

NORTH HEREFORDSHIRE CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION

NHCA Annual Dinner. Could those of you who have reserved places at the dinner with guest of honour Jacob Rees-Mogg, but have yet to purchase tickets, please contact the Association to confirm your attendance. If you are unable to join us please let us know as there is waiting list for tickets.

100 Club.

February monthly draw. First prize of £50: Albert Ward. Runner up: Brenda Clark. Congratulations both.

Herefordshire County Council elections – and indeed all Parish Council elections - take place Thursday 2nd May 2019. The County Council is on a knife edge with a Conservative majority of just 1. If you are able to help the Conservatives retain control of Herefordshire and give the crypto-socialists masquerading as “Greens” - and some even as “Independents” - a blooded nose, please contact the Association office on 01568-612565 or e-mail the Association office on office@nhca.org.uk

PS. A message for Conservative Central Office.....We do not want or need another General Election – and even less another referendum; in 2016 we voted to leave – and that is what we must do – on time.

PPS – a message to Tory MPs who voted with Corbyn to de-rail Brexit; you should be truly ashamed – surely not a little hypocritical to stand and be elected on a manifesto with which you did not agree.

Kung Hei Fat Choi – The Chinese New Year of the Pig – a year that traditionally highlights wealth and prosperity. We'll drink to that.

Actually, on the economic front, 2019 has again started encouragingly for the UK reporting the highest quarterly growth rate since 2016 in the face of a global economic slow-down. Remember those dire warnings from the high priests of “Remoanerdom” of the apocalyptic economic performance facing the UK as BREXIT loomsbut....ITALY – now in recession with an economy, broadly, no bigger than in 2004: GERMANY – the first shrinkage in the German economy for 4 years and likely heading for a formal recession (i.e. 2 consecutive shrinking quarters): FRANCE – growth rate falling to an annualised 0.9% as economic mismanagement hits the economy as it breaches EU borrowing guidelines – which the French (sensibly) typically ignore: consumer consumption down; investment – down. One rule for France – but can you imagine the opprobrium heaped on the UK if we so transgressed. UK economic growth is likely to be around 1.6% this year – hardly stellar but significantly ahead of Italy, Germany and probably France. As Liam Fox suggested – in the face of growing economic weakness in Europe and a distressed German car industry – a more sensible and pragmatic set of EU bureaucrats might steer towards re-negotiating a proper “deal” with the UK “....as quickly as possible”. **The UK is now however likely to have the fastest economic growth of the major EU economies in 2019 – as the BBC would say – despite Brexit. The yarn that the EU economy was on a one-way ticket to boomtown has been shot to pieces.**

- **Inflation (CPIH) down** to 2% - the better news – this almost certainly rules out any interest rate hike by the Bank of England. UK inflation at 2% is below the EU projected average.
- **Employment at another record level....** a record high of **32.5m in work** – 328,000 more than a year ago
- **The employment rate**, a measure of working age people in work, **hit 75.8%**, up from 75.3% a year earlier, the highest rate since 1971. Despite Brexit, in the 3 months to November 100,000 people shifted into the jobs market who were previously economically inactive.
- This pushed the **unemployment rate down to 4%** (and falling) its lowest level since 1975. This compares with unemployment rates in our EU pals of 9.1% in France, 14.4% in Spain and 10.3% in Italy; **The Eurozone unemployment rate at 7.9% is twice that of the UK.**
- **Wages rising faster** - at the fastest rate of 3.4% for more than 10 years.
- **Government borrowing falling further** – just £3bn borrowed in December – and below estimates – the 2nd lowest December total since 2001. In the year to date net borrowing is **£13.1bn less** than in the last comparable period and **at a 16-year “low”**. Compare with France as it breaches “EU-ordained” borrowing limits and Italian debt over 130% of GDP. As a percentage of GDP total UK borrowing fell to 84%.
- **Home ownership at 15 year high of 14.8m homes.** Home ownership in England up for the 4th year in a row, fuelled by the renaissance of the first-time buyer. **785,000 first time buyers last year** is the highest level for 10 years.
- **Net foreign investment in the UK up by £8.53bn** in Q3 2018 - a sum significantly higher than France & Italy and compares with falls in the Netherlands and Spain.

- The **Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) forecasts the UK economy will bounce back to be the world's 6th largest from 2020** onwards "as the economy takes advantage of new opportunities emerging from Brexit". The report points out that the **UK is the leading centre for creative and digital sectors, and the main financial sector in the European time-zone**. Further ahead India will be the third biggest economic power by 2033, Mexico will overtake Spain to become the largest Spanish speaking economy in 2031. Signalling Europe's falling fortunes, Italy drops out of the 10 largest economies by 2026 and slips to 13th by 2033. Surely it's right for the UK to re-focus on growth, not sloth, markets.

EU. Can anyone please tell me a single thing the EU has said or done, since our Referendum, to make me want to stay in the EU? Or as Matt Chorley wrote..."...Over in Remoanerland the People's Vote people were throwing their Tibetan handcrafted wooden toys out of their antique upcycled prams, somehow claiming every Commons vote was simply paving the way for another referendum." The hardening of the EU's attitudes seems to coincide with Martin Selmayr's (now Secretary General of the European Commission i.e. Juncker's "side-kick") - growing influence over the process. No.10 is reportedly worried over the growing power of this hostile Eurocrat – the grandson of Brigadier General Josef Selmayr – the German army officer given a 15-year sentence for war crimes in the Balkans. Selmayr is reported to have told journalists that detaching Northern Ireland was the price "the British" would pay to exit the EU. Who wants more evidence of EU interference in "our" sovereignty? In my view the Irish back-stop card is being played by the Irish Republic (aided and abetted by the EU) as a means of weakening Northern Ireland's ties with Great Britain as part of its long term pursuit of "the unification of Ireland". Paradoxically the Republic's stubbornness increases the chances of no deal, a prospect recognised by an increasing number of realist politicians on both sides of the argument.

But some wiser heads in Germany could prevail....as the key German motor industry sees car sales collapse - car production down 24% in the last reported month and domestic registrations down 31%. The German Ifo (the local version of the CBI) has rapped the European Commission for mishandling Brexit talks and for trying to punish the UK. Urging the Commission to tear up the Irish backstop and ditch its ideological demands it called on Brussels to "abandon its indivisibility dogma" on the four freedoms and come up with a creative formula, noting the current approach risked a disastrous showdown with London that could spin dangerously out of control. Ifo concluded "since 2000, the UK paid a net contribution of €76bn to the EU. One may argue that this fact alone merits fair treatment of the 2nd largest European economy." Incidentally Calais, Rotterdam and the Belgian ports all insist they are "Brexit proof" against queues at the ports should there be "no deal".

As Tory MP Greg Hands wrote, the Commission's top German Brexit officials are clear: the Withdrawal Agreement hugely favours the EU, and was always meant to be so. Top EU officials say; "Northern Ireland is the price that Britain must pay for Brexit;" that the Withdrawal Agreement shows Brexit "doesn't work"; that "the power is with the EU" and that "the EU has the best negotiating position for the future relationship". It has been clear from the beginning that the mission of senior Brussels officials has been to punish Britain for Brexit.

Penny Mordaunt, the international development secretary, believes opinion is hardening on leaving the EU without a deal — in favour of the alternative of trading with the bloc on World Trade Organisation terms. Telling the *FT* "You see this shift to no-deal. It's not because [voters] particularly want WTO terms, it's because they want it done". "That's not necessarily because that's their preferred option. But I think the public want to send us a message that, end of March, we expect you to leave the EU, and that is the most important thing. To them, **no Brexit is worse than no-deal.**"

Labour Split. After David Milliband's unfortunate handling of a bent banana – we now have a different split – a purported Labour Party split. It's not long since deputy Labour leader Tom Watson said Unite leader Len McCluskey was "coming after him". But this comedy has more acts to play. **Momentum-led Labour has commanded mandatory reselection of all sitting Labour MPs – clearly a ruse to expel the non-Marxists from the party.** There are still some sensible and pragmatic MPs - like Frank Field - who resigned the Labour whip – who are detested by Momentum and face almost certain de-selection. Mandatory re-selection begins next month. One Midlands constituency has seen its membership soar from a handful to over 4,000 thanks to Momentum infiltration and certain de-selection awaits that former Labour front-bencher. Never at ease with Corbyn – let alone sympathetic to his Marxist cause – what have these MPs to lose by joining/establishing a pro-EU home in a new version of Blairite Labour? Joining the media reported ranks of Chris Leslie, Luciana Berger and Angela Smith up to a further 20 could follow – even Chuka Umana's association has changed the rules to make his de-selection easier. Momentum began its de-selection moves last year against Brexit-backing Labour MPs like Kate Hoey, Frank Field, John Mann and Graham Stringer; its ambition has expanded exponentially. Could the Labour party implode? The odds are shortening. As for the catalyst – well – forget ingrained financial incontinence – but how about that persistent anti-Semitic strand or the inability to condemn Corbyn's poster boy – the dictator of Venezuela - who "led" this once rich country to the breadline and multi-million rates of inflation. Showing true hard-left colours Corbyn has slammed the Government's call for sanctions against Venezuela's Marxist dictator – ignoring the brutal crackdown and misery inflicted by Maduro

on Venezuelans. Note Corbyn parleys with Maduro and a wide variety of terrorist organisations – but was unable to speak to Theresa May – until he noticed his poll ratings had tanked.

Euro-barmy-army. So a European defence force of all the talents is to be created with a defence “compact” twixt France and Germany. Almost instantly come reports that all 6 German submarines are out of service; not adding to confidence we read the German military has been “forced” to use painted broomsticks as “pretend guns” which some may see eroding the notion that an integrated EU defence force based on German “might” is not a wholly reliable organ of security. Under-funding defence yet seeking protection from NATO (particularly American arms spending) has long been a German theme. Recent reports damn the years of neglect that have reportedly left the once proud German military a laughing stock. Reports cite weapons systems that are only partly operational, corvettes as yet unfitted with guided missile systems, a Bundeswehr lacking reconnaissance drones whilst short of 21000 officer and junior posts - and a navy that lacked 80% of the necessary electrical engineers and IT staff. Another report revealed severe shortages of “working” tanks, spare parts, bullet-proof vests and winter clothing. Shortages are enough to give you the shivers. *Der Spiegel* reported only 4 combat-ready fighter jets out of a fleet of 128 – 124 suffering coolant problems and no missiles.

No surprise really when you “piggyback” on US defence spending and when German defence spending is just 1.2% of GDP – a little over half the NATO “target”. Additionally, news has surfaced that Spain’s new E1bn (twice over budget) submarines are too big to dock. The original design produced a vessel so imbalanced it could submerge but not resurface – i.e. it was useless; the remedy – a redesign that stretched vessels 10 meters – and a vessel now too big for Spanish docks. Add these attributes to the French record of retreat – from Napoleon to WW2 (until rescued by the American and British liberation forces) - and clearly we see a formidable embryonic fighting force that should make any enemy tremble.

What the BBC – or Guardian - might fail to report.....

Trade Unionist proposes pension cut....Labour’s General Secretary, the Corbynista ex-public school girl and former lover of Unite leader Len McCluskey (*Mail-Online*), Jennie Formby – the lady accused by the *Jewish Chronicle* of protecting anti-Semitic Labour party members from “punishment” – is reportedly planning to cut benefits offered by the Labour Party Pension Scheme. *The Times* reports plans are afoot to scrap the “unaffordable” final pension scheme – downgrading it to one based on average earnings. Could this be the same Jennie Formby who led the campaign to prevent Unilever from doing the same – then she described Unilever’s move as “spiteful behaviour”. I’m sure Labour Party employees would never level the same charge at Mrs. Formby. A Labour source told *PoliticsHome*: “Jennie Formby and Jeremy Corbyn have spent their lives campaigning for workers’ rights, but by refusing to meet with staff trade unions to discuss a new pay deal it feels like they are failing to look after their own employees. **A whiff of hypocrisy – methinks.**

The eternal Birmingham “bin” dispute. Unlucky residents in Labour controlled Birmingham have now **endured over 630 days** (and counting) of industrial action and strikes - and more missed than actual collections. Many Labourites claim Birmingham City Council is a test-bed for a Labour Government’s policies. Heaven help us. Birmingham residents wondering when they may finally get their Christmas waste collected will be able to vouch for the failure of Birmingham Labour’s test-bed.

Scots tax payers face the lash....or at least a triple tax bombshell from the SDP-GREEN coalition Government. Note for Herefordshire – the Greens will be mounting a “mighty” challenge in the May County-wide elections. Scots face paying substantial extra sums to park at their workplace through a **new work-place parking levy** as well a **new tourist tax** that could hit Scotland’s £11bn /year flagship tourist industry. On top of that add on big council tax increases (an extra £54/yr on a “D” rated property) and axed rates relief on empty commercial properties - in addition to higher income tax rates announced before Christmas..... Ouch!

Things to come?...A whiff of leftie appropriation as the Labour MP for Brighton Kemptown argues for housing to be “taken out of private hands”, reportedly telling a Corbynista rally that the party is preparing (for) mass compulsory purchase of former council homes – and all properties sold under “right to buy” legislation. According to one report Moyle said “....**let’s not just talk about council houses – let’s get those bloody private houses back into our hands....we need to develop a system.... that takes property out of private hands...why not give every council the first right of refusal with any house put up for sale – I mean your private house**”. Although regarded as “off-policy” even by Labour HQ – the Marxist anti-property rantings of this MP show the extent to which the Labour Party has been commandeered by anti-private property Marxists.

Malice, ignorance, stupidity (or all three) of GREEN poster-boy. Ross Greer is a Green Party MSP; he has accused Sir Winston Churchill of being a “white supremacist mass murderer”; he has also claimed “Imperial Britain was happy to live with Hitler”, he has wished Buckingham Palace would burn down and, pre the actual event, that Margaret Thatcher would die. Is it a failure of the Scottish education system that this prominent elected **Green Party member has a zero grasp of history** – or is it just simple immaturity. As the *Express* opinedSir Winston Churchill did not just save Britain, he saved the whole of Europe, something that continent would very much like to forget. Frankly, Ross Greer isn’t fit to polish Churchill’s boots.

Sabotage away-day. Be aware. The *Sunday Times* reports Labour has been running away-days in Nottingham teaching rookey Corbynistas the arts of “smear-your-opponent on social media” – and as one attendee reported – smear – and even if you have to retract – the damage is already done. That seems to work as former Tory MP Byron Davies found after Labour activist Dan Evans spread vicious un-founded on-line smears. Despite extracting an apology from this malicious activist – damage done & seat lost.

Independent beats comprehensive – Labour front-benchers believe. One must congratulate Labour Shadow Attorney General Shami Chakrabarti – the lass who proclaimed the brilliance of comprehensive schools on TV – and her ascent to the political heights as evidence thereof. Fair enough... but is it not a tad hypocritical then to shell out over £20,000 per year to send your son to prestigious Dulwich College. Keeping to the Labour front-bench - why too did Corbyn’s former girlfriend Diane Abbot send her son to an independent school and Emily Thornbury (who prefers not to be known as the titled Lady Nugee) bus her daughters 14 miles out of politically correct Islington to a selective school. Sorry – **it seems comprehensive schools are fine for the masses – but not, perhaps, for the offspring of some Labour front-benchers.**

EU kills off men – headlines the *Mail*.....A new EU guide urges avoidance of the “generic use of man” as a “more than a matter of political correctness.....as it reflects influences, attitudes and perceptions....to avoid conveying prejudice, discrimination and degrading remarks”. Gobbledegook – but someone should tell Corbyn not to mutter “**stupid woman**” – hang your head in shame – Jezza. Banned words will include man-made, statesman, mankind, fireman, layman, committee of wise men etc. You’d think the ever-more bureaucratic EU could devote its “energies” to rather more far-reaching internal reform...but at least this provides comic relief.

Merkel thanks Greece for its sacrifices for the years of austerity that resulted in one of the deepest recessions in recent times, 28% unemployment & peak Greek youth unemployment of ~60%.....guarded by 2000 police to protect her from the “grateful” Greeks as demonstrations were banned.

5-star Spanish hypocrisy; with 2 colonies (Ceuta & Melilla) on the N. African coast otherwise encircled by Morocco and claimed by Morocco, Spain cannot escape the charge of utter hypocrisy by calling to regain sovereignty over Gibraltar (ceded by treaty to Britain in 1713) while in parallel refusing Morocco's legitimate right to its sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla. Gibraltar is not a colony. But even Spanish diplomats argue the treaties relied on by the Spanish to justify their sovereignty over the Ceuta & Melilla enclaves have no legal or moral value. Perhaps the leftwing Spanish government, maybe fearful of a populist rightwing back-lash, might look at the results of the last Gibraltarian plebiscite when only 99% of the population voted no truck with Spain.

Still no Belgian government. Famed for a 589 day run without a government – divided Belgium has entered the 3rd month with only a caretaker administration. Maybe the start of another record breaking run?.

Bill writes. It is enormously encouraging to see the IMF forecast that the UK will have the joint-third fastest GDP growth among the G7 in both 2019 and 2020. This is equal with France in 2019 and equal with France and Germany in 2020. Further good news came from recent figures that show wages have risen at their fastest pace in 10 years as employment reaches a record high, with more than 32.5m people currently in work.

In North Herefordshire, the number of people who are claiming key out-of-work benefits has fallen by 1,063 since 2010 – an overall reduction of 37%.

Following the Prime Minister’s statement to the House of Commons on 21st January on exiting the European Union, it is clear that further compromises must be made soon if the Government is to find a way forward that delivers on the Referendum result.

I welcome the Government’s continued commitment to respecting the Belfast agreement and The Prime Ministers willingness to engage with opposition parties, even if Labour won’t reciprocate. As it is in the best interests for both the UK and EU for the Northern Irish Backstop to be amended, I hope that this will be achieved in the coming week of negotiations with the EU.

If, however, the EU does not compromise on the Backstop, leaving without a deal would be preferable to remaining trapped in the EU single market under the Backstop arrangement currently outlined in the Withdrawal Agreement. The promise that “No deal is better than a bad deal!” is still true.

Roughly twice as many North Herefordshire constituents who have contacted me since early October have said that they would reject the withdrawal agreement as it stands, than those who have written in support of the deal.

Despite my optimism for a WTO clean global Brexit, if the Backstop were to be removed from the Withdrawal Agreement, I would nevertheless be willing to compromise and vote for the Prime Minister’s deal. The Prime Minister confirmed that there is no majority for a Second Referendum in the House and that the Government has a duty to implement the result of the 2016 Referendum. I therefore look forward to the revised deal that the Prime Minister will return with after re-negotiating with the EU.

I hope that it is one that will deliver the Brexit that the majority in North Herefordshire voted for in June 2016.

