian casualties is to have

a ceasefire, as soon as possible, and to take up offers of mediation from, for example, Turkey, which has offered to mediate from the outset.

But that is intolerable to the US, the UK and France, because that would leave Qadhafi in power. So, the likelihood is they will continue to bolster the rebels, and turn civil unrest into civil war. Whether they eventually succeed in making the rebel army into something that with close air support from NATO can take control of more territory from Qadhafi remains to be seen. What is certain is that a lot of civilians will die in the process. The overthrow of Gaddafi may require substantial numbers of NATO troops on the ground, something which the US, the UK and France are reluctant to do, because they don't want to become embroiled in another country after their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. That, rather than Resolution 1973's ban on "a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory", is what is deterring them. If necessary, NATO troops could be portrayed as "a liberation force", as journalists have already been speculating.

So, the likelihood is that bolstering the rebels will continue for the foreseeable future.

Was a massacre imminent?

The US, UK and France constantly justify their intervention in Libya on the grounds that it has saved many, many lives, especially in

Benghazi. In his weekly address to the American people on 26 March 2011, President Obama told them that Qadhafi was threatening a “bloodbath”. But he reassured them:

“We’re succeeding in our mission. We’ve taken out Libya’s air defenses. Qaddafi’s forces are no longer advancing across Libya. In places like Benghazi, a city of some 700,000 that Qaddafi threatened to show ‘no mercy’, his forces have been pushed back. So make no mistake, because we acted quickly, a humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided and the lives of countless civilians—innocent men, women and children—have been saved.” [4]

Two days later, he asserted:

“We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi — a city nearly the size of Charlotte (NC) — could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.” [5]

That implies that, without NATO intervention, Gadhafi might have killed nearly 700,000 people.

The view that a massacre was imminent in Benghazi is based on a speech made by Qadhafi on 17 March 2011, in which he threatened “no mercy” for his enemies.

He did say: “We will have no mercy on them”. But by “them” he clearly meant armed rebels, who stand and fight, not all the city’s inhabitants. He also said: “We have left the way open to them. Escape. Let those who escape go forever” and that “whoever hands over his weapons, stays at home without any weapons, whatever he did previously, he will be pardoned, protected”.

But the best evidence that Qadhafi was not planning a massacre in Benghazi was that he didn’t perpetrate a massacre in the other cities his forces recaptured, either fully or partially, including Zawiya, Misurata, and Ajdabiya. There is no doubt that considerable numbers of civilians have been killed in the process, but it cannot be said that massacres have occurred.

The above is based on *Did Obama avert a bloodbath in Libya?* by Chicago Tribune columnist, Steve Chapman, published on 3 April 2011 [6]. He says that he

“emailed the White House press office several times asking for concrete evidence of the danger, based on any information the administration may have, but a spokesman declined to comment”.

He comments:

“That’s a surprising omission, given that a looming holocaust was the centerpiece of the president’s case for war. Absent specific, reliable evidence, we have to wonder if the president succumbed to unwarranted panic over fictitious dangers.” Strangely, in their letter on 14 April, Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy didn’t claim to have saved any lives at all, merely, that “tens of thousands of lives have been protected” by their action.

What did the Arab League request?

The powers that are bombing Libya boast that they have the support of the Arab world for doing so. Didn’t the Arab League request intervention at its meeting in Cairo on 12 March 2011, which the Security Council endorsed by passing Resolution 1973 a few days later? Leaving aside the fact that the leaders of the 22 states that make up the Arab League are mostly unelected despots, **what did the Arab League actually decide at this meeting? According to the Al-Jazeera video report on the meeting (*Arab League seeks Libya no-fly zone*, 12 March 2011 [7]), the League took two more or less contradictory decisions:**

“Behind the scenes there were heated discussions resulting in two almost contradictory resolutions – there should be no foreign interference but at the same time the League wants the UN to set up a No Fly Zone.”

Of course, resolution 1973 goes much further than the imposition of a No Fly Zone, authorising virtually unlimited foreign interference, short of foreign military occupation, ostensibly to protect civilians in Libya. So, the Arab League didn’t request all the provisions of Resolution 1973, merely, the imposition a No Fly Zone.

There is no doubt that, without this request from the Arab League, Resolution 1973 would never have been passed by the Security Council. With it, the resolution only got 10 votes, with 5 abstentions – the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) plus Germany. Without it, the resolution would probably have failed to get the 9 votes necessary to pass.

The US-Saudi deal on Libya

The states in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) – Saudia Arabia plus the Gulf sheikdoms of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), all absolute monarchies – took the lead in pressing for action by the Arab

League against Libya. This was driven in part by a visceral hatred between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Qadhafi.

After a meeting in Riyadh on 10 March 2011, GCC foreign ministers called upon the Arab League to take measures to stop the bloodshed in Libya and to initiate contacts with the National Council formed by the Libyan opposition (see *Asia Times*, 19 March 2011, [8]). Hamad bin Jaseem bin Jaber Al Thani, the Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, said:

“When it comes to Libya I think the regime has lost its legitimacy. We support the no-fly zone. We also support contact with the National Council in Libya. It is time to discuss the situation with them and the Security Council should shoulder its responsibility.” (ibid)

Why have the GCC states adopted this stance so enthusiastically? Craig Murray, former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan, believes he knows the answer. He wrote on 14 March 2011:

“A senior diplomat in a western mission to the UN in New York, who I have known over ten years and trust, has told me for sure that Hillary Clinton agreed to the cross-border use of troops to crush democracy in the Gulf, as a quid pro quo for the Arab League calling for Western intervention in Libya.” [9]

This has been confirmed elsewhere (see, for example, *Exposed: The US-Saudi Libya deal* by Pepe Escobar, *Asia Times*, 2 April 2011 [10]).

So, it appears that GCC support for Western intervention ostensibly to bring “freedom and democracy” to Libya was a result of a deal, under which the US cynically endorsed the use of Saudi forces to suppress the democracy movement in Bahrain and, if necessary, in other Gulf states. Another point: the Arab League’s endorsement of a No Fly Zone was far from wholehearted [10]. Of the 22 full members, only 9 voted for it. 6 of these, including Saudi Arabia, were GCC members, whose votes had been bought by the US. Two others, Syria and Algeria, were opposed, on the grounds that it amounted to “foreign interference”. This opposition seems to have been the reason why a resolution opposing “foreign interference” was also passed.

A few days later the Security Council passed Resolution 1973 and “foreign interference” began in Libya.