

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

January/February 2016

#278

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It's war

Nia Griffith MP

Syria

Clive Lewis MP

Westminster View

Cllr Alice Perry

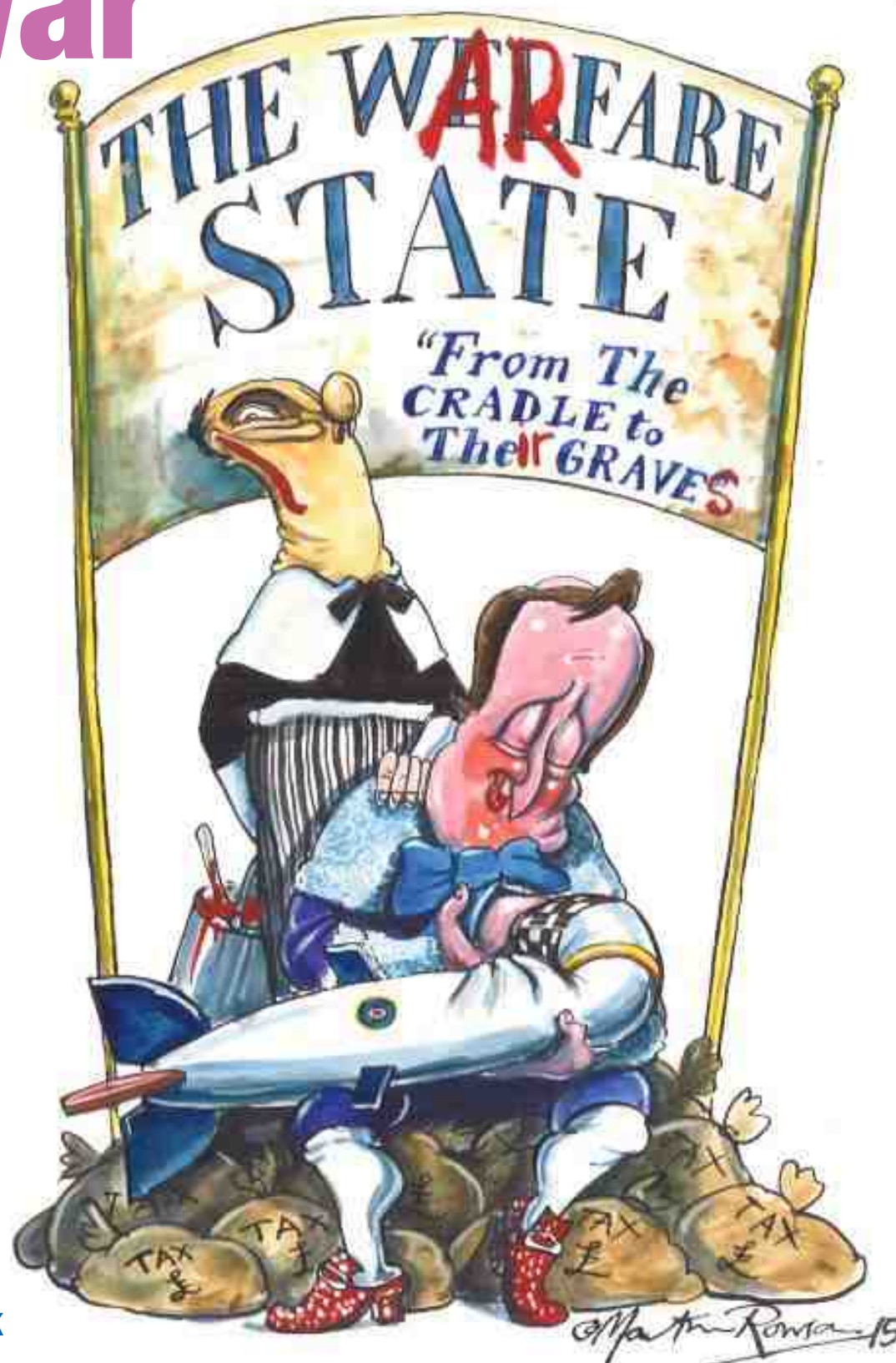
Local government

Prof Prem Sikka

Tax and Austerity

Tehmina Kazi

Anti-extremism



ISSN - 0968 7866

ISSUE

78 >



9 770968 786001

www.chartist.org.uk

Editorial Policy

The editorial policy of CHARTIST is to promote debate amongst people active in radical politics about the contemporary relevance of democratic socialism across the spectrum of politics, economics, science, philosophy, art, interpersonal relations – in short, the whole realm of social life.

Our concern is with both democracy and socialism. The history of the last century has made it abundantly clear that the mass of the population of the advanced capitalist countries will have no interest in any form of socialism which is not thoroughly democratic in its principles, its practices, its morality and its ideals. Yet the consequences of this deep attachment to democracy – one of the greatest advances of our epoch – are seldom reflected in the discussion and debates amongst active socialists.

CHARTIST is not a party publication. It brings together people who are interested in socialism, some of whom are active in the Labour Party and the trade union movement. It is concerned to deepen and extend a dialogue with all other socialists and with activists from other movements involved in the struggle to find democratic alternatives to the oppression, exploitation and injustices of capitalism and class society

Editorial Board

CHARTIST is published six times a year by the Chartist Collective. This issue was produced by an Editorial Board consisting of Duncan Bowie (Reviews), Peter Chalk, Mike Davis (Editor), Nigel Doggett, David Floyd, Don Flynn, Roger Gillham, Tehmina Kazi, Peter Kenyon (Treasurer), Frank Lee, Dave Lister, Andy Morton (Website Editor), Mary Southcott, James Grayson, Patricia d'Ardenne, Sheila Osmanovic and Patrick Mulcahy. Production: Peter Kenyon.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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Published by Chartist Publications
PO Box 52751 London EC2P 2XF
tel: 0845 456 4977

Printed by People For Print Ltd, Unit 10, Riverside Park, Sheaf Gardens, Sheffield S2 4BB – Tel 0114 272 0915.
Email: juma@btconnect.com

Website: www.chartist.org.uk
Email: editor@chartist.org.uk
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Newsletter online: to join, email webeditor@chartist.org.uk

Contributions and letters deadline for CHARTIST #279 11th February 2016

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OUR HISTORY - 64

William Mellor - Direct Action (1920)

A member of the Oxford University Fabian Society, Mellor became secretary to the Fabian Research committee in 1913. He was a contributor to the *Daily Herald* and a leader of the Guild Socialist movement, serving as secretary to the National Guilds League. He was involved in the Shop Stewards' movement and acted as an unofficial adviser to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Jailed as a conscientious objector, after the war he was industrial editor of the *Herald*, becoming editor in 1926. Briefly a member of the Communist Party on its foundation, he soon returned to the ILP. In the 1930's, he was a member of the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda and then in the Socialist League. Mellor was a good speaker and propagandist but tended to be domineering and temperamental. He twice tried unsuccessfully to enter Parliament. At one time he had a relationship with ILP member Barbara Betts, later known as Barbara Castle. Many of his writings were collaborations with G D H Cole.

"The struggle of the classes has two sides: it is a struggle for social equality, for the abolition of all economic distinctions between man and man, and it is a struggle for the right of every individual to express himself in the work he does, for the right to labour not for the benefit of an employer, but for the wellbeing and happiness of one's fellows. The struggle finds its expression on the economic field, for on that field is to be found the basis of all life. Bread and butter are the fundamentals of all existence, and a world in which supplies of bread and butter are unfairly distributed is a world marked by social injustice and social inequality. This fundamental economic inequality affects every sphere of life, and eventuates in a world whose people are sharply divided in morality, in methods of life, in outlook and in speech. It produces within society, two classes – the one leisured and cultured, free from economic care and worry; the other condemned to a life-long struggle to sustain animal existence, living the drab existence of a beast of burden. It produces a race of masters and a race of slaves. More and more as Capitalism develops the segregation of these classes is affected, and the continued free development of 'big business' can only end in the absolute division of mankind into machine-minders and machine-owners. Such a world is the apotheosis of Capitalism and the burial-ground of freedom."

"Fortunately for the world there is no free and unhindered development of Capitalism. The wage-slaves are everywhere questioning the divine right of their masters. They are seeking for a new basis of life, and blunderingly, but surely, are working for a change that shall destroy for ever that power of man over man that springs from the possession of property. The underworld is in a state of unrest, and it is striving to throw off the chains that weigh it down. That throwing off is in process the world over and in no country is Capitalism left unchallenged. The world is in revolt, and the weapons used to consummate that revolt are economic. Direct Action is the watchword of both those who defend and those who attack...My hopes lie with all the countless millions the world over who are striving to create out of the chaos of the old a new world, free from injustice, economic slavery and unmerited suffering."

"The sad fact is that there is so much wishful thinking about nuclear power in the male-dominated engineering establishment in the UK that we turn wistfully to unlikely solutions to deliver nuclear power. No, nuclear power won't work in some other guise, whether it be small, modular, Chinese or chocolate flavoured. Small nuclear reactors will not be cheaper than large ones - why were nuclear, power plant scaled up over time anyway? The Chinese, of course, whose own nuclear programme is stalling, will not deliver on the terms we want."

DR DAVE TOKE
ABERDEEN

LETTER

Wishful thinking on nuclear power

I am angry at the suggestion from Nigel Doggett in the last *Chartist*, that there should be a 'debate' about the suitability of nuclear power as a means of decarbonisation.

The UK's supposed nuclear build programme is a fantasy that serves now only to distract attention from the Government's lack of measures to boost renewable energy and energy efficiency. The only scheduled nuclear project, Hinkley C, has no serious chance of being started short of a commercial suicide wish on behalf of Electricite de France (EDF). EDF is reeling from the continuing losses associated with the other two plants of the same model planned for Hinkley C (the EPR) that have not been delivered. Its

own employee shareholders are pleading with the company not to go ahead with Hinkley C because of fears that it will finally destroy EDF. EDF is mainly owned by the French Government but has 13 per cent of shares owned by private sources. Rating agencies are threatening to downgrade EDF if the Hinkley project goes ahead.

This disastrous commercial scene is caused by the simple fact that the safety criteria needed for nuclear power plant make the technology so costly and difficult to deliver that it has become mission impossible under modern regulatory requirements. Indeed in the world as a whole nuclear power production has actually declined compared to 20 years ago.

Steadying Labour for the big challenges

The barrage of attacks on Corbyn from the motley army of establishment figures – enthusiastically joined by notable Blairites – has been relentless. "Unelectable", "out by Christmas", "Labour doomed to defeat", "student not a statesman", and so it goes on and on.

Yet he has survived, and Labour's embattled party is steadying. He has won three key victories. First, Corbyn has unpicked the central features of Osborne's Autumn statement and forced a retreat on Tax Credits and police cuts. The Tories' austerity plan is starting to fray.

Second, Labour's much heralded Oldham by-election collapse, billed as a referendum on Corbyn's leadership, didn't happen. The voters gave Labour a win – with an increased majority.

Finally, Corbyn has weathered the storms over Syria. While the Tories imposed a three line whip for bombing, Corbyn allowed a free vote and an opportunity for Hilary Benn to delight the Tories by (in the Bennite style of his late father) shamelessly appealing to the memory of the 1930s International Brigades who bravely fought fascism while the UK government sat on its hands. His fighting talk did not prevent a large majority of the Parliamentary Party, a majority of the shadow cabinet and (on a sample poll) a massive 75 per cent of party members backing Corbyn: cementing his leadership even further on one of Labour's most divisive issues.

As both shadow ministers **Nia Griffith MP** and **Clive Lewis MP**, argue, both the Tories and Blairites have failed to learn the lessons of the disastrous military adventures in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Rather than bombing, we must campaign to close down the supply of arms to Daesh, and stop the complicity of governments in permitting the flow of oil revenues and fighters across the Turkish border.

As **Andy Gregg** explains, Daesh is a product of the years of war and intervention by western imperial powers. With neither a military nor a peace strategy, bombs and Brimstone missiles are far more likely to fan the flames of terrorism, killing many innocent people and further boosting the stream of refugees. The Defence and Foreign Affairs select committee reports were largely ignored by Cameron, and Labour rebels equally ignored Labour party conference policy: to work for a political settlement and a humane response to the refugee crisis.

Margaret Owen highlights the plight of the Kurds in this troubled region. Hailed as libera-

tors in Sinjar and Kobani they are the most effective force on the ground combating Daesh. Yet Turkey continues lethal attacks on them while Britain turns a blind eye.

In spite of the Tories' austerity agenda, they are easily able to find £12 billion for additional defence spending and billions for the renewal of Trident. Corbyn has long argued that instead of Trident renewal, we should pursue a peace and de-proliferation strategy and use the £100 billion investment for social reconstruction. **Andrew Smith** provides a case for this switch of investment into green, socially useful jobs that would more than absorb the thousands currently employed in weapons production.

This chimes with **Frank Lee's** thoughts in reviewing Paul Mason's *Post Capitalism* where capitalism is increasingly unable to address the big problems of society. In the wake of thousands of redundancies in the steel industry at Redcar, Scunthorpe and in Scotland,

Tim Page further underscores the case for a socially responsible alternative industrial strategy.

For Labour, the big challenge is to reach out beyond Labour's growing membership, to the millions of voters at the sharp end of Tory policies. Labour needs to change the Tory neo-liberal narrative to one of progressive, redistributionist, sustainable social-economics. **Prem Sikka** provides more detail on the social and economic costs of

Osbornomics and outlines an alternative based on ending the billions lost in tax avoidance and evasion.

To be fit to lead this new social movement, Labour needs to engage with members and modernise the heavily centralised Labour Party machine built to close down, rather than open up, political thinking. **Trevor Fisher** shares the enthusiasm for a new politics but questions the ability of the leadership to mobilise a new, winning coalition of support. Could groups like Momentum lead to more sustained political engagement or will they be sidelined into hectoring sectarian politics? Or will Open Labour and other member forums provide valuable platforms for vital political debate?

While Cameron struggles to contain internal divisions over Europe and the fall out from the bullying scandal, it's time for Labour parliamentarians, if they are genuinely interested in defeating the Tories, to line up behind Corbyn's leadership and engage with members to develop the new politics and describe a positive socialist alternative.

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Paris agreement exposes Tory climate change treachery

David Toke reports better news from Paris – but says what about delivery?

The news from the Paris climate negotiations is surprisingly upbeat compared to the depressing scenes surrounding global talks only a couple of years ago. Nations are coming forward with pledges to reduce carbon emissions, based in particular on renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. Of course the battle is far from over yet - for a start the various national pledges for action need to be redeemed in practice. But what is significant is that emerging economies appear to be seizing the initiative in installing renewable energy.

The large majority of greenhouse gases come from energy use (including a significant proportion from transport). Energy also accounts for most of the production of carbon dioxide which is a very long-lasting greenhouse gas. Beef cattle make up a significant proportion of emissions through methane venting, although methane is much less long-lasting in the atmosphere compared to carbon dioxide.

Electricity generation currently accounts for around a quarter of UK carbon emissions with transport accounting for around 30 per cent. With technological advance in batteries moving forward at a rapid rate electric cars are becoming more desirable and practical meaning that electricity sources will become more important, not just to supply conventional electricity demand, but also to supply transport needs. But then electric cars are much more efficient compared to petroleum based vehicles, especially if the power comes from fluctuating renewable energy sources which can be stored in the batteries.

This is being reversed

For a while - between the beginning of the UK's Renewables Obligation support mechanism (in 2003) and up until this year - increasing priority was given to the carbon reduction agenda in the UK, partly because it also appeared to coincide with finding solutions to the crisis of higher oil and gas prices. But now this is being reversed.

Energy efficiency in buildings should be a priority, but efforts to further improve energy efficiency standards for new buildings have been cancelled and retrofitting of new buildings scaled back. 2015 was also the year when an 'energy positive' house (more energy produced than consumed) was installed in Wales for just £125,000 - not bad for a prototype - but there will be little support for such schemes in the future in the UK.

Meanwhile our renewable energy programme, now heading to supply over 25 per cent of electricity by 2017, is being virtually ended in 2017. The cancellation of so-called subsidies for onshore wind and countryside solar schemes has nothing to do with costs - their costs are now no greater than electricity from new gas fired power stations (being given subsidies under the 'capacity mechanism'). Rather Tories simply do not like the look of them. Meanwhile the Treasury (the source of much of the cutbacks in green energy) has altered the vehicle excise duty scheme to eliminate most of the advantages that are currently earned by buying a more

energy efficient vehicle.

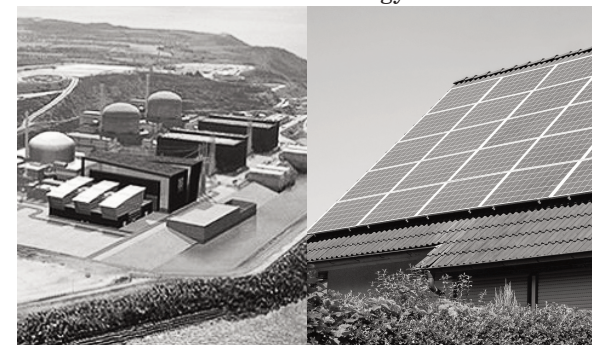
All of this is against a backdrop of a global revolution in deployment of renewable energy, now led by emerging economies. Approaching half of all the wind power and around a quarter of all the solar pv installed in the world in 2014 was installed in China. However, even in the EU and the USA the large majority of new electricity generation capacity being installed is renewable energy. Renewable energy is certainly not the fringe energy source many in the UK still think it to be. On the contrary it is now the dominant mode of investment in new electricity capacity.

This country has done reasonably well since 1990 to reduce its carbon emissions by nearly a third. However progress much beyond this is now threatened by the turnaround in policies and also, potentially, the drop in oil and gas prices which will boost consumption of fossil fuels. In the UK fossil fuels are now being subsidised and fracking promoted. In fact even fracking seems unlikely to deliver much as investors are put off by the mounting local opposition to shale gas operations.

Severe doubt

The Government are hiding, in effect, behind a fig leaf of planned nuclear power stations whose delivery seems to be in severe doubt owing to their sheer costliness and unattractiveness for industrial investors. Far from helping, this supposed programme is being used as an excuse to avoid further investment in renewable energy. It is not as if this failure to deliver nuclear power is isolated to the UK.

The global nuclear renaissance proclaimed a decade ago has failed to materialise and there is now less nuclear power as a proportion of global electricity production than there was twenty years ago. Nuclear power will massively expand in press releases, but not in practice. Nuclear power was never cheap, but concern about safety measures has made nuclear power stations even more difficult to build in practice - never mind the issues of decommissioning. A key to progress in the UK seems to be not only an increase in determination to reduce carbon emissions, but to get away from the current policies of fantasy nuclear power plants that are now helping to block measures to encourage energy conservation and renewable energy.



Tory energy subsidies:
Nuclear - blank cheque Solar panels - err...no money

Patty McCabe on missing million(s)

Damaged democracy

Recently I asked my 16 year old student how she thought Hitler would best consolidate his power in the early 1930s. She replied, in all earnestness, that the best way he could do this would be to restrict the number of people that could vote. All potential historical inaccuracies aside, and yet another World War Two analogy (they appear to be two a penny at the moment), she was pretty much on the money. The problem is that her comments did not bring to mind Nazi Germany, every examiner's favourite topic, but rather the changes that are currently being made by the government under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act, by which we would move from a household method of registration to individual registration.

On the surface, it would appear that there is very little untoward about changing the way people register to vote, in fact it sounds painfully dull. The government's insistence, however, on moving the original deadline of 2016 forward to verify any outstanding voters whose details could not be matched and approved for the new register mean that 1.9 million people could quite literally drop off the electoral register. This is despite explicit advice from the Electoral Commission not to do so: 'we recommend that Ministers should not make an order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER (Individual Electoral Registration). We recommend that the end date for the transition should remain, as currently provided in law, December 2016.'

Not only does failure to take the advice mean that 4% of the total register could quite literally disappear, but it also means the Boundary Commission,

currently set to start work in April 2016, will use the December 2015 electoral register. This is a problem as the unregistered voters are not evenly distributed. London is set to lose 6.9% of its voters (potentially 8 to 10 seats), while the South East will lose only 3.5%. Areas with high density housing and multiple occupancy will be hit the hardest, with representation shifting from renters to homeowners, and from urban areas to rural areas.

Needless to say whom this could skew the vote in favour of, with representation potentially being taken away from young people in general, students in particular and certain ethnic minorities. Whichever way you choose to look at this issue,

restricting the number people entitled to vote is damaging to any healthy democracy especially in a climate where people are already losing faith in the system. The voting turnout for the 18-25 age group was 43%. This is not going to be

helped by the changes to the system when most universities have stated that they have little intention of creating campaigns to encourage students to register in years when there is not a General Election.

With the current political climate being what it is, and the meaty matters readily available for the people to rally against, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 probably appears like dull reading for the politically conscious youth of today. Yet it is exactly this age group that the legislation will effect. This is not to say that other issues of today are any less important, but that failure to address the situation will result in a damaged democracy, where young people, students, and minority groups within society, will suffer the most.

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Dr Dave Toke is Reader in Energy Politics at University of Aberdeen

Go steel, go green

Tim Page explains how the steel industry crisis underlines the need for an industrial strategy

British Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review announced in November 2015 will be remembered, rightly, for its massive U-turn on tax credits. But another small drama was being played out as the Chancellor presented his statement to the House of Commons.

During his speech, Osborne said: "Businesses... need an active and sustained industrial strategy. That strategy launched in the last parliament continues in this one".

Talk of a government split would perhaps be over-dramatic, but supporters of an active industrial strategy – whose number definitely includes the TUC – cheered this statement, after six months in which the new Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Sajid Javid, has pointedly refused to speak those words, preferring the term, "industrial approach". This cannot be dismissed simply as semantics: "strategy" suggests the active power of government; "approach" means something less tangible.

Signed up

George Osborne, perhaps the leading contender for the Conservative leadership after David Cameron steps down, is recasting himself as a one-nation Conservative. This fits well with his support for a policy that meets the approval of Michael Heseltine, Peter Mandelson, Vince Cable, Andrew Adonis and Angela Eagle. Business organisations the CBI and the EEF, as well as the TUC, have signed up to support an active industrial strategy. At a time when businesses and workers seek policy certainty in the face of strong economic currents, this new commitment to industrial strategy could not have been more important. We now wait to see if the Business Secretary will step into line.

If he needs even more encouragement, Sajid Javid should look



at the recent turmoil in the British steel industry. Steel is a crucial foundation industry. It contributes over £2bn to the UK's balance of trade. It sustains tens of thousands of jobs directly, and many more in the supply chain. And it generates £90,000 of added value for each and every steelworker. If these jobs and skills are lost, they are lost forever. Communities with steel in their DNA will be devastated.

A stereotype would have you believe that heavy industries like steel are the industries of yesterday, but nothing could be further from the truth. In Germany, the wind turbine industry is the second largest user of steel, after the automotive sector. If we want the green industries – and the green jobs – that would both help to pay our way in the world and create a cleaner planet in the 21st century, we need a strong steel sector. The TUC has championed the need for a just transition to green growth, delivering wealth, security and prosperity for decades to come. UK steel must be at the heart of that low carbon future.

So what is to be done to support our steel industry?

First, government must take action to relieve the steel sector from exorbitant business rates. Firms in the UK pay business rates up to ten times higher than their competitors in France and Germany. Government can level the playing field by removing plant and machinery from busi-

ness rate calculations, a measure that as well as providing greater parity with our continental neighbours, would be pro-investment and pro-business.

Compensation package

Second, we need a meaningful compensation package for energy intensive industries. The Chancellor announced in the budget that he would bring forward from April 2016 part of the energy compensation package for steel and energy intensive industries, once state aid clearance is received. There are two problems with this announcement, the principle of which is welcome. The first is that the package on offer would compensate producers for the indirect costs of small-scale feed in tariffs, but not the Renewables Obligation. The sector still stands to pay 70 per cent of the policy cost the package aims to address. The second problem is that waiting for state aid approval will be a long wait, especially for an industry in immediate crisis. The government needs to use its influence to fast-track this proposal. The European steel industry is feeling the heat, so there should be a degree of understanding and flexibility for the UK's position.

Lastly, we need to use our procurement policy wisely to secure British steel jobs. For many years, trade unions were lonely voices in the battle for the smart

use of procurement policy, but finally politicians have caught up. There are a host of provisions within European procurement directives which enable the use of, for example, British steel in major infrastructure projects such as HS2. Procurement decisions are supposed to represent 'best value', not just lowest cost. A procurement policy that saves steel communities in the north of England sounds like good value. Tendered contracts can also include community benefit clauses, stressing the development of local skills, recruitment and reinvestment in communities as part of procurement spending. Other European governments make full use of these provisions. If the Germans can do it, the French can do it and the Italians can do it, why can't we do it too?

Dumping

Fourth, we need to take action on the dumping of Chinese steel on the European market. The TUC welcomes China's entry into the global economy. In 2013, we published a report, 'The Way of the Dragon', which looked at the rise of China and East Asia, considering how the UK should respond to this massive change in the world's balance of economic power. We highlighted the vital export markets for UK companies as major Chinese cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou – and the consumers that live in them – became richer. As internationalists, we welcome the opportunity for Chinese workers to move out of poverty, even as we support the right of those workers to join free trade unions and enjoy basic democratic rights.

But a global economy needs global trade rules that are fair and are seen to be fair. The sale of goods below the cost of production – 'dumping', to use the vernacular – is illegal under international trade rules. This is why the TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, has written to the Prime Minister, asking him to put pressure on China to stop dumping cut price steel on European markets. Again, the wheels turn slowly in the EU – it takes EU industry at least seven months to prepare an anti-dumping complaint and an investigation by the European Commission can take up to 15 months after that – in contrast to the much swifter action taken in the United States. Seventy per cent of the public in the UK support similar, swift

action here.

Fifth, it is not too late to learn from a major German experience of the economic crisis, that of short-time working. In other EU countries, such as Austria and Germany, this has been supported by the state and it allows companies to respond to fluctuations in the market without cutting jobs. In 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government introduced support for short time working through ProAct, which offered a £2,000 wage subsidy per head, to go with £2,000 for training. If the UK steel sector is going through a short-term crisis, there are clear lessons from the European experience of short-time working.

There is a range of practical proposals that can safeguard the sector and secure its place in the thriving manufacturing economy that the UK needs to rebuild

Finally, and linked to this last point, an active industrial strategy should develop the role of trade unions as social partners. In 2011, the TUC published a report, *German Lessons*, which, as the title suggests, sought to learn how Europe's powerhouse economy had achieved its success. The role of government, business and unions working together for the good of German industry and its workforce flowed through the report, including in Germany's support for short-time working. Interviewed for the report, Dr Frederic Speidel, IG Metall's full-time officer at Volkswagen, said: "The Grand Coalition [between

the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats] allowed a lot of good direct communication between trade unions and the government. We were able to bring in our politics, our ideas, our trade union concerns... The law on short-time working, which was limited to six months, was extended so that companies could have short-time work for eighteen months. It was eventually extended to two years." Norbert Kluge, the co-ordinator of the European Works Council at the German steel company, ThyssenKrupp, told *German Lessons*: "There was the great big coalition between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, and the Labour Minister was a Social Democrat, and we made them aware simply that they needed the highest interpretation of the German labour market rules to help these people." Norbert added: "I think this is why you read in the newspapers every day that German industry came out of the crisis better than others."

Major job losses

The UK's steel sector has seen major job losses in recent months. It continues to face huge uncertainty. We cannot sit on our hands and do nothing. We must not "leave this to the market". There is a range of practical proposals that can safeguard the sector and secure its place in the thriving manufacturing economy that the UK needs to rebuild. To do that, we need an active industrial strategy. Even George Osborne understands this. Over to you, Mr Javid!

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Shrinking the state

Austerity can only be ended by a shift in political philosophy argues **Prem Sikka**

Within minutes of the Chancellor delivering his autumn statement, *The Daily Telegraph* declared that ‘George Osborne has ushered in the end of austerity’. True that he succumbed to public pressure and temporarily abandoned the savage cuts in tax credits, which top-up the income of the less well-off. He also did not proceed with the rumoured cuts in police budgets, but that does not amount to the end of austerity.

Austerity is part of a neoliberal philosophy which espouses a smaller state for supporting citizens but not for corporations, reduction in government but not personal debt, abandonment of citizens to markets and cheapening labour to increase corporate profitability. Austerity is an ideological choice and not a social necessity.

Difficulty

The Greek economic crisis showed the difficulty of standardising economic policies across countries, regardless of their local needs. Many commentators have drawn attention to the foolishness of imposing an overvalued Euro and curbs on state intervention in social and economic matters. Yet this philosophy is written into broader economic policy too. For example, on 19 June 2015, the EU reassessed the UK's economy and said that “The United Kingdom should put an end to the present excessive deficit situation by 2016-2017 at the latest. The United Kingdom should reach a headline deficit of 4.1 % of GDP in 2015-2016 and 2.7 % of GDP in 2016-2017, which should be consistent with delivering an improvement in the structural balance of 0.5 % of GDP in 2015-2016 and 1.1 % of GDP in 2016-2017, based on the Commission's updated 2015 spring forecast”.

The above numbers are arbitrary and have no regard for any local social settlements mandated through the ballot box. They damage democracy and limit public choices. The policies are entrenched

ing austerity across the EU and have been eagerly embraced by the UK government as it resonates with its right-wing policies. For example, in its autumn statement the government is committed to a further £12 billion reduction in public expenditure as it seeks a ratio of 36.5% of GDP by 2020, a level last achieved in the depression era of the 1930s.

The relentless assault on ordinary people continues. The current government has backed off cuts in tax credits, but their replacement known as Universal Credits will deliver the same devastating effects from 2017 onwards. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has said that 2.6 million working families will be £1,600 a year worse off than they would have been under the current system while 1.9 million will be £1,400 a year better off.

The government is looking for £22 billion of what is called ‘efficiency savings’ in the National Health Service (NHS) which is already hard-pushed for cash. In addition, the government is looking for a 25% cut in the Department of Health's Whitehall budget.

Poor record

The government has a poor record on chasing tax avoiders, but there are to be 18% further cuts, which the government terms efficiency savings, to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). HMRC admits that for each of the last 10 years, it has failed to collect about £35 billion due to tax avoidance, evasion or arrears though some models put the estimates at around £120 billion a year.

Other cuts include 26% for the Cabinet Office; 14% for the Department of Works and Pensions, 37% for the Department of Transport and 17% for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. The government is to close a number of courts even though some 30,000 cases relating to tax disputes are waiting to be heard.



George Osborne: pondering how long he can fool voters

Altogether some 80,000 civil servant jobs are expected to disappear which will have a knock-on effect as people will have less to spend.

A 56% cut in local government funding by 2020 has been planned. So how are the local councils to fund libraries, road repairs, housing, flood defences, child care and services for the elderly? The government says that councils can sell £250 billion of assets. The difficulty is that this form of privatisation can only generate one-off cash and can not solve the deeper funding problems. Selling household silver to pay for operating costs is not a good policy. The sale of public buildings would mean that councils would need to lease offices and pay rents. The sale of parks would decimate the local environment. By starving councils of funding, the government will soon declare them to be inefficient and thus pave the way for privatisation of swathes of public services.

Local councils are to be allowed to add 2% to council tax to fund social care. This is expected to raise £6.2 billion, but are ordinary people in a position to provide this? The workers' share of GDP has been relentlessly depressed. In 1976, wages and salaries accounted for 65.1% of the gross domestic product (GDP). It now stands at 49.3%, the lowest ever recorded. Despite the recession corporate profitability is high, but a wage rise in real terms for workers is not on the horizon. Lengthening queues at food banks and decimation of

Prem Sikka is professor of Accounting at Essex University

local high streets show that ordinary people do not have the purchasing power to support a sustained economic recovery.

The government could stimulate the economy by redistribution of wealth, but it will not do so. The corporation tax rate has declined from 52% (in 1973) to 20% and is set to further decline to 18% by 2019. The top rate of income tax has declined from 83% (in 1979) to 45%. Perhaps, those with the broadest shoulders could carry the biggest cuts, but that is not the case. There are no plans to reverse cuts in corporation tax or income tax reductions for the wealthy.

The government could borrow to invest in social infrastructure, but is committed to eliminating the deficit and having a surplus by 2020. Instead, it is expecting ordinary people to take on more debt. The personal debt in the UK is about £1.46 trillion, just short of the GDP. The government's economic recovery plans assume that by 2020 this would rise to about £2.5 trillion. With a shrinking share of the GDP, most people will not be able to repay this debt. The seeds of another financial crisis are being sown.

The Conservative government is pursuing its ideological project of shrinking the state even though ultimately only the state can provide social infrastructure, bailout of banks, security and enable citizens to have a collective identity. The government may achieve its deficit reduction and appease the City of London, but at what social cost? A new society is being crafted where timely healthcare will be available to those able to pay, and decent housing will be beyond the reach of many. In the government's policies, poverty, poor health, lack of economic opportunity, decent housing and reliance on welfare are portrayed as failures of the individual rather than as properties of a social system.

Deprivation in inner cities

The Conservative administration of 1979-1997 pursued similar policies and these were accompanied by deprivation in inner cities, high unemployment, riots and ultimately complaints that without investment in healthcare, education and transport, the private sector could not thrive. Historically, the UK economy has

been built by a combination of public and private investment. The state built telecommunications, biotechnology, airlines, shipping, gas, water, electricity and other industries as the private sector did not show any appetite for risks in emerging technologies. This provided well-paid skilled jobs. The current obsession with deficits and appeasement of markets will leave the UK behind in competitive stakes.

The never-ending austerity will not be reversed by simply changing governments. A major shift in political philosophy is needed. There are signs that the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn may provide this new direction. Relationship with the EU will need to be renegotiated so that citizens' aspirations can be met and the state is not strait-jacketed by some market diktats about investment. The EU and UK government obsession with public debt and neglect of personal debt needs to be challenged. The alternative is misery for millions, insecurity and instability which will deepen social divisions.

CYPRUS

The new scandal of British forces in Cyprus

Emine Ibrahim on refugees blocked on ‘British soil’

A group of 115 refugees including 29 children arrived at RAF Akrotiri on Cyprus by boat in October. It was unclear if they intended to get to Akrotiri or had become disorientated and lost en route to Greece from Turkey.

Many of the refugees would not be aware that their arrival and the diplomatic wrangle which ensued is part of a huge question which has engulfed my parent's homeland for over 50 years. Those 29 children forced to live in tents by British forces to the point that we saw threats of suicide and tents aflame, are the most recent victims of Britain wanting to have its cake and eat it. Britain refused to process the refugees and resettle them against the legal view of the United Nations as they had landed on ‘British soil’. This is the very British soil

which will now be used for airstrikes on Syria and the very ‘British soil’ which has become famous for the 45 minute threat in the Iraq dossier.

Cyprus is a small island state in the Mediterranean which undoubtedly has punched above its weight over the last 50 years in terms of international media attention. From the armed struggle for union with Greece in the 1950s, the 1960 independence from the British empire, the Greek and Turkish intercommunal bloodbath that ensued to the tragic events of 1974 that has left the island divided since.

Let's not be fooled that the 1960 Republic gave Cyprus independence in the way we understand it. If you look at the various independence acts following the end of the British Empire they are titled as such. The Indian Independence Act, The Jamaican



Refugees arriving at RAF Akrotiri on Cyprus

Emine Ibrahim is a councillor in the London Borough of Haringey

Independence Act, then we have The Cyprus Act, surely there is a word missing.

This is another episode in the utter scandal that has been the role of British forces in Cyprus over the last 50 years.

Councils under the cosh

David Cameron may have been oblivious to the damage cuts are causing in Oxfordshire but Labour councils are aiming to resist reports **Alice Perry**

In the New Year Councils around the country will be setting their budgets. Since Labour lost power nationally in 2010, Councils have faced dramatic cuts from central government.

Following a meeting in November to discuss the impact of the Government's spending review between John McDonnell MP Shadow Chancellor, Lilian Greenwood MP Shadow Secretary of State for Transport and senior local government leaders; Joe Anderson Mayor of Liverpool, Steve Bullock Mayor of Lewisham, Graham Chapman Deputy Leader of Nottingham, Richard Leese Leader of Manchester, Kieran Quinn Leader of Tameside, Sharon Taylor Leader of Stevenage and Anne Western Leader of Derbyshire, the Labour MPs and Council Leaders released a joint statement, saying:

"Labour councils and councillors across the country have and will continue to innovate, run their authorities well and to do everything possible to defend local communities, protect those who rely on public services and, unlike the government, continue to set balanced budgets. Labour councils have led the way in driving economic growth, creating jobs and building homes.

The Government's cuts to funding for local councils are tearing apart the fabric of our local communities. Around the country, libraries and children's centres are shutting their doors, old people are not getting the care they need and deserve, youth services are disappearing, roads are going unrepaired and local communities are losing the tools for economic growth.

The cuts are ideologically driven, unfairly distributed, are putting pressure on all other public services. The Government responsible for reducing funding to such intolerable levels is attempting to lay the blame at the feet of local councillors.

The Conservative cuts to coun-

cil budgets are not primarily intended to reduce the deficit. Instead, they demonstrate the Tories' ideological plan to shrink the state. While they have cut councils' funding by 40% they have increased funding for the Cabinet Office and cut taxes for the wealthiest.

Funding cuts have hurt those most in need. In March the IFS assessed the impact of the austerity measures ordered by the Government and found that that the poorest areas are being cut much more deeply than wealthier areas. The 10 most deprived local authority areas have lost £782 per household while the 10 wealthiest areas lost just £48 per household.

The Government have closed their eyes to the damage they are causing to communities. Earlier this year the Public Accounts Committee's report into local government cuts said: "Value for money could be undermined by reductions in spending which lead to 'cost-shunting' between local government and other service

Even the Prime Minister displayed wilful ignorance of his own policies when he complained to his local council about service cuts

providers – for example, reductions in social care provision leading to bed blocking in NHS hospitals. Cuts to local government are an attempt by the Conservative government to push the blame for cuts down to local government while dismantling the welfare state. Their forced sale of council homes – without funding replacements – further demonstrates their strategy to abdicate responsibility for the worst decisions they are making.

It is time to bring unfair cuts to an end and to set up fair and sustainable funding for local communities and the services they rely on.

Labour at every level opposes unfair cuts to local councils,

recognises the value to communities of high quality public services, is committed to driving economic growth and will always seek to protect services that help make society fairer."

This powerful statement means a lot to all of us who have campaigned for fair funding for local government. It is important that MPs, councillors, trade unions and Labour Party members work together to highlight the damage these Tory cuts are doing. It is also important to emphasise that despite these massive, unfair cuts, and in incredibly difficult circumstance, Labour in local government continues to deliver for our communities.

Positive difference

Labour Councils still make a huge, positive difference to our communities. Around the country, Labour Councils are building new Council housing, paying workers the living wage, building new affordable Council housing, tackling rogue landlords, helping residents reduce energy bills and tackling fuel poverty. On employment they are securing new jobs and apprenticeships, and helping people back to work, tackling payday lending, promoting the use of credit unions, regenerating our communities, supporting local businesses.

New models

On the social side they are developing new models of integrated health and social care, providing free school meals to school children, pioneering new ways of improving public health, using ethical procurement policies and challenging companies guilty of blacklisting workers and supporting refugees.

In incredibly difficult circumstances, our councillors show the difference voting Labour makes. Losing the 2015 General Election was bitterly disappointing, but there are so many vital elections next May. The fight back starts here.

Alice Perry is an Islington councillor and a member of Labour's NEC

Turkish genocide against Kurds

While Kurdish forces win battles against Daesh/ISIS, Turkish leader Erdogan wages war against them with complicity in the West reports **Margaret Owen**

Let us be clear. Under President Erdogan and his AKP (Justice and Development party) Turkey, is committing crime after crime against its Kurdish citizens, and against the Kurds of Syria. But, to our shame, our government is silent.

Ever since his party failed to gain the super majority he needed, in the June election, (so he could rewrite the constitution and get himself appointed as life president), the violence against the Kurds of Turkey has escalated to such a degree that it echoes the worst years of the 1980s conflict. Maybe far worse, for now it is an urban war, no longer a rural one. It is the towns and cities that are targeted, and it is human rights lawyers, politicians, journalists, and trade unionists who are being arrested, tortured, and detained.

Erdogan is waging a genocide against the Kurdish people. His links with Daesh/ISIS/ISIL are well evidenced. He has used his NATO membership to get support to attack so-called 'terrorists', but for him the terrorists are the Kurds, and not the barbaric Daesh. Some commentators believe that, increasingly Islamic, authoritarian, anti-women, and conservative, Erdogan's strategy is to get Daesh to do its own dirty work against the Kurds, and ultimately it is President Erdogan who aims to be the next Caliph.

Refuses

The UK government refuses to condemn Turkey for its human rights violations against unarmed Kurdish civilians. It continues to describe Turkey as its friend, and makes no attempt to get the 'terror tag' lifted from the PKK which has, ever since 2013, been calling for cease-fires and the return to the peace process.

Nor will it recognise Rojava, where the Syrian Kurds, victims of both the Assad Regime and Daesh, have declared a self-administration, embracing pluralism, freedom of belief, gender equality as the foundation blocks of a real democracy for all of Syria. Yet it is the Syrian Kurds,

with the support of the PKK who defended Kobane from Daesh, and rescued the Yezidis from Mount Sinjar. Erdogan is determined to crush this unique liberation movement, yet both Syrian and Turkish Kurds have made clear they are not 'separatist'. They have no wish to 'change borders'. Their ideology is based on freedom and equality for all people irrespective of ethnicity, religion or gender. This is exactly what Erdogan fears.

In September, the AKP imposed a curfew on Cizire, home to 100,000 Kurds that lasted 12 days. Electricity, water, mobile phone communication were cut off, and 21 people were killed, including women and children. No doctors could enter the town that was surrounded by 5,000 police. In the heat bodies were decomposing, and some mothers kept the bodies of their murdered

Will Jeremy Corbyn, such a great friend of the Kurds, whom I have been with on missions to Turkey in the past, speak up for them in parliament when it reassembles after the New Year?

children in freezers, in an attempt to preserve them. Several women suffered miscarriages. The suffering was terrible, as police snipers shot at anyone who moved outside the front doors.

I was in Cizire and Sur shortly after the curfews were lifted and saw the appalling destruction: homes, shops, whole streets under rubble and spoke with the survivors of the massacres that had taken place. A few weeks later I was again in Diyarbakir as a member of the UK delegation to observe the snap election of November 2nd. This took place in such an atmosphere of fear and tension that it could hardly be called 'fair and transparent'. There could be no pro Kurdish peace rallies, many Kurdish mayors were dismissed from their posts, huge numbers of Kurds were arrested, and pro Kurdish media outlets were raided and

closed down. The AKP had the monopoly of the press, radio and TV. Besides, in the weeks following the atrocity perpetrated in Ankara, in which so many Kurdish peace activists lost their lives, the Kurds were mourning their dead and organising and attending funerals.

We met Muharrem Erbey, the lawyer and former head of the Human Rights Commission, who had only the year before been released, after nearly five years in prison, with all charges of supporting terrorism dropped. He told of us the arrest in October of Tahir Elci, Chair of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, charged under the Turkish Terror Act because he had said, in a TV interview, that the "PKK was not a terrorist organisation". Horrifically, on Saturday November 28th, Tahir, a greatly respected human rights lawyer and peace promoter, was killed, shot in the head, as he was talking to a press conference in Sur, nearby the beautiful C16th Kursunlu mosque that was blitzed with sniper fire during the September curfew.

Scrapped

Erdogan has scrapped the peace process entirely and is driving to war. Since that AKP victory in November Kurdish towns and cities in the south east have again been put under curfew and military siege. Moreover, Turkish jets daily bomb Kurds in Iraq and its armies shell the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG and YPJ) in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan).

The 24th November shooting down of the Russian bomber was planned at the highest level of the Turkish State. Scores of Kurds have been arrested, imprisoned and killed across the country. Curfews continue to be imposed, even yesterday on December 11th.

Will Jeremy Corbyn, such a great friend of the Kurds, whom I have been with on missions to Turkey in the past, speak up for them in parliament when it reassembles after the New Year?

Margaret Owen is Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy, a patron of Peace in Kurdistan & founder member of GAPS-UK (Gender Action for Peace and Security)

Prevent & Channel

Tehmina Kazi finds positives in anti-extremism work in schools

Back in 2010, I spoke at the ‘Beyond Prevent: Achieving Security and Challenge in Extremism’ conference in the House of Commons. I was critical of many of the surveillance aspects of the previous Government’s Prevent strategy, such as Project Champion, which placed security cameras in majority-Muslim parts of Birmingham. However, in the last three years, initiatives like these have been scrapped, as the Government has made strong efforts to listen to practitioner feedback. The entire Prevent strategy has undergone significant reform. As of last Summer, it is now a statutory duty for schools, prisons, local authorities and NHS trusts to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.”

Universal values

The strategy also includes non-violent extremism, which has been defined as “opposition to fundamental British values”, including “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”. While these are universal values, rather than specifically British ones, it is critical to actively uphold them, and use them to present a strong counter-narrative to extremist voices. Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) defines fundamentalism as ‘modern political movements that use religion to gain or consolidate power, whether working within – or in opposition to – the state’. Craftily, they can also amass power from civil society mobilisations. The ultimate aim is to present their interpretation of religion as ‘normative’, quash any kind of dissent, and gaslight said dissenters as being ‘crazy and unreliable’, or casting them outside the fold of Islam. All fundamentalist movements – no matter which religion they take inspiration from – have sought to control women’s bodies, minds and voices.

As my associate Kalsoom Bashir, from the Muslim women’s group Inspire, said in a recent *Guardian* interview: “When you

have ideologies out there – that homosexuals are going to be condemned to hellfire, that you mustn’t talk to [gay people], or that if this was a Muslim state they wouldn’t be allowed – I do have a problem with that. I’m proud that the interpretation of Islam I adhere to is inclusive; it does not promote hatred or violence, or sow the seeds of division or suspicion.”

Bashir is responsible for delivering Prevent training to police officers and teachers in Avon and Somerset, with the aim of making sure that children are kept safely in their families and are getting the best out of their educational experiences. Rather than asking professionals to ‘spy on’ their charges, or single out particular incidents, the aim of the strategy is to get them to look out for a whole range of concerning

Far from shutting down debates on controversial issues, this is an example where Prevent created a space for hot-button issues to be discussed in a safe and secure environment

behaviours. It is part of the pastoral care that all good teachers take seriously. Children who are deemed to be vulnerable to radicalisation are sometimes referred to the Government’s anti-radicalisation Channel programme, which has seen more than 4,000 referrals since 2012. But contrary to popular belief, a referral to Channel does not equate to “being grassed up to police,” as one young person put it. Channel panels are chaired by the local authority, and the police are only one of several agencies represented.

Further, there are many examples of Prevent successfully turning young women away from a path of extremism and fundamentalism. A young woman in Bristol, who started wearing a headscarf in sixth-form, disengaged from lessons and distanced herself from friends. The young woman said she just wanted to “focus on Islam” and thought that

voting made one complicit in a “kuffar” system. Once she was referred to Channel, a female theologian spoke to her about faith and identity in a nuanced way. The young woman had never had this kind of exposure, and came back to finishing her A-Levels.

Redemption

Another story related to 15-year-old, Yusra Hussein, who went missing from Bristol and ended up in Syria. Other girls in the vicinity ended up sympathising with her, after being dumped by Muslim men whom they had slept with. This ties in nicely with Mia Bloom’s research on redemption, and the fact that some people see membership of an extremist group as providing a means of redemption for committing so-called ‘sins.’ In response to this, Kalsoom Bashir led a workshop on relationships between men and women in a faith context. In this, she said it was natural to be attracted to people, but that the young women shouldn’t feel pressured into doing anything they don’t want to do. Far from shutting down debates on controversial issues, this is an example where Prevent created a space for hot-button issues to be discussed in a safe and secure environment. The facilitator was careful to foster both critical and caring thinking, as in, how we relate to others around us. This fits in with OFSTED good practice guidelines too.

Enable

The most important thing is to enable young Muslim women to reconcile their identities as female, British and Muslim. I am confident that the Prevent programme has advanced enough to make way for these exchanges. Of course, this doesn’t absolve civil society practitioners of our responsibilities in this area. While we should not hesitate to correct state institutions when they make mistakes, we should not automatically see them as the enemy, when they are our partners in safeguarding.

Tehmina Kazi is Director of Muslims for Secular Democracy and a member of Chartist EB

Where is the peace plan?

Nia Griffith says with the ‘bomb Syria’ vote over we must step up the campaign to shut off the supply of resources

Back on 26th November I listened in Parliament very carefully to the Prime Minister making the case for the UK’s involvement in air-strikes on Syria. With unusually quiet rows of attentive MPs, as befitted the gravity of the subject matter, it was not difficult for him to deliver his carefully prepared speech with an air of authority. But it soon became clear that he did not have an effective strategy for following up the air strikes and bringing the security and stability that Syria so desperately needs.

Yes, the Prime Minister was expected to respond to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on Syria. Yes, there had been weeks of build-up in the press, giving the impression of greater growth in public support for British military intervention in Syria than has subsequently been shown in opinion polls. And yes, he was expected to give the Commons a vote. Nevertheless the timing and undertones of his statement were horribly tinged with the pursuit of revenge for the Paris attacks. It is understandable that in the wake of appalling atrocities in Paris, that we should want to do something urgently to combat Daesh/Isis and show solidarity with our allies. But knee-jerk reactions, with little thought for the consequences are no way to make decisions on such a complex situation as Syria: simply bombing places like Raqqa in Syria, as fleeing Syrians have pointed out, would inevitably lead to civilian casualties.

Barbaric acts

We all abhor Daesh with their barbaric acts, and their murdering of innocent people including many Muslims. But military experts have warned that air strikes alone are not sufficient to drive Daesh out of the territory it holds. Far more needs to be done to cut off their supplies of oil and weapons, and to prevent more young people being drawn into their hateful propaganda and rad-



Tanks lined up for Daesh oil: someone’s buying

icalisation.

But in terms of re-taking the parts of Syria they control, we need to have a strategy which includes how and by whom the peace can be secured and maintained. The Prime Minister gave no explanation as to how this complex transition would be achieved, either in the short term or the long-term and simply talked vaguely about some 70,000 rebel forces.

So-called ‘forces’

However, as pointed out by experts, there may be such a number of people who have a weapon, but many of them could hardly be described as regular soldiers. They are scattered geographically and composed of many disparate groups, some of whom have links to terrorist groups. They are not necessarily prepared to work with each other, never mind with outsiders like ourselves. The Prime Minister could not give us details about the commitment or capacity of these so-called ‘forces’ for taking and holding territory.

The tragic irony about going for air-strikes now is that, at long last, after little progress for several years, we have signs of a greater determination in the United Nations to tackle the region’s problems, with Russia now showing a willingness to be involved. There is the beginning of a recognition that whilst we may condemn Assad’s treatment

of his own people, any peace process has to consider his role. It was only on November 14th that 20 countries and international bodies came together and set out a roadmap, which includes the huge challenge of establishing a ceasefire in 2016. So rather than launching air strikes within three weeks of this meeting, the UK should use its influence to take a lead in furthering the Vienna process, getting commitment from the regional powers and developing a political strategy for the area. Those efforts should also include dealing with the flow of funding to Daesh and challenging those who help them through the trade in oil and weapons.

Simply glossed over

Until Jeremy Corbyn raised the issue of who is giving succour to Daesh/Isis with funding and trade in oil and weapons, hardly any attention at all had been paid to this matter and the Prime Minister simply glossed over it in his reply. With the impetus of the Vienna process, there should be renewed efforts to challenge the likes of Saudi Arabia and others about the flow of help to Daesh.

Now that we have had the debate and the vote for air strikes on Syria, we must not simply forget about it. We should be continuing to put pressure on the Prime Minister about what the UK is doing to stem the flow of resources to Daesh, and push for a lasting settlement for the area.

Nia Griffith in MP for Llanelli and one of 151 Labour MPs who opposed air-strikes.

She is shadow minister for Wales

Fire and Brimstone

Andy Gregg says British bombing in Syria adds more fuel to the fire and raises the risks of innocent lives being lost in the West and Middle East

If I was an innocent non-combatant citizen of Raqqa looking in desperation at my situation it would be hard to avoid concluding that the Western powers are quite happy to bomb and kill me and my family because no one must be allowed to bomb and kill theirs. Bizarrely, Western powers seem to think that by bombing people in Raqqa or Mosul, somehow they are making an attack on London or Paris less likely. It has been said that a terrorist is a fighter without an airforce. Our government and the Labour MP supporters of bombing have agreed a course of action that fails to make the most basic attempt to understand human nature - the likely feelings of those whose families and homes are about to become ‘collateral damage’, if they haven’t already fled the area. The potential for a further radicalization of young people in the West is also obvious as they watch gruesome online images of the death and destruction of their Muslim ‘brothers and sisters’ caused by weapons paid for by them or their parents’ own taxes.

It goes without saying that Daesh is a despicable and dangerous organisation that seeks to challenge our freedom and instil fear and intolerance in our society. However, whilst it can threaten to kill a few hundred innocent civilians in Western countries and many hundreds of thousands more in the Middle East, it is not an existential threat to us in the West in the way that Nazi Germany was. If we let it terrorise us out of our civil liberties and the liberal cultural freedoms that we currently take for granted then we only have ourselves to blame for doing exactly what it wants us to do.

Not in a war situation

Western powers have failed to see that they are not in a war situation where they are fighting a primarily conventional static army. Instead they are fighting an asymmetrical battle in which Daesh is actively trying to get them to bomb Syria and other parts of the Middle East so as to stoke up opposition both in the region and amongst disaffected and radicalised youngsters in Western towns and cities. It is a good rule of thumb in military (or indeed political) planning to try to avoid doing what your enemy wants you to do. We have just walked into a trap set for us by Daesh.

Bombing Syria without any strategy or even the most basic of plans for the aftermath and without any troops on the ground (local or otherwise) capable of taking and holding territory is the very definition of military folly. The decision to bomb Syria actually has more to do with Britain’s fading imperial pride and its desire to occupy a place at the table with the other bigger boys then it does with any sensible military strategy.

In addition to the stupidity of the UK’s decision to bomb (and its almost inevitable result of increasing jihadi attacks on us in the UK), attacks from the air

(even if only by the paltry number of British planes) are likely to exacerbate the huge exodus of refugees from Syria. Millions have already been displaced as a result of the barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian airforce and the equally indiscriminate bombing sorties by the Russians, as well as a motley group of other air forces from the region and beyond that will now include the UK. A significant but very much smaller number of refugees are also fleeing from the appalling situations they face in areas under the control of Daesh.

In the West we are told we should be concerned about the hundreds of thousands of refugees pouring into Europe. Our actions are highly unlikely to do anything other than stimulate the exodus. In fact most refugees and displaced people are still staying in the region and their huge numbers there are already destabilising Jordan, Turkey and particularly Lebanon (a country with a very short fuse and huge explosive potential).

Daesh like its predecessor AlQaida is a many-headed hydra. Attack it in one location and it will just bubble up in many other places. Now that it is under challenge in Syria and Iraq it has begun setting up franchises across North Africa and large parts of Asia. In particular there is good evidence that many Daesh fighters are falling back to safe zones in Libya (in particular the area around Sirte - which ironically used to be Gadhafi’s heartland) as well as developing their links with similar jihadi groups in Somalia, Yemen and across the entire Maghreb into Nigeria.

Key sense

There is however one key sense in which the Syrian/Turkish border area is central to Daesh’s thinking. Daesh’s official magazine is called Dabiq after a very sensitive site for Daesh and its theology, the Dabiq Valley. According to Muslim tradition, in the ‘End of Days’ Dabiq will be the site of the “great

battle” between Muslims and Christians. Daesh of course wants nothing more than to bring this mythical war into reality and without realising it we are doing everything possible to help them in this respect.

It would not be so bad if we knew which side we are going to fight on – with or without the Syrian army? The Russians? The Saudis? Hezbollah and the Iranians? Or the 57 varieties of ‘Free Syrian’ militias that include AlQaida affiliates like Jabhat

al Nusra? The only thing we seem to be clear about is that we are trying to fight Daesh. However, even if we are clear about this, most of our allies are not. Turkey, Saudi and other Gulf states have never shown that attacking Daesh is their top priority.

Accusations of complicity in funding Daesh and/or the purchasing of their oil have been made of Turkey, Saudi and other Gulf States. Turkey is far more concerned to attack Assad and ensure that the Syrian Kurds are not able to set up a self governing enclave on their border that will stimulate further trouble with their own sizeable Kurdish minority.

The Saudis are far more concerned to stop Iranian and Shia influence in the region than they are to defeat Daesh, and are currently

concentrating their resources on committing dreadful war crimes by carpet bombing the Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen. The Syrians seem far more concerned to attack the motley Free Syrian Army who threaten their heartlands in the North and West of their country than Daesh which controls the East.

Growing danger

By getting militarily involved in the region we are aligning ourselves in a tangle of alliances and enmities that has the potential to engage us in a dangerous proxy war for middle east domination. There is a growing danger of confrontation between the US,

Saudi, Turkish and Kuwaiti bloc (roughly aligned with Sunni Islam) and the Russian, Iranian and Syrian army (aligned with the leading Shia and Alawite powers). Such an apocalyptic scenario is exactly what Daesh devoutly wishes for.

Ironically the situation resembles nothing so much as the situation in Europe almost a hundred years ago that resulted in the First World War - which of course was the war that resulted in the arbitrary boundaries and the enduring hatreds in the ‘Middle East’ that still poison this troubled and tortured part of the world.

Desperate for targets

The notion that there might be 70,000 moderate ‘allies’ who are in a position to challenge Daesh in Raqqa is so laughable that it isn’t even worth spending time on here. The notion that our Brimstone missiles bring an important new tactical capability into the mix is also highly questionable. The allies are currently desperate for targets. The first bombs dropped by British planes (within hours of the vote to bomb) were on oil installations that had already been hit twice by coalition planes and then largely obliterated by Russian ones. The notion that Brimstone missiles or indeed any other missiles or drones are somehow capable of ‘surgical strikes’ that only hit Daesh fighters is fatuous. All missiles of this size whether fired by fighter planes or drones are dependent less on the accuracy of the missiles than on the veracity of the ‘intelligence’ sources who are calling them in. In Afghanistan and Iraq there are well attested stories of drone strikes being called in to bomb targets that were part of local tribal turf wars rather than being of any strategic importance.

The invasion of Afghanistan and then the war on Iraq in the 2000s destabilised the entire region and provided both the ideological underpinning for jihadism and the failed states that have been their safe havens to incubate their hatred. The bombing of Syria has the potential to make this situation far worse. If Assad falls in Syria then the consequences for the delicate balance of power in Lebanon is likely to be catastrophic. A further ratcheting up of the long war between the Turks and the Kurds in Eastern Anatolia will have repercussions across the whole of the Middle East. Add also risks of escalation between Russia and Turkey, or Saudi Arabia and Iran. Confronted with a hornets nest it is usually sensible not to thwack it with a stick – no matter how long the stick may be.

The fourteen years of the war on terror have confirmed that it is not us setting the pace or the direction of the conflict because at every stage we have contrived to do exactly what our enemy wants us to do.

I can almost hear Osama bin Laden chuckling in his watery grave.

**Andy Gregg is
Director of Race
on the Agenda**

Job creation by cancelling Trident

Andrew Smith on the potential to shift priorities from militarism to green industries

Cancelling Trident inevitably prompts the question 'That's all very well, but what about the jobs?' It's an argument all of us have come across when debating Trident or the arms industry. We are forever being told that the arms trade may be undesirable, but 'if we didn't do it someone else would', and that it's a necessary evil if the UK is to maintain a strong manufacturing base.

This isn't just an argument made by the arms companies, it's also made by parliamentarians, trade unionists and many who we would consider allies in the fight for social justice.

The close connections between the arms trade, politicians and civil servants were revealed this year at Defence & Security Equipment International 2015 (DSEI), one of the biggest arms fairs in the world. DSEI, which took place in September, brought the biggest arms companies in the world together with some of the most oppressive dictators. The Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, used it to announce that his department would put an even greater focus on arms exports going forward.

Politicians promote the idea of the arms trade as a cash cow, but even if we put morality to one side that doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Every year, taxpayers subsidize arms companies to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds to export their wares into war zones and to arm oppressive regimes. One estimate, from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute puts the subsidy at £700 million a year. These weapons don't just provide military support, they provide political support too, and give a sign of UK support for atrocities taking place across the world.

The government justifies it by arguing that it needs to protect high-skilled manufacturing jobs. However, despite all of these resources, and despite the deep well of government support, the

number of jobs in the arms trade is on a long-term decline that doesn't look like changing any time soon.

It doesn't need to be this way. This year alone, the UK will spend £37 billion on arms and the military. What if a similar figure was invested in promoting social and environmental justice and creating jobs in the renewable sector? There is a severe skills shortage in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and a greater emphasis could see the UK as a global leader. At present the government spends 25 times more on Research & Development (R&D) for the military (£1.4 billion) than it does on R&D for renewable energy (£58 million).

At present the renewable energy industry is being held back by a major skills shortage. This means we are missing out on large numbers of supply chain jobs. For example, only a quarter of the parts that make up UK wind turbines are produced in this country. Like arms, the renewable energy sector is highly skilled. It has a similar breakdown across broad categories of skill levels and employs many of the same branches of engineering. With the right investment and support, thousands of new skilled jobs could be made available.

Our research shows that a move towards offshore wind and marine energy could benefit us all by providing greater security from environmental threats and by producing more jobs than the entire arms industry. We estimate that the right levels of investment and support could help create over 300,000 jobs in offshore wind and marine energy alone. This is based on building the domestic supply chain, including placing obligations on companies to locate and develop skills in local communities.

Arms trade jobs are paid for by taxpayers, resources can be redirected. Shifting priorities would secure green jobs for the future and improve human security

rather than threaten it. The transition could be made without large-scale job losses. Like the arms trade, the renewable-energy sector is highly skilled, and actually has a very similar breakdown across broad categories of skill levels, employing many of the same branches of engineering. There would also be appropriate work available in most areas where arms workers are located, with tens of thousands of supply-chain jobs that could be located anywhere in the country.

The Scottish region of Unite the Union has suggested that in the event of Trident being abolished it should be complemented by 'the creation of a Scottish defence diversification agency to help offset the employment impact'. With a wider brief, such an agency could be established to examine alternative work for others currently employed in the arms trade.

By changing directions, the UK can take a leading position in technologies that will be in high demand, will have major export potential and will also help other countries cut their carbon emissions.

It needs government action and at least the same level of investment and support that is currently enjoyed by the arms trade. We can all act to make the government shift priorities, create more and better jobs, and build a safer world for all.

Cost of trident renewal

The lifetime cost of new trident missiles will be over £100 billion, with the cost jumping regularly. This money could be used to fully fund A&E services for 40 years, employ 150,000 new nurses, build 1.5 million affordable homes, build 30,000 new primary schools or cover tuition fees for 4 million students.

(Source - CND)

Andrew Smith is a spokesperson for Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT)

You can view CAAT's Arms to Renewables report at www.A2R.org.uk

EU: worth fighting for

Pete Rowlands on fighting Brexit and the rise of the nationalist right

The title of Frank Lee's article in *Chartist* 276 was 'What is the European Union for?' In it he effectively renounced much of what he wrote four years earlier, in 2011, in a *Chartist* pamphlet entitled *Europe – the unfinished project*.

The pamphlet, which I broadly agreed with, argued that the European project, in terms of an integrated social democratic EU, had stalled, but that it was still worth fighting for as against the neo-liberal Anglo American alternative. He quotes an argument that the latter had won, but denies that this was the case.

Much of the pamphlet was a critique of Eurosceptic attitudes, particularly those held by the left, and particularly of the Euro. Here he stresses that the only way to control international capital is through the Euro, which would otherwise, with a return to national currencies, be able to play states off against each other in a race to the bottom. While Frank Lee is right in this he does not discuss how the peripheral countries post the 2008 financial crisis can move beyond being stuck in a deflationary situation.

'Difficult to sustain'

He says that his previous views are now 'difficult to sustain', implying that changes since then have made the 'European Project' no longer a viable goal, but much of what he argues indicates simply that he has changed his mind, as most of what is cited goes back decades.

Essentially Frank argues that while the UK has always been Atlanticist, Europe is only slightly less so, and the more recent ex communist states even more so. Thus NATO is a *de facto* part of the EU constitution, meaning that neither the EU or any member state has an independent foreign policy. Economic policy is also closely linked to US interests, with US domination ensured by its reserve currency and hold over monetary and trade institutions, buttressed by the 'soft power' of universities, think tanks and publications.

Frank appears to have been influenced by *The Implosion of Capitalism* by Samir Amin, (2014), which he quotes from extensively.

It is not clear, to me at least, what Frank quite means by all of this. He says '...in its present structure the EU cannot endure, nor does it deserve to'. Does he mean that even if some progress can be made towards an integrated, Euro based, social democratic EU it will not be worthwhile because it will still be dominated by American neo liberalism which it is futile to oppose? Was Francis Fukuyama right, even though he (FF) has to some extent changed his view?

Much of what Frank has to say is obviously in general terms true. NATO is not an appropriate alliance for EU members, although as he observes the ex Communist states would not agree. But since the end of the Cold War a more independent line has been pursued, partly out of necessity because of the Balkan wars, but as shown in the refusal to follow the US and UK in Iraq in 2003, the defence agreement of 2004 and more conciliatory attitudes towards Russia.

On the economy it is probably true that neo liberalism has become a stronger force in the EU in the last 15 years, as the excellent article by Andy Morton on the *Chartist* blog, demonstrates. And yes, the US wields huge power as demonstrated over the TTIP negotiations, although as Frank acknowledges this power is in decline.

The EU is in a poor state, due mainly to the continuing Euro problems and failed austerity policies, and its 'democratic deficit', which makes it appear remote to most people. That is part of the reason for the rise of the anti EU right and their success at the polls in last year's Euro elections, when UKIP here, the National Front in France, and various other right wing groups, some overtly fascist, significantly increased their representation. The left parties also did well, particularly those grouped within the Party of the European Left, of

which the German *Die Linke* is the best known.

Serious threat

The anti EU right are now a serious threat, and threaten the EU with break up. This would enhance the power of the right generally, promote national division, racism and the growth of fascism. It would enable big business to exploit these divisions to its own advantage. Only the left have answers that can benefit the majority of people, in a reformed EU based on employment and growth, decent services and more open government.

Frank's position on this is wrong, as he has failed to explain why it is not possible to reform the EU. It is also in effect a call for Brexit at the forthcoming referendum, which would either be a disaster for the UK or aid the break up of the EU which would be a disaster for all members of the EU. Think again, Frank.

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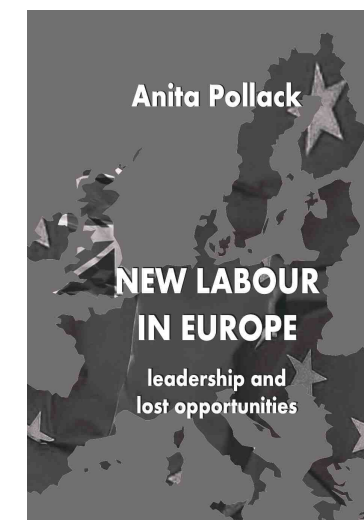
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A new politics or not?

Labour needs fresh thinking and no return to the old certainties argues **Trevor Fisher**

The Oldham West by-election on 3rd December gave some relief from the obsessional infighting at Westminster. A good result for Labour showed that the infighting, especially the Syria bombing vote the previous night, had no effect and Corbyn is not the negative brand he is seen to be by the London based media. However beyond that it did not offer many pointers to the future, particularly as the constituency was so solid that a loss would have been devastating. But winning it gave no real pointers to anything. The message of the 2015 election was that Labour can hold its core voters with ease, but winning marginals is not possible on current trends.

However with a centrist local candidate in Jim McMahon with an excellent record on the local council, including renovating all the war memorials, this was not a vote for Corbynism. It showed that Corbyn is not as toxic as the Westminster bubble thinks, and may end the idiotic attempts to portray him as a devil in a suit.

However, bigger problems remain, both inside and outside the Labour Party. In the wider electoral battle, there has been no Corbyn bounce and Labour remains at the time of writing at 28% to the Tory 42%, back to Gordon Brown levels while the Tories have moved forward from their General Election score of less than 37% of the actual vote. The success of the Tories as a political machine remains. The defining aspect of modern Westminster politics – with the rise of the SNP in Scotland – the other major success story. The immediate issue is the future of the wider progressive movement at a time when the country is moving right. As we go into 2016 a really progressive politics is essential. How near is this to happening?

The first essential is to note the curious overreaction to the Corbyn victory, similar in some ways to the Blair surge of the 1990s which took the Labour membership up to 405,000 in 1997. At the end of 2015 it was up to 370,000. The current surge, as

with the Sturgeon surge in Scotland, is something of a bubble.

Labour has no reason to take any election as given, certainly not the London Mayoral election in May 2016. Against this background the need to widen support for the party is vital, and the intensification of internal party conflict unwelcome. Mike Davis rightly points to the risks of unreconstructed Leninists using Momentum to become 'a harbour for sectarians and authoritarians' (*Chartist* 277). But a rather greater challenge is the threat of returning to internal battles which have no relevance to the majority of ordinary people.

A civil war in the Party

Even before the Oldham result the *Left Futures* website ran a debate on mandatory reselection. Corbyn has made it clear – twice – that he does not want this, and for good reasons. Boundary changes will force most MPs into selection contests automatically, and the bigger problem is not having enough MPs in most areas of the country. Yet for the correspondent (David Osland) who started the debate on 28th November mandatory reselection, explicitly, what he opined was what “many of us old Bennites regard as an article of faith”. While Osland states he is not involved in Momentum, being an old Labour Briefing and LRC comrade, he represents what many would like to see as a civil war in the Party.

It's the opposite of what is needed, which is to reach out and build a progressive alliance which can bring about a broad front anti-Tory, anti-austerity movement. This is not happening at the moment. While I am sympathetic to much that John McDonnell is doing, in his response to the Chancellor's November statement, he rejected the idea that the Tories are 'Machiavellian', regarding them as 'incompetent'. No, they are Machiavellian, and they have convinced a wide swathe of opinion that their agenda is centrist and inevitable.

Countering the prepared and


dogmatic attacks on their enemies, including the BBC, the welfare state, and trade unions, is the essential task. As Ken Spours says in his important pamphlet *The Osborne Supremacy* (Compass) 'the Conservative election victory in May 2015 revealed the achievements of its political and ideological bloc that has been obscured by coalition government and the lack of analysis by the Labour party and the wider left'. Labour does not analyse, nor the wider left. This is the challenge for 2016 along with overcoming the fragmentation which bedevils the opposition.

In France the Front National outpolled other parties in first round of local elections, underlining the rise of fascism in Europe. The Socialist Party, which has failed in government, stood candidates down to boost the centre right vote against the FN in the second round. There are no easy routes for a new progressive politics.

What can *Chartist* do to help a real new politics emerge on the left? A small discussion journal has limited resources, but can provide forums for confronting the issues. It can oppose any triumphalism over the current paths in the Labour Party or a return to old certainties. The future has to be negotiated with a realisation that nothing can be taken for granted.

Trevor Fisher recently rejoined the Labour Party.

He was formerly active in the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, Labour Reform and Save the Labour Party



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Sharing the Arts

Keith Savage talked to arts venue manager **Simon Glinn** about funding inequalities

The creative industries can sustain jobs and transform lives, but in some parts of the country this isn't happening.

The part that 'culture' should play in our lives has always been something that has prompted argument and debate. For some 'culture' smacks of elitism – a diet of opera, ballet and Shakespeare – for others it has come to embrace everything from Morris dancing and fire-eating through to crochet and as a result is rendered meaningless.

Politicians across the spectrum, for what it is worth, have less problem about their hopes for culture and cultural education. Before becoming Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn wrote 'It is my firm belief that the role of government must be to work alongside arts communities and entrepreneurs in widening access to the arts, and for this broader engagement to stimulate creative expression'.

In 2012 Darren Henley, now Chief Executive of Arts Council England, wrote a report at the request of the coalition government on cultural education in which he emphasised the need for every child to have access to cultural knowledge, skills and understanding (rather than just knowledge and facts) and the value of partnerships between producers and potential audiences. His report was widely welcomed.

So what might prevent all having a chance to experience high quality artistic performances? Simon Glinn has had a long and successful career managing arts venues and has worked with world-class companies. He has seen changes in the landscape first hand: "the word 'culture', as we now understand it, wasn't as prevalent in our language or thinking 30 years ago.

In his own words, Simon says:

"We didn't even have a government department for culture until the end of the last century but since then local councils have been required to write cultural strategies, to define what 'culture' is.

"Government, at all levels, can help us understand where culture

sits in the work done particularly at local government level – alongside planning, transport, housing, education, social services and so on.

"The major conurbations – places like Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham (not just London) – understand that developing cultural programmes can have a transformative effect. Yes, they create jobs and are good for the visitor economy, but it goes much wider than that. There are all sorts of impacts that are much harder to measure – to do with engagement and community connections, for example. Liverpool's cultural strategy has been key to the city's regeneration over the past 15 years and it is at the heart of the devolution deal that the city region has opted for.

"Beyond the conurbations this is less well understood – partly because the smaller towns become, the less access they have to world-class music and theatre. It isn't sustainable to maintain symphony orchestras or resident drama companies in small towns and it isn't always easy to bring the highest quality performances to provincial venues.

"It really matters that we try to do that. As Darren Hanley emphasised in his report children must experience live art of the highest quality. In Liverpool, for example, there's a commitment to providing the opportunity for all state school students to see and hear the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at least twice as part of their education. That represents a considerable commitment in terms of time and energy on the part of the RLPO but they do it willingly because they see why it matters.

"Whilst there is a great willingness on the part of our big arts companies to work with local communities and with children, at a time when reductions in incomes and budgets have to be managed there are difficulties in delivering this outreach work that are not always recognised.

"In the short-run the task of any arts venue or company is to stay in business but in the medium-term the challenge is to have an impact on the lives of all the



Simon Glinn: CEO Buxton Opera House

people in the community within which you work. You want to build and see a mutual pride between arts organisations and audiences.

"One thing that we have lost in recent years is the sort of money that the old enterprise allowance scheme used to provide for new and emerging artists, performers and companies. That enabled people to get experience and to tick-over without having to be fully-functioning businesses.

"For some venues and performers cuts in public funding has meant a reliance on philanthropy – which can be risky but has worked very well in some cases. In the years immediately after the banking crisis audience numbers held up well – one of the last things people give up spending on is live entertainment – but pretty much globally box office receipts were down about 13% by 2013. The task of delivering the best possible art whilst remaining commercially viable becomes tougher.

"The pressure to see the business as being about filling the building, getting bums on seats, is a real one but we also need to remember that live artistic endeavour is about sharing stories and illuminating the uncertainties in the world around us."

Keith Savage is a member of High Peak CLP and a former local councillor

Post capitalism - the shape of things to come?

The survival of capitalism is a political not an economic issue writes **Frank Lee**

In a world where the political and cultural discourse is dominated by the political elites and their allies in the economic, and media institutions, Paul Mason's book* comes as a refreshing oasis in a desert of rubbish. The book seems to be a distillation of a broad range of ideas, reading and insights developed over a long period. Mason raises a number of relevant questions, some self-evidently true, others more contentious. Unfortunately it is impossible seriously examine and do justice to all his arguments here.

Firstly, Mason demolishes the prevalent neo-liberal model and its proponents, which admittedly is not too difficult. This is easily the best part of the book and his conclusions seem axiomatic. However, this dysfunctional system of political economy is going to be replaced by a vague concept of 'post-capitalism' rather than socialism. This will be apparently a post-scarcity society with an abundance of information which is made possible by the development of information technology and the ongoing growth of the knowledge economy and information society.

Post-capitalism

He writes: "Capitalism...will not be abolished by forced march techniques. It will be abolished by creating something more dynamic that exists...which will break through reshaping the economy around new values and behaviours. I call this post-capitalism."

We have heard this story before. Keynes wrote in 1930 (Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren) "In the long run mankind is solving its economic problem..." viz., scarcity and "economic bliss" apparently awaits us. Of course it didn't work out that way. Nor could it since the barriers were cultural and political as well as economic.

In the same vein I remember as a kid watching on our old black

and white television a programme called 'Tomorrow's World' compered by Raymond Baxter. The programme was full of rosy prognostications about the future of work and life, and how we would be working 10 hours a week and spending all our spare time fishing or reading or in Marx's words being a critical critic in the evening. This was wide of the mark. If anything in the present day working people are spending more time at work rather than less; working on the train, unpaid overtime, working at home.

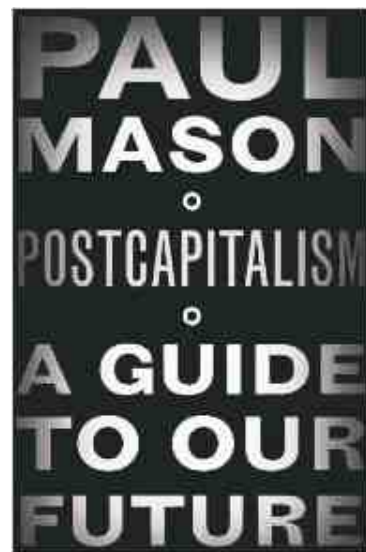
Bertrand Russell was nearer the mark when he argued that the world was ready for socialism in a technical sense but that the masses were not psychologically ready. In Marx's view they were not yet a class for itself, that is to

Mason's faith in the transformative effect of information technology and its irresistible undermining of the capitalist order is elevated to a *deus ex machina*

say a class aware of itself as a class and recognising its interests and the political implications of this.

Historically it seems to be the case that technological revolutions do not necessarily result – at least in a mechanical and/or linear pattern – in political and social revolutions. After all Marx predicted that the USA would be the first socialist country since it had developed the means of production to the extent that the social relations of production (socialism) had perforce to come in line. Once again, it didn't happen. The German social theorist, Werner Sombart, outlined why this was the case in *Why There is No Socialism in America* first published in 1906. He argued that in the US workers were more status conscious, and loyal to ethnic groups - such as Irish, Italian and Polish Americans. Moreover the ambitious would rather go West

Frank Lee is a former FE economics lecturer and member of the Chartist EB



to seek their fortune than engage in a socialist revolution in the East.

Mason's faith in the transformative effect of information technology and its irresistible undermining of the capitalist order is elevated to a *deus ex machina*. But wait a minute, the information revolution has been a double-edged affair. The new technologies can and are used for all sorts of nefarious ends: mass surveillance, industrial espionage, money laundering, cyber-crime, financial chicanery, and monitoring in the workplace, to name a few. Moreover there has always been an abundance of information. Having spent many years as a student in the Bodleian Library, the British Library and the British Library of Political and Economic Science, I can safely say that I never experienced insufficient information - if anything there was an information overload.

New vanguard

But for Mason the new technology is bringing about the formation of a new vanguard which will end capitalism.

"On the London Underground, I'm in a carriage where everybody under the age of 35 has white

wires connected to their ears to a device on which they are listening to something they've downloaded via a network...or maybe they are playing games, for the physical actions and intense levels of concentration. They are glued to digital information and the first thing they'll do emerging at street level is to plug into the global network via 3G."

Not making connexions

One wonders what they are listening to exactly. A reading of W.B.Yeats' *The Second Coming* perhaps? No, more like the latest episode of Hollyoaks. When I read this particular passage my heart sank. Here you have a mass of people not making connexions with others but head down retreating into a solipsistic existence in virtual cyberspace. They might as well be living in a bubble. If anything illustrates the atomistic nature of neoliberal capitalism this surely is it.

If this 'vanguard' manages to stir itself into any sort of political action it will be easily dealt with by the repressive forces of the state.

Other than its defeat, political


class struggle is generally conspicuous by its absence from Mason's account, and it needs adding Mason's whole approach is ethnocentric. The non-western world receives scant attention and 'imperialism' is only mentioned in passing three times throughout the whole book. In addition, and most importantly, the whole book is redolent of economic determinism, namely that advances in technology will lead to the demise of capitalism. Thus the social relations of production are determined by the forces of production. Vintage Engels, Hyndman and Kautsky.


I don't buy it. We can safely say that any transition from capitalism to a newer form of social and economic organisation will be contested on the terrain of struggle in the political, economic and cultural spheres. The following language may be slightly archaic but the substance is essentially correct. (Georgy Lukacs – 1920)

"The most striking division in proletarian class consciousness, and the one most fraught with consequences is the separation of the economic struggle from the political one... In the absence of a real understanding of the interac-

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Labour CND is delighted to announce a conference in London to discuss the Labour Party's approach to Trident and foreign policy in the light of the election of Jeremy Corbyn. The conference will include sessions on trade unions and Trident, foreign policy and parliamentary campaigning on nuclear weapons.

With Parliament set to vote on replacing Britain's nuclear weapons system in 2016 and Jeremy Corbyn elected on a clear anti-Trident platform, this is one of the most pressing issues facing the party.

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Drowning in debt

Carl Packman on the flip side of Tory cuts—ballooning debt and pay-day lenders

Listening to David Cameron, George Osborne, and the other deficit-fetishists in the cabinet you could wrongly assume that the national debt is the only problem facing Britain today. However less is spoken about the other debt problem which has been a consistent one throughout the terms of the previous two governments: the personal debt crisis.

Towards the national debt, the Tories are prepared to make cuts to in-work benefits that could make thousands worse off by £2,500 a year, not to mention cuts to key services and local council budgets including for libraries, community policing and schools.

Tory cuts don't make economic sense. Yet they carry on as though they've won the argument.

Dangerous levels

All the while the debts of British households continue to rise to dangerous levels.

According to The Money Charity the total amount of personal debt Britons owed at the end of October 2015 was £1.456 trillion. This is up from £1.42 trillion at the end of October 2014 – an extra £7 per UK adult.

The average total debt per adult – including mortgages and personal loans – was £28,826 in October – around 113.1% of average earnings, up from £28,739 in September.

Mid-way through 2015 we collectively owed £172bn in unsecured credit (debt not taken out against an asset such as a house or a car), which equates to a terrifying £6,454 per UK household – and this is increasing month-on-month.

Research by the Money Advice Service shows that around 9m are in serious debt in the UK, and a further 1.8m are in denial about their debts. Call centres for debt charities such as Stepchange and the National Debt Helpline are inundated with enquiries about debts spiralling out of control. The number of calls received about household debt by one charity rose 140 per cent between

2007 and 2014.

All the while Britain is going backwards in tackling poverty. Between 2004 and 2012 the incomes of those in the bottom quarter fell by around nine per cent, to levels no higher than in 2000.

Many Britons today have no savings. Over a quarter of us have absolutely nothing put away for a rainy day, and nearly 60 per cent have less than £1000 of savings.

One consequence of the personal debt crisis is the rise of non-mainstream loan firms, such as payday lenders, who in recent years have cropped up on our high streets in droves. In 2012 borrowers spent over £900m on payday loans, with £450m spent on loans which were 'rolled over' – that is to say, loans that were extended with interest, fees and charges piled on top.

The personal debt crisis persists, passed on elsewhere with an increase in car loans, sub-prime credit cards, home collected credit and high-cost instalment loans

After several notable controversies around debt collection methods and irresponsible lending practices, the payday loans industry has been subject to improved regulations by the Financial Conduct Authority. However the personal debt crisis persists, passed on elsewhere with an increase in car loans, sub-prime credit cards, home collected credit and high-cost instalment loans.

Recognising the problems is a lot easier than finding the solutions. Previously it had been hoped by critics of the payday loans sector – including high-profile names such as the Archbishop of Canterbury – that credit unions (cooperative finance firms that offer savings and loans products) would be able to compete head-on with irresponsible lending and the world of high-cost credit.

But unfortunately it will be at least a generation or more before they are able to serve customers

otherwise visiting payday lenders. In fact a research paper I co-authored with the Political Economy Research Centre at Goldsmiths, University of London, this year found that as credit unions grew and took on riskier customers during the recession years, they increased their own risk of insolvency by the amount they lost on late or defaulted loans.

All is not lost, though, if we think creatively. In the spirit of Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's recent pledge to deliver 'Socialism with an Ipad', there are a great many start-up companies forming at the moment aiming to improve the financial capability of low- and middle-income consumers and offer lower-cost forms of finance by working digitally and with mobile technology.

Soon, the day of physical banks will pass and branchless banking will be the new norm. The potential advantages of this include financial products that are 'lightweight' with fewer overhead costs and offered at substantially lower prices than from mainstream financial providers.

Using new technology to better understand personal data can improve credit scoring which will improve the access to finance to those with thin credit files such as new-arrival immigrants, while financial health apps will let you set personal budgets and help stick to them.

Marrying digital innovation

If the Shadow Chancellor is serious about marrying digital innovation with a social purpose, then he could start by pledging support for the Financial Conduct Authority's 'regulatory sandbox', which allows new firms to enjoy a period of product development without the previously associated regulatory costs.

For millions the personal debt crisis is getting worse and more acute. Solutions thus far haven't quite cut the mustard. But there are financial technologies that offer a social purpose to fill a much-needed gap. It is deserving of our support.

Carl Packman is an independent professional researcher looking at UK personal debt.

He is a member of Lewisham East CLP

Imprisoned – for being raped

Patrick Mulcahy on Arabic double-standards

The BBC Arabic Festival (October 30th to November 2nd 2015) showcased the work of documentary makers and fiction filmmakers telling stories about life in the Middle East. Its theme was the expression of power ('Rulers and the Ruled') broadly exploring the circumscriptions of life in a number of countries and the necessary and morally compelling efforts to break them. A common directive for travellers is to 'respect the laws of the receiving state'. These laws do not respect the rights and dignity of women. This subject was explored in Christine Garabedian's documentary, *Pregnant and in Chains in the United Arab Emirates*.

Like many Arab states, the United Arab Emirates frowns on adultery, circumventing this on men's side by allowing them to marry multiple times, although polygamy is said to be a declining tradition amongst young Emiratis. But women can only marry once. Sex outside of marriage is not permitted in its seven emirates – and pregnancy in unmarried women, even if the result of rape is punishable through imprisonment.

The practice of jailing unmarried women is not openly discussed in the UAE. Garabedian's documentary focuses on immigrant women who are exploited by their employers or those around them and are further victimised by the court system. They are forced to flee the country, losing their job, hiding any signs of pregnancy. In the case of rape, the perpetrators are not punished.

The outrage at the UAE court system is not new. The case of Australian hotel manager Alicia Gali, who was subjected to a brutal gang rape by three co-workers in 2008 and then jailed in Fujairah for eight months, was kept away from the media in order not to jeopardise Australian business interests. The culture of silence prevents the matter from being debated publically or being the subject of reform. Human Rights Watch describes the UAE as using its affluence to disguise serious human rights problems. It reports, for example, that 'female domestic workers are excluded from regulations that apply to workers in other sectors'.

The documentary was screened just as the UAE won its second three year term membership of the

United Nations Human Rights Council. 'The UAE has set an unparalleled model for promoting values of tolerance, and people to people cooperation and solidarity,' said Dr Hanif Al Qassim, Chairman of the Board of Management of Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue.

Incredibly, in 2013 the UAE was scored the 14th best country in the world for respecting human rights by the organisation Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD) based on 'its efforts in supporting emergency relief and establishing development projects in different countries'. A search for 'prosecution of women for being raped' on this organisation's website prompted a nil return.

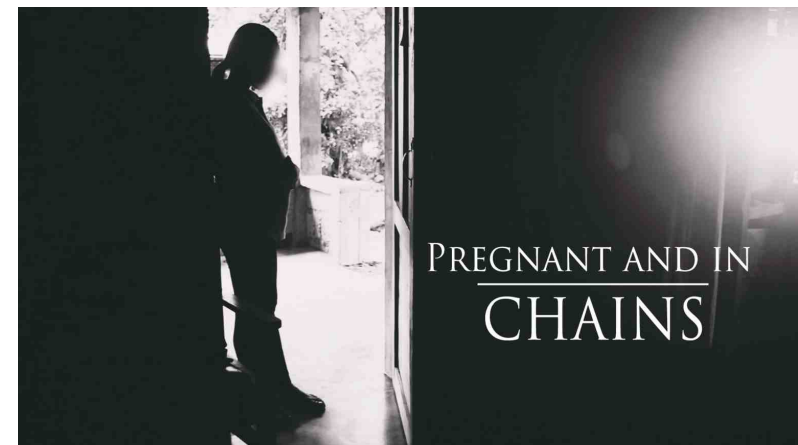
There appears to be little appetite to change this policy – or indeed to remove the European Parliament's logo from GNRD's website. In the meantime, as shown in Garabedian's documentary, unmarried women who have been made pregnant outside of marriage in the UAE are forced to find

safe houses to elude state gaze and hope they can escape the country with their child. 'Non Muslims are required to respect Shari'a law in Dubai and conduct themselves accordingly'. But is there an agreed definition of 'conducting

oneself accordingly' when one is exploited?

There is one case that ended slightly happier than Alicia Gali's. Marte Dalelv, a 25 year old Norwegian convicted of extra-marital sex after reporting rape in Dubai in 2013, was pardoned and allowed to return home, though the convictions for providing false testimony, drinking alcohol and extra-marital sex still stood. Indeed, her attacker, originally given a thirteen month sentence was also pardoned.

Nothing changed. The conditions for having a dialogue on the issue do not yet exist. Garabedian's documentary, which also does not refer to the Dalelv case, shines a flashlight rather than a spotlight on the issue. Article 25 of the UAE constitution may say that 'All persons are equal before the law, without distinction between citizens of the Union in regard to race, nationality, religious belief or social status.' But men are emphatically not subjected to imprisonment for being raped whilst carrying an unborn child.



The documentary 'Pregnant and In Chains in the United Arab Emirates' is available for rent at £1.99: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4LCtcT6bWk>

Duncan Bowie on a potted biog

Not the Jeremy Corbyn we know

JEREMY CORBYN - ACCIDENTAL HERO
W Stephen Gilbert (Squint Books, £9.99)

This is to my knowledge the first book on the new Labour leader. It is however not a biography nor even 'an informative portrait' which the book blurb claims, but a commentary. Gilbert is a scriptwriter who has written a book on Dennis Potter and also writes for the London Progressive Journal website. He is not to be confused with Stephen Gilbert, the former MP.

The book is in fact little more than a collection of comments on journalistic coverage over the last few months. There is practically

no information on Corbyn's thirty year political career or his political associations and associates. In fact I'm not sure I learnt anything I did not already know, and activists who have worked with Jeremy will no doubt find massive gaps in the story to the extent they will hardly recognise the subject.

Gilbert's lack of political and historical knowledge shows. At one stage Mark Reckless MP is referred to as Mark Feckless. The book at times wanders off into tangential commentary to discuss Margaret Thatcher, Michael Foot and Harold Wilson. Gilbert is actually quite sympathetic to Corbyn's position on a number of political issues, but overall this is

a very poor book, rushed out without any research and without any interviews with either Corbyn himself (whom Gilbert apparently met briefly once) or with anybody who has ever worked with Corbyn.



The return of class

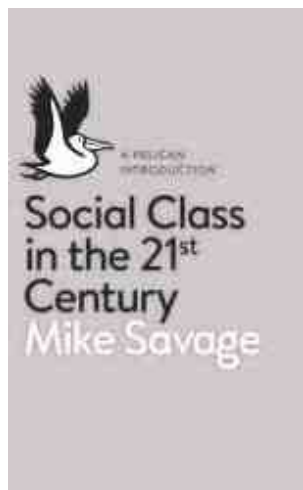
SOCIAL CLASS IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Michael Savage (Penguin, £8.99)

When Allen Lane set out in 1937 to launch Pelican books, clear and concise introductions to important topics, he began by republishing George Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. Other books from left-leaning intellectuals followed; H.G. Wells, Beatrice Webb and R.H. Tawney contributed to the Pelican series. E.P. Thompson's groundbreaking *The Making of the English Working Class* was given the Pelican treatment. The left-leaning tendency in Pelican books continued when, in 2014, they were re-launched in stylish blue covers, starting with a guide to economics by Ha-Joon Chang.

Social Class in the 21st Century follows in this tradition. In it, a team of nine leading sociologists present a picture of class in contemporary Britain, drawing heavily on the 'Great British Class Survey' that they ran with help from the BBC. Class, they claim, is changing; extraordinary inequalities are creating a hugely privileged elite and a vulnerable 'precarariat', while the groups in the middle are increasingly blurred. Class has become less about feeling a sense of belonging to a larger group, and has instead become 'more muted, individualized and complex'.

They put forward a model of

seven classes based on the interplay of economic, cultural and social capital. The authors draw heavily here on the ideas of the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, and one of their accomplishments is the way in which they succeed in rendering his impenetrable theorisations accessible to the average reader.



The most interesting finding of the research is that a person's original position in the class system has effects on their earning potential despite social mobility. Though they may acquire a legal training, a person from a less privileged background will lack the social capital to get a job in a better-paying firm. Someone with degrees from less prestigious universities will find it more difficult

to become an academic at an elite institution. The authors compare this 'social class background pay gap' to the gender pay gap, and rightly point out that this problem has drawn little attention in the past.

The book is, first and foremost, a work of popular sociology, and the framework for class that the authors present is not one that will be entering into broader use any time soon. They themselves show the limits of their terms by occasionally slipping into using the terms 'working class' and 'middle class', in particular when describing the social geography of modern Britain.

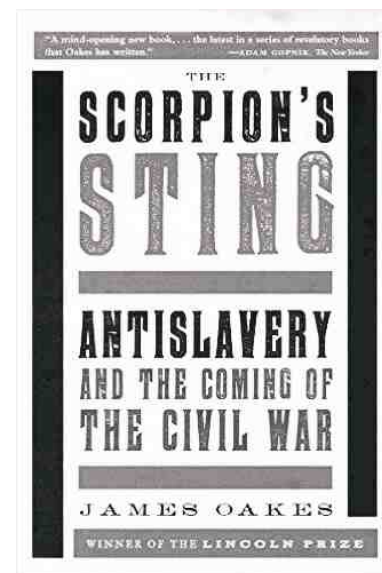
Though Bourdieu is by far the biggest influence on the authors, it is also notable that they draw on the more recent work of the economists Thomas Piketty and Guy Standing. The title of the book is presumably supposed to recall that of Piketty's *Capital* in the Twenty-First Century, and the ideas contained here could be argued to form part of developing new analyses of contemporary capitalism. Savage and his co-authors have been keen to defend class as an analytical category despite the attacks that it has come under in recent decades. They make a laudable effort to ensure that these emerging currents of left thought do not abandon the concept of class as they move to a greater focus on inequality.

Patricia d'Ardenne on anti-slavery

THE SCORPION'S STING: ANTI-SLAVERY AND THE COMING OF THE CIVIL WAR
James Oakes (W.W. Norton, £9.99)

When the scorpion is surrounded by fire, it stings itself to death. This metaphor, adopted by anti-slavery leaders before the US Civil War embodied a peaceful strategy to surround the slave states with a 'cordon of freedom' that would enable slaves in increasing numbers to escape, undermine the South, and lead to voluntary abolition. The South understood this, and seceded. This book considers whether there could have been a peaceful route to abolition (probably not), whether Lincoln was late to emancipation (no), and what role race played in the politics of slavery (everything).

In chapters one, two and three (Like a scorpion girt by fire, The Right versus Wrong of Property in Man, and Race Conflict) the metaphor reveals irreconcilable



differences. The North could not constitutionally prohibit slavery in Southern states, and 'the cordon of fire' was neither lit nor tested. But with secession, the Union was about to fall apart. And it was about slavery- a relative concept. More accurately it was about two labour systems, the latter using chattels. The slave was property, and the US Constitution, according to the South, protected property rights as inalienable. The Constitution applied only to the White races. Black people could never claim equality or citizenship. The North (in general) argued that slavery and the idea that 'all men are created equal' were contradictory and therefore irreconcilable concepts.

The Wars over Wartime Emancipation, the longest chapter in the book, analyses the history of releasing slaves for fighting- a common practice since ancient times, and certainly evident in pre-revolutionary America, and considered legal by the North. Oakes reveals the suicidal failure of the South to use the one force that might have saved it, a body of men desperate to be armed and fight with them in order to obtain their own freedom, and recruited instead by the North.

The Epilogue, Harriet Beecher Stowe and her British Sisters summarises the inability of the British and Americans to understand each other before and during the war- a neglected topic! It is partly based on an article Stowe wrote in 1863 for 'the Women of England', and reveals how deep the gulf was, and how it prevented a consistent foreign policy and use of alliances with Europe. I think this section would

have worked better woven into the general text, but this is a minor quibble.

The text is very accessible to the non-specialist, but the sources are well displayed for those who want to read on. Our history books should be updated in the light of what we can see was an inevitable conflict between two cultures which held diametrically opposed interpretations of the American Constitution. This war was always about slavery

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Hope for the future?

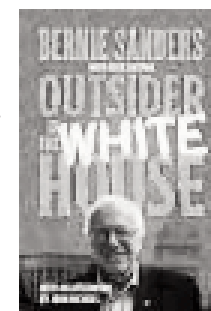
James Grayson on an American socialist

OUTSIDER IN THE WHITE HOUSE
Bernie Sanders and Huck Gutman (Verso, £9.99)

Bernie Sanders cut his political teeth in the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Currently as Senator for Vermont he seeks the Presidential nomination of the Democrats. He has previously been Congressman for Vermont and the Mayor of Burlington several times, during

which voter turnout doubled. Sanders is not a member of the Democratic party. He has stood and won as an independent, usually the only independent in the House or the Senate and as a socialist. The book was originally put together when Sanders was in the Congress during 1996, when he had no Presidential ambitions but there is a forty page afterword by John Nichols, now that he has. The authors deny that it

is a handbook for political campaigning. In my opinion it is one of the best. This is essential reading for anyone contemplating running an election.



Duncan Bowie on the 1930s communist milieu

RADIANT ILLUSION?
Nicholas Deakin (Ed) (Eden Valley Editions, £10)

This book is the product of a series of seminars held at Gresham College in Holborn, London. It comprises a series of essays on 1930's communists – some by academics, some by their children. Nicholas Deakin, a professor of social policy, himself wrote a substantive introductory paper examining the motives and the trajectories of the 1930's Oxford and Cambridge communists, carefully focusing on their political development and avoiding commentary on the links to espionage which produced its own publishing industry.

Deakin's link to 1930's communism is that he married the daughter of the leading London communist, Jack Gaster. The introduction is by Roderick Floud, principal of Gresham College (and previously vice-chancellor of London Metropolitan University), whose own father Bernard Floud was a Labour MP, who committed suicide after allegations that he



was a Soviet spy.

The historian of communism, Kevin Morgan, contributes a chapter, as does Geoff Andrew, whose new biography of James Klugmann was reviewed in the last Chartist, as does Jane Bernal, who is writing a biography of her mother Margot Heinemann. Another chapter is by sociologist Phil Cohen who has previously written a book on growing up in a communist family

– Children of the Revolution. There is also a write up of a seminar discussion which includes contributions from Professor Peter Hennessy, the historian Juliet Gardner, and intriguingly a contribution from Denis Healey, himself a communist at Oxford in the later 1930's, made a few months before his death.

I attended the final seminar in the series which was a fascinating discussion of the intellectual communist milieu in the years before the Second World War, including a contribution from Sir Ronnie Mackintosh, an Oxford socialist in the 1930's, who was a senior civil servant in the Wilson era, and whose own memoir, Turbulent Times, is well worth reading. The book is a fascinating study of what drew intellectuals into the Communist party in the pre-war period – as Healey says, it was because it was the only political party seen as standing up against Hitler. The whole seminar series can be viewed on the Gresham college website. <http://www.gresham.ac.uk/search-results/radiant%20illusion>

The new Spanish radicalism

HOPE IS A PROMISE: FROM THE INDIGNADOS TO THE RISE OF PODEMOS IN SPAIN
Carlos Declos (Zed Books, EBook £1.99 download)

The author is an academic, DJ, broadcaster and journalist who offers an analysis of events in Spain, particularly the North.

His story starts in May 2011 with the occupation movement which became known as 15M. Readers should bear in mind how close Spain is physically to what became known as the Arab Spring. An issue for the State everywhere is the collection of taxes in a way that the citizenry finds acceptable. At the time when they moved against the Indignados both Comps and Barbera, (national politicians) were under investigation because of suspicions of corruption. Later that year during a strike that threatened the national economy, air traffic controllers were forced back to work, some at the barrel of a pistol.

The people had a culture of

protest which manifested itself in several ways particularly occupying properties in the face of eviction. The banks had structured loans in such a way that they had incentives to repossess and the debts continued to grow. Initially there were slogans such as the one posted on the former Spanish Credit Bank, 'This is not a crisis it is called capitalism.' There had been assumptions by the Authorities to the effect that all rural land was 'Urbanisable' and for ambitious cultural industries projects: 'If you build it they will come.' Both failed.

There was a building boom in Spain over the last couple of decades or so but developers had problems when people mobilised on the slogan, 'Take the right to decent housing out of the market.' Social media networks enabled large numbers of people to mobilise quickly. People tended to relate colours to social action and to parade accordingly: red for education, green for housing and white for healthcare. The police found that they were unable to act with impunity in the face of

mass filming of events.

At the May 2014 election Podemos (tr. *we can*) won five European parliament seats. At the November 2014 elections left candidates won mayoralties in a series of large towns. There are other left parties including PartidoX (pirates). In Barcelona a process of popular nominations and tiering for candidates for office emerged under the badge of Barcelona En Comu. A partisan but thoughtful book which will repay study.

Hope is a Promise

From the Indignados to the Rise of Podemos in Spain

Carlos Delclós

Frank Lee on parasitical finance

KILLING THE HOST
Michael Hudson (Nation Books, £25.50)

There is a particular type of parasite which preys on humans – dracunculus – which can reach a metre in length. Care must be taken extracting these creatures since when one simply pulls off the protruding head of the worm, the worm will break and leak high levels of foreign antigen which can lead to anaphylactic shock and fast death of the host. Professor Hudson compares this sort of biological parasitism with the financial parasitism which is now sucking dry the world economy, the host.

The rise of the Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (F.I.R.E) sector - banks, credit agencies, investment companies, brokers and dealers of commodities and securities, security and commodity exchanges, insurance agents, buyers, sellers, lessors, lessees and so forth - has now reached such a level that it has become larger, more ubiquitous, and profitable than productive industry. Prior to the ascent of financialised capital and the deregulation and privatisation mania, the role of finance was usually restricted to greasing the wheels of the productive (value-creating) economy. Commercial banks took the public's deposits and funnelled it as credit into manufacturing and commercial enterprises. In this regulated environment commercial banks and other financial institutions were legally circumscribed in the level of credit they could extend.

Then came the Big Bang: finance was off the leash. Instead of producing real value as embodied in goods and services, selling of ownership titles was to become the chosen field of investment.

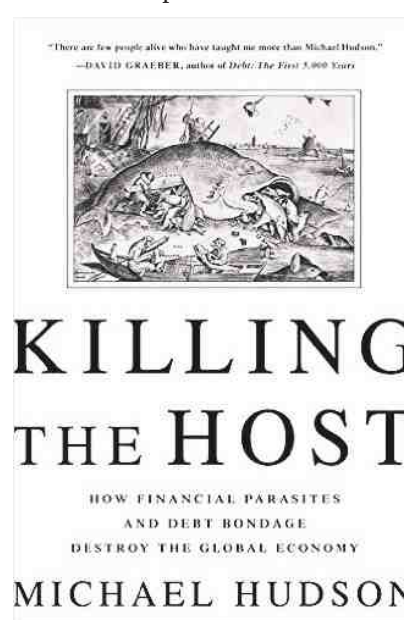
A good example of this has been share buy-backs. Most of the rise in global stock market valuations has been due to companies borrowing at very low interest rates and buying back and retiring their own shares. This means that those shares remaining in circulation go up in price since the book value of the company remains the same while its volume floating shares (this is called market capitalisation) have con-

tracted. On paper the firm has become more profitable since its share valuations have increased. This means an upward revaluation for the shareholders and the CEOs who now hold their hands out for a bonus.

Notice that no new value has been created. The whole thing was just an exercise in moving pieces of paper around.

What is worse this process has not only slowed down the flow of investment monies into the productive sector, it has actually now reversed the flow from the productive into the financial sector. As for growth, nothing actually grew except the shareholder bonanza and the CEO's bonus.

The one-time symbiosis between the productive and finan-



cial sectors has thus transmuted into a parasitic relationship. Other methods used to generate positive cash-flows include predatory take-overs and lobbying for corporate tax cuts.

In this way it is entirely possible to generate profits during a period of economic downturn and investment slump.

Hudson also gives a good explanation of what in economics is called 'economic rent'. This (also known as price gouging) is the practise of charging a higher price for a particular item due to a particular market structure – monopoly/oligopoly – which enables this pricing policy. The utility/energy industries in the UK – a blatant cartel – have been doing this since they were privatised during the Thatcher era.

Privatisation was little more than a legal licence to print money.

Traditionally, this practise was prevented by these industries being in the public sector. As Hudson explains: "European governments prevented monopoly rent by providing basic infrastructure services, or even at subsidized prices...the guiding idea for public infrastructure – which should be thought of as a factor of production like labour and capital – was to lower the cost of living and doing business ..."

But since Mrs T led Britain down the road of debt peonage and rent serfdom by privatising this infrastructure, she and her emulators in other countries turned them into tollbooth economies."

Thus the semi-feudal system of rent-extraction has produced a rentier class, once described by John Stuart Mill as people 'getting rich in their sleep'.

In the new world order it is titles to ownership which confers wealth, not producing value as embodied in goods and services. The neo-liberal counter-revolution with its ideological policy troika of privatisation-liberalisation-deregulation results in "the economy... being turned into a collection of tollbooths instead of factories."

In short the ongoing stagnation in the world economy, punctuated by periods of acute crisis – as in 2008, and soon to be repeated – has been due to the lack of productive investment, and, as a consequence, the loss of income and proper jobs. The absorption of capital which might be used for such investment is being sucked into the finance sector further augmenting the fabulous wealth of the 1%.

In addition to these domestic issues, institutions like the WTO, IMF, World Bank, BIS act in a global capacity to spread the reach of new Bilderberg neo-liberal oligarchy around the globe. Whole countries, have been and are being systematically looted, Ukraine and Greece spring to mind. Hudson gives a detailed and vivid account of how Latvia was bled white by these blood-suckers.

This is a timely and impressive work, well worth a read.

Duncan Bowie on the case for reform

Tax and Corbynomics

THE JOY OF TAX
Richard Murphy (Bantam Press, £16.99)

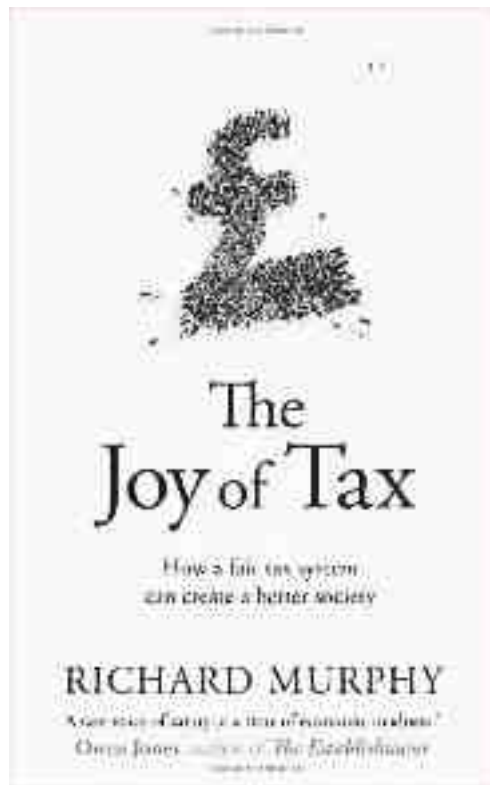
Perhaps I expected too much of this book. Richard Murphy has written widely on tax justice and tax havens and has contributed to *Chartist*. I enjoyed his 2011 book – ‘The Courageous State, which made the case for an interventionist state and for a tax regime which supported such a State. His new book is subtitled ‘How a fair tax system can create a better society’, and I was hoping that the book would provide an answer.

As Murphy is now one of Corbyn’s economic advisors, and in fact the book has a promotional sticker on the cover – ‘by the creator of ‘Corbynomics’ - I was hoping that the book would actually set out the basics of a progressive tax policy. I was looking for a comprehensive tax package for the next Government, which would be progressive and redistributive and would tax wealth and unearned income. Instead, much of the book is a discourse on the principles of the tax system, preceded by an explanation of the mysteries of the creation of money, government debt and quantitative easing, with Murphy asserting that everybody else misunderstands these three concepts.

Unfortunately his deconstruction of these so-called myths is not convincing, and in my view detracts from his fundamental argument as it presents the important issue of how government is financed as a case of smoke and mirrors.

When the book finally gets round to tax, Murphy is so insistent on pointing out that tax is optional not compulsory and that taxpayers money is just Government money due from taxpayers (a somewhat semantic point), that he does not really focus on what a progressive system would look like. He also seems to confuse process and principle and, perhaps showing his accountancy background, spends time on transparency and evasion and the workings of HMRC rather than the key point of who and what should contribute to Government revenue.

For me, the clearest and most useful section of the book was Murphy’s precis of Adam Smith’s four key elements of taxation, which he summarises as equity, certainty, convenience and efficiency. However Murphy seems a little confused as to whether or not Smith’s objective of equity which Murphy appears to share is critical, by discussing certainty, convenience and efficiency – all of which are secondary process issues. When it comes to principles, Murphy discusses peace, truth and simplicity as well as equality.



In the penultimate chapters on ‘the ideal tax system’ and a draft speech for a Chancellor of the exchequer we get a discourse, then a programme, but without in my view a sufficiently clear link between principles and proposals. Moreover, many readers are likely to abandon reading the draft speech, given the first half is about the purposes and administration of the tax system.

We do however at last get a tax reform programme: Capital Gains Tax should be abolished with capital gains taxed as income, but with capital gains on housing only taxed on death. Stamp duty would be abolished. Inheritance

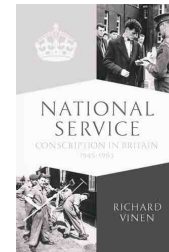
tax would be replaced by a wealth tax, but not charged on primary residences or private businesses. Council tax would be replaced by a land value tax, but the change would be delayed for three years. A new house building programme would be funded by ‘infrastructure quantitative easing’. VAT would be retained with rates reduced. Murphy does not support National Insurance as a regressive tax and discusses a new tax on ‘financial flows through bank accounts’ to ‘discourage excessive consumption’, though I struggled to understand the relationship between the two.

In the final pages, Murphy argues for making income tax more progressive by introducing higher rates but is unspecific on the detail, while arguing rightly that this is the ‘price for social justice for each and every person in the country’. Why this key point is not made earlier is puzzling, but perhaps Murphy is just following the tradition of budget speeches where the most substantive change is sneaked in at the end of the speech.

There is much of value in Murphy’s book, though the meat is actually in the last half of the final chapter and the author would have been better to concentrate on presenting a more logical and systematic presentation of his tax reform options.

The book, while analysing the current system, fails to provide an analysis of the impact of the proposed changes – it has no figures on rates, tax take or distributional impact in terms of who gains or who loses. I agree with some of Murphy’s proposals, but have significant doubts about others, notably his proposals on land and property tax. We need a more thoroughly worked out tax reform programme. This is a useful contribution, but not a very convincing one. We would need a Labour chancellor to present a much more substantive reform case.

Mike Davis on the ‘in-betweeners’



NATIONAL SERVICE CONSCRIPTION IN BRITAIN 1945 - 1963
Richard Vinen (Penguin, £10.99)

Two million men were conscripted to the British armed forces between 1945 and 1963. Initially it was for 18 months, extended to two years following the Korean war. A number of conscripts served overseas. In March 1954 13,000 British soldiers were in transit to the Far East. For most conscripts it meant tedious but hard work and little privacy at one of many mainland camps. Students were often excused.

Without peacetime conscription Britain would not have been able to cling on to its status, nor its empire argues Vinen. National Service cuts across the lives of an entire generation. While society was changing in the ‘boom years,’ young men had to rapidly forge new relationships with their families, especially with wives and girlfriends who were regarded as a dangerously softening influence by the armed services.

Civil society v. corporate power

TTIP – THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP
Ferdinand De Ville & Gabriel Siles-Brügge (Polity Press, £12.99)

Books about trade negotiations rarely capture much public attention. But this one deservedly has. It chronicles the twists and turns in the latest bilateral efforts of the USA and the European Union to make trading between the two blocs easier. As readers of *Chartist* will be aware, TTIP has already aroused considerable public controversy in European civil society, and among its elected representatives in the European Parliament (EP) (see *Chartist* 264 Sep/Oct 2013 ff).

A clear ideological divide has emerged between the leading centre right and centre left parties, particularly over the scope of TTIP and it proposed Investor-to-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions. The authors don’t take sides. But they highlight the critical importance of greater transparency throughout trade negotiations if elected representatives and non-governmental bod-

ies serving civic society are to make informed decisions.

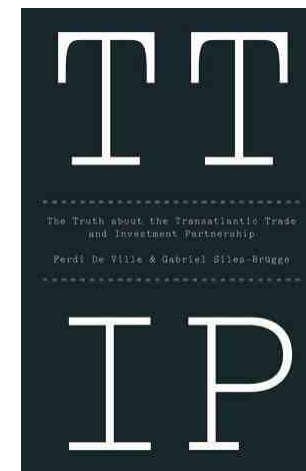
They examine the claims made by both proponents and opponents. Particularly, important are their efforts to put these particular talks into historical perspective. With the setbacks in multilateral trade negotiations exemplified by the collapse of the Doha round started in 2001 and the increasing prominence of China, India and other non-OECD trading partners – bilateral and regional agreements have become more readily negotiated. A global reduction in tariffs in internation-

But changes were coming: the abolition of 11-plus, legalisation of homosexuality, race equality laws. Studies of conscript life and attitudes helped influence these changes.

Vinen describes the conscripts as ‘an in-between generation’ in culture and demographic nature. They all lived through the Second World War but were absent from many sociological studies and those of ‘affluent workers’ of the 1960s, which makes his study quite unique.

Unlike France in Algeria, no one conflict for Britain had the same focus, despite recent revelations about British torture and atrocities of Mau Mau liberation fighters in Kenya in the 1950s.

It could be very dangerous for conscripts if sent to police ‘colonial emergencies’, namely Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and for an unlucky few brutal trench warfare in Korea. Conditions in these conflicts were harrowing. Terrible atrocities were committed against them in the jungle conflicts. All this in stark con-



al trade to relatively low levels (less than 3% in EU/US trade, has put the focus on non-tariff barriers. That is why the need for much greater public scrutiny has arisen.

Trade negotiators on both sides of the Atlantic, the authors argue, have sought to depoliticise regulatory policies and render them to economic logic. More trade is good for economic growth and jobs, so any regulation getting in the way of enterprise is a restraint on private enterprise. That is what has fired civil society especially in Europe to oppose TTIP and ISDS, in particular. This is laid out in great detail in chapters 3 and 4.

The book concludes with the authors accepting that they cannot provide definitive answers to the questions arising from the negotiations to date. But they are confident that the processes now in train provide vital lessons for how future trade negotiations should be conducted. There are clear limits to the ‘depoliticising’ agenda driven by technocrats. That should be a catalyst for rethinking global trade politics, they conclude. Let’s hope that they are right.



Clive Lewis MP says it is time to learn from the past

War without end

I have to admit I too failed to respond in a timely manner to the awful attacks in Beirut late last year. Around 40 people were killed and almost 200 injured. These deaths were also claimed by Isis.

Whilst it's right and proper we pay due attention to the plight of our nearest neighbours, we must never forget the plight of those further away.

But do we, hand on heart, believe if a second terrorist attack had happened on mainland Europe on the same day as Paris, with similar casualties to Lebanon, it would have received more coverage?

If the answer is 'yes', and I believe it is, then this raises some uncomfortable questions.

Does that mean we and our media value all human life equally? Or are some lives more newsworthy, more valued, than others?

To what extent are the news values of the BBC, Sky, and newspapers – i.e. the prominence or not they give to a story - shaped by our collective values as a society? And how much do their news values, in some way, shape our own?

It's an age old question, one complicated by mainstream media ownership that makes a mockery of the notion of a 'free press'.

Ultimately, how we and our allies respond to the atrocities in France, will in part, answer some of these questions.

The 'War on Terror' is now approaching its 15th year with no end in sight. It has

cost millions of lives, trillions of dollars, destabilised an entire region and arguably spawned a series of global, jihadist terror networks.

Henry Kissinger, no stranger to bloody foreign wars, once said: "The task of the leader is to get his/her people from where they are to where they have not been."

Perhaps it's now time for our leaders to lead. To acknowledge

but the price of failure, as we have seen over the weekend after the Paris attacks, is far too costly.

That means working with Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others to stop the war by proxy and cutting-off arms and finance to the numerous factions.

It means committing to spend billions of pounds on economic and educational development in Africa and the Middle East. No one could ever describe the \$1.6 trillion spent on the war since 2001 as 'value for money'. Better then surely to spend future resources on peace and stability.

Next comes tackling the moral inconsistency of western support for Saudi Arabia - one of the biggest exporters and funders of terror - and other brutal Gulf regimes. Condemning Saudi Arabia doesn't by implication mean we must condone Iran. Quite the opposite in fact. However, how can we lecture Russia on its support for the theocrats in Tehran when we give succour to the monarchists of Riyadh?

Finally, there's the weeping sore of Israel and Palestine. Surely any lasting, comprehensive peace strategy for this region must include a peaceful solution here?

But where is the vision? The leadership? The big picture, strategic approach to foreign affairs the world is crying out for?

Climate change is upon us. The pressures that will now pile upon humanity, as we progress through the 21st century, are plain to see. Now is not the time for 'insanity', not the time to keep on repeating the mistakes of the past. Now is the time to learn from them.



that Einstein was right, that the definition of insanity is 'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results'.

How many more last throw of the die, how many last, Field Marshal Haig-like pushes must there be before we come to our collective sense?

The response to the horrors of Paris must be different. It must be part of a comprehensive, long-term international and regional strategy that crushes ISIS with economic, diplomatic and yes, as a last resort, military action.

It also means an internationally agreed settlement on Assad's regime. Easier said than done,

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