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**Execrable Lisbon "Reform" Treaty**

Has any one actually **read** this 272-page tome from cover to cover, I wonder? Or even tried to?

I've calculated, using Adobe's Read-Out-Loud function (timed at three minutes per page), that it would take you nearly thirteen hours to plough your way through it just the once. And because the prose is so impenetrable, you will not understand it properly until you've carefully gone through it three or four times. I would challenge anyone to deny, therefore, that not a single one of

the 54 esteemed signatories has read it even a single time. What prime minister or foreign minister can set aside thirteen hours for study? If he/she did, it would probably be half-an-hour at a time snatched before going to sleep at the end of the day, which means not finishing the wretched document for a month.

Former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing is the progenitor of this oeuvre. He chaired the committee that drafted its forerunner, the would-be "**Treaty Establishing A Constitution For Europe**", or **TEACoFEe** as I once described it - a "*tea-coffee-or-whatever-you're-having-yourself*" mishmash designed to please and annoy everyone in equal measure. The **TEACoFEe** was then thankfully rejected in the French and Dutch referendums. He had earlier (June 2005) advised president Jacque Chirac against a referendum because the **TEACoFEe** was too long and complicated for ignorant French plebs to understand, but he was ignored.

Perhaps the mighty Jean-Claude Juncker, long the prime Minister of the Colossus that is Luxembourg,

was right after all when he famously said, in relation to those pesky referendums,

*"If it's a Yes, we will say 'on we go', and if it's a No we will say 'we continue'"*.

The Lisbon Reform Treaty is a slightly modified version of the **TEACoFEe** - still 90% the same according to Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Bertie Ahern, or very, very near to it. A few provisions have been changed, largely cosmetic things like removing the EU anthem, but the phraseology and architecture have also deliberately been made much more difficult to comprehend. Astute as ever, Mr d'Estaing now proclaims that

*"Public opinion will be led to adopt, without knowing it, the proposals that we dare not present to them directly ... All the earlier proposals will be in the new text, but will be hidden and disguised in some way ... What was [already] difficult to understand will become utterly incomprehensible, but the substance has been retained ... Why not have a single text? The only reason is that this would look too much like the constitutional treaty. Making cosmetic changes*

*would make the text more easy to swallow."*

Karel de Gucht, Belgian Foreign Minister helpfully adds,

*"The aim of this treaty is to be unreadable ... The Constitution aimed to be clear, whereas this treaty had to be unclear. It is a success."*

It's certainly that. To achieve unreadability a very simple technique has been used. At the beginning of the treaty after seven sheets of pompous signatures it states

**"AMENDMENTS TO THE TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION AND TO THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY"**

Thereafter, it goes on, page after page, beginning each clause with phrases such as

*"Article x shall be amended as follows",*

after which you are instructed to delete, insert, modify and/or renumber Article x, which apparently appears in one or both of the previous two treaties mentioned. Consequently, you can't possibly understand the import of the particular amendment unless you have

the other two treaties open in front of you at the specific article in question. This couple of treaties, by the way, usually go by the more familiar names of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Treaty of Rome (1957)

respectively, though to put you off the scent the Lisbon Treaty doesn't tell you this or even mention the names of those proud cities.

Even the proposed new 2½-year "President of the EU Council" doesn't get his own clause in the treaty: he (or she) is introduced via the "insertion" of a new Article 9B into those previous treaties.

Lisbon is thus an abomination that no serious business would ever contemplate writing or signing. If it really was a "reform" treaty, it would have replaced the two prior treaties in their entirety and incorporated all the amendments into a single, unambiguous easy to comprehend document.

But then it wouldn't have met Mr de Gucht's demanding standard of unreadability.

And, frankly, that's the single biggest reason for any compos mentis person to vote NO.

Would you sign a contract for, say, employment or to buy a house, if you didn't understand a word it said? Yet the threat of a NO is of course precisely why no-one (but the Irish) is being permitted a referendum this time around.

As a result, the constitutionally unavoidable Irish referendum is going to become a huge battleground, where NO and YES camps across the length and breadth of Europe are going to be slugging it out via proxies within Ireland. For only Ireland can stop, or at least further slow, Mr Juncker's relentless march.

Apart from the unreadability aspect, the principal YES arguments you hear don't seem to really stack up. Apparently the main *raison d'être* for the treaty is to make the running of the EU smoother and more stable with the advent of the recently joined members. But, as various studies and publications, notably the (subscription-only) Economist, have pointed out, decision-making has actually become more not less slick since the last dozen members joined, with new rules and regulations being adopted 25% faster than before enlargement.

People sometimes come up with little details for voting YES, such as that Lisbon mentions "*climate change*". Well, yes it does, but only parenthetically and only to add via Clause 143 the magic words "*in particular combating climate change*" to an existing article, 174, about "*deal[ing] with regional or worldwide environmental problems*". This hardly embraces Al Gore's absurd climate changeology cult.

But the main argument advanced by the YES camp is not really that the Treaty serves any specific purpose. Rather, that it is part of the mighty locomotive that is the EU, which is always advancing towards some mythical nirvana in a never-attainable future, and you either get on board or get left behind at the station.

Therefore, to vote NO is

- to vote against the train,
- to choose to remain at the station,
- to abhor the very existence of the EU.

Some have even suggested it is almost treasonous. A common theme in the UK, shared by many EUocrats, is that if the British were to vote against the Lisbon Treaty, in the promised referendum which prime minister Gordon Brown is now denying them,

this should be interpreted as a vote to leave the EU altogether. Actually, many British think it should be rejected with precisely this ulterior objective.

The same arguments were trotted out after the Irish voted down the Nice Treaty in 2001 and had to be cajoled, bribed and frightened to vote again with a YES a year later, so as not to be ejected from or villified by or left behind by the EU.

Yet such a notion is nonsense.

The EU is not the plaything of EUocrats, MEPs, Commissioners and other Brussels bigwigs, even though they number in the tens of thousands and often behave as if it is. It is above all a club of the citizens of the 27 constituent countries, and they add up to 490 million (an astonishing 60% more than America's population). So if some of them decide they want something different from the Brussels bunch, and are able under Club rules to achieve this, the EU remains just as much the EU as it ever was. Your golf club doesn't stop being your golf club just because, for example, members vote to admit women even though the Committee happens to oppose it.

So no thinking citizen could possibly vote to support the Lisbon Treaty:

- It is un-understandable for ordinary people, and therefore you simply cannot know what it is you would be voting for.
- The evidence is that it is not needed to improve the smooth running of the enlarged EU, which after all was the excuse for the (eventually ratified) Nice Treaty.
- It is not an integral, unavoidable part of the EU unless ratified, and not ratifying it is no act of disloyalty. Quite the converse in fact, because it would probably avoid a slew of negative consequences.

Of course the 26 countries who will (or have) put the treaty to their parliaments for ratification are guaranteed to pass it, because the respective ruling parliamentary coalitions are the very ones who have signed it.

I look forward, therefore, to a vigorous debate within the only country that will give its citizens the chance to vote, as well as the proxy war as wealthy foreign antagonists from both sides try

(covertly) to influence Irish voters.

For Ireland represents the EU's last chance for sanity over this execrable treaty, whose only "reform" is a negative one.

**That Illegal Apartheid Wall Round Gaza**



This remarkable picture appeared on the front page of the Irish Times last week which wonderfully illustrates the contorted view many journalists and others hold of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. According to the caption, It shows "thousands of Palestinians

*pour[ing] through dozens of holes in the wall, rushing to buy items that are in short supply due to an Israeli blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza".*

It seems the perfidious, vengeful Israelis, with their "illegal" "apartheid wall" and military-controlled

"checkpoints" have turned innocent Gazans into prisoners. And when they closed off the entryways last week, merely because the Hamas government was firing deadly Qassam rockets and mortars into southern Israel at a rate of 50 per day, this became a blockade resulting in loss of electric

power, children starving, babies dying in hospital, blah, blah, blah.

But look again at that photo. That's a wall between Gaza and **Egypt** which, notwithstanding the well-known secret tunnels under it that bring in bombs and other matériel, is there to keep Palestinians out of Egypt, especially those of an Hamas-Islamicist hue. Apart from the fact that Egypt is not under attack from Gaza, why is this not described as an "illegal" "apartheid wall" with (a single) military-controlled "checkpoint" at Rafah, to be condemned by the world's bien-pensants? Why is this wall not blamed for the blockade, since without it there could be no blockade?

There is of course only one answer. Egyptians are not Jews. Therefore you don't have to automatically hate and condemn everything they do, whether it is imprisoning Gazans, or wounding 90 would-be escapees, or oppressing fellow Egyptians under a decades-long dictatorship. For they, or course, are not part of any vast and sinister conspiracy that malignantly controls the Western world's governments everywhere. Not like certain other hook-nosed pigs and apes.

## Soapy, Slippery Morality

I am always embarrassed to admit I watch one of the world's longest running TV soap operas, Coronation Street, but I do. I despise the characters but it is compelling none the less, and I wouldn't miss it.

An interesting observation is how

Acceptable/Lauded/Encouraged <i>Central theme of many storylines, with no untoward consequences</i>	Unacceptable/Taboo/Non-existent <i>Will usually not be permitted to even happen in the storyline</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sex before marriage</li> <li>■ Adultery</li> <li>■ Shacking up with boyfriend/girlfriend</li> <li>■ Paedophilia</li> <li>■ Abortion</li> <li>■ Gay sex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sex with someone else's boy/girlfriend</li> <li>■ Adoption of unwanted babies</li> <li>■ Unkind words towards gays</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Excessive drinking/ alcoholism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Drug-taking, even in moderation</li> <li>■ Underage drinking</li> <li>■ Underage driving</li> <li>■ Drink-driving</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Smoking cigarettes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Inhaling cigarettes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Racism</li> <li>■ Even noticing racial difference - and this in northern England!</li> <li>■ Existence of Islam or Muslims</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Not illegal = moral = acceptable</li> <li>■ Illegal = immoral = unacceptable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal moral judgements of right and wrong</li> <li>■ Parental guidance on personal morality</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Absence of ambition or any effort at self-improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improving one's own life position</li> <li>■ Leaving the community in order to take up a better lifestyle or job</li> </ul>

what might be termed morality is dealt with, so I constructed little table below of what's OK and what's not.

The Red-Green colour-coding is meant to indicate -

- **Red = what most people would consider to be immoral;**

- **Green = what most people would not think to be immoral.**

See how the left hand column is mostly red, the right column green. From this, it is interesting to note that the soap opera's moral universe seems to be, roughly speaking, a slippery inverse of what you would expect in real life.

I have been particularly affronted by the casual treatment of paedophilia - adult men having sex with underage schoolgirls is just good fun, it seems. In the past few years, there have been at least two storylines with this theme, featuring 16-year-olds - Katie with a grandfather (2003), Rosie with her schoolteacher (2007).

But does any of this matter? Since it's only entertainment, perhaps not much. On the other hand, you would have to wonder whether the on-screen

- encouragement of freewheeling consequentless sex,
- lack of any personal moral judgement or parental guidance (only the law counts) and
- a complete and prevailing lack of personal ambition among everyone, young and old

also foster similar behaviour in real life among younger, more impressionable viewers, from small children upwards.

The series clearly places an extra burden on conscientious parents, if only to remind their kids that it's only "*only a show*".

## Belcanto, Budapest - A Restaurant Review

"*Belcanto*" is the Italian for "*beautiful singing*" and refers to a particular vocal technique which originated in Italy during the late seventeenth century, reaching its pinnacle in opera of the early 1800s. The Sicilian composer Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35) was a major exponent, and one of his best-known Belcanto works is "*Norma*", about love betrayed. Its title role is regarded as the most taxing ever written for a soprano, which is why Maria Callas made it her own in the 1950s and 60s. "*Casta Diva*" is undoubtedly the opera's most gorgeous aria and and to get a more modernised flavour, listen to this utterly delightful interpretation by the elfin Filippa Giordano - why not play it as you read on.

One of the world's most beautiful opera houses may be found in Budapest, on the Andrassy Boulevard, named after Count Gyula Andrassy de Csikszentkiraly et Krasznahorka, a Hungarian hero of the nineteenth century. Nearby is a smaller opera house (the Operettszinhaz) and a number of other theatres.

And right around the corner is the **Belcanto** restaurant, whose purpose in life is to continue the opera sensation well after the respective theatres have kicked you out. Exquisitely appointed, as you can see from the photo, there is an interesting menu.

But its prime attraction are wonderful singers - two beautiful young sopranos and a barrel-chested baritone, and the small orchestra of four that accompanies them, as indeed so do all the waiters and waitresses from time to time. While you eat and drink, they will regale you with wonderfully delivered renditions of renowned and lesser known hits from opera and other classics masterpieces, and will play requests. I was entranced at how they played my own request, Albinoni's haunting Adagio in G-minor for strings and organ, which you can hear [here](#).

No doubt each of Belcanto's vocalists and instrumentalists is performing his/her heart out each evening, in the hope of being discovered by a hungry roving scout from the adjacent opera houses - and if it were up to me they would be.

Savour the music, it's fabulous, because you won't enjoy the food, even if it is irrelevant to the evening's experience.

The menu looks enticing - who could resist, for example, "*Crispy goose leg with cabbage and champagne, onion potato soufflé*"? Actually I could. I don't like my poultry desiccated from long hours in an oven, distinctly uncrisp and skin removed, cabbage riddled in vinegar, champagne undetectable, potatoes converted to rubber. And this was one of the more delectable dishes. The food is, frankly, ghastly, without exception. I imagine the "*chef*" is no more than a couple of teenagers with a microwave.

Yet believe me, you pay handsomely for the privilege - my group forked out €80 per person for a main course each and a shared desert, plus mediocre wine and some bottles of beer (no draft!).

So don't go there for the food and drink. The music is the thing, but you really would need to start off with a performance at one of the theatres to put you in the mood. Otherwise you might concentrate too much on what the singing waiters put in front of you.

My overall score as a percentage?

- 90% for the music and service,
- 10% for the food.
- So 40% overall.

Belcanto is located at number 8 Dalszínház Street, Budapest 1061. If you have a GPS or want to have a look via Google Earth, it's at Latitude 47°30'8.69"N by Longitude 19° 3'28.84"E. You can phone for a reservation on +36-1-269.2786, and they speak good English.

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### Dispatching Cold Callers

Want to know how to deal with cold-callers who ring you up out of the blue and try to sell you stuff you don't want, and won't get off the line?

Tom Mabe has the solution. Watch this video clip ...

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### Issue 169's Letter to the Press

Just the one letter, and it went unpublished. No other letter in similar vein appeared which might have displaced mine. I find this disappointing because it's about time the media abandoned the canard of the "*Israeli blockade*". How can Israel alone be held accountable for such a thing if one wall is maintained by Egypt?

- [Gaza/Egypt Apartheid Wall](#)  
- to the Irish Times

What an extraordinary photo on the front page of the Irish Times ([January 24th](#)). I had never realised that the infamous apartheid wall, declared illegal in 2004 by the International Court of Justice, which imprisons Gazan inhabitants in their ghetto and was a key element of the recent blockade in response to sustained Hamas rocket attacks, was in fact built in order to keep Palestinians out of Egypt. Good for the latter for knocking it down. It's time the democratic Egyptian entity learnt to embrace its enemies. - Yours etc.

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## Quotes for Issue 169

Quote: "I absolutely publicly apologise to the families in Omagh. I am desperately sorry that we have not at this point brought people to justice for that dreadful attack ... I publicly apologise to all those families and all those victims, to all those who were injured, without reservation ... Of course, as chief constable, I have to take responsibility for the shortcomings that the judge [who presided over the acquittal of the only suspect] highlighted."

Sir Ronnie Flanagan, Northern Ireland's former Chief Constable apologises for deficiencies, under his watch, in the police investigation into the 1998 Omagh bombing.

This is an extraordinary turnaround.

Back in 2001, the new police ombudsman Nuala O'Loan issued a report highly critical of Sir Ronnie's Omagh investigation ("seriously flawed ... defective leadership, poor judgement and a lack of urgency").

But he considered her investigation to be neither "fair, thorough or rigorous ... [with] an erroneous conclusion."

Moreover, he then declared, "I would not only resign, I would publicly commit suicide if I felt this report to be fair."

It's to his credit that he has now at last accepted his responsibility, though he doesn't need to carry out his bizarre threat.

Quote: "You're a corrupt little crook."

John O'Shea, boss of the (reputable) Irish charity GOAL, whispers, undiplomatically, in the ear of President Fredrick Chiluba of Zambia at a formal reception during a recent visit to Dublin.

Mr Chiluba was subsequently charged with stealing \$46 million from his own people, 75% of whom survive on less than one dollar a day.

Mr O'Shea is champion of giving aid directly to the people who need it, rather than channelling it through despotic governments

who routinely cream off more than three-quarters.

Quote: "I know you think it's crazy, but I kind of like to see Barack and Hillary fight."

Former US president Bill Clinton, as tensions grow between his wife and rival Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama.

Of course he loves it, because Mr Clinton is the main subject of their acrimony.

Quote: "Bill has a dream."

Headline in the New York Post accompanying a photo



Clinton asleep during a service to honour the late Dr Martin Luther King Jr

Quote: "The Ottawa Citizen and Southam News wish to apologize for our apology to Mark Steyn, published Oct. 22. In correcting the incorrect statements about Mr. Steyn published

Oct. 15, we incorrectly published the incorrect correction. We accept and regret that our original regrets were unacceptable and we apologize to Mr. Steyn for any distress caused by our previous apology."

The Ottawa Citizen and Southam News apologise for something. No, I don't understand either.