Labour Affairs

Incorporating the Labour and Trade Union Review

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The TUC and Social Partnership

As we approach the next general election in 2015, it is hard to feel optimistic that the Labour Party will be any bolder than New Labour. Timidity and caution appear to rule the day. Policymakers in the party are afraid of challenging major business interests that may disapprove of any mildly radical policy that could conceivably affect their interest and cause them to locate to a more accommodating regulatory environment abroad. More generally, the 'business friendly' attitude and aversion to any kind of principled stance on issues affecting working people continues to saturate the attitudes of Labour MPs and policymakers. Yet the last five years have seen government by a coalition bent on dismantling key elements of the post-war welfare state. They have had considerable success in undermining universal education and health provision, and have kept in place 'socialism for the rich' in the form of massive subsidies for failing banks, low-paying employers and rapacious landlords. It is, therefore, hard to see how there could be much opposition to halt the relentless march towards an American-style pluto-democracy with most services provided by profit-seeking private companies in a desolate public realm.

Nowadays the trades unions are hardly taken seriously as an economic, let alone a political force. Years of decline and an inability to leave behind a set of attitudes and strategies that made some limited sense in the 1960s and 1970s, but no longer do, sometimes make them look irrelevant to the modern political and economic landscape. However, some re-appraisal has been going on for a number of years, even if it has only taken place in small parts of the movement. It is quite likely, however, that the current TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, is at least the third to hold that office who has realised that making British trades unions once more a force for the working class interest needs to involve the unions taking some responsibility for the running of the firms in which their members work and more broadly assuming a role in the running of the country, in a way that has been part of the political and economic way of life in many European countries for many decades. However, she is the first General Secretary in recent decades who has actually said so and she has made the aspiration a central part of her ambitions for her term of office. Her Attlee lecture, printed in 'Labour Affairs' last year made this clear and she and colleagues in the TUC have since continued the work of putting social partnership, and industrial democracy in particular, on the agenda of union business.

The leadership of the TUC have evidently concluded that there is a choice for the movement between continuing irrelevance and decline (which may not be gradual) and an approach that repositions trades unions as doughty defenders of workers' rights but also as partners in the running of businesses and advocates over a range of other issues such as training and education which were not previously prominent in union campaigning and bargaining. This would no more make trades unions pushovers at the bargaining table than it does for European unions embedded in social partnership structures. It is evident in our published interview with Frances O'Grady, which is available in this issue of 'Labour Affairs', that this orientation is no flash in

the pan or fad, but absolutely central to the direction which the TUC would like the labour movement to travel in. Research, scenario planning and advocacy is being quietly but persistently carried out in order to prepare the movement for a new orientation. On the most optimistic view, the trade union movement could provide a way of avoiding the fate of Britain becoming a poor man's United States.

However, this is only a beginning and the initiative remains fragile. There are a number of issues to address. The first is within the trade union movement itself. The general secretary's initiative has not provoked loud protests but at the moment widespread enthusiasm amongst union officials and leaderships is hard to detect. A lot more will need to be done to get them signed up, let alone work enthusiastically for it. It is very easy to nod in acquiescence and then to make sure that nothing gets done. This work is only just beginning and the outcome remains uncertain.

The second issue concerns the Labour Party, which has shown little enthusiasm for industrial democracy and which has shied away from a broader social partnership approach ever since the 1970s. However, it has recently committed itself to employees having a say on remuneration committees and this may well involve it taking on more commitments to industrial democracy than it currently realises. The Labour Party is also largely financed by the trade union movement. There is ample scope for pressurising the party to adopt a more robust social partnership approach as a condition for continuing support in a new and more benign version of performance related pay where the paymasters (the unions) get something worthwhile in return for keeping the Labour Party afloat. Miliband, like Blair, is apparently an opponent of those on welfare benefits doing nothing for what they receive. This should apply to the Labour Party as well and the unions should ensure that they get 'something for something'.

The third issue concerns the opposition to social partnership on the part of the majority of businesses and the majority of the Tory party. This should be the least of Frances O'Grady's worries. They can be tackled when the trades unions are committed to a change of orientation. If the trade unions once again become a force in the land with the backing of large sections of the population then they will have to listen and so will the Labour Party. At the moment they can point to the irrelevance of organised labour to the running of the economy because there is at least a grain of truth in their claim.

The Labour Party will not listen if the major trades unions do not support the approach adopted by the current general secretary. She has shown the courage of her convictions and has a clear view of the direction that British unionism has to take. She deserves the support of everyone interested in making sure that Britain remains a civilised place in which to live and work.

We apologise for the late appearance of this issue. Technical hitches.

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INTERVIEW WITH FRANCES O'GRADY, TUC GENERAL SECRETARY

CONDUCTED BY MARK LANGHAMMER AND CHRIS WINCH, 26TH AUGUST 2014.

The conversation starts with ML inviting FO'G to talk about the publications that the TUC has recently produced about industrial democracy.

FO'G

Very often when you have a conversation about workers' voice, somehow you always end up going back to Bullock or In Place of Strife. Today, we are actually in a very different environment, not just in terms of union membership, union density, industrial relations and so on, but we are also trying to crack a different problem. Now we know the shareholder supremacy model is completely bust. The counter-argument to Bullock – that shareholders own the company and they are therefore the best stewards of its long-term interests – has been left completely exposed by the massive shift in the profile of share ownership, the length of tenure of any one share, and most vividly of all by the 2008 crash.

So I think that part of our job is to pose a different question to that which Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon and others posed previously. First and foremost, if the old model is bust and if we agree that it's bust, then what should take its place? Of course, one of the reasons that it's bust in the first place is the complete denial and waste of worker talent, intelligence and contribution to a firm. But there is also a bigger challenge about the kind of economy that we live in; not just whether it's just and fair, but whether we are going to repeat the mistakes that led up to the 2008 crash. The root cause of the crash was the growing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a very few free-floating, promiscuous, global masters of the universe. That's important because I, and an increasing number of economists, buy the thesis that the worse inequality gets, the greater the chance that we'll get another crash, only next time it will be bigger and quicker.

ML

The whole thing as you say, with In Place of Strife and even Heath and Bullock and attempts further back in 1946-47 with Bevin asking the TUC to take a role in running national insurance, is what 'traction' is there in the movement, and in society today, and are we as a movement incorrigibly adversarial or is there some sense of fight about let's help run this thing or shape this thing… ?

FO'G

Yes, I think that there are clearly key constituencies that we have to influence and bring on board. First and foremost, the trade union movement. This is ultimately about tackling inequality and the flaws of the old economic model. We are still not clear whether it's going to be more of the same or whether we are going to build a very different model. My discussions with union leaders have sparked an interest, which if it was merely positioned as being about social partnership European style, it would not. So it's a very new dimension to the debate. Some people on the left see these sorts of proposals as being a threat to trade unionism and collective bargaining and others on the right see it as fanciful and assume that we ought to stick to bread and butter stuff and do what we do best. Then there were people like Jack Jones, who was a genuinely intelligent and far-sighted thinker and created a different sort of tradition for the left, one which James Larkin junior would have described as 'intelligent trade unionism'. Looking ahead, the task is to think bigger and come up with some quite ambitious thinking, not just about how our day to day work as trade unionists could be transformed, but what contribution we could make to transforming the country.

CW

That makes a great deal of sense to us in terms of our own understanding of Jack Jones' importance.

FO'G

I'm a big admirer of Jack and he was a very creative thinker. Telling the story in terms of his vision can appeal to people, some of whom otherwise would have been instinctively suspicious. The left has had to reflect on its own history and realise that there is more to this (proposals for corporate governance reform), it's not a threat to traditional collective bargaining. Or more to the point, some feared a euro-style social partnership would lead to co option, that muzzled trade unionism. We realised that there was another strand of our history to draw on. Unions 21, the union think tank, is also interested and doing important work on these sorts of issues.

We've issued a series of pamphlets. We are also writing blogs and using social media to generate interest and I've seen that others like Labour Research are starting to critique our work so that's generating a broader debate amongst activists. A lot of the public debate has focused on our proposals for workers on boards, something the person in the street can understand and the polls show has strong public support. There is a link between this and the High Pay Commission's proposals

for workers representation on the committees that set top pay. Of course the TUC doesn't believe that having workers on these remuneration committees would in itself transform the world, but because it opens up decision making to a degree of accountability and democracy.

Why shouldn't a boss have to look their own workforce in the eye and explain why they're getting a big pay rise and why that's more than most workers are getting? As we know, the pay gap is growing massively. So arguing for worker representation on top pay committees is a way in to generate some excitement, a sense of justifiable outrage, about who takes decisions in whose interests, and why it is that workers are currently locked out of those decisions. There is a lot of discussion about the need for more diversity in boardrooms - and I'm a supporter, for sure, of more women in the boardroom. But if we are talking about women, why on earth aren't we also talking about better representation of the people whose lives depend on decisions taken in the boardroom, workers? If we are talking about diversity let's talk about it in its fullest sense. In Britain I think that there is an almost inherited kind of nervousness about this agenda. I think the public is way ahead of the political class on this.

ML

Does it help that quite a lot of our industry is foreign owned, for example Nissan…?

FO'G

I wonder whether that's going to come through and, if so, it will be interesting to see how that debate develops. There's so much obsession with free movement of people and hardly any attention given to free movement of capital. But I wonder whether that will begin to come through more sharply as people wonder why the majority of shares in British based firms are now owned overseas.

ML

But even in terms of the practice, there are, for example, British workers on the boards of German companies in the UK…

F O'G

Exactly! There is a myth that British culture is not compatible with the approach to worker representation taken in the most of the rest of Europe, as if French and German unions somehow have a less confrontational approach. Well, since coming into this job I've developed close links with French and German trade unionists, and I can tell you that they are just as independent and just as determined to get a fair deal, as British trade unionists. But they can combine this with rights to works councils and Board representation.

ML

The TUC publication, 'German Lessons' set out a useful direction of travel?

FO'G

European unions are no pushovers, you know the idea that codetermination has somehow softened the German trade union movement– come on. The majority of European countries now have some form of worker representation at board level, and what's good enough for French or German workers is good enough here. We are not victims of our past. We can consciously choose to construct a culture that creates more fairness and gives people a voice. If you look at the number of days lost through strike action in Britain nowadays, they're way down. In some cases, that's good news because disputes have been resolved fairly. But in other cases, people are not even in a position to assert their rights.

CW

I was surprised to see what an outlier we were in that respect.

F O'G

That old idea that there is a link between not having workers on boards and having high levels of strike activity was broken long ago.

ML

In your contact with the Labour Party, does any or much of this resonate?

FO'G

The Attlee lecture I delivered last year got a very positive response from senior people in the Labour Party. We have a very clear set of campaign priorities. Beneath that we have a very worked up set of policies about how to support progress under each of those priorities, which are set out in TUC documents, responses to consultations, and so on. The TUC's policy on governance reform, and I would stress this, is about a lot more than just having workers on boards. Our call for workers on boards is high profile policy, an ambitious policy. But it's also only one element of what we want to see. We also want better information and consultation rights, stronger rights at work and better coverage of collective bargaining.

But I would say that there are members of the shadow front bench who are engaged. Of course, when the High Pay Commission report came out, Labour made a public commitment that when they got into office, they would put workers on remuneration committees. Now they have to answer the question, 'How?' We've made some detailed policy proposals on how that commitment could be delivered. And that immediately takes you to the core, fundamental changes needed to introduce democracy and democratic structures in the workplace.

ML

Company Law? A company is a legal and political construct. You can change it.

FO'G

Exactly. I'm not sure that everybody thought through, having made that commitment, how it would be delivered, because I pointed out that unless you do have some form of independent election with workers participating, the only worker representation that you'll get on a Remuneration Committee is actually a management rep., because they'll be hand-picked. You have to have some degree of democracy at work to deliver

it. The policy answers are closely aligned with improving information and consultation rights, the development of works councils, and representation of workers, eventually up to and including board level. So it makes sense to address that wider package as a whole. So that's the dialogue that's happening now.

ML

And how are you getting on with that?

FO'G

The cause of more democracy at work is one that unions have been pressing for a very long time. Some might say we have high hopes, but realistic expectations, and it's worth putting out there. I think that we've made some progress putting it on the agenda.

CW

Whereas it wasn't on the agenda at all, and now it is.

FO'G

Exactly. We need to inoculate politicians against the idea that we need to get the CBI signed up to everything before we can make progress. As with the campaign for a national minimum wage, another key progressive demand, of course there will be outright opposition to change from some quarters of business. So get used to it, plan for it and have the courage of your convictions, because it's the right thing to do. Of course, part of my job is to encourage more sympathetic employers to speak in favour of corporate governance reform, and separate them from the anti-democrats, as I would see it. Informally, I've spoken to lots of employers, including those leading multinational companies who are required to provide for workers' voice in the other countries they operate in and do so without a problem. And through the crash, unions came to very sensible agreements with employers to protect jobs and keep plants open - exactly the sorts of agreements that the Germans and others made.

There are firms such as First Group who do have workers on boards, but they are pretty rare. In fact our current TUC President, Mohammad Taj, a bus worker, was a regional worker director for First Group. Some companies are willing to explore how we might boost workers' strategic voice on a voluntary basis and if that can 'normalise' the conversation, that's all to the good. Traditionally, if we can create voluntary agreements, even if we don't get the whole shebang, that's a positive start. If we can begin to break down that kind of oligarchy at work, and introduce the idea that worker's voice at a strategic level is the sensible thing to do, that's welcome. We issued another report on information and consultation recently, and some of the senior HR managers agree with us that the weakness of the current legal framework is bizarre. They genuinely believe that the workforce is their most important asset – in which case you'd be mad not to involve them at a strategic level and hear what the workers' concerns are and how you best address them. So the more mainstream the debate becomes the better, I think.

CW

So that's really the phase 2 isn't it, how does one mainstream these discussions within the trade union movement, the Labour Party and also beyond.

FO'G

Coming in when I did 18 months ago I had a very short amount of time until the next election to deliver on something in this area. I knew it was a long shot but I think that we've made some progress. So we have our traditional routes to stimulate debate through union magazines, trade union think tanks, and our education programme - we train over 50,000 stewards every year. We do online training too which enables us to reach people cheaply and on a mass basis.

ML

This sort of thing is quite fundamental not just for workers' voice. It's actually to do with the legal construction of a company, patient finance, long term thinking, all of that. Just to come back to what you are doing, because I was one of the graduates of the 'Leading Change' programme, it was a good programme because you had quite a long term engagement with colleagues from different places and with different experiences. Is there scope for that kind of thing to "beef up" activists' capacity around worker voice, company construction, finance and economics, patient capital and worker economics?

FO'G

Yes …

ML

Just an aside here, one of the lectures John Monks gave, he was talking about Belgian trade unionism and how visible it was. He put this down to Belgian trade unions being involved in their national insurance and the pension scheme.

FO'G

Arguably, we made a big mistake in not taking up such opportunities when they were offered to us.

ML

He mentioned that post-war, Ernest Bevin had suggested something like the Belgian insurance scheme.

FO'G

John's written about it. I've gone back to source and it's interesting looking at the debates that people had back then....I thought we should have gone that extra mile, you should have grabbed it.

ML

But we are at a juncture - post crisis - and there's all to play for now ….

FO'G

Yes it is and sometimes I think we're not ambitious enough. It's certainly worth a go and there are times when you think you haven't got much to lose.

When you look back at the post-war period they had the comfort then of 4 or 5 trade union leaders in the Cabinet. It must have felt a much more intimate relationship and a common cause, a sense of co-determination at that level politically. Clearly again we are in a very different world now.

Perhaps we are a bit hard because it is easy with the benefit of hindsight to look back and say, 'Why didn't you do more?'

And I think we mustn't go too far the other way in the sense of dismissing the reasons why people fear co-option of trade unions, because those are genuine fears. We have real experience of employers using very sophisticated union avoidance and dilution techniques. We've seen cases, albeit a very small number of cases of corruption, for example famously at VW in Germany. Now those are the exceptions not the rule, but that doesn't mean that we should let down our guard on some of those threats. We have to go in with our eyes open and when we're presented with those sorts of historic opportunities, my judgement is that we should take them. But we also have to make sure that we're fit to take full advantage of them without compromising what is our core responsibility to democracy and accountability. I do believe that very strongly. We are ultimately a democratic movement.

You'll know the CBI objections to workers on boards. On the one hand they say that board discussions are all too complicated for workers to understand, that we'd be lost in the boardroom. And on the other hand, they argue that worker directors would threaten the entire corporate governance system. So which is it? Are we too incapable and shy to make a contribution in the boardroom or are we going to tear down capitalism if we get there? But there are very practical issues about how do we train people so that they can play an effective role. I've never been keen on the idea of any of us on public bodies going in on our own. It's hard to be in on your own, which is why we want workers' representation, not just one. We also have to put support mechanisms in place, so worker directors are trained not just about knowledge but in the skills to operate in those environments, how you network outside of the room, how you make effective interventions. That's exactly what we're looking at now in very practical terms.

CW

To go back to that point you just made about one not being enough, do you have any sense of what the minimum would look like in a decent industrial democracy…?

FO'G

I think that the bottom line is at least two worker directors on a board - the TUC has produced detailed papers that set out the nuts and bolts of what we are asking for and how it would work. At a pragmatic level, we suggest starting with very large companies. You can bet your bottom dollar that the majority of these companies are multinationals that already have workers on boards in the other EU countries.

CW

And there are different thresholds in different European companies for the size.

FO'G

Yes.

CW

In terms of union leaderships and executives, national officers, how does it play with them in the medium term?

FO'G

I think that people support it. They've been very supportive of the work that we've done, not just in our exec, but it runs all the way through the regions, so they see it as commonsense. A lot of them have mixed experiences of European Works Councils, and other kinds of mechanisms so they know that it's not the be all and end all. That's why it's important that we talk about it in terms of that broader package of improving workers' voice and rights.

The landscape has been changed dramatically by the fact that 80% of workers in the private sector aren't members of a union, so the balance of risk has changed. I've had these very straight conversations with people saying, 'look at the figures'. The real threat is that membership and collective bargaining coverage goes off the cliff American-style. What you saw in the States is that it goes down, down, down because you've got no power to help anyone anymore. We end up with little union fortresses that can help members inside a particular enterprise but can't help anybody else beyond it. They get good pay and conditions for themselves but it stops at the company door, and increasingly they become emasculated anyway, because workers know they can always be replaced by a non-union workforce. Let's ask about our performance as a movement over the last ten years real wages down because membership is down. As an organiser I'm interested in the corporate governance reform agenda because I think it's our best shot at creating embryonic democratic structures within non-union Britain. All of us have a legitimate interest in having a democratic country and a healthy and thriving trade union movement is a key pillar of that.

What we can be really proud of is, despite all the battering that unions have taken, both in terms of industrial restructuring and in terms of the law, we have maintained membership around the six million mark. Although the latest figures show that because of the cull of jobs in the public sector we're down, private sector membership is up. Which is pretty amazing really. I think that a lot of our organisers and stewards should take credit for that. But what's happened to trade unions and collective values is much bigger than what's happened in any one country. This is about a set of ideas and a model of capitalism that has systematically reduced the power and dignity of working people. And, if we're going to push back on that, it will take more than what we're doing now. I could have a thousand more organisers and I still wouldn't be able to rebuild union membership sufficiently to reverse growing inequality. In my view we need an alliance between a sympathetic government, trade unions and civic society if we're going to push back on these extreme levels of inequality, wealth and power. The corporate governance reform agenda is just one part of that strategy, it is an important element in reforming the way in which our companies actually work, giving us the opportunity for every worker to have the right to a voice, but for us to have the opportunity to galvanise that voice into independent, democratic, trade unions. So again,

it's a big challenge to be ready to take advantage of that.

CW

So would it be a breakthrough if one of the big unions really owned this issue?

FO'G

Yes. I think that there are senior individuals within UNITE for example who get it, who see that bigger picture. And it's very important, because this is the largest private sector trade union.

ML

When I recently read a UNITE document from Northern Ireland (I find that Irish trade unionism has a different orientation) but they were getting into the mechanics of company law and all the rest of what a good employer should look like, and how we should encourage that through carrot and stick. I was going to ask about two big associated issues. One of them is the rebalancing of the economy. The other is the relationship between wages and profits. Less of GDP goes on wages than ever before for the last 30 years, more goes on profits. How do we get Britain a pay rise? But on the other one, rebalancing the economy, how do we do that? Different company law, different interventions, industrial strategy, how are you tackling those issues at the moment?

FO'G

It's part of our shared analysis of tackling the root causes of that inequality. How do you do that? We know that trade unions and collective bargaining is one part of the answer, with one international report suggesting that the decline of trade unions accounts for about one fifth of the growing inequality gap. Another is an industrial strategy to create better paid, better skilled jobs and the industries that will sustain them. Banking and finance reform is absolutely critical to encourage patient capital. Corporate governance is another vital strand because as long as top directors are allowed to behave like certain Premier League footballers, then they just take the money and run. And as long as shareholders remain the sole stewards of a company, then companies will remain hooked on pursuit of the quick buck. This isn't a moral judgement, it's how our system works. So we have to change the rules.

Unions have been engaging in solidarity bargaining for the last 30 years. And although we still have 5 million earning less than the living wage, it is the middle who have been hit hardest proportionately. Unions have been using our bargaining power in general to try and protect the worst paid. But it's middle incomes that have collapsed. And if the middle collapses then we won't be strong enough to help the working poor.

I think we're all clear about what needs to be done, but a lot of it requires political solutions. We can't do it all on our own. So I am encouraged by Ed Miliband. He does think seriously about these issues and though the language wouldn't be mine – predistribution, for example - he's absolutely right, that the state, on an ever reducing portion of the tax base, can't go on mopping up after the sins of the system. Labour now understands that you have to intervene in the market and that was an important break with New Labour thinking. This is not to say that everything New Labour did was bad but it fundamentally accommodated free market liberalism in a way that hadn't happened before. And it failed to understand that you need a whole range of strategies to provide some kind of protection against the worst failures of the market. For example, a degree of public ownership, a more democratic regime for companies, and a stronger tax base. Instead we got sold individual rights as an alternative to market intervention but individuals are never going to be strong enough to exercise them on their own.

ML

I'm from Belfast, so I don't have a "dog in the race" in terms of British politics – but looking outside in, it looks like Labour is desperately tentative. He's saying some of the right things about predatory capitalism but you get the impression that opinion polls, triangulation, matter far too much to them. We've had an awful crash, we need to be bold. Polls tell you that bringing the railways back into public ownership would be popular. How should that go? How do the unions influence the Labour Party? Isn't it about time that performance related pay applied to the Labour Party? Pick a couple of big ticket issues and say 'come on guys we're not giving our money for nothing'?

FO'G

Obviously for the affiliated unions, the policy forum, that route…

ML

Or do you co-ordinate influence, that's what I'm trying to get at…

FO'G

Obviously the TUC seeks to engage with all political parties, and a series of policy conversations have taken place with Labour. We're making progress in some key areas. We've made real progress with our proposal that the Low Pay Commission should have powers to bring unions and employers together in industries where we have the evidence that we ought to pay more, to set a higher statutory remuneration package. We've looked to build cross-party support and win support from some employers on that. And it's hard to believe but you couldn't even mention the term 'industrial policy' even five, ten years ago, it was a dirty word. So I'm happy that we've helped put industrial policy back on the map. Tax policy is a little trickier, spending policy is a little trickier.

CW

The Tories have managed to hegemonise this issue of the social security budget, but a lot of it you could argue is socialism for the rich, for companies that don't want to pay their workers properly, greedy landlords and so on.

FO'G

Exactly, subsidising tight fisted employers with tax credits and housing benefit.

CW

Can we get the Labour Party to be a bit bolder on that issue?

FO'G

Well, to be fair to Ed, he personally got this, he understood that point, that actually the problem here is not just low but unfair pay. Unions did a lot to make living standards a key issue that every politician now has to address, but we also had to come up

with practical policies to solve the problem. So on the doorstep voters probably don't give a fig about what we're saying about giving the Low Pay Commission being given new powers, but in terms of delivering real improvements in people's living standards and reducing the welfare bill, that practical policy is key. I think we've seen a generation of politicians across the board, who have felt powerless in the face of a globalised economy and feel afraid of companies who can threaten to ship out and punish governments who try to rein them in. That does not mean that you have to give up. On the contrary, you have to be even more determined.

CW

You've always been interested in Vocational Education and Training (VET) issues, and the TUC has done some great work. But the Labour Party does seem very timid on these issues and I know that the TUC has come up with some practical ideas to improve the situation. Do you think there's any scope for getting greater interest in VET, in both the unions and Labour? My sense is, it's a bit patchy and in the Labour Party there's a great deal of timidity.

FO'G

Labour sometimes isn't alone in putting the cart before the horse here. Everybody gets so excited about structures, and sectors versus localism and everything in between, that they forget to work out what the purpose of any structures should be. One of the mistakes in the past was seeing skills policies over here and industrial policies over there (indicates that they were in separate places). Our argument is that skills policies needs to be positioned at the centre of an intelligent industrial strategy. I'm not keen on people wasting huge amounts of time and money moving the deck chairs around. We worked quite hard with Vince Cable to establish structures that have union representation built into them: the National Industrial Councils and the UKCES (UK Commission for Employment and Skills), as well as industrial skills partnerships. Of course, we'd like 50:50 representation for unions and employers and unions still have to fight on some structures even to get our foot in the door, but the principle is that they should be social partnership bodies.

And all roads end up returning to the need for corporate governance reform.

I went to see Cowley (the BMW-owned car plant). It was a fascinating example of a very sophisticated company with very mature industrial relations. The union have just negotiated not only a very decent pay rise, but to convert the agency workers onto permanent contracts. They're also bringing back in house apprenticeship and training programmes, recognising that they need to invest long term and develop plans jointly as a company. Why has that taken so long? What do you need to incentivise companies to see training as a key part of investment policy? How do you get companies to the stage where they are upping their investment and taking a long termist, rather than a short termist view? Skills are a natural part of that but it's not the whole story. If you've got a company like BMW investing heavily in robotics, they have to train people to use that technology - which is just what they are doing now with massive investment.

There is now genuine respect across the board for Unionlearn (the TUC led body involved in VET activities). It's taken a 20% cut but that's the same as every other government funded body, and the amazing thing is that they didn't get rid of us. We're still there and one of the reasons is that it's bloody good. Unionlearn has been independently assessed as delivering high-quality training opportunities, it works and it's got strong employer and union support - and that's why it's difficult to get rid of us. I think Labour is committed to giving us an even bigger job to do.

CW

I would hope so, if you think about levies in some areas or specification in government contracts, including within the supply chain, do you think that there's any chance of getting movement there?

FO'G

Oh yes, on procurement, they've already publicly made commitments on apprenticeships. But what about everybody else? Apprentices are important but there is also the great bulk of the workforce who need more skills and training too.

CW

Yes, that's interesting, I remember Peter Mandelson said, apropos of levies, something like that the employers would just fiddle it, those were his words almost, and I guess you need corporate governance to make sure that doesn't happen.

FO'G

Exactly, and you know, we've had levies in construction and broadcasting. In broadcasting actually, I think it's worked pretty well. In construction?

CW

It's mainly managers who benefit

ML

A couple of final questions. If the Conservatives remain in power, what would be your concerns about further restrictions on trade union activity?

FO'G

Well, they've been very upfront about that, haven't they? And we've been upfront in our responses. I genuinely worry that this is about a deeper attack on democracy and dissent and civil liberties. Although, to set a threshold on ballots that no other democratic election would have to meet, means we're being singled out. But also it's the picket line stuff that interests me, potentially criminalising trade unionists on picket lines where local government workers, firefighters and so on have gathered. Quite often people are gathering together in numbers higher than the 6 that would be legally allowed and it's not a problem, the police know it's not a problem. The people gathering on the town hall steps, outside a fire station, that's what you would expect people to do. But of course as the seventh person visiting the picket line, I could find myself outside the law. I think what's more worrying is there is a read across to the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill and I suspect deliberately so. Criminalising certain behaviours

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Froggy

News From Across The Channel

Correction

On the subject of the reform of local authorities in France, an exaggeration appeared in last month's Froggy. There is no project to do away with the *département*. Or rather, there was such a project (2008 Attali government report) but it has not been adopted. Next there was (early 2014) a project to do away with the council that runs the *département*, (called the '*conseil général')* but that was given up too. Needing the support of the Radicaux de Gauche after the resignation of left-ish ministers at the end of August, the Government has given up that idea, in exchange for Left Radical support. The responsibilities of the *conseil général* will still be further discussed however, with a view to decrease them.

So there is a wish to do away with the *département* but it is no more than a wish at the moment.

The *département* clearly still has its defenders. It is part of history, and part of everyday life, even apart from its role in running services. It has a name and a number, for example *Côte d'Or* is 21 in the alphabetical list, and its number appears in people's national insurance number, in their postcode, and in their car's number plate. After a reform in 2009, the *département* number is no longer part of the car's registration number but it must by law appear on the number plate, on the right of the number and inside the logo of its region; the other novelty is that you can freely choose the number you want. Most people choose their actual *départements*, but some, e.g. Bretons or Martiniquais living in Paris, choose their department of origin.

Separatists

The département is run by a mixture of central and local government. In 1790 it was an agency of the state, run by a *préfet* nominated by Paris, and civil servants nominated by Paris. They were accompanied, much later, by a locally elected council. The slogan of the French Revolution and part of the 1791 Constitution, was 'France, One and Indivisible' (*La France, Une et Indivisible*). This knitting of France into departments achieved the aim of unity. This explains why today, when Spain, Belgium, Italy and Britain have regions that behave like mini states, and talk of separating, France is united in its territory. This is not to say that there are no regional differences. Some of the actual official regions are old distinctive provinces, like Brittany and Corsica, but there is no serious

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in respect of industrial disputes, including being the seventh person on the picket line, would then allow snooping on mobile phones, and other forms of surveillance.

I think that has very profound implications for civil liberties in this country as it suggests we're going down a very authoritarian route. I'm absolutely certain that the public don't see trade unions as the problem. On the contrary, they see over mighty corporations as the problem. The public is worried about inequality and the very, very wealthy individuals who are distorting our democratic process, not trade unions which are made up of ordinary working men and women. So I'd be very interested in what you think their motivation is as I'm just writing my Congress speech (laughs). Some of this will be covered. It doesn't make any sense and there are elements within the Conservative Party, like Bright Blue, who also think it's an absolute mistake to demonise trade unions, and yet they seem intent on doing so.

CW

I think there's still a very strong current within the Tory Party that thinks that trade unions are an obstacle to the working of the market and I don't think that's gone away.

FO'G

Yes, that's what I've written more or less. I think there's also class prejudice and it's getting worse out in society, so I suppose when you look at who holds the reins in the Conservative Party, it's not surprising.

ML

Just to finish off, when you get to the end of your term, hopefully your first term, where would you like to see the trade union movement?

FO'G

I'd like it to be bigger, stronger. Although I've always known about Jim Larkin senior, Jim Larkin junior is someone I've only really begun learning about and I like that notion of intelligent trade unionism. I don't think that it's all just about ideas, sadly. If it was only about the strength of our argument, we would be in a hell of a lot stronger place than we are now as a movement. Ideas alone aren't sufficient, but I'd like us to be respected as a thinking, intelligent movement. I want Britain to become a more equal and democratic country and it's as simple as that really. I do feel very proud of the trade union movement. There have been times when I don't think that anyone else was fighting for ordinary working people as hard. We're never going to go away, but we can't take our future for granted. There's a lot we can do for ourselves.

plan for separation.

The class struggle

Economic development is not evenly distributed through France, but it is not concentrated in particular regions which then might want to take their wealth away from the whole. The poles of wealth are the cities, and the cities are spread out: Paris, Lyon, Nantes, Bordeaux.

An economist specialising in the '*territoire*' (Laurent Davezies) described France as divided in four parts:

1. One part is productively and commercially active, concentrated in the big cities, representing 36% of the population. 2. A second part is not productive but living on a combination of tourism, retirement pensions and public sector wages in the west, representing 44% of the population. 3. A third part is productive and commercial but unsuccessful, mainly in the northern half of the country (8%) and finally, 4. A fourth part is the non active, benefit dependent area in the north east (12%). This economic situation therefore does not favour a particular region that might then want to go it alone. The redistribution of income from income rich areas to income poor areas, might cause resentment, but not a desire to separate.

If the 4 part division of France represents reality, it explains its 2 part political division, with the UMP (right wing coalition) and the Socialist Party on one side, and the National Front on the other. 80% of the population, if we follow Davezies, are more or less satisfied with their situation, or even very satisfied; this would lead them to support the two liberal parties; on the other hand, the 12% feeling left out and having nothing to lose, tend to vote for the National Front. That party's stronghold, Hénin-Beaumont, is in the 'non active, benefit dependent' part of the north-east which is where its voters are.

The State has coped with the destruction of the industrial base of France, especially in the ex-mining and steel producing north east, by spending money on benefits and government job creation. Austerity measures limiting this have a limited impact on the 80% but a drastic one on the 12% already living on a very small income.

Austerity affecting drastically a large minority, the fight against austerity is therefore going to be a minority fight. Like the division of the Western world into an opposition of interest between the 1% versus the 99%, the numbers involved are too unwieldy and represent a number of the dissatisfied that is either much too large for people to recognise themselves in a vital way in that number, or too small to be effective in the case of the 12%. In neither case is a viable and realistic alternative to the present arrangements presented. Both standpoints leave out the 'external proletariat', the working people of the developing world who produce our clothes, food and equipment. We profit from their labour and leave them out of the equation when it comes to defending our standard of living, in the same way that 19th century English textile workers did not concern themselves with the origin of the cotton they worked on. Now that the exploitation of the rest of the world means the end of jobs for many in the developed world, it is peculiar that it is still left out of political plans.

September Wine Harvest

This is still about localities, in this case the territories that produce particular foods and drinks, called *terroir*, and the influence of the Anglo-Saxon globalist outlook on France.

The *terroir* is a territory that produces a particular food or drink.

The word *terroir* has no direct equivalent in English, even the word *territoire* sounds wrong when translated in English as 'territory' in the context of for example local government. Yet in French it is used routinely: local authorities are 'collectivités territoriales', leaving the country in the sense of crossing the border is 'quitter le territoire', France is 'le territoire français'. In English 'territory' is used in the context of animals ('the robin defends its territory') and gangs. There is something wrong with human beings having 'territories'. (Even the Territorial Army has jettisoned its name, and now calls itself the Army Reserve).

Doubt has long been cast in England on the validity of the notion of '*terroir*', the place where something is grown, giving it its unique characteristics. Everything, taste, texture, colour can be reproduced, if not in a laboratory, at least anywhere with a suitable climate, supposing vines can't be grown under plastic.

Terroir is a notion, say the critics, cultivated for commercial purposes; it is a 'non-tariff' barrier to trade, to speak the language of the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership, (TTIP). For example only wine made from grapes grown in Champagne can make Champagne. Other wines do not deserve the name, even if their taste and appearance are similar.

Champagne isn't one thing with one taste, like R. White lemonade. It is a category; lots of growers make it, in varying degrees of quality. The taste also changes from year to year with variation in rain and sun. So, why not allow others to use the name, if their wine could be taken for a Champagne?

Perhaps wine made from grapes grown somewhere else could be taken for Champagne, perhaps the origin is not crucial to the character of the wine.

Champagne is holding on to its trade mark at the moment. Competitors in the wine market obviously want to minimize the French advantage, hence the fashion, in England at least, for buying wine by grape sort: "I'll have a glass of Chardonnay'.

Suddenly that new approach widens the market in a fantastic manner. It is easier to buy (and to sell) wine. Instead of having to be familiar with the name and taste of the wine of a region, especially a French or even European region, you only need to be familiar with the taste (or at least the name) of a wine making grape, wherever it comes from in the world.

This is good news for some French producers; before they were, for example, the absolutely unknown (and if known totally unregarded) "Coiffy-le-Haut" (from a region too cold to produce good wine), now their label displays their name printed small and "Chardonnay" printed big, and they will at least sell to English holiday-makers visiting the local supermarket. They might also take their chances on the wider market place alongside other Chardonnays.

Better known wine producers will cling on to their famous names. Like the *départements*, they refuse to be insignificant in the global world, and

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Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Play It Again, Uncle Sam.

Suppose people were offering you some wonderful cure-all medicine. You ask what happened to previous patients? Some are dead, and others are much worse than they were before they were given a dose of this wonderful cure-all. But the cure-all crowd have excellent explanations for all this, and show an admirable stoicism in the face of other people's suffering.

Western politicians, and the USA in particular, have totally botched the very powerful position they had when the Soviet Union collapsed. They were callous and irresponsible in the 1991 Gulf War. Callous and irresponsible after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, when they should have recognised that Najibullah's government was as good as they were going to get. Callous and irresponsible in the 2001 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, when they refused a Taliban offer to let them present evidence under Taliban rules that al-Qaeda had indeed organised the destruction of the Two Towers. Callous and irresponsible in the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. Repeatedly foolish in not telling Israel that it has to create a Palestinian State acceptable to Arab opinion in order to have any chance of long-term survival.

The USA and Britain sold the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the basis of a blatant lie and a foolish misunderstanding. The lie was the "weapons of mass destruction". The misunderstanding was the belief that a better Iraq could be built on the basis of New Right wisdom.

The USA in the past had some success at nation-building, before they acquired New Right wisdom. The people who turned Japan, Italy and West Germany into reliable allies after World War Two knew what they were doing. They would never have done anything as crazy as disbanding the Iraqi Army, or letting the wonderful heritage of Iraq's museums be looted.

War is not a large collection of individual fights, any more than an orchestra is a random heap of individual players. Individual actions must be coordinated if an army is to win. It takes a long time to create the correct culture, in which people forget who they used to be and become part of a military machine. It's nasty, certainly, but then so is war in general. Without such a collection of odd attitudes, what you have is just the appearance of an army. Something that will collapse into a mass of armed individuals intent on their own survival as soon as the going gets tough. The collapse of the new Iraqi Army in the face of ISIS forces was exactly that.

In most of Middle Europe, there were solid memories of politics before Leninist rule, and a lot of reliance on the values of Old Europe. A silly "New Europe" flourished briefly but is now mostly extinct. In Russia, New Right values had their chance and messed up. Putin stopped the rot and prevented a probable return to power by the Russian Communist Party. But the New Right learn nothing and bitch about everything. Given a sensible offer, Putin might be their friend. They prefer to defend their own wisdom and make him their foe.

In Iraq, there was no solid tradition to fall back on, apart from two mutually hostile versions of Islam among Arabs and tribal values among Kurds. *Of course* it is a mess. Elementary facts are:

a) A government cannot modernise its people if it is visibly a lackey of the West. It needs to have plausible credentials that it actually is looking after its own people and forcing compromises on whatever foreign interests may be allowed.

b) Modernisation is never mild, tolerant or polite. It was not in Britain or the USA, or anywhere else in Europe. In Britain, it was done many decades before the society became even loosely democratic.

c) Competitive electoral politics will normally widen the gap between existing communities. It will often create war where previously there was peace, tolerance and intermingling. The general pattern in Iraq since the invasion has been for politicians to think 'don't fix it, blame someone else'. Trying to get something done means you can be blamed if it fails. Criticising means you can pick up more discontented voters, or at least keep those you have.

Complaining about particular Shia politicians is irrelevant. The boot on the other foot is almost certain to kick with the same brutality. The new leaders are also pretty useless at organising anything,[1] with a lack of military helicopters particularly notable. The USA "accidentally" allowed Saddam to go on using helicopters after the 1991 Gulf War, so he was easily able to put down rebellions by people who responded to Bush Senior's call for rebellion. Those were Religious Shia: Bush Senior wanted a rebellion by people content to be docile lackeys of the USA, and was presumably puzzled that this failed to happen. Just the sort of "insight" he might have learned as Director of the CIA! (There are people within the CIA who know what they are doing, but the New Right has

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they have a long life in front of them. The French state is trying to disengage as much as possible from the population, leaving them to the market (private employment, private education, private health) but the elements put in place with the French Revolution to engage the population with the State are still in place, and the population still has representatives and institutions that force the state to keep its role. The wine of *Nuits-St-Georges* and its place of origin the *Côte d'Or* (21) will live on.

mostly suppressed them and sometimes persecuted them. The dominant idea is that truth is whatever the boss-man wants it to be.)

A Holy Land Without Palestinians?

A quick reality-check on the current crisis in Palestine:

a) Three Israeli teenagers are kidnapped and murdered in the West Bank.

b) Israel blames the Hamas government of the West Bank, ignoring evidence that it might be someone harder-line, possibly supporters of the self-styled Caliphate (formerly ISIS).

c) Rockets are fired from Gaza – probably by someone harder-line than Hamas.[2]

d) Israel inflicts disproportionate punishment on Gaza as a whole.

e) Any suggestions that this is unfair gets denounced as anti-Semitism. Even when it comes from people who had previously been quite favourable to Jews and/or Israel.

Does this sum it up correctly?

It seems a repeat of the earlier cycle, when Israel undermined the authority of Arafat and the PLO because they failed to control their own hard-liners. This helped the rise of Hamas, who however became more moderate when they became a government with something to lose.

What's really puzzling is what Israel and the USA think they can achieve. The idea of a new sort of Arab government friendly to the West was a major factor behind the invasion of Iraq. It has been a pathetic failure. Exactly the same thing was tried in the Arab Spring and visibly failed (with some ambiguity in Tunisia, which however was never active against Israel).

The most plausible explanation is that they think they can create continuous chaos and then thrive in it. This is a ludicrous misreading of politics – chaos in a society almost always produces in the end a highly authoritarian movement with a strong ideology hostile to the outside world.

I suppose a failure to realise this would be consistent with the gross misunderstandings of politics that became fashionable when large elements of 1960s radicalism were absorbed into existing power structures in the West. They see the emergence of highly authoritarian movements as pure evil that happens for no reason at all. Their preferred script – head-on confrontation with all manifestations of 'evil' – might have come from visions of Armageddon. And quite possibly did.

And it is highly likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Within Israel, there is also an understandable ambition to re-Judaise places with strong historic meaning to Jews via their scriptures. This would amount to most of the West Bank, and contradicts the idea of a viable Palestinian state. Of course Israel can't be overtly against the land-for-peace deal they have signed up to. But if they were serious, they would have done what they could to build up the various Palestinian authorities rather than undermining them. Instead every action by hard-liners is blamed on those authorities.

They are not reading the right lessons from the growth of Islamic extremism. It is used as another excuse for a hard line, rather than a trend that will be fatal for Israel unless they compromise now with whatever regimes are there.

Einstein on Zionism and Fascism

"In a 1938 speech, 'Our Debt to Zionism', he said: 'I should much rather see reasonable agreement with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state. My awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain — especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks, against which we have already had to fight strongly, even without a Jewish state. ... If external necessity should after all compel us to assume this burden, let us bear it with tact and patience."[3]

In 1948 he went further, noting that fascist ideas had become part of the Zionist mix. Mussolini's fascism was widely admired throughout the world, including the USA and the UK. Churchill, though hostile to Hitler from very early on, was an enthusiast for Mussolini in the 1920s. Italian Jews were found both among the Fascists and anti-Fascists, and there was nothing inherently anti-Jewish in fascism until Hitler became dominant. George Orwell remarks in one of his letters that Sir Oswald Mosley had a bodyguard of Jewish boxers early on, before his movement became mindlessly anti-Jewish. (It could be argued that Fascism failed because it became mindlessly anti-Jewish, losing useful friends and making huge numbers of influential enemies.)

What's remarkable is not just what Einstein said, but also how today's Israelis are resistant to his message. Consider this from *The Jerusalem Post*:

"Einstein believed Palestine should be a model Jewish settlement focusing on social justice, yet he refused to work at Hebrew University, remarking he had a 'negative attitude' of the institution in 1933. He disliked the Revisionist Zionists, who he claimed in 1935 'lead youth astray with phrases borrowed from our worst enemies.'

"Had he stopped there, one could argue he was simply a slightly naïve scientist casting himself as a political activist. But on December 4, 1948, he signed his name to a letter in The New York Times that should tarnish his reputation.

"'Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our times,' read the letter, 'is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the 'Freedom Party' (Tnuat Haherut), a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties.' He and his fellow signatories were referring to Menachem Begin's Herut party. The letter used the word 'fascist' nine times in several paragraphs. Einstein accused Begin of supporting the 'doctrine of the fascist state' and running a 'terrorist party.'

"The letter continued: 'The people of the Freedom Party have had no part in the constructive achievements in Palestine. They have reclaimed no land, built no settlements, and only detracted from the Jewish defense activity. Their much-publicized immigration endeavours were minute, and devoted mainly to bringing in Fascist compatriots.'"[4]

Begin was Prime Minister from 1977 to 1983. He did make peace with Egypt, giving up the Sinai Peninsula, which in Jewish tradition was part of the wilderness they wandered before getting the Promised Land. But he also began the failed policy of intervening in Lebanon, which has created some dangerous enemies, notably Hezbollah. And like most other leaders, he encouraged settlement in the West Bank, making a stable peace unlikely.

Sowing the wind. The whirlwind is likely to be nuclear, and with people on the Arab side from whom nuclear weapons are

a good opportunity for mass martyrdom.

The Self-Styled Caliphate.

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, political power passed to a series of successors called Caliph. And did so very messily, with several assassinations and the beginning of the Sunni / Shia split. Still, most Sunni recognise a continuous line of Caliphs that included the later Ottoman Emperors. When the last of these was deposed by Ataturk in 1924, the creation of a new caliphate was considered but never agreed on. The British-supported Sharif of Mecca claimed the title in 1924 but got little support and was driven into exile by the Saudi dynasty. After his death in 1931 there were no more serious claimants.

ISIS, the Sunni insurgent movement in Syria and Iraq, expanded its claims to declare itself the Islamic State and its leader as Caliph after its spectacular victories over a demoralised Iraqi army, a mostly-Shia force in a mostly-Sunni area. Many Muslims, some of them radical Islamists, support the general idea of a restored Caliphate that might in principle constitute a single state for all Muslims. But the right of ISIS to do this is another matter: it is still a relatively small movement. It is insignificant outside of Syria and Iraq, with possibly an extension into Lebanon, where Sunni Muslims as a whole are less than 30% of the population. It could not be viewed as a valid Caliphate in Sunni Muslim terms unless it could get a lot more support of the estimated thousand million Sunni Muslims throughout the world.

Which makes it odd that the BBC and other Western media are referring to the former ISIS as the "Islamic State" and Caliphate, as if these claims were solid. "Self-Styled" would be the normal language to use for governments or religious leaders whose status is strongly disputed by those they claim authority over.

It also gives the movement legitimacy in the eyes of the mass of disaffected Muslim youth, both in the Middle East and in Western countries. You give people a hell on earth, one likely result is a lot of religious extremism. And today's youths of all creeds and colours no longer have the same chance of decent, respected and well-paid work that the West managed to provide from the 1950s to 1970s.

In the West, it is not so much a failure to be assimilated. Many people have noted that the Radical Islamists can assimilate as much of the West as they find useful. In many ways they have exactly the same aggressive gun-flaunting culture that's become so popular, only with themselves as heroes in an Islamic cause, since the West treats them as marginal.

It doesn't help that Western policies have repeatedly favoured Israel at the expense of Arab and Muslim interests. Or that any Muslim who had the idea of expressing their natural adventurousness in a Western army would soon find that they were really not wanted. The dominant attitude of "there ain't no black in the Union Jack" was noted long before the current troubles started.

Muslims in Britain have absorbed British values, but with themselves as heroes rather than marginalised. All wholly avoidable, but only if New Right ideas had been junked.

End Game in Ukraine

Ukraine in its current form was invented by the Bolsheviks in 1922. It lumped together people who had been part of the Tsarist Empire with others who had been ruled by Austria-Hungary. And after 1945, further territory of a broadly Ukrainian nature were taken from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania.

A territory known in Tsarist times as New Russia was included, despite being a mix of Russian speakers and Ukrainian speakers that might have been more logically made into a separate Union Republic, or just included in Russia. It did serve to increase the pro-Soviet elements in the new Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In 1954, Khrushchev decided for trivial reasons to add Crimea, hitherto included with Russia.

The Orange Revolution, taking its cue from the USA, successfully polarised Ukraine between West and East, and gained enough of the mixed population to make a credible claim to have won. It then made a total mess of ruling, meaning that the mixed population surged back and Yanukovych returned to power in 2010.

In 2013, Yanukovych rejected a very bad deal offered by the European Union. One which would have destroyed the industry of East Ukraine. This led to protests by a new movement, including the failed forces of the Orange Revolution, but also some outright fascists, Svoboda and Right Sector. Yanukovych unwisely tried a compromise back in February, which was used as a pretext for a complete take-over by his enemies. This could be called the Blood Orange Revolution.

Crimea had already been considering secession. This tipped the balance. The vote was irregular, but Kiev showed no interest in a proper referendum to settle the matter, of the sort that is happening soon in Scotland. They denied that there was any right of secession, but Russia moved in and annexed the territory regardless.

There were similar but weaker sentiments in parts of East Ukraine. Russia chose to encourage those sentiments, which was irresponsible. Putin got authorisation to invade, which he later got cancelled. This led on to the fragmentary secessions that are currently being slowly crushed by the Kiev government.

The West won the propaganda war, convincing people that a move to help people who preferred Russia to a semi-fascist regime in Kiev was actually the start of a return to Russia to the lands it gave up in 1989-91. They seem now reconciled to staying out of it and letting East Ukraine be crushed. They were probably pressurised by China to do this, since China values stability and respect for existing borders. If you watch China's English-language channel, it has never been at all sympathetic to the rebels.

The aid convoy must reflect genuine concern for the mostly-Russian population of the seceding areas, who are being bombed and shelled without much concern for their safety.[5] Kiev might be glad to get rid of as many as possible, while Russia would want to help them where they are. Still, it plays well in Russia and with those sympathetic to them.

The European Union had been pushed into sanctions, quite possibly causing the setback in German economic growth for the latest quarter.[6] The USA has less trade and is hurt less. It has done nothing about cooperation in space, where it will be dependent on Russian vehicles until the promised private-enterprise US rockets come through.

Russia retaliated with a ban on imports of food, which it can get from elsewhere. If the European Union will not be friendly, it is best to reduce links and go somewhere safer.

Meantime there has been a "deafening silence" in recent weeks over the Malaysian airliner that was shot down. The USA initially blamed the separatists, but has notably failed to come through with detailed evidence. There are good grounds for suspicion.[7]

And the Kiev government is in trouble over the deal they signed with the European Union. This is likely to get worse. Good little lackeys get patted on the head, but then find that their wallets have mysteriously vanished.

The Fall of the US Middle Class

Ever since they elected Ronald Reagan, the "great middle class" of the USA has been voting itself into oblivion. Their "idyllic" suburbs are now in decline.[8]

The Mixed Economy as it existed from the 1940s had done very well for those people. A lot of people who'd rate themselves working class in Britain felt they belonged to it and maybe did. But they had also never lost their suspicion of the government. The big cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s included a lot of blame for the government for not fixing everything at once.

Anarchists protest at everything and liberate nothing. The most significant thing

they can achieve is to create social voids that are reliably filled by people much more authoritarian than those the original protest was made against. There was a lot of anarchism in the broad Hippy movement, and it transmuted easily enough into Libertarianism. The New Right found an opening in the mix of cynicism and anti-state feelings that dominated 1960s radicalism.

Hippy sympathisers did at least see the collapse of the conventional morality they had been protesting at. Mainly because the New Right used the votes of the respectable or conservative middle class to undermine the basis for its existence.

Pure capitalism was promised. Pure capitalism has never actually existed. It was nearest to being achieved in Britain and the USA in the 1920s, which led on to the Wall Street Crash and then the Great Depression.

From the 1940s to 1970s, the West was committed to the Mixed Economy, capitalism permitted it but with the state required to regulate it and to replace it where it seemed to be failing. This was also the system for Japan and the "Tiger Economies" of East Asia.

From the 1980s, pure capitalism has been the official ideal in Britain and the USA and much more popular in Western Europe. But the reality has remained a Mixed Economy. This even extended to the state underwriting the gambling debts of the rich during and after the crisis of 2008.

The Thatcher / Reagan policies of the 1980s did not in fact boost GDP growth above the levels achieved in the "disastrous" 1970s. They were way below the 1950s and 1960s, the prime years of the Mixed Economy. And since the 1980s there has been a decline, even before the disastrous crisis of 2008, which has seen a virtual standstill in Western growth.

Meantime China moved cautiously from a highly state-run system to their own form of Mixed Economy, one that is vastly more state-dominated than the West ever had at the height of enthusiasm for the Mixed Economy.

Russia was persuaded to try pure capitalism, but this actually caused a sharp economic decline and a great loss of productive industry. Putin stopped the rot, but they are still heavily dependent on the export of raw materials.

"Errors" selling the Post Office

"Taxpayers may have lost out on about £1bn from the undervaluing of Royal Mail, a committee of MPs has said.

"The government feared failure and acted on bad advice over the Royal Mail stock market flotation, reports the Business, Innovation and Skills select committee.

"The Department for Business said the MPs' report contained "factual errors and misunderstandings".

"Royal Mail shares were priced at 330p, but jumped as high as 618p per share, and now stand at around 473p."[9]

That's been very unsuspicious. If the public have *lost* a billion, someone else must have gained it. People similar to those who set up the deal.

And it's not even as if there have been real benefits, except for the rich. A recent article in *The Guardian* puts it nicely:

"Privatisation isn't working. We were promised a shareholding democracy, competition, falling costs and better services. A generation on, most people's experience has been the opposite. From energy to water, rail to public services, the reality has been private monopolies, perverse subsidies, exorbitant prices, woeful underinvestment, profiteering and corporate capture.

"Private cartels run rings round the regulators. Consumers and politicians are bamboozled by commercial secrecy and contractual complexity. Workforces have their pay and conditions slashed. Control of essential services has not only passed to corporate giants based overseas, but those companies are themselves often state-owned – they're just owned by another state.

"Report after report has shown privatised services to be more expensive and inefficient than their publicly owned counterparts. It's scarcely surprising that a large majority of the public, who have never supported a single privatisation, neither trust the privateers nor want them running their services.

"But regardless of the evidence, the caravan goes on. David Cameron's government is now driving privatisation into the heart of education and health, outsourcing the probation service and selling off a chunk of Royal Mail at more than £1bn below its market price, with the government's own City advisers cashing in their chips in short order."[10]

The Art of Failing Elegantly

Why is there no coherent political opposition to New Right ideas? The "missing link" is to see it as the flip size of the very successful spread of personal and sexual freedoms since the 1960s.

1960s radicalism was brilliant at destroying what existed; much less successful at replacing anything. A widespread fault was to condemn the past for being less than perfect, rather than recognise that there had been substantial achievements.

The general pattern was to believe in an underlying "human nature" that would automatically shine forth if artificial constraints were removed. Of course different people had utterly different ideas about what this underlying human nature actually was.

The most successful were those who believed that "underlying human nature" was greedy, but that enlightened self-interest would put natural limits on it. This allowed them to become fans of the rich and cheer-leaders for business interests.

Aligning oneself with existing powers brings short-term success, obviously. Especially for people cunning enough to present the rich and powerful as oppressed and the poor and weak as aggressive and unjust.

The minor drawback is that none of it is true. People who compare it to fascism are flattering the movement. Fascism had a coherent program that would have produced a coherent world system if it had not been militarily defeated, with the Soviet Union doing the bulk of the fighting and suffering. Fascism was also wise enough to keep money in its place and could appeal to human social feelings, though of a low, degraded and bigoted sort. This lot think money will fix everything, and it is simply not working.

In Britain, and also the USA and Western Europe, the Left failed to do its proper job. Instead it undermined the widespread popular belief that the 1945 Labour Government improved Britain and that the Soviet Union was the main force that stopped Fascism from conquering the world.

Much to their surprise, once most people had been educated in this new wisdom, mainstream Leftism collapsed.

Meantime other radical movements have flourished, most notably the Greens. There should be lots of openings.

Snippets

"In emerging markets there are two types of corruption, organised and disorganised; and the difference is huge. 'Japan is a very corrupt society, now and then in Japan big businessmen are caught, literally with suitcases carrying millions of dollars in cash. But the Japanese economy is highly efficient. Why? Because corruption is highly organised; and from a business point of view, in such cases, you can look at it simply as a tax. You ask: Can I afford it?' and then factor it into your business plan.'

"But unorganised corruption was a killer because of its `unpredictability.' Giving the example of a company in Bangladesh he said that a particular corporate paid a bribe for getting a licence, as there was no other option, and got it after two weeks. But the next day somebody showed up from the ministry of power supply. When the man said he's already got the licence, he said: `Sure, but you're going to use this much of power, and for

that you need special permission.'

"'That's when you realise what is going on, and that this is disorganised corruption. That's when you give up! The uncertainty associated with it is killing. In Korea too there is huge corruption, but it is highly efficient and organised. Once you pay the bribe, you know you are done, and that guy will distribute it down the line. You can make a rational business decision and ask can I afford it. Of course you can choose not to do it, but then you don't have a business. Indonesia today is a high cost economy because corruption is disorganised there.'"[11]

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"The mountains trembled – and gave birth to a ridiculous mouse." That's an old English saying.

In the case of Afghanistan, the much-vaunted electoral process hasn't even produced a mouse. Two mediocre politicians squabble over the prize.

The problem arose because of a suspicious reversal of fortunes in the second round of the election. In Round One, Abdullah Abdullah got 45% and his main rival just under 32%. In Round Two, there were more than a million extra votes and his main rival had leapt past him to claim victory. Naturally Abdullah Abdullah objected.

The solution was supposed to be a recheck of the votes. At the time of writing (27th August), Abdullah Abdullah has rejected this as well,[12] when it seemed about to confirm the same suspicious result.

Competitive electoral politics only leads to a successful democracy when the main politicians are broadly honest and prefer compromise to confrontation. Not qualities that Afghans are noted for.

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"Leading political figures in Kosovo face indictment by a special EU court for crimes against humanity, including killings, abductions, sexual violence and other abuses of Serb and Roma minorities, according to the chief prosecutor leading a three-year special investigation.

"The threat of indictment comes in a progress report published on Tuesday morning in Brussels by Clint Williamson, an American prosecutor appointed by the EU in 2011 to investigate ethnic cleansing committed in Kosovo since the 1999 Nato intervention brought an end to the conflict there."[13]

Independent Kosovo was the West's creation, remember. The official position was that the six Federal Republics of Yugoslavia were sovereign and could secede at will. Also that majority-Serb areas were forbidden to secede in turn. But though Kosovo was not a Federal Republic, it was decided that it somehow gained the right to secede when the Serbian government used standard measures of repression against armed insurgents. It was decided that NATO had somehow acquired both the right and the obligation to intervene. It might seem strange that no one suggested a similar right for the final brutal crushing of the Tamil Tiger secession in Sri Lanka. At least it might if you thought there was any real honesty in what gets called "International Law". The bottom line is that the Kosovo insurgents were friends of the West and the Tamil Tigers were not.

In the same spirit, the majority-Serb areas in the north of Kosovo were not allowed to stay with Serbia. I've never seen a decent explanation as to why.

***

"Impoverished mother Pattaramon Chanbua told the ABC she gave birth to twins after agreeing to be a surrogate for the West Australian couple with a promised payment of about $16,000.

"She claims the couple, who have not been identified, rejected Gammy and returned to Australia with his healthy sister.

"But the baby girl's Australian father says the clinic's doctor only told them about the girl.

"He has told the ABC they had a lot of trouble with the surrogacy agency and had been told it no longer existed."[14]

One of many bad cases, but they need to be set alongside many others when all has gone OK.

What I'd suggest would be UN licensing for large non-profit-making organisations that are also supervised. Make sure that would-be parents are suitable and that surrogate mothers are not exploited, and that unwanted babies get the best possible care. It would cost money, of course, but let the customers pay.

***

On the wider matter of child-care, it is tragic that so many children end up in orphanages and are damaged by this unnatural upbringing.

In a book about China, there was mention of an orphanage split into units of one woman and maybe six children. This seemed a good idea, so I asked about it on Quora.[15] It seems it is called the *SOS Children Village*, founded in 1949 by an Austrian named Hermann Gmeiner.[16] And is rare in China, as in other places, being quite expensive.

I'd have thought it money well spent. Something a decent society ought to be able to afford.

***

The rise of Trotskyism in Europe coincides very neatly with the general decline of the Left. A left-wing movement will always offend those with the wealth and power, and must rely on clarity and truth for its power. And also be able to taunt the right with its past failures and all of the things it used to defend that are now unacceptable.

The record of the British Conservative party is vulnerable on this. In most of Europe, new parties with a clean anti-Fascist record arose to occupy the centre-right of politics. In Britain it was the same party and mostly the same people.

Trotskyists don't want to know, obviously. Their line was to stay neutral and plan for revolution. Obviously absurd, particularly since no Trotskyist movement anywhere in the world has ever got beyond the status of being an "armed nuisance".

Why the rest of the left has failed is less clear. It's been left to us in the Bevin Society to remind people that Churchill was an enthusiast for Mussolini until Italy actually chose to join in on Hitler's side. And the public has been led to believe that characters like Chamberlain and Halifax were no worse than weak and peace-loving in the face of the terrifying Nazi beast. Not that they were moderately favourable to European fascism for as long as it seemed to serve the interests of the British Empire.

There is a whole lost heritage needing to be recovered. I remembered a song my parents had told me about, but which seems almost forgotten. After asking on Quora, I got this version:

"In Bucks there is a country house, country house
"Where dwells Lord Astor and his spouse
"And Chamberlain and Halifax
"To manufacture Fascist pacts, fascist pacts.
"Fare thee well the League of Nations
"Hail to "peaceful penetrations"
"And good bye to International law- law- law
"Adieu Democracy, adieu, adieu, adieu
"We have no further use for you, use for you
"We'll pin our faith to fascism and war
"What is the National Government for - Government for?"[17]

Apparently based on a traditional folk song called "There is a Tavern in the Town", itself perhaps derived from a Cornish miner's song.[18] A matter that someone musical should try taking up.

***

A lot of goods are cheaper in the USA, but not medicines. It is illegal to import them, and the prices are much higher.

"It's no surprise that American corporations spend billions of dollars each year on lobbying, trying to gain favorable treatment from legislators. What some may find a bit unnerving is the industry that's leading the pack in these efforts.

"You might think our nation's defense and aerospace companies, which have legions of hired guns on Capitol Hill, are the leaders…

"Back in 2006 for example, U.S. consumers paid about 70 percent more than our northern neighbors for prescription drugs still on patent, according to the Canadian board. Five years later, in 2011, that difference had surged to 100 percent. And with drug price inflation in the United States hitting 11 percent in 2011, that gap will undoubtedly grow ever wider in the future."[19]

A nice example of how Libertarian ideas are ignored when it suits the rich.

***

I've mentioned before that it might have been a good idea if some refuge for displaced Jews had been set up where there weren't many people, rather than in the midst of the Arab World, with the reasonable expectation of permanent warfare.

I now learn that there was at least one, The Kimberley Scheme for Australia. This would have involved "the purchase of seven million acres in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia as a farming settlement for a potential 50 000 refugees from Nazism".[20] No one was bothered about displacing the Aboriginal Australians, but the existing white settlers didn't like the idea of a large block of aliens. Quite likely they didn't particularly want Jews as such. Whatever, the scheme was definitely rejected in 1944.

For some reason, people expected Arabs to put up with something much more drastic. And still seem puzzled that they do not. Whereas I assume there would still be great trouble creating a refuge for Jews or anyone else in Australia, empty though it mostly is.

***

"Pope Francis has lifted a ban on the beatification of murdered Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero.

"For years, the Roman Catholic Church blocked the process because of concerns that he had Marxist ideas.

"An outspoken critic of the military regime during El Salvador's bloody civil war, Archbishop Romero was shot dead while celebrating Mass in 1980.

"Beatification, or declaring a person "blessed", is the necessary prelude to full sainthood.

"The bishop was one of the main proponents of Liberation Theology - an interpretation of Christian faith through the perspective of the poor."[21]

At the time of his election, I had wondered if the new pope might have been influenced by Latin America's Liberation Theology, even though he was strictly speaking no part of it. It looks like it could be happening.

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At the time of writing,[22] the riots in Ferguson, Missouri have died down. That's the normal pattern with riots: the anger gets discharged and people stop seeing any point to it. But the problems have not gone away.

Black people in places like Ferguson know that they have been left behind by the blacks who have managed to ascend into the middle class or the elite. Most of whom have been loyal to their new-found status than their race.

One problem is the fragmentation and local control of police forces in the USA. There may be a lot wrong with British policing, but government control and large regional police forces do maintain some standards. In the USA, police often act like an army of occupation in poorer communities. And almost anywhere, they seem to react violently to any challenge to their authority. Much more drastically if the challenger is black.

And they are defending huge inequalities:

"In the U.S., a child born in the top 20 percent economically has a 2-in-3 chance of staying at or near the top, whereas a child born in the bottom 20 percent has a less than 1-in-20 shot at making it to the top, making the U.S. one of the least upwardly mobile nations in the developed world. Our levels of income inequality rank near countries like Jamaica and Argentina, rather than like countries like Canada and Germany, but American voters, in large, believe America is just doing fine…

"The study measured actual income inequality and upward mobility versus perceived income inequality and upward mobility in a number of countries. The results are conclusive: U.S. voters don't demand income redistribution, from the rich to the lower economic classes, because they don't grasp how severe inequality actually is…

"Income inequality is now a problem in just about every developed nation, but America remains an outlier. In the U.S., the top 20 percent earn a whopping 16.7 times what the bottom 20 percent earn, and that gap is ever widening, given 95% of all income gains since 2009 have gone to the richest 1 percent."[23]

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He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.

Harold Wilson

For my part, while I am as convinced a Socialist as the most ardent Marxian, I do not regard Socialism as a gospel of proletarian revenge, nor even, primarily, as a means of securing economic justice. I regard it primarily as an adjustment to machine production demanded by considerations of common sense, and calculated to increase the happiness, not only of proletarians, but of all except a tiny minority of the human race.

Bertrand Russell,
The Case for Socialism,
In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays

LISTENING TO ITALY
by Orecchiette

THAT SINKING FEELING (AGAIN)

Summer is the peak season for migrants arriving in small boats at Lampedusa and Sicily. The rest of Europe turns a blind eye to what we like to think is Italy's problem and Italy has to cope financially and logistically with it. Frontex, which "promotes, coordinates and develops European border management in EU and Schengen Associated Countries" is going to make a greater effort to help under the recently agreed Frontex Plus. But, says the EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs, Cecile Malmstrom, as she shares smiles and handshakes with Italy's Minister of Internal Affairs, Angelino Alfano, it might be hard to get the financial contributions from member states. And as the flood of migrants increases, the chances of this happening are not good. Migrant numbers increased from 42,000 in 2013 to 100,000 so far this year. And, just under 2,000 have drowned or died en route.

The second boat story appeared in The Economist (Aug 30 - Sept 5th), which featured a cover: *That sinking feeling (again)* with a "fotomontaggio" of a paper-hat type of ship...made from a €20 note. It was obviously sinking while Mario Draghi baled it out "freneticamente" with a wastepaper basket. In the prow stood the straight-backed Merkel and Hollande dwarfing a very tiny Matteo Renzi, the Italian Premier. And, as one of the Corriere della Sera's commentators said, he looked like a small child who had just been given an ice cream so that he wouldn't disturb the grown ups. Corriere della Sera featured the cover, and yes, it is "impudent" (as someone said), it could also seem funny, depending on your position in the political spectrum. But no one likes being laughed at, and Italians have been discomforted by this depiction of their Premier as a child-like figure clutching a cornet.

Comments by Corriere readers on the Economist's cover inevitably and quickly made mention of Silvio Berlusconi. His twenty years in politics have left their mark and some commented that the decline and recession had happened while he was in power. Berlusconi was famous for denying the financial crisis that was obvious to most commentators: "We aren't in crisis, the restaurants are full and you can't find a seat on a plane".

Berlusconi has avoided and escaped the many personal legal charges brought against him. He was acquitted once again in July from his conviction for having sex with Ruby, the under-age prostitute. There was a flurry of disbelief in Italy at this. La Repubblica re-issued a long incisive article by Eugenio Scalfari, the paper's venerable co-founder. It was originally published in 2009. Called "The dramas and the secrets of the imperial court" it started with Silvio's ex-wife's exposé of his lifestyle. A Huffington Post article of 21 July also said that the acquittal was neither a political nor moral rehabilitation. But, Berlusconi (ludicrously) does his weekly community service, and for the rest of the time is back influencing mainstream politics as leader of the centre right Forza Italia Party.

When Renzi was elected he made a pact with Berlusconi, called Il Patto del Nazareno. This outlined electoral changes, including the redefinition of the upper chamber to base it on the regions. Berlusconi's support props up what is now only nominally a centre-left government of Renzi. Nominally centre-left, because significant numbers of Renzi's party, as well as smaller groups on the left, detest his reforms, which appear to be developed during phone calls with Berlusconi. They dislike his personal ambitions, the betrayal of their ideals and he neither gets their support or votes. It must be added that many Deputies are also worried that they may lose their seats if there is an early election.

Is there a connection between the recent acquittal and Berlusconi's centre-right support for Renzi's government's reforms? And, if there is a connection, what does Berlusconi want in return? Is it anything other than a continuing exercise of power? Unlikely. Berlusconi is no altruist and will wring for himself the maximum possible benefit. It is interesting that the President of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, nicknamed "the cadaver," will be 90 next year.

Renzi has been working hard to push through these enormous changes to the structure of the upper and lower houses of government and has barely taken a holiday. Not for him were photo opportunities in fish shops and on beaches. This man is determined to pave his path with compliant colleagues. Meanwhile there was a little impatience in Euroland at Renzi's concentration on his political rather than financial reforms. But, some flexibility has been negotiated with Brussels and Renzi has promised movement.

The Economist's cover profoundly irritated the CEO of Fiat Sergio Marchionne, who feels the need to be proud of being Italian, "because Italians are as good as anyone". He was widely reported as finding the image objectionable, "crap". He used the ice cream insult as a pivot to build a speech about the need for swift, tough government action on the financial front. He emphasised that Renzi must be supported to move an immobile country forward and the audience apparently received him in silence.

And yet another ice cream ripple, as Pierfranco Pellizzetti, essayist, wrote a blog for Il Fatto Quotidiano which characterised Renzi as being just another political pigmy hoodwinking not only Italy, but a credible Europe. He was despairing of what he called Renzi's "privatized Keynesianism" which feeds his own personal and political ambition, at the cost of the impoverishment of the middle classes. The blog finished by flying a list of past political figures who Renzi should use as examples of moral and social sensitivity - an odd bunch: Leon Blum, Winston Churchill, Luigi Einaudi, Willy Brandt, David Lloyd George and Franklin Roosevelt. He dismisses Renzi saying that everyone will know he will recite the gag of the ice cream cone while the country slides, or presumably melts away in the sun.

And Pellizzetti is very disillusioned with Europe. His end of August blog mentioned that day's choice of "Mrs Nobody" Federica Mogherini to the European Foreign Affairs seat. - chosen via machinations that are jiggled to ingratiate or displease, depending on the political expediency. After Pellizetti's ice cream blog, Beppo Grillo gave him a spot on his own blog as *Blogger of the Day.* Strange because he must have known that he would be nasty. He was. He wrote that it gave him enormous anguish to think that 200 years of European intellectual and political development had resulted in people such as Grillo being elected to make decisions on our behalf. Pellizetti didn't leave out Grillo's Euro Group leader: a man close to homophobic, xenophobic British allies, the "worrying oddity" Nigel Farage.

Parliament Notes

Dick Barry

War Graves

A question from Conservative backbencher David Amess on 2 July on Commonwealth War Graves elicited an odd response from Defence Minister Anna Soubry. Amess asked (1) "how many graves are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, by (a) cemetery and (b) country; (2) which cemeteries are maintained by the Commonwealth Graves Commission, by country; and if he will make a statement. This was Soubry's reply:

"The Commonwealth Graves Commission ensures that the **1.7 million people who died in the two world wars** will never be forgotten. The Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. It is therefore not possible to list every cemetery in this answer. Detailed and searchable information on the numbers of graves at each location in every relevant country is available on the Commission's website: www.cwgc.org (my emphasis).

The question was specifically related to Commonwealth War Graves, so Soubry's reference to the 1.7 million who died in the two world wars omits the deaths of non-Commonwealth combatants on the allied side, such as Belgium, France, Italy, Russia and the United States. And it omits all those who were killed among the Central Powers. This applies also to the deaths in World War Two. It is difficult to be accurate about casualty figures, but two sites---*The Long, Long Trail; The British Army in the Great War; and History Learning Site, Military casualties of World War Two*---estimate that in the Great War there were 956,703 deaths of military personnel from the British Isles plus Australia, Canada, India and other Commonwealth countries. And in World War Two there were 452,000 killed from Great Britain and the Commonwealth. A total figure some 300,000 fewer than the figure of 1.7 million provide by the Minister.

The Supply Of Dual Use Chemicals To Syria

In a statement on 9 July, Foreign Secretary William Hague attempted to explain how and why British business have supplied dual use chemicals to Syria.

"Following Syria's accession to the chemical weapons convention (CWC) last year. and as part of the process to eliminate its chemical weapons (CW) programme, Syria provided a confidential declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which lists a number of states from which it obtained supplies of goods used in its CW programme. The information in Syria's declaration is classified under the terms of the CWC. However, I wish to inform the House that a review of our own files suggests that there were a number of exports of chemicals to Syria by UK companies between 1983 and 1986 which were likely to have been diverted for use in the Syrian programme."

"These exports were: several hundred tonnes of the chemical dimethyl phosphite (DMP) in 1983 and a further export of several hundred tonnes in 1985; several tonnes of trimethyl phosphite (TMP) in 1986; a smaller quantity of hydrogen fluoride (HF) in 1986 through a third country. All these chemicals have legitimate uses, for example in the manufacture of plastics and pharmaceuticals. However, they can also be used in the production of sarin. DMP and TMP can also be used for the production of the nerve agent VX. That is why the export of such goods is strictly prohibited under the UK export regime introduced since the 1980s and progressively strengthened."

"From the information we hold, we judge it likely that these chemical exports by UK companies were subsequently used by Syria in their programme to produce nerve agents, including sarin. Some of the companies no longer exist. Furthermore, some of the chemicals in question may have been sourced by a UK chemical trader, rather than produced in the UK. The review of our records also confirmed an export of ventilation fans by a UK company to Syria in 2003. The fans were not controlled goods. Following an enquiry by the exporter, officials considered the export under licensing procedures, and insufficient grounds for refusal were found. Syria appears to have diverted these fans for use in a chemical weapons facility."

"In the early 1980s, the exported chemicals were not subject to any international or UK export controls.

However, knowledge of these exports, and growing concerns that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was developing a chemical weapons capability, helped prompt the introduction of tighter controls, both in the UK and internationally. The export of goods (control) order was amended to control DMP in July 1985, and TMP and HF in June 1986. There has been a complete overhaul of export control legislation, policy and practice since the 1980s, designed to ensure that such exports could not happen today. The UK operates a robust export control regime, and takes international obligations on this issue very seriously."

"Key instruments and legislation include:

The chemical weapons convention. The Chemical Weapons Act 1996 implements the provisions of the convention which imposes specific controls on the transfer of certain chemicals including DMP and TMP.

The development of the Australia Group, of which the UK was an original member in 1985. As a matter of routine, all changes to the Australia Group control lists are reflected in UK national export controls. It controls trade in HF as well as DMP and TMP.

The Export Control Act 2002. Replacing legislation passed in 1939, the current legislation provides for controls on the export and brokering of listed goods and technologies, in addition to controls on unlisted items where it is believed they may be intended for use in weapons of mass destruction programmes.

Furthermore, the EU has developed EU-wide controls on the export of dual-use goods, including chemicals. Our ability to control exports is underpinned by the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, adopted by the UK in 2000 and updated in March 2014. The criteria set a clear basis for the assessment of export licenses. This is undertaken on a case-by-case basis taking account of all available information.

Today, the UK is playing its full part in the international effort to eliminate Syria's programme. As the House is already aware, the UK is accepting 150 tonnes of B precursors from the Syrian chemical stockpile for destruction. I can today also inform the House that in addition to those chemicals, a further 50 tonnes of the industrial chemicals hydrogen chloride and hydrogen fluoride will also be destroyed in specialised commercial facilities in the UK. We expect the ship transporting all these chemicals to arrive in the UK next week. The Members of Parliament in whose constituencies destruction will take place have been informed."

Did Hague feel slightly queasy when admitting that the UK supplied dual-use chemicals to Syria in the 1980s when his heroine Margaret Thatcher was PM? And why did he omit to inform the House that in August 2013 the House of Commons *Committee on Arms Exports Control* accused Ministers in its report of permitting the export of industrial materials to Syria in the previous few years that could have been used to make chemical weapons?

According to David Lowry, writing in *Our Kingdom, power & liberty in Britain* on 7 September 2013: "The Business Secretary wrote to Sir John Stanley, chairman of the joint committee a year ago stating: "Chemicals used for industrial/commercial processes---two Standard Individual Export Licenses (SIEL). These licenses were issued on 17 and 18 January 2012 and authorised the export of dual-use chemicals to a private company for use in industrial processes. The chemicals were sodium fluoride and potassium fluoride. These chemicals have legitimate commercial uses---for example, sodium fluoride is used in the fluoridation of drinking water and the manufacture of toothpaste; and potassium fluoride has applications in the metallurgical industry and the manufacture of pesticides."

But, Lowry wrote, "The Business Secretary tellingly added: *'However, they could also be used as precursor chemicals in the manufacture of chemical weapons which is why they are included on the Australia Group chemical weapons precursors list."*

Lowry stated that "these licences were only revoked on 30 July 2012, well into the Syrian civil war." And stated further, "A statement published to accompany the publication of the Report last month on 17 July said: *"The Committees welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement that 'we will not issue licenses where we judge there is a clear risk the proposed export might provoke or prolong regional or internal conflicts, or which might be used to facilitate internal repression'. However, the Committees adhere to their previous recommendation that the Government should apply significantly more cautious judgements when considering arms export licence applications for goods to authoritarian regimes 'which might be used to facilitate internal repression' in contravention of the Government's stated policy."*

Lowry concluded: "It is manifest that ministers have utterly failed to deliver this recommendation as it assisted Syria's chemical weapons programme. It has abrogated any moral right it may have had to object to Syria breaching international norms against chemical weapons while assisting President Assad in

making them."

Gaza: Hague's Final Act

William Hague resigned as Foreign Secretary on 15 July to take up the post of Leader of the House of Commons. His final statement as Foreign Secretary touched on Israel's attack on Gaza, although he accused Hamas of being initially responsible. According to Hague, Hamas (militants in Hague's vocabulary) simply fire rockets indiscriminately against civilians, whereas Israel carefully target their missiles. In his statement he constantly refers to the violence perpetrated by Hamas, while understating that on the part of Israel.

Mr William Hague:

"The House is aware that despite intense efforts by US Secretary of State John Kerry, talks between Israelis and the Palestinians broke down at the end of April and are currently paused. Since then, there have been several horrific incidents, including the kidnap and murder of three Israeli teenagers and the burning alive of a Palestinian teenager. We utterly condemn these barbaric crimes. **There can never be any justification for the deliberate murder of innocent civilians.**" (my emphasis).

"These rising tensions have been followed by sustained barrages of rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. Between 14 June and 7 July rockets were fired by militants into Israel, to which Israel responded with air strikes. Rockets are fired indiscriminately against the civilian population, including against major Israeli cities. Israel then launched Operation Protective Edge on 7 July. Israeli defence forces have struck over 1,470 targets in Gaza, and over 970 more rockets have been fired towards Israel. Two hundred and forty Israelis have been injured. In Gaza, as of today, at least 173 Palestinians have been killed and 1,230 injured. The UN estimates that 80% of those killed have been civilians, of whom a third are children."

"The whole House will share our deep concern at these events. This is the third major military operation in Gaza in six years. It underlines the terrible human cost, to both sides, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it comes at a time when the security situation in the middle east is the worst it has been in decades. The people of Israel have the right to live without constant fear for their security, and the people of Gaza also have the fundamental right to live in peace and security. There are hundreds of thousands of extremely vulnerable civilians in Gaza who bear no responsibility for the rocket fire and are suffering acutely from this crisis; and the Israeli defence forces estimate that 5 million Israeli civilians live within range of the rockets fired from Gaza. Israel has a right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks, but it is vital that Gaza's civilian population is protected. International humanitarian law requires both sides to distinguish between military and civilian targets and enable unhindered humanitarian access."

"The UK has three objectives: to secure a ceasefire, to alleviate humanitarian suffering, and to keep alive the prospects for peace negotiations which are the only hope of breaking this cycle of violence and devastation once and for all. I will briefly take these in turn. First, there is an urgent need for a ceasefire agreed by both sides that ends **both the rocket fire and the Israeli operations** based on the ceasefire agreement that ended the conflict in November 2012. Reinstating that agreement will require a concerted effort between Israelis, Palestinians and others, such as the authorities in Egypt, with the support of the international community. **All those with influence over Hamas must use it to get Hamas to agree to end rocket fire.**" (my emphasis).

"We are in close contact with Israeli and Palestinian leaders and our partners and allies. The Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 9 July, and in the past few days I have spoken to President Abbas, to Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman and Strategic Affairs Minister Steinitz, and to Egyptian Foreign Minister Shukri. As Arab Foreign Ministers meet tonight, I have just discussed the situation with the Foreign Ministers of Jordan and Qatar."

"On 10 July the UN Secretary-General told the Security Council that there was a risk of an all-out escalation in Israel and Gaza and appealed for maximum restraint. He had been in contact with leaders on both sides and other international leaders, underlining his concern about the plight of civilians and calling for bold thinking and creative ideas. On Saturday we joined the rest of the UN Security Council in calling for a de-escalation of the crisis, the restoration of calm and the reinstatement of the November 2012 ceasefire. We are ready to consider further action in the Security Council if that can help to secure the urgent ceasefire that we all want to see. Yesterday, I held discussions in the margins of the Iran Vienna talks with Secretary Kerry and my French and German counterparts to consider how to bring about that objective. Once a ceasefire is agreed, it will be vital that its terms are implemented in full by both sides, **including a permanent end to the unacceptable threat of rocket attacks and other forms of violence against Israel.**" (my emphasis).

"Secondly, we will do all we can to

help alleviate humanitarian suffering in Gaza. At least 17,000 Gazans are seeking shelter with the UN. Hundreds of thousands are suffering shortages of water, sanitation and electricity, and stocks of fuel and medical supplies are running dangerously low. More than half the population was already living without adequate access to food before the crisis, the large majority reliant on aid and many unemployed. The UK is providing £349 million for humanitarian relief, state-building and economic development for Palestinians up to 2015, and providing about £30 million a year to help the people of Gaza."

"We are the third biggest donor to the UN Relief and Works Agency general fund.. Our support has enabled it to respond to the crisis by continuing to provide health services to 70% of the population, sheltering 17,000 displaced people, and distributing almost 30,000 litres of fuel to ensure that emergency water and sewerage infrastructure can operate. The Department for International Development is helping to fund the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN access co-ordination unit. With our support, these organisations are providing food to insecure people, helping to repair damaged infrastructure, getting essential supplies into Gaza, getting medical cases out and delivering emergency medical care. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, has spoken to Prime Minister Hamdallah, and DFID stands ready to do more as necessary."

"Thirdly, a negotiated two-state solution remains the only way to resolve the conflict once and for all and to achieve sustainable peace so that Israeli and Palestinian families can live without fear of violence. No other option exists which guarantees peace and security for both peoples."

"I once again pay tribute to Secretary Kerry's tireless efforts to secure a permanent peace. Of course, the prospects for negotiations look bleak in the middle of another crisis in which civilians are paying the heaviest price, but it has never been more important for leaders on both sides to take the bold steps necessary for peace. For Israel. that should mean a commitment to return to dialogue and to avoid all actions which undermine the prospects for peace, including settlement activity which does so much to undermine confidence in negotiations. For Hamas, it faces a fundamental decision about whether it is prepared to accept Quartet principles and join efforts for peace, **or whether it will continue to use violence and terror with terrible consequences for the people of Gaza.** The Palestinian Authority should show leadership, recommitting itself to dialogue with Israel and making progress on governance and security for Palestinians in Gaza as well as the west bank."(my emphasis).

"In all these areas, the United Kingdom will play its role, working closely with US and European colleagues, encouraging both sides back to dialogue, supporting the Palestinian Authority, keeping pressure on **Hamas and other extremists**, and alleviating the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. There can be no substitute, though, for leadership and political will from the parties concerned. The world looks on in horror once again **as Israel suffers from rocket attacks and Palestinian civilians die.** Only a real peace, with a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and contiguous Palestinian state, can end this cycle of violence. And it is only the parties themselves, with our support, who can make that peace." (my emphasis).

Responding for Labour, Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander supported Hague's statement and echoed much of his criticism of Hamas. The following extracts provide a flavour of what he said.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

"Today, a spiral of violence has again engulfed Gaza, southern Israel and the west bank, bringing untold suffering to innocent people in its wake. Of course, I unequivocally condemn the firing of rockets into Israel by Gaza-based militants. No Government on earth would tolerate such attacks on its citizens, and we recognise Israel's right to defend itself. As the Foreign Secretary set out, in recent days hundreds of rockets have been fired from Gaza at Israel, and at least three Israelis have been seriously injured. However, he was also right to acknowledge that, since the start of the Israeli military operations in Gaza just seven days ago, more than 170 Palestinians have been killed and thousands more have been injured. The UN has reported that more than 80% of those killed were civilians, and that a third of those killed were children. Although this conflict cannot and must not be reduced simply to a ledger of casualties, the scale of the suffering in Gaza today must be fully and frankly acknowledged, because the life of a Palestinian child is worth no less than the life of an Israeli child."

"Does the Foreign Secretary agree that **if the operating logic of Hamas is terror and the operating logic of Israel is deterrence**, then pleas by the international community for restraint alone will be insufficient? Today, the risk of an all-out escalation in the conflict and the threat of a full ground invasion are still palpable.---and preventable, **if Hamas stops firing rockets.**" (my emphasis).

There were strong words of condemnation of Israel from former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw.

Mr Jack Straw:

"The whole House condemns the killing of the three Israelis and the burning of the Palestinian, and none of us has any truck with Hamas. However, for all the vacuous words of the Israeli Government and the Israeli defence forces spokesman, is it not clear that they have no regard for international humanitarian law; that they place a completely different and much lower value on Palestinian life than Israeli life; and that the cycle will go on as long as the international community, in an effort to be even-handed, fails to say to the Israelis that the actions that they are taking are completely outwith the United Nations charter and any idea of how a civilised nation ought to behave?"

Flight MH17: 'Putin Did It!'

In his last statement, on 21 July, before the summer recess, David Cameron spoke about the shooting down of flight HM17 and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza. And he was adamant that Putin and Hamas were respectively responsible. Following the customary words of sympathy for those who died aboard HM17, he directed his anger at Putin and Russia. What follows are key extracts from his statement.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):

"Alongside sympathy for the victims, there is anger. **There is anger that this could happen at all;** there is anger that the murder of innocent women and children has been compounded by sickening reports of looting of victims' possessions and interference with the evidence; and there is rightly anger that a conflict that could have been curtailed by Moscow has instead been fomented by Moscow. That has to change now." (my emphasis).

"In the past few days, I have spoken to Presidents Obama and Hollande, Chancellor Merkel, and the Prime Ministers of the Netherlands, Malaysia, Poland and Australia. We are all agreed on what must happen. First, those with influence on the separatists must ensure that they allow the bodies

of the victims to be repatriated and provide uninhibited access to the crash site to enable a proper international investigation of what happened to flight MH17. Secondly, President Putin must use his influence to end the conflict in Ukraine by halting supplies and training for the separatists. Thirdly, we must establish proper long-term relationships between Ukraine and Russia; between Ukraine and the European Union; and, above all, between Russia and the European Union, NATO and the wider west."

"I spoke with President Putin last night and made it clear that there can be no more bluster or obfuscation. I also made it clear to President Putin that we expect Russia to end its support for the separatists and their attempts to further destabilise Ukraine. No one is saying that President Putin intended flight HM17 to be shot down---it is unlikely that even the separatists wanted this to happen---but we should be absolutely clear about what caused this terrible tragedy to happen. The context for this tragedy is Russia's attempt to destabilise a sovereign state, violate its territorial integrity, and arm and train thuggish militias."

Cameron is an intelligent man, so when he said that there is anger that the shooting down of flight HM17 could happen at all, was he genuinely ignorant that prior to HM17 seven civilian airlines had been shot down by military fire, including Iran Flight 655 by USS Vincennes, an American cruiser on 3 July 1988? *Counterpunch: Tells the Facts, Names the Names,* a US media website, contained a report in July 2008, twenty years after the incident. The following are key extracts from the report. The full report can be read on: *www.counterpunch.org/2008/07/11/the-shoot-down-of-iran-air-flight-65*

The Shooting Down Of Iran Air Flight 655

"In a daily press briefing on July 2, 2008, the following set of questions and answers took place between an unidentified reporter and Department of State Spokesman Sean McCormack:

Question:

"Tomorrow marks the 20 years since the U.S. Navy warship Vincennes gunned down the IR655 civilian airliner, killing all 300 people on board, 71 of whom were children. And while the United States Government settled the incident in the International Court of Justice in 1996 at $61 million in compensation to the families, they, to this day, refuse to apologise--

Mr McCormack:

"Mm-hmm."

Question:

"--as requested by the Iranian Government. And actually, officials in the Iranian Government said today that they're planning on a commemoration tomorrow and it would, you know, show a sign of diplomatic reconciliation if the United States apologised for this incident."

Mr McCormack:

"Mm-hmm."

Question:

"Do you think it sends a positive message if, on the 20th anniversary of this incident, the United States Government apologised for (inaudible)?

Mr McCormack:

"You know, to be honest with you, I'll have to look back and see the history of what we said about this---about the issue. I honestly don't know. Look, nobody wants to see---everybody mourns innocent life lost. But in terms of our official U.S. Government policy response to it, I can't---I have to confess to you, I don't know the history of it. I'd be happy to get an answer over to your question."

CounterPunch reporter:

"Mm-hmm. Could this be true? Could the spokesman for the State Department not know anything about the role that the US played in the Iran-Iraq war in general and Iranian Air Flight 655 in particular? Is it possible that the entire US Department of State is ignorant of that history? Is it conceivable that the current US policy towards Iran is being made by a host of ignoramuses? This is, indeed, a frightening prospect..... The frightening prospect is not helped at all by the correction that appeared on the website of the US Department of State shortly after the above set of questions and answers took place. The correction read:

Iran Air Flight 655 (Taken Question). Question:

"Does the State Department have anything to say on the 20th anniversary of the accidental downing of an Iran Air flight?

Answer:

"The accidental shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 was a terrible human tragedy, and today U.S. officials at the time expressed our deep regret over the tragic loss of life. We would certainly renew our expression of sympathy and condolences to the families of the deceased who perished in the tragedy."

CounterPunch reporter: The last major event that brought about the final capitulation of Iran occurred on July 3 1988. On that day the American warship Vincennes shot down Iran Air Flight 655 over the Persian Gulf, killing all 290 passengers on board. True to its pattern of denying any role in the Iran-Iraq war, at first the United States government tried to deny culpability in the downing of the civilian airliner. On July 3 AP reported that the 'Pentagon said U.S. Navy forces in the gulf sank two Iranian patrol boats and downed an F-14 fighter jet in the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday during an exchange of fire.' The report also said that, according to Iran, the US shot down not an F-14 but a civilian airliner killing all passengers on board. 'U.S. Navy officials in the gulf', the report went on to say, 'denied the Iranian claim.'

"Subsequently, the US claimed that the 'Iranian airliner, in some ways, was not acting like a passenger plane... It was heading directly for the ship, appeared to be descending and was about four miles outside the usual commercial air corridor' (The Washington Post, July 4, 1988). The Pentagon further asserted that USS Vincennes was in international waters, i.e. outside the territorial waters of Iran, and that the passenger plane was emitting a military electronic code."

"Slowly but surely, all the above claims were proved to be false. Vinnences was not in international waters, but in Iran's territorial waters. The Iranian airbus was not heading for the ship or even descending but ascending. The plane was not four miles outside of the usual commercial air corridor, but well within it. Moreover, Flight 655 was not emitting any military signals but regular transponder signals which identified it as a commercial aircraft. All these contradictions resurfaced four years later, when on July 1 1992, the ABC News program Nightline broadcast a piece, investigated jointly with Newsweek magazine, entitled 'The USS Vincennes: Public War, Secret War.' Newsweek magazine itself published on July 13, 1992, a separate article by John Barry and Roger Charles which appeared under the title 'Sea of Lies.' Both pieces showed the contradictions in the US claims, four years earlier, concerning the downing of the Iranian civilian plane"

"Indeed, with regard to the answers provided by the US government to the questions 'Where, precisely, was the Vincennes at the time of the shoot down?' and 'What was she doing there?' ABC's Nightline stated that the 'official response to those two questions has been a tissue of lies, fabrications, half-truths and omissions.' For example, on the issue of the exact position of USS Vincennes

when it shot (down) the Iranian airliner, the following exchange between Ted Koppel of Nightline and Admiral William J. Crowe Jr. took place:

Ted Koppel: But if I was to ask you today, was the Vincennes in international waters at the time that she shot down the Airbus---

William J Crowe Jr: Yes, she was.

Ted Koppel: In international waters?

William J Crowe Jr: No, no, no. She was in Iran's territorial waters.

Ted Koppel: Let me ask you again. Where was the Vincennes at the time that she shot down the Airbus?

William J Crowe Jr: She was in Iran's territorial waters.

The remaining six civilian planes shot down by military fire were:

Cathay Pacific Airways (1954).

On July 23, 1954, mainland China's People's Liberation Army fighters shot down a Cathay Pacific Airways (the airline of Hong Kong, then under British control) C-54 Skymaster flying from Bangkok to Hong Kong; 10 out of the 19 passengers and crew died. In apologising for the attack to Britain days later, the Chinese government stated that they thought the plane was a military aircraft from the Republic of China (Taiwan) on an attack mission against Hainan Island (near where the shoot down took place).

El Al Flight 402 (1955).

On July 27, 1955, an EL Al flight from Vienna to Tel Aviv flew into Bulgarian airspace and was shot down by two Bulgarian MiG fighters. All 58 people on board were killed. After officially denying involvement, Bulgaria admitted to having shot the plane down. Eight years after the attack, Bulgaria agreed to pay a total of $195,000 ($1.5 million in current dollars) to Israel, having already compensated non-Israeli passengers.

Libyan Arab Airlines Flight 114 (1973).

On February 21, 1973, a Libyan Arab Airlines (a wholly owned part of the Libyan government) Boeing 727 flying from Tripoli to Cairo got lost and flew over the Sinai peninsula, which had been under Israeli control since the Six-Day War in 1967. After giving signals to land and firing warning shots, Israeli jets shot down the plane, killing 108 of the 113 people on board, and leaving four passengers and a co-pilot alive. Defense Minister Moshe Dyan called the event an "error of judgement" and the Israeli government compensated the families of victims. Libya condemned the attack as "a criminal act" while the Soviets called it a "monstrous new crime".

Itavia Flight 870 (1980).

On June 27, 1980, an Itavia Airlines flight from Bologna to Palermo with 81 passengers and crew crashed in the Tyrrhenian Sea, near Sicily. The New York Times' Elisabetta Povoledo reported that "the most widely accepted theory behind the crash"--for which an Italian court last year said there was "abundantly clear evidence"--was that a stray missile from an aircraft hit the plane, but any information about which country's aircraft it was, or why, is still very much up in the air.

Korean Air Lines Flight 007 (1983).

KALOO7 was shot down by a Soviet fighter plane on September 1, 1983, killing all 269 passengers and crew, including Larry McDonald a Congressman from Georgia then in his fourth term. An ardent anti-Communist and believer in various conspiracy theories about the Rockefellers, the Trilateral Commission, and the Council on Foreign Relations plotting to bring about a socialist world government, McDonald also was president of the John Birch Society, the ultra-right-wing conspiracist group. There is no evidence that what happened was more complicated than KALOO7 entering Soviet airspace and being shot down as an intruder.

Siberia Airlines Flight 1812 (2001).

On October 4, 2001, 64 Siberia Airlines passengers and 12 crew members onboard a Soviet-made Tupolev Tu-154 en route from Novosibirsk to Tel Aviv were killed when the plane was shot down over the Black Sea by a Ukrainian missile. It took a while for Ukraine to admit that was what happened, but after pressure from Russian investigators, Ukraine's then-president, Leonid Kuchma, accepted that the Ukrainian military was at fault. From 2003 to 2005, Ukraine paid $15.6 million to families of victims following a deal with the government of Israel.

Double Standards

The following exchanges took place on 22 July. In the first, (Written Answers session), Labour's Roger Godsiff asked the Foreign Secretary "If he will introduce an embargo on the export of weapons to Israel." To which Foreign Office Minister Ellwood replied:

"We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza. We call for an immediate de-escalation and restoration of the November 2012 ceasefire, to avoid further civilian injuries and the loss of innocent life. **The United Kingdom does not believe that imposing a blanket arms embargo on Israel would promote progress in the Middle East Peace Process. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend its citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties.**" (my emphasis).

"Export licence applications to all countries continue to be considered on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Exporting Licensing Criteria, taking into account the circumstances prevailing at the time of application. In view of the situation in Gaza, we are keeping all licence applications under review to ensure that all our decisions remain consistent with our human rights commitments and all applicable criteria. If a decision is taken to suspend or revoke licences we will announce this to Parliament, and where possible we will do this in concert with our EU partners." Note: Parliament went into its summer recess on 22 July.

Later that same day, during the debates session, Lib Dem Member Adrian Sanders asked the Minister for Europe, David Liddington: "What discussions he has had with the French Government on arms sales to Russia; and if he will make a statement. Liddington replied:

"**The United Kingdom has already suspended all such export licences to Russia where exports could be used against Ukraine.** We have discussed the possibility of an EU-wide arms and defence exports embargo with the French Government, both bilaterally and at European Council and Council of Ministers meetings." (my emphasis).

Mr Sanders: "I urge the Minister to press the French and other EU countries more on that, **because it really is time we all put principles ahead of short-term economic interest and stopped arming the Russian regime." (my emphasis).**

Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.

C. S. Lewis

It's A Fact

The number of people aged 18 to 24 claiming jobseeker's allowance in each region of the UK at May 2014 was:
East of England – 17,295 (3.5%);
East Midlands – 18,505 (4.2%);
West Midlands – 28,705 (5.3%);
London – 28,830 (3.6%);
North East – 17,065 (6.6%);
North West – 32,165 (4.7%);
South East – 19,090 (2.5%);
South West – 13,835 (2.9%);
Yorkshire and the Humber – 29,440 (5.5%);
Northern Ireland – 12,880 (7.4%);
Scotland – 24,455 (4.8%);
Wales – 16,465 (5.5%).
Parliamentary Written Answer 30/6/14.

The number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance by age, at May 2014, United Kingdom, was
Under 17 years – 195;
Aged 17 years – 1,130;
Aged 18 years – 25,685;
Aged 19 years – 39,165;
Aged 20 to 24 years – 193,875;
Aged 25 to 29 years – 160,250.
PWA 2/7/14.

Number and percentage of people aged 50 and over in employment, April 2013 to March 2014
East of England – 926,000 (42.4%);
East Midlands – 646,000 (39.2%);
West Midlands – 759,000 (38.6%);
London – 885,000 (41.8%);
North East – 341,000 (35%);
North West – 905,000 (36.6%);
South East – 1,348,000 (42.9%);
South West – 843,000 (40.1%);
Yorkshire and the Humber – 722,000 (38.5%);
Northern Iterland – 221,000 (37.7%);
Scotland – 760,000 (39%);
Wales – 428,000 (36.7%).
PWA 7/7/14.

Number of defendants found guilty at all courts for murder, manslaughter, infanticide and causing death by dangerous driving, England and Wales, 2003 to 2013
Year 2003,
Murder – 277;
Manslaughter – 244;
Infanticide – 0;
Death by dangerous driving – 233.
Year 2004,
Murder – 361;
Manslaughter – 265;
Infanticide – not available;
Death by dangerous driving – 241.
Year 2005,
Murder – 394;
Manslaughter – 260;
Infanticide – 2;
Death by dangerous driving – 255.
Year 2006,
Murder – 372;
Manslaughter – 212;
Infanticide – 1;
Death by dangerous driving – 223.
Year 2007,
Murder – 369;
Manslaughter – 219;
Infanticide – 2;
Death by dangerous driving – 233.
Year 2008,
Murder – 439;
Manslaughter – 248;
Infanticide – not available;
Death by dangerous driving – 221.
Year 2009,
Murder – 376;
Manslaughter – 219;
Infanticide – 1;
Death by dangerous driving – 225.
Year 2010,
Murder – 346;
Manslaughter – 209;
Infanticide – 2;
Death by dangerous driving – 154.
Year 2011,
Murder – 343;
Manslaughter – 173;
Infanticide – 0;
Death by dangerous driving – 114.
Year 2012,
Murder – 343;
Manslaughter – 166;
Infanticide – 1;
Death by dangerous driving – 116.
Year 2013,
Murder – 314;
Manslaughter – 171;
Infanticide – 1;
Death by dangerous driving – 109.
PWA 8/7/14.

The prison population aged 60 and over, by age group, England and Wales, at 31 March 2014 was
Age 60 to 65 – 1,791;
Age 66 to 70 – 967;
Age 71 to 75 – 489;
Age 76 to 80 – 228;
Age over 80 – 102.
PWA 21/7/14.

The average weekly amount in payment of employment and support allowance, November 2008 to November 2013, was:
November 2008,
All ages - £61.17,
Aged over 50 - £64.20.
November 2009,
All ages - £73.66,
aged 50 and over - £76.40.
November 2010,
All ages - £81.71,
Aged 50 and over - £83.76.
November 2011,
All ages - £90.55,
Aged 50 and over - £91.73.
November 2012,
All ages - £103.02,
Aged 50 and over - £104.17.
November 2013,
All ages - £109.97,
Aged 50 and over - £111.83.
PWA 22/7/14.