

# The Socialist Correspondent

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**Discussion, debate and authors' opinions:** To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all the opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

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# The Socialist Correspondent

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## Wars in the Middle East

“The wars in the Middle East, once frequent, are now permanent, as the US looks for ways of maintaining its domination of the region.” This is the opening sentence of Simon Korner’s analysis of the situation.

He writes that the US-backed regional powers, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, are becoming increasingly aggressive. Saudi Arabia has launched an invasion of Yemen alongside a murderous bombing campaign and Turkey is waging war against the Kurds in its own country. Meanwhile, Turkey keeps IS’s supply lines open and they are armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as Turkey.

The US strategy of fragmentation, which destroyed Iraq and Libya, has faltered as Russian airpower has allowed Syrian government forces to make gains. This has changed the balance of forces and forced an acceptance by the US that the Assad government cannot be defeated in the short-term.



Assad

However, the West is still intent on removing President Assad and dividing up Syria. This partly explains the UK Tory government’s push for Britain to join the bombing campaign. It wants to have a full seat at the table if Syria is to be cut up.

There are few people who believe that even if there were 70,000 rebels in Syria that they can be marshalled against IS. The different rebel groups see Assad as the enemy, not IS.

These myriad groups are incoherent and uncoordinated. Even, David Cameron, has had to acknowledge that they are “not ideal partners”.

No doubt with bribes of money and weapons some of these groups will be got together at the talks in Vienna as the West’s proxy in Syria.

When Cameron announced that he would only take the proposal to bomb Syria to the House of Commons, if he could be guaranteed a majority, it

## Commentary

was clear that what he meant was to divide Labour and draw into line the Tory rebels. Labour’s right-wing, which



Tony Blair and David Cameron

has dominated the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) for many years, obliged him.

However, it should be noted that “the large majority of Labour MPs followed their new leader and voted against the Tories and the bombing of Syria” as Martin S. Gibson records in his article.

It has been a difficult period for Jeremy Corbyn since he became leader but “the good news ... so far always seems to lie beyond the confines of Westminster and his PLP.”

His leadership campaign confounded the right-wing of the Labour Party and the media and brought into activity many thousands of people who seized the opportunity to engage in politics.

It will be a long and daily struggle as the Blairites, supported by the media, will not give up on their aim to oust Corbyn.

## UK referendum on the EU

One of the next issues to face Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party, the trade unions and the wider movement in Britain will be the UK referendum on the European Union.

In Britain there is much confusion over the European Union. Some people, including some on the left, think that remaining in the EU is a question of solidarity with other peoples in Europe and with refugees and asylum seekers escaping from wars.

However, as Greece has shown, the EU is a bulwark of capitalism. Alex

Davidson in his piece, “Germany leads on Greek privatisation” outlines the continuing disaster for the Greek people as a result of the bail-out programme imposed on Greece by the Troika (the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund).

The first sale of Greek public assets to meet the terms of the bail-out programme is about to go ahead with a German company, Fraport, set to take control of Greece’s fourteen regional airports.

Other Greek assets likely to be sold off include banks, energy companies, transport infrastructure and tourist resorts and as the German Finance Minister has stated, “debt relief is not possible within the currency union. European treaties do not allow it.”

Greece is a prisoner of the EU and its torture shows no sign of abating. Greece demonstrates that the EU is a reactionary, undemocratic and capitalist institution.

The main campaign to “leave” the EU, which will receive the available state monies (in the millions), will not couch the argument in anti-capitalist terms so the debate in the mainstream media will largely exclude socialist analysis.

And, of course, the campaign to “stay-in” will be business-led, supported by the three living former Prime Ministers, Major, Blair and Brown.

Having the support of the former PMs may be a weakness rather than a strength given how badly discredited they have become.

A joint Tory/Labour campaign may also have the effect of alienating their respective constituencies.

Within the labour movement the argument against the EU has gained ground with the Greek tragedy and the increasing understanding of the grave dangers of the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), being developed by the United States and the EU.



Jeremy Corbyn

# Permanent wars in the Middle East

The wars in the Middle East - once frequent - are now permanent, as the US looks for ways of maintaining its domination of the region.

By **SIMON KORNER**

After pulling out of Iraq and pivoting the majority of its military resources to Asia, the US strategy of creating regional gendarmes - Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel, each with its own interests - has ensured that wars in the Middle East will continue.

The rising ambitions of smaller players such as Qatar and the UAE are also fuelling conflict.

According to George Friedman of the rightwing American website *Stratfor*, the US "has come to the conclusion that wars of occupation are beyond American capacity... The United States wants regional powers to deal with issues that threaten their interests more than American interests. At the same time, the United States does not want any one country to dominate the region... Therefore, it is in the American interest to have multiple powers balancing each other."

These US-backed regional powers are becoming increasingly aggressive. Saudi Arabia has launched a ground invasion of Yemen, alongside a murderous bombing campaign, in order to crush the Shi'ite Houthis, who are supported by Iran. Almost all the Gulf states are backing the Saudis.

Turkey is waging war against the Kurds in its own country, and bombing leftwing Kurdish forces in Syria, under the guise of targeting IS. Turkey, Qatar and the Saudis have armed IS; and Turkey has left open the IS supply lines which cross its border with Syria, whose regime it detests.

Israel, the most loyal imperialist gendarme, has long been part of a pincer movement strategy against Syria, diverting Assad's forces to the Golan, while Turkey threatens from the north.

It has been knocking out Syrian army posts in numerous small scale attacks in southern Syria, keeping out of the limelight, while arming and aiding Al Qaeda,

known locally as Al Nusra, which now controls the Syria-Israel border. Israel has also made secret plans for an invasion, according to Israel's *Ynet* news, if it deems such action necessary.

## US failure to unseat Assad

In Syria, the US policy of relying on proxy forces failed to unseat Assad.

The Americans therefore began a bombing campaign, with French and British support - in contravention of international law - to change the regime, but the strategy was challenged by Russia, defending its long-term Syrian ally from total destruction.

Russia's bombing campaign targeted IS and Al Qaeda, known locally as Al Nusra, to enable Syrian ground forces to regain sovereign territory. As a result, American rhetoric has changed, with Secretary of State, John Kerry, no longer insisting on the immediate removal of Assad, but conceding that he might remain in the short term.

Until Russia's intervention, the US strategy of toppling the internationally recognized Assad government had succeeded in weakening the Syrian forces.

Recently declassified documents reveal that, as early as 2012, the US had planned to set up "a declared or undeclared Salafist [fundamentalist Sunni] principality in eastern Syria..."

The fracturing of Syria into "two or three parts", as the head of the US Defense Intelligence Agency put it, would be achieved by establishing rebel safe zones inside Syria, supported by the US and allied air forces and special forces on the ground.

Assad would not challenge these zones, according to the Brookings Institute, for fear of the allies destroying his air power, depriving him of air superiority over IS, and thus hastening his fall. To this end, Britain contributed 120 SAS men, dressed as IS fighters,

according to the *Daily Express*, alongside thousands of CIA men fighting alongside Al Qaeda.

But the US strategy of fragmentation - which destroyed Iraq and Libya - has faltered as Russian airpower, combined with Iranian and Hizbollah ground troops, has changed the balance of forces on the ground.

Provoking a direct confrontation with Russia, Cameron has called for Britain to bomb Syria, not content with his Commons defeat on the issue two years ago - a defeat that at the time served to restrain the US.

The refugee crisis has given the Tories and their media an excuse to argue for 'humanitarian intervention', no-fly zones and so on. The sustained campaign of anti-Russian propaganda has softened the ground, with many Labour MPs supporting the call to arms.

Of course, Britain has bombed Syria already - seconded to the US Air Force - and British drones have killed suspected British IS members, but Cameron wants Britain more deeply involved. This is, in part, to rein in IS, which is out of control. But more importantly, it is designed to shore up British credibility as a military power, after its failures in Basra, Helmand and Libya, and to reiterate British support for US militarism.

Greater British involvement would also make clear to France that it has a rival in the former colonial stamping ground.

## 'Free Syrian' army almost non-existent

The global media assault against Assad has ranged from condemnation of his alleged use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, to asserting the existence in Syria of a liberal secular opposition, which would take power after Assad's removal.

No evidence has been produced to substantiate these claims. Most serious commentators agree, for example, that the supposedly 'moderate' Free Syrian Army is so weak as to be almost non-existent.

If there was a significant secular rebel



force, the US would have been able to use it to better effect. Instead, America has turned to the more effective Al Nusra, into which Free Syrian Army fighters have been absorbed.

From the start of the rebellion, the opposition has been far from moderate, carrying out terrorist attacks on civilians - including hospitals and schools. The very rapid turn to violence of the anti-government demonstrations - protests which had been sparked by Assad's turn to the IMF that wiped out subsidies for basic commodities - shows there had been prior planning for armed rebellion.

Western complaints that Russian bombing was targeting moderate, western-backed rebels do not hold water, given the fact that Al Nusra, which the West supports, is an Al Qaeda franchise,

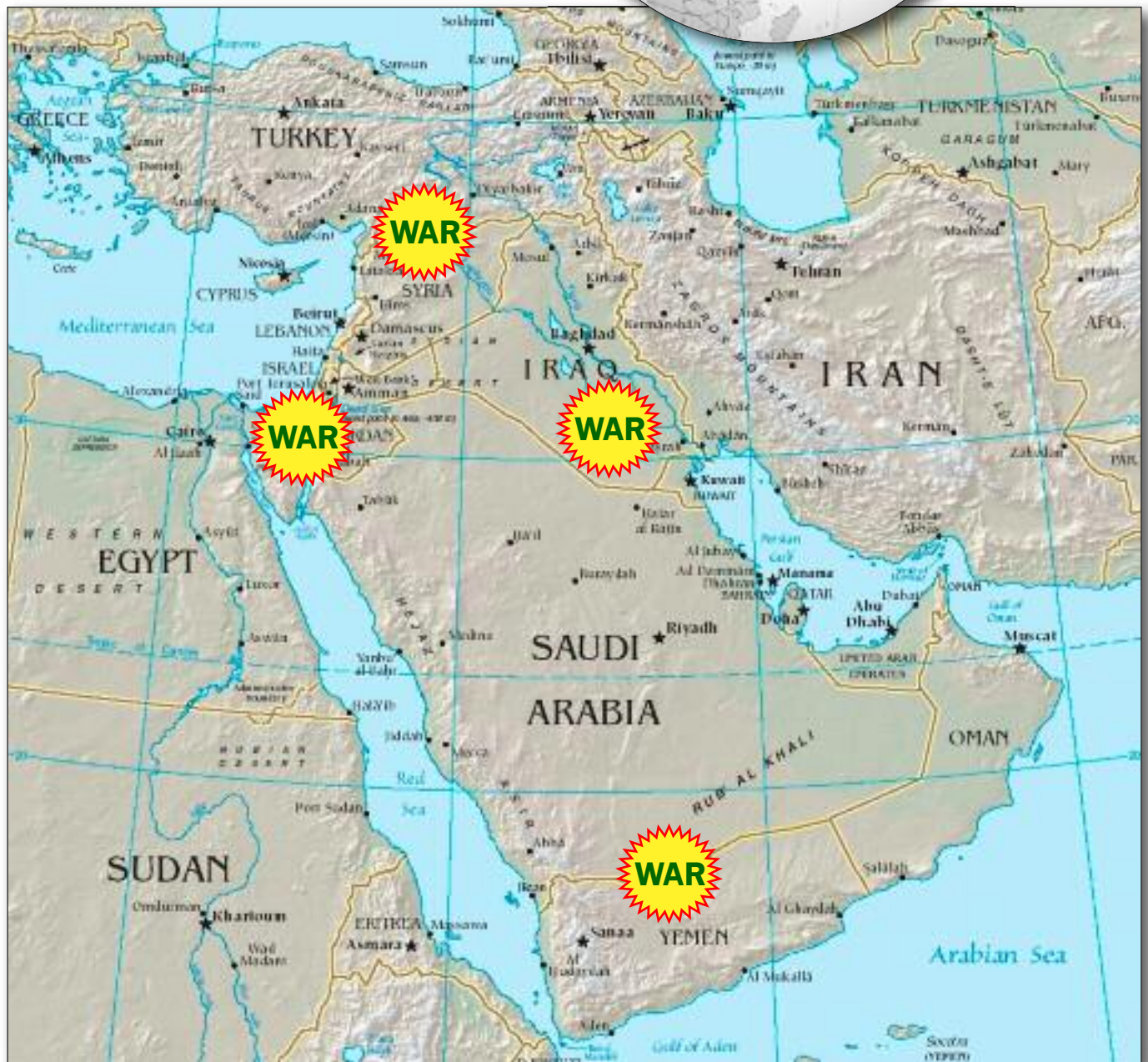
and that there is no clear demarcation between the rebel groups.

Western complaints that Russia was not bombing IS also ring hollow given the half-hearted nature of their own attacks on IS. A telling fact: in a year fighting IS, there have been 6-7000 western air attacks, mostly against minor IS targets, compared to 25,000 US-Saudi air attacks on Yemen, in 6 months.

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry: "Regrettably, all at-

tempts of the international coalition to counter the terrorist group Islamic State look more like some demonstrative steps, an attempt at simulating anti-terrorist activity."

This doesn't mean IS is a US proxy force. While Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have backed it, along with the Al-Nusra-led coalition known as the Army of Conquest, IS is too unstable and too ideologically clear, in its own terms, to represent a viable



partner for the US long-term.

Meanwhile, Russia has maintained all along that a united secular Syria was the best way forward, and that removing Assad would threaten that. The Russians learned from their passivity in Libya, where they acceded to the no-fly zone and watched as France and Britain conducted their terrible bombing campaign, which handed over Libya to Islamist warlords.

The Russian involvement acknowledges that Assad, backed by Iran and allies, are the only forces that can defeat IS. And in response to western objections to Russian bombing, Putin argues rightly that Russia was asked in by Syria, unlike the western powers.

### Destruction of Iraq

Taking a wider view, the Syrian conflict is inseparable from the destruction of the Iraqi state following the US invasion.

The US postwar strategy for Iraq was outlined in 2007 by Vice President, Joe Biden in *The New York Times*, as one of “decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group ... room to run its own affairs.” In effect, three Iraqi regions - Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni - would be divided and ruled, with a weak, nominal central government in Baghdad easily controlled by America.

This power vacuum allowed the rise of IS, whose popularity among Iraq’s Sunni minority has a material basis in the loss of Sunni position, first after Saddam’s fall, and again after the Americans withdrew and the Sunni Awakening Councils they’d set up became targets of Al Qaeda.

The corruption and sectarianism of the Shi’ite-dominated government in Baghdad also benefited IS, as did the American dismantling and ineffectual rebuilding of the Iraqi army, with many battle-hardened Iraqi soldiers, including generals, defecting to IS. IS was also helped in Egypt by Sisi’s coup against the Muslim Brotherhood, which convinced many Sunnis that even a relatively moderate Islamist government would not be tolerated by the West.

Assad’s overview of the link between the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the current conflict in Syria is worth quoting at length: “We were strongly opposed to that invasion, because we knew that things were moving in the direction of dividing societies and creating unrest... At

that time, we saw that the war would turn Iraq into a sectarian country; into a society divided against itself... We knew well that we would be affected.

“Consequently, the beginning of the Syrian crisis, or what happened in the beginning, was the natural result of that war and the sectarian situation in Iraq, part of which moved to Syria, and it was easy for them to incite some Syrian groups on sectarian grounds.

“All these things together created the conditions for the unrest with Western support and Gulf money, particularly from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and with Turkish logistic support.

“Once again, I say that there were mistakes, and mistakes always create gaps and weak points, but they are not sufficient to cause that alone, and they do not justify what happened. And if these gaps and weak points are the cause, why didn’t they lead to revolutions in the Gulf States - particularly in Saudi Arabia, which doesn’t know anything about democracy? The answer is self-evident, I believe.”

Underlying the western war against Assad - apart from his symbolic position as the last significant representative of the old secular order, including his

staunch opposition to Israel, which has marked him out for ousting - is the fight to control oil and gas pipelines transporting energy from the Gulf.

Most of these pipelines cross Syria, which occupies a strategically important position for exports to Turkey, and Europe - pipelines which Assad’s father nationalized in the early 1970s.

In 2011, Syria, Iran and Iraq proposed a new jointly funded pipeline from the Iranian half of the South Pars gasfield in the Gulf to Damascus, via Iraq.

Qatar, with its rival plan to pipe energy to Turkey via Syria - from its own South Pars gasfields - has a strong interest in destroying the ‘Shi’ite’ pipeline plan.

The Saudis, likewise, seek control over pipelines running through Syria. This explains both countries’ push for the fracturing of Syria into two or three terrorist-run oil-transit statelets under imperialist tutelage - not unlike the Suez canal zone before Nasser.

### Imperialist Wars

Imperialist wars in the region have a long history, motivated by control over energy. It was access to oil that led British imperialism to Mesopotamia before

WW1, as the Royal Navy switched from coal power to faster oil power in its arms race with Germany. The war netted Britain oil-rich Mosul and Palestine under the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, while France got Syria and Lebanon.

The now familiar cycle of conquest began with the British occupation of Iraq during WW1, which involved ruthless force to suppress the Iraqi resistance, including bombing civilians, for the first time in history, and using poison gas (chemical weapons).

In Iran, Britain orchestrated a coup by army officer, Reza Khan, in 1921, in order to safeguard the Anglo-Persian oil company’s oilfields.

Britain under Churchill, and his man on the ground T.E. Lawrence, used colonial vassals to rule (cheaply) on their behalf, setting the pattern for current US strategy.

By the time Britain granted Iraq ‘independence’ in 1932, that state was regarded as an “Arab institution we can safely leave while pulling the strings ourselves, something that won’t cost very much,” as Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Head of the India Office Political Department, had articu-



**Bashar al-Assad  
President of Syria**

“We were strongly opposed to that invasion (of Iraq), because we knew that things were moving in the direction of dividing societies and creating unrest ... At that time, we saw that the war would turn Iraq

into a sectarian country; into a society divided against itself ... We knew well that we would be affected.

“Consequently, the beginning of the Syrian crisis ... was the natural result of that war and the sectarian situation in Iraq, part of which moved to Syria, and it was easy for them to incite some Syrian groups on sectarian grounds.

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lated British policy in 1919.

From 1945, the US was ushered in to take over the Middle East by a British Empire too weak to continue as colonial enforcer.

Britain encouraged the US to develop the Saudi oilfields (Britain already had Iraq and Iran), and in return the Americans would defend imperialist interests against the Communist and secular nationalist threat. Britain maintained a strong influence in the region, notably in Aden, an occupation being replayed currently in its support for the Saudi-led invasion of Yemen.

Only during the Cold War was imperialism seriously challenged, with the So-

cialist countries supporting secular Arab nationalist regimes. When that support was withdrawn, new space opened up for the West to incite sectarian tensions once more, and any secular socialist or nationalist ideological alternatives lost all purchase. In this sense, IS can be seen as a product of the defeat of Socialism.

A hundred years after Sykes-Picot, the colonial borders may have been erased by IS, but the strategy of imperialist fragmentation and perpetual war remains.

The new elements are the increasingly powerful regional powers, and, more decisively, the reassertion of Russian power in the region.

Despite the fact that it is itself an am-

bitious regional capitalist power, Russia has been playing a positive role at this time in challenging the dominant global imperialist power - inviting Assad to Moscow to demonstrate its support for Syria, and attempting to drive a wedge between potentially patriotic elements among the Syrian rebels and IS/Al Qaeda.

Rebuffing Russian diplomatic efforts, the US has ramped up the military pressure to reverse Syrian army gains, and has co-ordinated an unprecedented alliance between rebel forces - an alliance which includes IS. The perpetual imperialist war continues, and with it the growing sectarian divide in the region.

# PARIS: 13th November attacks being used to enforce another agenda

How quickly the media has drawn back from the brief interlude in which refugees were presented as “people like us”, people who once had ordinary lives torn apart by war and terror.

**By FRIEDA PARK**

The body of a small child on a beach was emblematic of the desperation of those who attempt to escape the devastation of their own countries.

That message has changed. The media now manipulates the natural sympathy that people feel for the dead and bereaved in the Paris attacks of 13th November and the fear that this is close to home to enforce another political agenda.

The capitalist media's aim now is to stop people seeing asylum seekers “as people like us” and once more to see them as a threat along with anyone who is Muslim.

The ironies are many. The killings blamed on IS in Paris are a fraction of the killings and terror inflicted by it on people in Syria and the Middle East.

Their suffering and the growth of IS originated in the wars instituted by the United States, Britain and France.



**After the Paris attacks, French President, Francois Hollande declared France was ‘at war’ with IS. He used the Paris horror to launch another series of French bombing raids on Syria which began three months ago.**

Yet through guilt by association, these same people, victims of this horror, come under suspicion of bringing terrorism to Europe.

Where are the public buildings lit up to remember the hundreds of thousands who have died in Gaza, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan?

The one-sidedness of the response gives the message that the lives of people in Europe are worth more than those in the Middle East.

Though the invasions and occupations of these countries are at the root of terrorism and mass migrations of people trying to escape, the language of politicians in response to the attacks has become more warlike.

The UK Conservative government are using the situation to justify their case for bombing Syria and in support of their proposed legislation to give it wider powers to invade our privacy and curtail our civil liberties.

Sympathy for the victims of the Paris attacks should not be mobilised to feed hatred and fuel the fires of war and terror in the Middle East.

The search for peaceful solutions would be a more fitting tribute for the victims of the Paris attack.

# Cameron unleashed at home and abroad

Compared to his former Deputy Prime Minister and Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg MP - who cuts a forsaken and forgotten political figure these days - David Cameron's cup runneth over. With 330 MPs - out of a total of 650 - he is unleashed to do pretty much what he wants until May 2020.

By **MARTIN S. GIBSON**

With the LibDem coalition monkey now well and truly off his back Cameron, in less than six months, has reversed the decision - of over two years ago - not to bomb Syria.

Well underway through Parliament is his Thatcher-esque Trade Union Bill which will further curb workers' ability to take industrial action.

Tory Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt's dictatorial behaviour - 'accept my new contract or I will impose it upon you' - towards Junior Doctors in England is a sign of things to come. If he can behave like this with doctors what will he be like with other NHS staff when it's their turn to be told what they must accept.

Tory Chancellor, George Osborne has announced there is to be no let up to austerity and public service cuts and tens of thousands more redundancies.

Osborne's recent U-turn on abolishing working families' Tax Credits - opposed by many Conservative MPs - has more to do with the Chancellor's Tory Party leadership ambitions than any softening of his huge Welfare budget cuts.

Before the General Election in May, Cameron said he will not stay on for another term as Prime Minister.

If he sticks to that there is every possibility of a Tory Party leadership contest sometime in 2009. Osborne and Home Secretary, Theresa May are the early front runners to replace Cameron and already they are competing with each other privately and publicly for the top job.

Cameron has also been making progress on his promise of an In-Out referendum on Britain's membership of the EU sometime in 2017.

As part of the softening up process of the British electorate, Cameron has been touring European capitals feeling out the

big EU players as to which items in his shopping list of EU concessions they can deliver for him. He can then return home and tell the British people he has fought really hard and he has extracted this and that meaningless power from Brussels' control.

With Nick Clegg and his europhile Liberals now out of his hair, this will be a much easier task.

All that said, Cameron still has a very long way to go yet before he will con-



David Cameron

vince his party's own Euro-sceptics, let alone UKIP, that he is serious about standing up for Britain.

As for Clegg, after five years at the top - well nearly the top - he now occupies the back benches on the other side of the house with his single-figures party in tatters: only eight MPs where there once were 57, no Cabinet ministers where there once was four.

To add to Cameron's good fortune in winning a majority in the General Election, he also benefits from a divided opposition in the House of Commons.

For starters, there are 50 new, innocent and not so innocent and keen as mustard, Scottish National Party MPs - joining the 6 already there - whose only discernable strategy is to attack the official opposition, the Labour Party.

Already two of them - Michelle Thomson MP for Edinburgh East and Natalie McGarry MP for Glasgow East - have had to resign from the SNP amidst allegations of financial impropriety.

## SNP campaigning for another Labour massacre in May 2016

With their eyes firmly fixed on the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2016, the Scottish nationalists attack Labour - still their biggest rival in Scotland - at every opportunity.

The SNP hope to repeat in May their Westminster General Election massacre of Labour when only one out of 40 Scottish Labour MPs - Ian Murray - was re-elected.

Unlike the Westminster first past the post - winner takes all system - Holyrood elections use the additional member proportional representation system. Voters have two votes: one to elect the 73 constituency MSPs and one to elect 56 additional member or 'list' MSPs from eight separate electoral regions:

1. Central Scotland;
2. Glasgow;
3. Highlands and Islands;
4. Lothian;
5. Mid Scotland and Fife;
6. North East Scotland;
7. South Scotland;
8. West Scotland.

These list candidates are selected by each party and it is possible that a voter may choose to cast his or her first vote for an SNP constituency candidate and their second for a Labour, Tory or other party's list candidates.

SNP strategists are already getting the word out that this kind of vote splitting is not good: their message is vote 1 and 2 for the SNP.

Naturally enough, the independence referendum of 2014 is fading as other daily Scottish, UK and international events dominate the news and political agenda.



The SNP, now coming to the end of its second term in office at Holyrood - 2007 and 2011- is not as assured as it used to be, despite the enormity of its own popularity as a party during and immediately after the referendum in 2014. As with all governments it has made mistakes but there is a mood developing that they need to and must do better.

They have been there since 2007 and it's not good enough for the SNP to blame everyone else, especially Westminster, for all of their failures.

Nicola Sturgeon's combative style - 'I'll take no lectures from Labour ...' is beginning to grate and the SNP government's record of failure on health, its new all-Scottish police force, its two new MPs mired in financial scandal, its failure over the last four years to reach its carbon emissions targets and more, may influence voters as the heightened emotions of the referendum slowly ebb away.

Then there is the matter of Westminster - which since May has taken centre stage even from the SNP - making Holyrood politics seem petty and parochial by comparison.

Syria's civil war, with its refugee crisis, the Paris killings and now the Westminster Parliament's approval of RAF air strikes, are every bit as dominant in Scotland as elsewhere throughout the UK.

RAF Typhoon jets, from their Scottish air base in Lossiemouth in Moray - the constituency of the SNP's Angus Robertson MP - are now based at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus and are bombing Syria as I write.

Then there is the challenge for Leader Sturgeon of how to manage and control from Edinburgh such a large cohort of 56 MPs who live and breathe the corrupting air of the hated Westminster parliament five days a week for five years.

It wouldn't be so bad, but this Westminster cohort contains no fewer than three of the SNP's biggest beasts and biggest egos:

- former SNP Leader, Alex Salmond MP for Gordon and SNP Westminster spokesman on foreign affairs;

- SNP Leader in the House of Commons, Angus Robertson MP for Moray; and,

- SNP Deputy leader, Stewart Hosie MP for Dundee East who is next in line to Nicola Queen of Scots herself.

Every now and then you get a hint - no more than that at present - that Holyrood SNP and Westminster SNP are not on the same page when it comes to pol-

icy, strategy and tactics. All I can advise is watch this space.

More generally, just like Cameron, Osborne and the Tories, the SNP exploit at every opportunity Labour's very obvious and very public divisions under its new socialist leader, Jeremy Corbyn who Cameron now faces every week across the despatch box.

Cameron has seen off his idol Tony Blair's and Gordon Brown's New Labour; he has despatched Ed Miliband's One Nation Labour and now, over the next five years he faces a leader the like of which Labour has never had, the socialist, Jeremy Corbyn MP

Corbyn was elected in September by a landslide 60% of first preference votes



**Nicola Sturgeon**



**Jeremy Corbyn**

During that 80 day leadership contest a staggering 250,000 Labour Party members and supporters voted for him. Nearing the end of the contest when it became clear he would win, tens of thousands of new members flocked to the party and they are still doing so.

It was a political earthquake.

### **Syria: Corbyn's biggest leadership challenge**

Corbyn's biggest challenge to date was the emotionally charged House of Commons debate and vote on 2 December over air strikes in Syria against Islamic State (IS). Cameron won the vote by 397 votes to 223 with the support of 66 Labour MPs, 11 of whom were members of Corbyn's Shadow Cabinet.

The large majority of Labour MPs - 166 - followed their new leader and voted against the Tories and the bombing of Syria.

Left to Jeremy Corbyn it would have been an emphatic No from Labour to bombing in Syria. He is, however, something of a prisoner of a Parliamentary Labour Party dominated by New Labour-Blairite MPs who have more in common with the Tories.

Those MPs were elected in May. Corbyn only became their leader in Sep-

tember: he therefore inherited people who loathe him and who certainly did not vote for him.

Only 36 MPs nominated him to stand in the leadership contest, just one more than the rules require to be eligible to stand. He literally scraped through with the fewest number of PLP nominations ever for a leader of the Labour Party.

Most of those 36 voted for other candidates: some lamented later they only nominated him to ensure the widest possible debate in the contest.

During the leadership campaign - as it became clear Corbyn was winning - Tony (Tory) Blair himself intervened and said that those thinking of voting for Jeremy Corbyn needed a 'brain transplant'. Britain's brain surgeons are going to be busy: quarter of a million voted for Corbyn and his 40.5% majority was very much larger than Blair's in 1994.

Corbyn beat the two favourites and "big hitters" of Tony Blair's and Gordon Brown's Cabinets - Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper - into second and third place respectively. Last in the four candidate contest was the Blairite standard bearer, Liz Kendall MP who won a derisory 4.5% of the ballot.

It makes Jeremy Corbyn's victory all the more astonishing and all the more galling for the PLP which he has inherited. I reckon it must be almost a quarter of a century since the words 'socialist' and 'socialism' have been uttered - and not in a derisory way - in the upper echelons of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

His Blairite detractors claim it was his predecessor's extension of the leadership election franchise and the creation of the new "£3 registered supporters" who were entitled to vote in the leadership election that gave Corbyn his landslide victory.

With the capitalist press and broadcast media reaching tens of millions of voters every hour of every day - criticising and castigating him - it is ludicrous to suggest that these new Labour supporters could have unfairly skewed the leadership vote in Corbyn's favour.

It was his inspiring policies and words - like his 'sunshine of socialism' - and the contrast between them and the tired and uninspiring evasions from the other three candidates that won him 59.5% of first-preference votes.

This ensured his victory in the first round of voting something his new Deputy Leader, Tom Watson failed to do, having to go to the third count before he topped the 50% mark in the

## OLDHAM WEST & ROYTON

### General Election May 2015

Party	Votes	%	±%
Labour	23,630	55	+9
UKIP	8,892	21	+17
Con	3,957	19	-5
LibDem	1,589	4	-15
Green	839	2	+2

Majority 14,739

Turnout 60%

Swing from Lab : 4%

### By-Election 3 Dec. 2015

Party	Votes	%	±%
Labour	17,209	62	+7
UKIP	6,487	23	+3
Con	2,596	9	-10
LibDem	1,024	4	-0
Green	249	1	-1

Majority 10,722

Turnout 40%

Swing to Labour: 2.3%

concurrent contest for deputy leader.

Unavoidably, Corbyn's shadow cabinet reflects this Blairite legacy. When party leaders select their Cabinets, they usually agonise over which friends or allies they will have to disappoint.

Corbyn's challenge was exactly the opposite. He had very few friends or allies to disappoint.

The picture of him during the House of Commons Syria debate being squashed on the Labour front bench in between his Shadow Foreign Secretary, Hilary Benn and Deputy Leader, Tom Watson to his left and the two Eagle sisters - Angela and Maria - on his right, all four in his Shadow Cabinet and all four voted with the Tories, is surely a visual metaphor of a socialist leader being held prisoner by a pro-capitalist PLP.

The good news for Corbyn so far always seems to lie beyond the confines of Westminster and his PLP.

And so it was on the Friday after he was uncomfortably squeezed on the front bench, he had the much more pleasant duty of celebrating a resounding Labour victory in the first by-election of this Parliamentary term in Oldham West & Royton, in Greater Manchester on Thursday 3 December.

A safe Labour seat but with a low turnout of 40%, Labour still managed to increase its share of the vote and secure a 10,000 plus majority. (See result table).

A delighted Jeremy Corbyn said, 'This campaign shows how strong the Labour Party is, not just in Oldham, but all over the country.'

Taking a swipe at his austerity-lite Blairite opponents - who have caved-in to the need for public sector cuts, he said it also showed how 'popular the opposition to austerity and cuts was.'

### Syria and the Paris pretext

The pretext for Britain's latest imperialist war adventure were the horrific events in Paris of Friday 13 November - with

136 dead and 352 injured.

Britain's strategic aim in bombing IS in Syria and joining its imperialist allies led by the USA and including chiefly France and Saudi Arabia - is not just the destruction of the "death cult" and "medieval monsters" of Islamic State (IS). If it was, these allies would have done more about that long before now.

Destroying IS is certainly part of the plan, but their real aim - their Syrian end game - is regime change, using so-called moderate Sunni rebels to overthrow the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad and to replace it with a more compliant, pro-west regime.

As Simon Korner reports on page 4 of this issue, in his article, *Permanent wars in the Middle East*, they would also be content to leave Syria in fractured, sectarian chaos as they have done elsewhere, notably in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

If Plans A or B succeed in Syria, that won't be the end of it; they have unfulfilled ambitions in their old colonial stamping ground of the oil rich region of the Middle East. They want all of it under their influence and control, like in the old days.

Once they deal with Syria and Assad, the US-led military alliance will proceed to their next and arguably most powerful enemy in the region, Syria's ally, the Islamic Republic of Iran with its 80 million strong population.

All that stands in the way of this grand US imperialist alliance is the alliance of Syria, Iran and Russia.

Russia began air strikes against IS in November at the request of President Assad. The US fear is that Assad may well, with Russia's military help, defeat IS and the US-armed Free Syrian Army and whose only aim is to topple Assad.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has much empathy with Assad regarding US aggression, having his own first-hand experience on Russia's western frontier.

Following the defeat and break up of

the Soviet Union, every former Soviet republic to the west of Russia - except Belarus and Ukraine - has joined the US-dominated war alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). On its western border therefore, Russia feels very much threatened by US imperialism and its allies.

Since the self-styled "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004 and the US-backed coup there in 2014 - involving Ukrainian fascists and the violent overthrow of Ukraine's President Yanukovich - the threat to Russia's western frontier has intensified.

Putin and Assad have also had hurled at them the ritual CIA catalogue of dodgy accusations, downright lies and character assassinations which precede every US regime change assault: "dictators" and "butchers" among them.

### Turkey's act of aggression

On 24 November events took a serious turn for the worse when Turkey - Syria's hostile northern neighbour, US ally and member of NATO - shot down a Russian fighter jet, killing one of the two pilots who were returning to Russia's air base in Latakia, Syria after air strikes against IS in Syria.

Turkey claimed it did so because the Russian fighter had violated Turkey's sovereign air space for 17 seconds and within a distance of 1,000 metres or so. The Russians have flatly denied all of the Turks' claims and regard it as an unwarranted act of aggression.

When invited to comment on this Turkish act of aggression, US President Obama and his NATO puppets claimed Turkey had the right to defend its sovereign air space.

No matter that the Russian jet was there to attack Turkey's and the US' alleged No1 enemy, the "medieval IS death cult".

Speaking in Moscow on 3 December, Vladimir Putin accused Turkey of having 'shady dealings' with IS, 'offering it sanctuary' and of 'stabbing Russia in the back'. Putin promised reprisals for Turkey's aggression but no 'hysterical reaction'.

This Russian-Turkish hostility may turn out to be only a skirmish in the grand scheme of global power politics but it shows how potentially dangerous to the peace of the world the conflict in Syria and the Middle East may yet be.

With so many different hostile interests and factions who knows what incident, accidental or otherwise, may spark an all out war between the big military powers and their allies.

Imperialism, is war. Conquest and military might are in its DNA.



# Germany leads on Greek privatisation

The first sale of Greek public assets, to meet the terms of the bail-out programme, is about to go ahead with a German company set to take control of Greece's 14 regional airports.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

The German company, Fraport, won the bid to buy the rights to operate the 14 regional airports, currently owned by the Greek state, in a deal worth 1.2 billion euros for a period of 40 years with an option of a further 10 years.

This is the first sale of Greek state assets which will go towards the privatisation fund of 50 billion euros, half of which will go to the recapitalisation of the Greek banks.

The funds from the privatisation programme will be overseen by the Troika (the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund).

Fraport is among the world's leading groups of companies in the international airport business. The company operates Frankfurt airport, one of the world's most important air transportation hubs. Frankfurt airport is Germany's largest employment complex at a single location with more than 500 companies employing over 80,000 workers.

Fraport has a turnover of 2.4 billion euros and had a profit of 252 million euros in 2014. It is active in four continents including operating airports in China, India and Russia.

Stefan Schulte, the Chief Executive Officer of Fraport, is a Board member of the Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) associated Economic Council. The CDU is led by Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, and Wolfgang Schauble (pictured), the German Finance Minister and the architect of Greece's draconian bail-out terms including the drive to privatisation of Greece's public assets.

## 14 Greek airports sold on the cheap

The fourteen Greek regional airports to be taken over by Fraport are: Aktio, Chania (Crete), Corfu, Kavala, Kefalo-

nia, Kos, Mitilion, Mykonos, Rhodes, Samos, Santorini, Skiathos, Thessaloniki, Zakynthos. Thessaloniki is Greece's second largest city.

These airports have a very high tourist traffic serving some 19 million passengers per annum. In 2014 there were, for example, 1.9 million arrivals in Rhodes, 1.4 million at Thessaloniki and 1 million at Corfu.



Angela Merkel



Wolfgang Schauble

The Greek state currently earns 450 million euros from these airports every year so Fraport is getting ownership on the cheap.

The Governor of the Ionian Islands, Theodoros Galiatsartos, who was elected on a Syriza ticket, and whose area of responsibility includes Corfu, Kefhalonia, and Zakynthos, described the sale of the airports as "contrary to local and national interests" and a "scandal".

Former Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis wrote critically that "Eurozone leaders demanded that Greek public assets be transferred to a Treuhand-like fund - a fire sale vehicle similar to the one used after the fall of the Berlin Wall to privatise quickly, at great financial loss and with devastating effects on employment, all of the van-

ishing East German state's public property".<sup>1</sup>

Varoufakis was referring to the Treuhandanstalt (or Treuhand), which oversaw the restructuring and selling of about 8,500 state-owned companies in the German Democratic Republic at the time of the annexation of East Germany by West Germany. Profitable businesses were closed and 2.5 million employees (out of 4 million in total) in state-owned enterprises were laid off in the early 1990s.

## Germany buys up Greece

German based companies have led the field in buying up Greek companies for some time. Since 2005 Germany has been the sole biggest investor in Greece as the table <sup>2</sup> on the next page shows.

One of the biggest deals was the sale of a 10% stake in the Greek state-owned telecoms company Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation (OTE), which was bought by Deutsche Telekom in 2011 for \$585 million as part of an earlier privatisation programme also tied to a bail-out.

## Greece's loss, Germany's gain

Greece's economic turmoil has proven to be Germany's financial gain. Greece's financial debt to Germany is estimated to stand at around 90 billion euros.

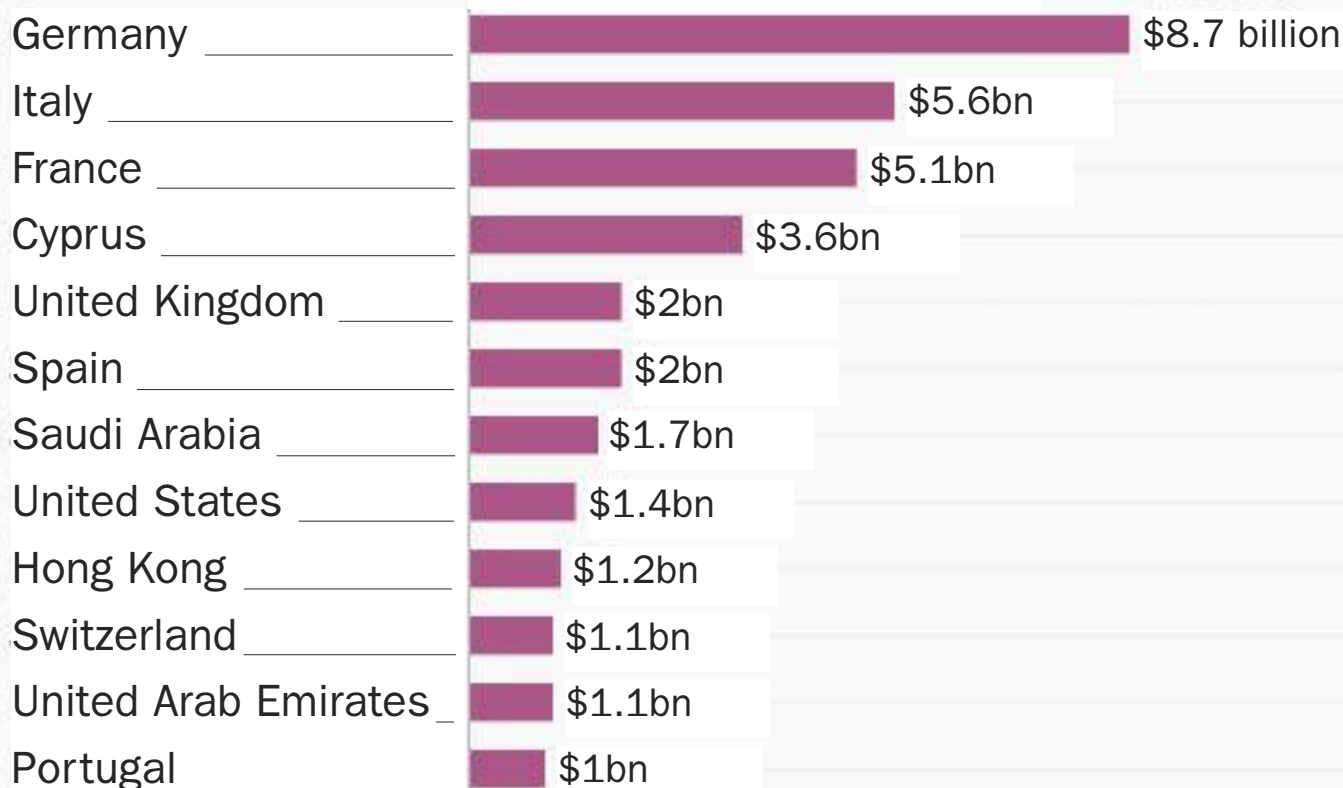
But according to a study, released by the Halle Institute for Economic Research, Germany has saved more than this sum as a direct consequence of the Greek economic crisis.

With Greece's economic woes creating financial instability across Europe, investors flocked to the relative "safe haven" of German bonds, pushing down interest rates and leading to savings of at least 100 billion euros for the German government, according to the Institute.<sup>3</sup>

The next privatisations planned are those of the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki. On the shortlist to buy a 51% stake in the port of Piraeus are China's Cosco Group; the Danish container ter-

## Countries whose companies have invested the most in Greece

Overall deal value since 2005



minal operator, MAERSK; and the Philippines-based International Container Terminal Services (ICT.PS).

Workers at the port of Piraeus went on strike in October in protest at the proposed sale of the port.

The port of Thessaloniki is due to be sold in March 2016.

Other Greek assets likely to be sold off include banks, energy companies, transport infrastructure and tourist resorts as well as further shares in the Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation.

The Troika are overseeing the harsh bail-out terms and conditions including the privatisation of Greek state assets.

There have been differences within the Troika over how to deal with Greece. There are reports of the Washington-based International Monetary Fund (IMF) pushing for a restructuring of Greece's debt pile by extending maturities and reducing interest payments.

However, this approach is rejected by the European partners.

The IMF has been criticised by its own watchdog, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), "for failing in its duty of care towards Greece by pushing self-defeating austerity measures on its battered economy."<sup>4</sup>

The IMF has been criticised by its own watchdog, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), "for failing in its duty of care towards Greece by pushing self-defeating austerity measures on its battered economy."

The IEO has said that the IMF should have eased up on the spending cuts and tax rises, pushed for an earlier debt restructuring, and paid more attention to the political costs of its punishing policies during its five-year involvement in Greece.

However, German capitalism's strong economic position has given it economic hegemony over Europe and political

dominance of the EU.

Following the defeat of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the EU extended its borders into Central and Eastern Europe.

Led by the German Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schauble, the EU has been intransigent in its approach to Greece.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*<sup>5</sup>, Schauble stated, "Debt relief is not possible within the currency union. European treaties do not allow it." His argument cannot be faulted.

The problem lies in the constitution and treaties of the European Union and the Greek people are paying a heavy price.

### FOOTNOTES

1. <http://yanisvaroufakis.eu/2015/07/21/europes-vindictive-privatization-plan-for-greece-project-syndicate/>.

2. <http://atlas.qz.com/charts/EyC1W6Fw>.

3. [http://www.iwh-halle.de/d/publik/iwhonline/io\\_2015-07.pdf](http://www.iwh-halle.de/d/publik/iwhonline/io_2015-07.pdf).

4. "Watchdog says IMF 'failed in duty of care' towards Greece", *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 2015.

5. *Der Spiegel*, 18 July 2015.



# 1974: Portugal's April revolution

As the peoples of Europe struggle against the brutal results of neo-liberal capitalist economic policies, the April 25, 1974 revolution in Portugal which overthrew a brutal 48 year fascist dictatorship, may serve as a beacon.

By **PAT TURNBULL** (based on a Portuguese Communist Party analysis)

A heroic military uprising of the MFA (Armed Forces Movement) was followed by a popular uprising.

As well as liberating the Portuguese people from fascism, the revolution ended the Portuguese colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau, recognizing the right of the peoples there to full and immediate independence.

A new Constitution of the Republic establishing democracy was approved on April 2, 1976 by the Constituent Assembly.

Despite its great achievements, the April revolution was an unfinished revolution. Many of its main achievements were destroyed. Others, though weakened and threatened, remain in Portuguese national life.

The revolution of April introduced basic democratic freedoms and basic rights of citizens. It established freedom of association and the right of workers to organize in the workplace, the right to collective bargaining, the right to strike, and the right of trade unions to participate in the management of social security and the preparation of labour legislation.

Nationalisations resulted in basic sectors of the Portuguese economy being freed from private interests and able to boost economic development. The agrarian reform expropriated land from large estates and formed new cooperative operating units, as well as extending the rights of farmers through the law of rural leases, prohibiting tenure regimes like *colonia* and sharecropping, and recognising the dynamism of the cooperative and ownership and management by the people.

The revolution legally enshrined and promoted equality and human rights including the rights of women and young people.

It improved the living conditions of the people, instituting the national minimum wage and minimum pensions, the right to 30 days of holiday, holiday pay and a 13th month's pay, maternity leave, reduction of working hours, unemployment protection, and rights for elderly people and people with disabilities.

It made progressive changes in education, health, culture, sport and the environment, and ensured substantial progress on infrastructure and social facilities.

It put an end to the international isolation of the country, established diplomatic relations between Portugal and the

tuguese people, a deep change in concepts, social and ethical behaviour.

The counter-revolutionary process which followed confirms that the issue of power ultimately determines the course of national politics.

Divisions in the MFA gradually allowed conservative elements to resume positions in the armed forces. Collaboration by the Socialist Party and others with the most conservative elements, leftism, anti-communism, interference and financial pressures, economic, political and diplomatic imperialism - all these paved the way for a counter-revolutionary process which culminated in the de facto liquidation of the MFA and a radical change in the balance of forces.

Since 1976, in clear disregard for the Constitution and the democratic rule of law, successive governments of different party compositions have adopted policies which have restored monopoly capitalism, with its dynamic of exploitation of workers and of centralization and concentration of capital.

Many of the rights and freedoms of workers have been liquidated. The growing domination of foreign capital on the Portuguese economy and limitations on national sovereignty and independence have especially strengthened with integration into the EU.

A planned and coordinated offensive was launched against nationalised and other non-capitalist sectors, with credit policies, investments, unfavourable prices, and the appointment of managers interested in the failure of the companies and in preparing them for privatisation, so that public companies were increasingly delivered to private capital.

Public services and state social functions were dismantled, directly or by the use of forms such as public-private partnerships. Fraud was rife, with underestimations of value, auctions, corruption and stock speculation and the delivery of vast sums of state money.

The agrarian reform was destroyed by the restoration of landed property through illegal and violent actions against workers, and other legislative, financial and technical moves to make the



Poster celebrating the April 1974 "Carnation" revolution.

socialist countries, diversified external relations and paved the way to a foreign policy of peace, cooperation and friendship with all peoples of the world.

The April Revolution was also a revolution in the consciousness of the Por-

working of the cooperatives impossible. Many thousands of small and medium farms were destroyed in moves to promote the concentration of agricultural property.

Small and medium enterprises were destroyed in the process of favouring concentration and centralisation of capital. All these processes transferred more and more property into the hands of large national and foreign capitalists giving them greater and greater power.

This restoration of monopoly capitalist power had very serious consequences. The production system was disorganised. Important companies which should have had a leading role in economic development were sacrificed.

Major national development projects were abandoned. Agriculture stagnated and agricultural workers were hit with unemployment and a worsening of living standards. Parasitic and speculative activities resulted in the rapid enrichment of a few at the expense of the workers and the public purse, absorbing and consuming

much of the national resources.

The workers have suffered the erosion of many of their rights and freedoms, reduced wages along with rising prices, insufficient rises in pensions, the growth in short-term contracts and other forms of insecure work, restrictions on trade union freedoms and the rights of Workers' Commissions.

Public services - health, education, housing, transport and justice - are under attack and at risk of destruction. Poverty and social exclusion have grown and large areas of the country have been depopulated.

A distortion of history accompanies these processes, with persistent actions to conceal and misrepresent the true nature of the fascist regime and its crimes, and to devalue the significance, achievements and scope of the democratic revolution.

Promoting alternation in government between political parties represents the interests of big capital. The role of workers in national life is sidelined and the

capitalists are allocated the decisive role in the creation of wealth. An exaggerated individualism and selfishness in society is promoted. Welfare and charities replace social protection rights, an assault on human dignity.

Portugal's accession to the then EEC increased obstacles to democratic politics and assisted in the process of destroying the April achievements.

The process of modernization of the national productive apparatus was hindered. The Common Market (the free movement of goods and capital) already offered Portugal poor conditions for rising out of its relative backwardness.

All the processes towards integration and the creation of supranational bodies since have strengthened transnational capital and affected Portugal's national sovereignty and independence.

The Portuguese people have and always should have the full right to decide their own destiny and choose a path more in line with their own history, interests and aspirations.

## Joint statement of the Socialist Party and Communist Party of Portugal following the national elections of 4 October 2015

**Lisbon, November 10, 2015**

**Joint position by the Socialist Party and the Portuguese Communist Party on a political solution.**

The Socialist Party (PS) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) have adopted the following position regarding the political situation, within the framework of the new institutional context of the 13th legislature that emerged from the October 4 [2015] elections.

1. The October 4 elections represented a clear defeat of the PSD (Social Democratic Party)/CDS (People's Party) coalition. PSD/CDS have lost the political conditions and legitimacy to continue in office. [The outcome of the] October [elections] condemned, not just the PSD/CDS government, but also its policies.

The elections brought about a new composition of the Assembly of the Republic [Parliament] for the current legislature, which reflects a substantial change in the balance of forces. This new reality, and the will for change that was expressed by the Portuguese people, raises the demand and the respon-

sibility of ensuring that the course that has been followed by the previous government is brought to a halt.

It is this responsibility that must be materialized: finding a policy that may respond to the most pressing problems that are faced by the Portuguese, as regards employment, wages and income, pensions and social benefits, rights, the social functions of the State and public services, namely healthcare, education, social security and culture.

2. This was the goal that PS and PCP strived for, throughout a committed process of mutual assessment, that sought to identify issues, measures and solutions that may reflect the necessary sign of change.

It was a serious assessment, which recognized the distinctive nature of the two Parties' programmes and the different assumptions that underlie their assessments and viewpoints regarding fundamental aspects of the country's situation.

But it was also, and above all, an effort and assessment which confirmed that there is a set of issues which may ensure an immediate response to legitimate aspirations of the Portuguese peo-

ple to see their incomes restored, their rights brought back, better living standards ensured. Both Parties chose to stress their points of convergence, rather than their points of divergence.

3. Among others, PS and PCP identified the following aspects in which there is a possibility of convergence for political solutions that cannot be postponed, despite each Party's different programmatic assessments:

- unfreezing pensions;
- restoring the holidays which have been abolished;
- a decisive fight against precarious work, including the false "green receipts" [whereby long-term work is disguised as occasional work], the abusive use of traineeships and the use of so-called "employment and insertion contracts" to replace full-time workers; a review of the mechanism that defines the deductions that are to be paid by workers with "green receipts";
- an end to the special regimes of re-qualification/mobility [which are concealed forms of dismissal];
- the respect for the right to collective bargaining in Public Administration; the full restoration of the pension top-ups for



workers in the State entrepreneurial sector; a reduction in VAT for the catering industry [restaurants] to 13%;

- the introduction of a safeguard clause for the Municipal Tax on Homes [IMI]; the guarantee of protection of personal homes for families that are subject to enforcement proceedings or for tax debts or repossessions;

- the expansion of tax stimuli for small and medium companies;

- a reassessment of the reductions and exemptions in the Social Security Tax (TSU);

- the strengthening of the National Health Service by providing it with adequate human, technical and financial resources, including the materialization of the goal of ensuring family doctors and nurses for all;

- the repeal of the recent changes in the Law on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancies [abortion];

- the guarantee, by 2019, of access to kindergartens for all children over the age of three; a stronger direct and indirect Educational Social Action;

- job contracts for all teachers and non-teaching staff in schools;

- smaller class sizes in schools;

- gradual moves towards free school textbooks during compulsory schooling;

- the promotion of regular contracts for PhD research workers in public laboratories or other entities and the gradual replacement of post-doctoral grants by contracts for research workers;

- the reversal of ongoing processes of privatisation/concessions of land transport companies;

- the inadmissibility of any new privatisation processes.

PS and PCP note that there are other issues on which, although there was no agreement on the conditions for their materialisation, there is agreement regarding the goals that are to be achieved.

Among these:

- the restoration of the wages of workers in Public Administration during 2016;

- the restoration of the 35-hour working week in Public Administration, as well as the lifting of restrictions on hiring in central, regional and local Public Administration;

- the elimination of the extra tax on IRS [the main income tax]; the progressive nature and a raising of the brackets for the IRS tax;

- the elimination of the obstacles which the so-called moderating fees rep-

resent for the users of the National Health Service;

- a more widespread access to, and higher payments of, social protection and social assistance benefits, the strengthening and diversification of sources of income for Social Security.

4. PS and PCP recognize that an agreement regarding a future government or government programme would imply greater requirements of political identification. However, PS and PCP recognize that, with the current level of convergence that has been achieved, conditions exist to:

- put an end to the cycle of economic and social degradation that the continued existence of a PSD/CDS government would represent. With this idea in mind, they will reject any solution proposing a PSD/CDS government, and they will defeat any initiative that seeks to prevent an alternative solution for the government;



- ensure the necessary institutional basis for the PS to form a government, present its programme [to Parliament], begin functions and adopt a policy that will ensure a lasting solution, with the prospect of a full mandate;

- on the basis of the new institutional balance of forces existing in the Assembly of the Republic, adopt measures that respond to the Portuguese people's aspirations and rights.

In this sense, PS and PCP affirm their common disposition to:

- undertake a common assessment of the ways in which the issues where a convergence was identified should be reflected in the State Budgets, both in general terms and in detail, in order to not forsake the opportunity of ensuring that these instruments may correspond to the necessary restitution of wages, pensions and rights; to the unpostponable reversion in the deterioration of the Portuguese people's living standards as well as in social functions, with the State ensuring universal, public and quality services; and a reversion in the current path of decline, injustice, exploitation and impoverishment, which has been stepped up in recent years;

- examine the measures and solutions which may, outside the scope of the State Budget, be immediately imple-

mented;

- examine, in bilateral meetings that may jointly be considered necessary, other issues, whose complexity may so require, or which are related to:

- (a) legislation with impact on the Budget;

- (b) motions of censorship against the Government;

- (c) legislative initiatives that may emanate from other Parliamentary groups;

- (d) legislative initiatives which, whilst not having impact on the Budget, represent fundamental aspects of the activity of the government or of the functioning of Parliament.

The option for a bilateral position between the PS and PCP does not limit other solutions which PS and PCP may consider it convenient to establish with the Left Bloc and the Ecologist Party "the Greens".

5. With full respect for the political independence of each Party, and not concealing from the

Portuguese people the differences regarding fundamental aspects of each Party's viewpoints, which their Party Pro-

grammes clearly reveal, the Parties signing this text, which is today made public, confirm with the necessary clarity their disposition and determination to prevent the PSD and CDS from continuing their policy, that the country has now roundly condemned, and to ensure a course for the country that may guarantee:

- the turning of a page regarding policies that reflected the strategy of impoverishment that was followed by the PSD and CDS;

- the defence of the social functions of the State and of public services, social security, education and healthcare, with a serious struggle against poverty and social and economic inequalities;

- a new economic strategy based on growth and employment, on the increase in income for families and the creation of conditions for public and private investment;

- the promotion of a new model of progress and development for Portugal, which invests in raising wages and on the struggle against precarious jobs, re-launching investments in education, culture and science, and ensuring that Portuguese society can recover confidence and hope in the future;

- value the participation of citizens, political decentralisation and the autonomy of the islands.

# Cuba's future: solidarity can help

Big changes are happening, both within Cuba and in its relations with the United States. Cuba's survival as a beacon of socialism is close to the hearts of all on the left and the question of whether or not these changes imperil that survival has been widely debated.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

An important contribution to that debate was the Cuban Futures Conference held in October 2015 and organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign<sup>1</sup>.

This article reflects the contributions made by the eminent Cuban and British speakers at the event.

The Cubans themselves have, unsurprisingly, been the best custodians of their revolution. That it has survived so long in the face of astonishing adversity is a tribute to their political acumen and the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people. It is worth re-iterating some of those challenges:

- Invasion, terrorist attacks, assassination attempts on Fidel Castro and the missile crisis of 1962;
- Being a tiny, isolated third world country with a legacy of colonialism and subject to devastating hurricanes;
- Defeats for the left in Latin America, including the overthrow of Allende in Chile and the US invasion of Grenada;
- The transition from Fidel's leadership;
- The illegal US blockade which is nearly as old as the revolution itself;
- The defeat of the Soviet Union and



**The new Embassy of Cuba in Washington D.C., USA. The building was formerly the Cuban Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy. Switzerland was the "protecting power" of Cuba in the US between 1977 and 2015 and of the US in Cuba between 1961 and 2015.**

the subsequent virtual collapse of the economy when the gross national product almost halved in two years.

On its own this last point would have meant economic collapse in any other country, but not for Cuba. During that time, which the Cubans called the "Special Period", survival was tough, but survive they did and without mass starvation or social chaos.

Cuba remains important as an example of what can be done if there is the will to do it. Even in the most difficult circumstances, people's needs can be put before the greed of the banks, the exploitation of low wages and zero hours contracts, the decimation of public services and housing and the inhuman treatment of people on benefits.

However, Cuba is important not just because it provides a model and moral example, but also because it offers practical support to people across the globe.

It has done this militarily in the fight against apartheid, through medical services, literacy programmes and in establishing relations based on equality and respect with other nations. This has included setting up regional alliances in Latin America such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA).

It defied the defeat of socialism elsewhere and was undeterred from its path of up-holding human values.

This is the context in which the Cuban Futures conference considered recent economic changes, the changed relationship with the United States and what the impact of these might be.

## **Relations with the United States of America**

The aim of the US since the early days of the revolution has been its unconditional overthrow and rolling back the gains of the Cuban people.

They were prepared to adopt any means to achieve this end: invasion, acts of terrorism and economic blockade.

Due to the resistance of the Cuban people and the international solidarity that it received, Cuba could not be defeated in this way. Its people could not be broken and now the US has come to

negotiate instead.

In itself that is a victory. Furthermore they are negotiating with the original revolutionary leadership, the very people that they saw as enemies for so long. In the entire history of Cuban-US relations this is the first time that Cuba has been treated as an equal.

But why, after the United States clung to its policy of confrontation and isolation for so long, should this happen now? There are several reasons.

Firstly the existing policy failed spectacularly.

Secondly the US has become increasingly isolated from world and Latin American opinion on Cuba.

Thirdly the economic reforms Cuba has embarked on will create more opportunity for foreign trade and investment and US businesses are concerned that they will miss out on these.

Fourthly there has been a dramatic decline in opposition to engagement with Cuba from the Cuban-American community.

Finally Obama sees this issue as something he can achieve towards the end of his presidency that will be part of his legacy.

The Cubans know that this rapprochement offers both opportunities and dangers. Obama and others have explicitly stated that they still want to defeat the revolution, but instead of bludgeoning the Cubans into submission they will try a different route.

They now aim to change attitudes within Cuba to promote individualist and capitalist thinking and they seek to do this at different levels.

The leadership of Cuba still contains some of the original revolutionary leaders, but new generations are coming through. The US hopes that they will be easier to influence.

Furthermore it believes that engagement will make it easier to change the minds of the Cuban people. Using the opportunities for foreign investment and through encouraging private enterprise in Cuba the US believes it will create a more capitalist mentality and make people less "dependent" on the state.

It will also alter its strategy in forming dissident groups. Up until now the billions of dollars poured into support-

ing such individuals and groups has been ineffectual in influencing ordinary Cubans.

However, Obama has indicated that support to set up alternative trades unions will be a priority in future. Given the structural economic changes happening in Cuba this could be a canny move.

The Cubans hope that the reverse will happen and that US visitors to Cuba will see by its example in health care, education and so on what could be achieved in the United States.

#### **What has happened so far since the process of normalisation began?**

The first steps were the release by Cuba of the American spy Alan Gross and the release of the final 3 of the Cuban 5 by the United States, with their triumphant return to Cuba.

Obama has loosened travel restrictions on Americans going to Cuba and increased the amount of cash remittances that can be sent to the island. He also removed Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, which will begin to make it easier for companies to do business with the island. In a historic move the two countries reopened embassies in Washington and Havana.

From the Cuban perspective there are major issues outstanding before relations can be truly normalised with the United States. These are:

■ **Ending the Blockade.** Although Obama has used his powers to ameliorate some aspects of this he cannot dismantle it. The main elements of the blockade are contained in laws passed by Congress and it needs to repeal them.

However, Obama does not have a majority there so immediate progress is unlikely.

■ **Compensation for the Blockade.** The cost to the Cuban economy of the blockade has been estimated at between \$122bn and \$833bn.

■ **An end to US subversion.** The US has channelled huge amounts of money into Cuba to promote dissent aimed at regime change. This is done through US Aid, which has requested \$22.3bn for 2016 from the government. This is twice the amount granted in 2004. US Aid is also a conduit for money from private companies and it has been advertising recently for programme managers for Cuban operations.

■ **Guantanamo.** The Cubans demand the return of the Guantanamo Bay military base illegally occupied by the United States.

■ **The Cuban Adjustment Act.** As well as the repudiation of the legal framework of the blockade, Cuba also wishes to see the repudiation of the Cuban Adjustment Act which automatically grants citizenship rights to Cubans who leave their homeland and make it to US soil.

These are all things that the US needs to act on. Cuba does not need to do anything and will reject any demands that it change its system of democracy.

If the US wants to raise human rights then Cuba has already pointed out the poor record that the US has itself on this issue. As the ball is very much in the US court and there are significant barriers to making progress on some key issues it is felt that this could be a long, slow process.

The Cubans reckon there could be



**1898, Havana: the 10th US Infantry Regiment - the USA's Army of Occupation in Cuba.**



some advantages to this as it will give them time to plan and adjust to new developments. This would include building the infrastructure to cater for increased numbers of tourists.

The first bi-lateral meeting between Cuban and US negotiators was held in September. It discussed how to make progress on areas which were agreed to be in both parties interests.

These included co-operation on civil aviation, medical collaboration and law enforcement. Other discussions clarified areas of disagreement, like human rights and the US demand for compensation for companies nationalised after the revolution.

Both sides highlighted issues that they would want to table in future discussions. At present Cuban negotiators are seeking to identify common threads and interests and to encourage work in a spirit of respecting differences.

It has been said that major US companies are already in talks with the Cubans and in particular are interested in their unexploited oil reserves.

Despite the positive developments the US has also made negative moves. As well as the increased funding for subversion in Cuba, Obama also re-signed the Trading with the Enemy Act, which restricts trade with Cuba.

Obama has one year left in which to make progress and the objective for Cuba is to get as much put in place as possible to make changes irreversible, whatever the complexion of the legislature or whoever is elected President in November 2016.

For example, it is difficult to imagine that the recently re-opened embassies would be closed again.

### The Economic Changes in Cuba

The Cuban Futures conference heard there are many economic problems in Cuba which have stemmed from a legacy of colonialism, following models which did not suit Cuban circumstances and still being reliant on production of primary commodities such as sugar and nickel. Both of these have recently fallen in price.

Above all, the effects of the blockade and the collapse of the Soviet Union had a profoundly negative impact.

Some practical effects of these problems have been the under-employment of the workforce. Whilst people were



**1959: Washington, D.C., USA. Fidel Castro lays a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial.**

protected during the special period they were not necessarily employed productively, a problem which has endured.

In this highly fertile island Cuba is a net importer of food. The value of salaries had plummeted since the special period to only 28% of their previous worth.

The system of dual currency in Cuba has led to inequality between those who have access to dollars and those who do not.

Since 2010 Cuba has been implementing radical changes to its economy which include:

- Re-structuring the labour force to move large numbers of workers from the public to the private sector. Initially this was set at 0.5 million rising to 1 million. This move recognised that large numbers of people were already working in an informal private sector and with the changes many of them are now registered and paying taxes.

- Private enterprises can now employ a limited number of staff in addition to family members. They can also borrow money and sell goods and services to the

state.

- Local management now has autonomy in state enterprises.

- To try to boost wages, there was a move to payment by results, based on the productivity of individuals and enterprises.

- Cooperative enterprises can now be formed in sectors other than agriculture.

- The government is encouraging farming, with land being leased.

- There is a new foreign investment law allowing for the formation of mixed companies and more generous profit repatriation.

- Cuba plans to move back to a single currency. Though this may help reduce inequalities caused by the dual currency it may cause other problems. For example state enterprises, which trade in Pesos may become less competitive.

As these changes are implemented some difficulties have begun to emerge. Salary increases have proven hard to achieve as productivity bonuses are not working well.

In addition negotiations are now de-centralised and the outcome of pay bargaining is dependent on local management and trade unions. The result is that workers are not being paid equally for their work.

The private sector is also weakening the role of trade unions. Union membership in the sector stands at 40% whereas, prior to this, 90% of the workforce as a whole was unionised.

Enforcing workers rights is harder in the private sector and nearly one third of young people are employed in the sector.

Both the changed relationship with the United States and the economic changes in Cuba mark a radical departure and managing the powerful political and economic forces that they let loose will be a major challenge.

It would be unwise to make predictions about how all of this will unfold. As ever, through our solidarity, we can make a difference and support the Cuban demands to end the blockade, pay compensation for the damage that it has done and close the US base at Guantanamo.

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### FOOTNOTE

1. <http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/news/article/2859/major-british-conference-discusses-the-future-of-us-cuba-relations>

# US billionaires raise \$50m to fight BDS

Sheldon Adelson and fellow American billionaire, Haim Saban, launched their \$50 million effort to fight the U.S. university campaigns of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against Israel, at a closed meeting in June.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

The meeting was held at Sheldon Adelson's Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas and only one media outlet was invited, Israel Hayom, the Israeli daily newspaper owned by casino mogul Adelson.

The gathering was dubbed as the first "Campus Maccabees" Summit and brought together pro-Israel extremely rich Americans committed to countering BDS.

Adelson and his fellow conference organisers limited participation in the event to donors willing to pledge at least \$1 million over the next two years. Some twenty donors took part in the meeting, which also brought together some 50 Jewish American organisations.

Both Adelson and Saban stressed that their overarching goal was to get all pro-Israeli actors on campus to work together against BDS. "It's a challenge to get Jewish groups to work together", Adelson said in an interview.

Going back in history, the arguments and debates between Jews brought down the Temple. The purpose of this gathering he stressed was to unite forces and "put boots on the ground" on college campuses.

Adelson describes three components of his Campus Maccabees concept: donors who will fund the operation; activists on the ground willing to take the fight to the campuses; and researchers who will supply information about the anti-Israel groups and recommend possible avenues to block their activities.

This right-wing pro-Israel initiative indicates that the BDS movement is growing, gathering strength and becoming very effective.

**Adelson: Republican mega donor**

Sheldon Adelson is a Republican Party

mega-donor. In 2005, he and his wife, Miriam, contributed \$250,000 to the second inauguration of George W Bush and during the 2012 Republican primaries Adelson first supported Newt Gingrich and then the eventual nominee, Mitt Romney. Altogether he spent \$92 million supporting losing candidates during the 2012 US presidential election cycle.



**Adelson**

George W Bush appointed the Adelsons to serve on the Honorary Delegation to accompany him to Jerusalem for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel in 2008.

Since 2008 the Adelson Family Foundation has made contributions totalling \$140 million to Birthright Israel, which finances Jewish youth trips to Israel.

Adelson also donated \$5 million to the Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces in 2014.

Adelson's partnership with Haim Saban began several years ago when both helped fund the Israeli American Council, an organisation of Israeli expatriates living in America.

Saban declared during an interview, "When it comes to Israel we're (he and Adelson) both on the same page. Our interest is to take care of Israel's interest in the United States. Period. Over and out."

**Saban: Hillary Clinton supporter**

Haim Saban is a major supporter of Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton.

He was born in Egypt to Jewish parents but moved to Israel in the 1950s. He served in the Israeli Defence Force and



then built the country's premier tour promotion business. In 1975 he moved to France and established an independent record company, which sold more than 18 million records in a period of 8 years.

He moved to Los Angeles in 1983 and launched a chain of recording studios that became the top supplier of music for television. In 1988 he formed Saban Entertainment, an international television, production, distribution and manufacturing company. It created several major hits, including The X-Men.

In 1996 he merged his company with Rupert Murdoch's Fox Kids Network and in 2002 Saban and Murdoch sold Fox Family Worldwide to the Walt Disney Company for \$5.3 billion. Saban is thought to have profited by some \$1.6 billion.

Saban then formed Saban Capital Group (SCG) and in 2003 he led a group of investors that acquired a controlling stake in ProSiebenSat1Media, Germany's largest broadcasting group. He served as Chairman until it was sold to private equity companies.

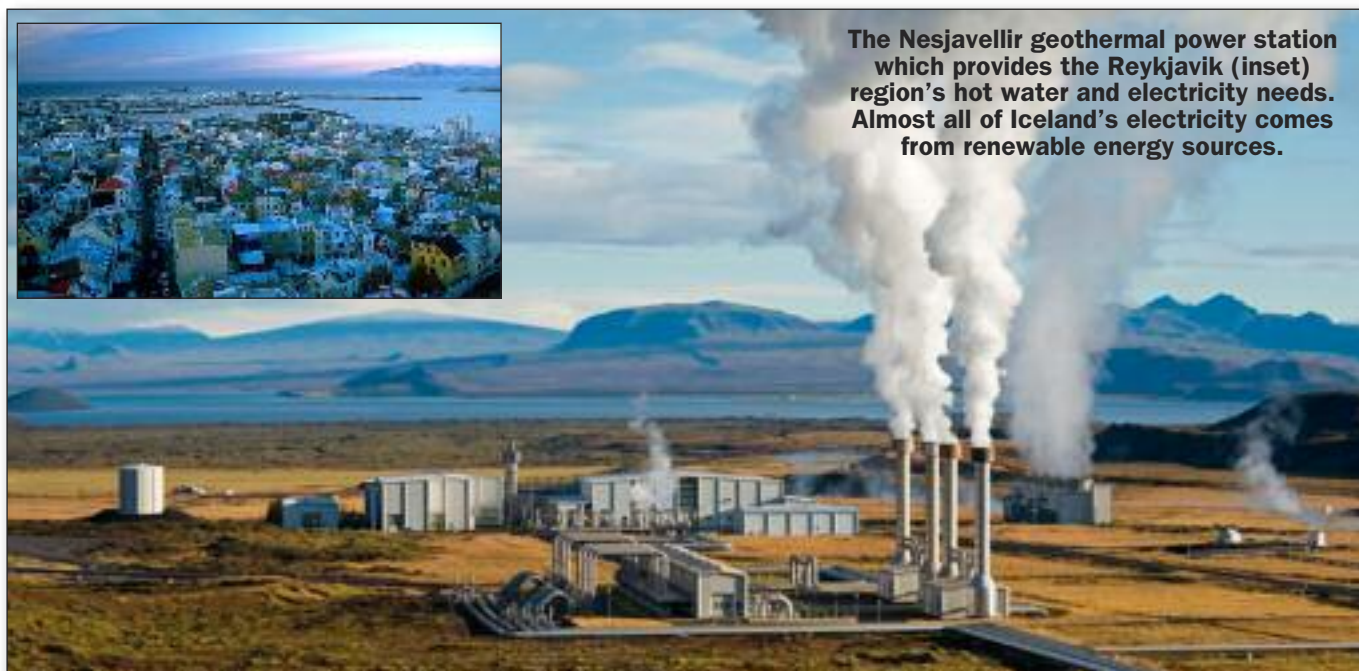
In 2005 SCG teamed up with other companies to acquire a controlling stake in Bezeq, the Israeli Telecommunications Corps and in 2007, SCG with other investors acquired Univision Communications, the premier Spanish-language media company in the United States.

Saban founded the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution with a huge donation.

Between 2009 and 2013, when Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State, he donated at least \$7 million to the Clinton Foundation. In 2013 his wife, Cheryl, joined the Board of the Clinton Foundation.

Haim Saban is on record as saying that he has three methods of influencing American politics: make donations to political parties; establish think tanks; and control media outlets.

Adelson and Saban are now using their vast wealth, influence and connections to campaign against the BDS movement with their "Campus Maccabees" initiative.



The Nesjavellir geothermal power station which provides the Reykjavik (inset) region's hot water and electricity needs. Almost all of Iceland's electricity comes from renewable energy sources.

# Unions' living wage victory in Iceland

The Icelandic Federation of Labour (logo below) consists of 51 member Unions representing 100,000 members. The total population of Iceland is roughly 330,000 people.

By **DAVIE** and **SHEILA McGEOCH**

The Icelandic Trade Union movement called a general strike for 6th June 2015 which had such strong support it would have brought the country to a complete standstill.

The aim of the strike was to achieve a living wage agreement with employers and Government.

This was the culmination of the struggle to stop working people having two or more jobs to simply be able to pay bills and eat. The demand was a living wage at a level agreed to allow one wage earner to survive whilst only working one job.

The outcome was a full acceptance of the union demands. The agreement was, with Government approval, the introduction of a National living wage of 300,000 Icelandic Kroner per month. This is approximately the equivalent of £1500 per month.

The various Trade Unions have been involved in campaigning and ongoing stoppages for over a year to achieve a settlement. This is a tremendous success for organised labour and is an example of what can be achieved by struggle.

A recent opinion poll in Iceland found that 91.6% of the population agreed with the Unions' demand. There is still an ongoing struggle for full implementation.

The standard charge for every property in Iceland for heating, hot water, electricity, cold water and sewage is equivalent of £60 per month. This flat rate charge (irrespective of consumption) is paid by all properties.

This is all provided by the State-run

Geothermal Power Plants. Other costs to working people for food, clothing etc. are relatively higher than in the UK.

The Icelandic trades unions also own some beautiful luxury log cabins in a stunning area of West Iceland. These are available free to members for holidays. The weekly slots are allocated through a rota process for those on the list.

The banking crisis of 2007/2008 seriously impacted on Iceland with several banks overstretched and bankrupt.

Instead of accepting bailouts from the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund the Icelandic people voted to cancel all repayments and reorganise their banking system.

In June 2015 five Chairmen and previous Chief Executive Officers of these failed banks were given prison sentences of up to 4½ years for this failure.

Maybe lessons could be learned in Britain and Europe. Iceland is still capitalist but with a strong labour movement voice.





# Many questions on nations and states

**“The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.”<sup>1</sup>**

**By FRIEDA PARK**

In these few sentences in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848, Marx and Engels (pictured below) encapsulate a contradiction imposed on the working-class by capitalism’s form of political and economic organisation - the nation state.

On the one hand nation states create divisions between peoples and disunity in which the working-class has no objective interest.

On the other this is the political framework in which our battles take place, against our own capitalist class first and foremost. Whilst we can only ultimately win as one international working class, nevertheless our struggles nearly always happen within national parameters.

Immediately this can lead to a concentration on national concerns at the expense of international unity.

Worse, and under the influence of capitalist, nationalist ideology, the working class of one country can perceive itself to have a different set of interests to the working class of another or with immigrants to “its” country.

Neither of these positions is consistent with a Marxist approach. However, the debate within Marxism on what became known as the national question has been quite complex.

A central reason for this was that it was being elaborated at the very time when nation states were being formed in Europe. It was,

therefore, a key political concern at that point in time.

The writings of Marx, Lenin and others are rooted in this historical milieu and they could not entirely foresee how nations and national movements would develop throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.

As nations were being formed and national movements emerged so also their views changed.

## **Creation of national capitalist states**

In the revolutionary movements of the mid-nineteenth century national capitalist states were created, overthrowing the

last remnants of feudal absolutism.

While Marx welcomed this as progressive, he also condemned national claims of small nations which effectively served imperial Russian or feudal interests. The consolidation of small nations into larger ones he regarded as positive.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand he supported the anti-colonial movements of countries, such as Ireland, oppressed by British imperialism.

In other words Marx did not view the claims of nations to independence as automatically progressive, but viewed each from the perspective of what would benefit the working-class.

In 1903 the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) adopted the policy of “The Right of Nations to Self Determination”, a formulation which became the subject of a furious debate between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg<sup>3</sup>.

Lenin himself acknowledged that both he and Marx analysed the national question in their own specific historical circumstances and it helps to bear this in mind. His writings are not an easy read.



They are polemical in style, with Lenin heaping scorn on his opponents and going into great detail concerning their disputes.

There are propositions which superficially appear to be contradictory. For example he says: "Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the "most just", "purest", most refined and civilised brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity ..."<sup>4</sup>

And: "...the principal practical task both of the Great-Russian proletariat and the proletariat of other nationalities: that of the day-by-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the equal right of all nations to their national state."<sup>5</sup>

Some of Lenin's arguments become quite convoluted and it is easy to see how he can be misinterpreted. Whilst he argues that the working class should unconditionally support the right in principle of nations to self determination he also argues that does not mean support for secession in every circumstance.

However, if secession is the democratic will of the people of a country, even if led by the capitalist class, then it should not forcibly be prevented.

He argues that the recognition of national rights makes it possible for nations to deal equally with each other and this will counteract nationalism.

To get to grips with this we need to understand how Lenin sees the historical juncture in which he is writing. Like Marx he sees himself addressing the national question principally in two respects:

1. The creation of nation states by capitalism in democratic revolutions overthrowing the last remnants of feudalism.

2. The struggles of colonial peoples for their liberation. This was of major importance to his party as Russia was an imperial power oppressing nations within its bounds.

Generally he regards the process of nation-forming in Western Europe to be complete and expresses his support for the assimilation of nationalities of the kind he saw happening in the melting pot of New York City.<sup>6</sup>

In these states he is against federalism and de-centralisation and says: "But while, and insofar as, different nations constitute a single state, Marxists will never, under any circumstances, advocate either the federal principle or de-centralisation. The great centralised state is a tremendous historical step forward from medieval disunity to the future socialist unity of the whole world..."<sup>7</sup>



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

And: "From their daily experience the masses know perfectly well the value of geographical and economic ties and the advantages of a big market and a big state. They will, therefore, resort to secession only when national oppression and national friction make joint life absolutely intolerable..."<sup>8</sup>

Yet he also indicates situations in which these seemingly categorical positions might not represent the best option.<sup>9</sup>

As some of Lenin's statements can seem contradictory his works need to be read as a whole to get a sense of how he sees the national question.

He views national movements in a positive light as, in his era, they represented the triumph of capitalism over feudalism and of liberation from colonialism. The victory of capitalism would lead to its further internationalisation (what we now call globalisation), paving the way for socialism. He also believed the overthrow of capitalism was imminent.

However, Lenin constantly hedges round the slogan "The Right of Nations to Self Determination" with explanations of what it means in practice and when a specific national demand should be supported and when not.

A whole theoretical area is opened up as to what constitutes a nation, which can then claim rights. As a principle it becomes relative rather than absolute. Even though the slogan is understandable in its historical context it always had its problems in providing clarity as a guide to action.

#### Developments since Marx and Lenin

In addition our world has been transformed since Marx and Lenin were writ-

ing. Some developments relevant to the national question are:

- The completion of the territorial division of the world between imperialism, with the establishment of the British Empire as the foremost power in the world.

- The ethnic cleansing of existing populations in vast areas such as North America and Australia and their replacement by white, British settlers.

- The whole world divided into nation states.

- Two world wars aimed at the re-division of that world between competing imperial powers.

- The ascendancy of United States imperialism as the dominant world power and the decline of British imperialism.

- The rise and fall of fascism in Europe.

- The Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions with socialism established in one third of the world.

- Political independence for colonies and the replacement of colonialism by neo-colonialism.

- The formation of an extensive network of capitalist military, political and economic blocs, alliances and treaties, such as NATO, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union, and NAFTA.

- The defeat of socialism (apart from Cuba) and the break-up of the Soviet Union.

- The rise and decline of the non-aligned movement and the rise of the BRICS.

- Since the end of the Soviet Union, imperialism waging war at will to promote its interests.

- The rise of movements which owe their allegiance to a religion rather than a nation.

- The mass migration of peoples.

- Increasing ethnic and cultural diversity within all nation states.

- Increasing globalisation, economic interdependency and the greater connectedness provided by information and communications technology.

Despite all of these developments, nation states have remained durable as the preferred form for the capitalist class to organise itself.

Even the ceding of some powers within the European Union is a far cry from their disappearance. However, whilst nation states endure it is much less clear what constitutes a nation. Our world seems less homogenous than Europe at the start of the 20th century.

But if nations are to have rights then we needed to know what a nation, as distinct from a nation state, is.

Stalin argued that a nation was defined by a common character, language, geo-

graphic territory and economic life.<sup>10</sup>

Yet nations and nationalism were promoted by capitalist classes to justify the formation of their state structures. It was they who gave us the dominant definition of what it is to be British, French, German or Italian.

In Europe this drew on pre-existing feudal structures and cultures, which to a greater or lesser extent are reflected in modern European nation states. Viewed from a euro-centric perspective this has a logic and it is one that xenophobic and racist parties play into.

For example they will assert that Britain has certain values and beliefs not shared by immigrants. But the concept of naturally occurring nations, which we can endow with rights is challenged by a global perspective and developments in the last 100 years.

### Nation states created by imperialism

All nation states are now more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Large scale movements of peoples do not respect national borders.

Outside of Europe the world is full of nation states created by imperialism in totally non-organic processes. Lines were drawn on maps, peoples divided and existing countries partitioned.

Whole continents are populated by people whose recent ancestors came to colonise them, displacing the existing peoples of those countries.

This has led to all manner of conflicts and instability, yet trying to unpick the mess that this has created by simply asserting national rights would not get us very far.

What are the organic nations in Africa that have a right to determine their own futures?

What or who really are the nations of Canada or Australia?

Should the Kurds have a homeland? What about Israel, Palestine and the huge Palestinian diaspora?

Western powers may seek to break up countries like Iraq into smaller ethnic/religious/national entities. And so on ... Nation states continue, but defining nations or national identities has become harder. It is also clearer that national claims may not be progressive. (One could cite the break-up of the Soviet Union in this context.)

Framing our policy on the basis that nations have rights is, today, the wrong place to start.

The effort to define national legitimacy or asserting that nations have rights does not tell us whether national movements, in our highly diverse and conflict driven world, are progressive or reactionary.

In any case our ultimate goal is the

... the world is full of nation states created by imperialism in totally non-organic processes. Lines were drawn on maps, peoples divided and existing countries partitioned.

This has led to all manner of conflicts and instability, yet trying to unpick the mess that this has created by simply asserting national rights would not get us very far.

end of nation states and national divisions, so we should be very wary of political nationalism. But there are conditions in which national movements have a progressive content.

Surely the key question is not whether a movement is national or not, but whether it is progressive or not. Each should be judged on its own merits according to the objective class content of the movement.

This does not mean taking at face value what a movement says about itself, or what alliances it has built, but examining what interests it actually represents.

Some useful questions might be:

- Does the movement represent the interests of oppressed peoples against imperialism?
- Might secession and fragmentation help imperialism control and manipulate countries?
- Does it divide the working-class within a nation state?
- Is the movement led by the working-class or by capitalist interests, co-opting other classes in support of its national project?
- Does it help the working-class and build international unity or does it appeal to the sectional/national interests of one group of workers against another?

### FOOTNOTES

1. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels 1848.
2. See the series of articles written by Marx in 1851-52 edited by Eleanor Marx under the title *“Revolution and Counter Revolution”* Unwin Books, 1971. For example he says, “Thus the Bohemian and Croatian Pan Slavists, some intentionally, some without knowing it, worked in the direct interests of Russia; they betrayed the revolutionary cause for the shadow of nationality...” p.49 and “...the natural and inevitable fate of these dying nations was to allow this process of dissolution and absorption by their stronger neighbours to complete itself. Certainly this is no very flattering prospect for the national ambition of the Pan Slavistic dreamers who succeeded in agitating a portion of the Bohemian and South Slavonian people...” p.76
3. For Luxemburg’s position see the *National Question Selected Writings*, Rosa Luxemburg, *Monthly Review Press*, 1976.
4. *Critical Remarks on the National Question* p.27 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
5. *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* p.64 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
6. *Critical Remarks on the National Question* p.22 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
7. *Critical Remarks on the National Question* p.38 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
8. *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* p.73 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
9. For example in *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* he says that it is possible that federation might be a better option than secession p.113. Summed up he places greater importance on nations in Europe that have been “annexed” and “revolts of small nations in Europe” p.159 in Progress Publishers *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism V I Lenin*, 1970.
10. *Marxism and The National Question* J V Stalin, 1913.





# Deadly imperialist rivalry over Africa

**Apart from the story of genocide - of what happened to the Rwandan people (see page 26), - there is another Rwanda story: of the most powerful imperialist nation, the United States of America, backing the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in order to gain advantage in Africa against an imperialist rival, France, and in general of a contest between the Anglophone and Francophone imperialist worlds.**

**By JAKE THOMPSON**

When Patrick Mazinhaka, vice chairman of the RPF, spoke before the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa on May 24 1994, he said: 'I would like to express my great appreciation for your interest in the human tragedy which has been unfolding in Rwanda since April 6, 1994. We also appreciate the interest shown by your staff and the accessibility afforded the Rwanda Patriotic Front representative in the USA.'

On 14.6.94 the *Financial Times* reported: 'Human Rights Watch says France provided weapons, armoured cars and helicopters, as well as military advisers and up to 680 troops to help the Rwandan government fight the rebel RPF ... Less can be proved about the RPF's military sourcing. Major Paul Kagame (pictured), the RPF's top military commander, was Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's chief intelligence officer before landing his own rebel movement. And despite repeated denials, it is an open secret in Uganda that Mr Museveni allowed the Rwandan rebels to use Ugandan territory as a sanctuary for the planning of attacks, stockpiling of weapons and movement of troops.' Uganda was formerly a British colony.

Once the RPF had claimed victory on 18th July 1994, the *Financial Times* reported: 'The United States has given representatives of the old government five days to leave and their bank accounts have been frozen. Moves are afoot in the UN to expel the Rwandan representative on the Security Council.'

And on 23.7.94: 'The US was finalising plans to establish a military base of operations in Entebbe, Uganda ... for a round-the-clock airlift of medical sup-

plies and humanitarian aid, Mr Clinton said. US military forces would work to modify two existing airstrips in Zaire, at Goma and Bukavu ... about 1,000 US troops drawn from Nato would take part in the relief operation.'

On 26.7.94: 'US military officials arrived in Kigali this week to begin the



**Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda**

planning of their humanitarian relief operation.' On 30.7.94: 'At least 4,000 US troops are already being sent to Zaire and Uganda to help deliver food, water and other supplies to more than one million Rwandan refugees.'

On 27.7.94 the *Financial Times* re-

ported on the new leader of Rwanda: 'General Kagame ... has assumed the posts of vice president and defence minister ... He appears much older than his 37 years, having spent more than a third of his life as a guerrilla in the African bush ... He defended the dominance of the RPF in the new government .. [he] prefers to speak English, instead of French, Rwanda's official language.'

In the *Irish Times*, 1.8.94: 'The US Defence Secretary, Mr William Perry, visited Kigali where he was welcomed by victors of the 3-month Rwandan civil war ... In Kigali, Lieut Col Ron Peck of the US Air Force told soldiers: "Don't ask me how long we will be here, I don't have a clue ... We will stay until the mission is accomplished.'

The *Irish Times* on 11.8.94 revealed more about the US's role during the war in Rwanda: 'UNAMIR (the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda), reduced to a force of 450 during the fighting, pleaded for reinforcements but the US held up a Security Council resolution for weeks. When it finally backed a resolution to send 4,000 extra troops, mainly from Africa, the UN asked it to airlift the troops and other Western nations to give equipment. But troops from countries such as Ethiopia and Tunisia are still waiting for the US aircraft, and UNAMIR, so thin on the ground, has not been able to carry out its mandate.'

Then the conquest of Rwanda was extended to the conquest of neighbouring Zaire, a much richer prize with its diamonds, cobalt and copper. There President Mobutu Sese Seko ruled over what was still part of Francophone Africa.

The *Financial Times* reported on 22.8.95: 'Nearly 3,000 Hutu refugees were expelled from eastern Zaire yesterday ... The final straw appears to have been last week's Security Council decision to lift the arms embargo on Kigali, a move bitterly opposed by Kinshasa [capital of Zaire].'

In 1996 Laurent Kabila with his allies from Rwanda and Uganda waged war in Zaire to oust President Mobutu.

The *Observer* on 8.12.96 spelled it out: 'France has stood by powerless as one

of the nations central to what Paris considers its domain in Africa has imploded. Rwandan soldiers, Zairean rebels and Ugandan troops have driven Mobutu's army from large swathes of eastern Zaire ... The US ambassador to Zaire, Daniel Simpson, said: "France is no longer capable of imposing itself in Africa. Neo-colonialism is no longer tolerated." US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on his first ever trip to Africa: "The time has passed when Africa could be carved into spheres of influence, or when outside powers could view whole groups of states as their private domain."

The *Financial Times* gave us a possible insight into the US strategy in Africa on 4.2.97. 'Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea are all in the hands of fairly young leaders hardened by years fighting in the bush. They enjoy strong backing from Washington ...' On 10.3.97 it reported: 'America's aim, the [Zairean] elite claim, is to force Kinshasa to accept the east's secession and then flood the region with four million Rwandan Hutus, overspill from one of Africa's most populous countries.'

Edward Mortimer in an article in the *Financial Times* on 12.2.97 entitled 'The moral maze', wrote: 'It suited many governments, especially the US administration, to accept the official Rwandan claim that the only Hutus remaining on Zairean soil were a hard core of militia-men and soldiers loyal to the ousted regime - those who had carried out the 1994 genocide ...'

'Some relief agencies have ... [accused] the US of a deliberate cover-up. Mr Nicholas Stockton, emergencies director of Oxfam UK and Ireland, says that on November 20 he was shown US aerial photographs which "confirmed, in considerable detail, the existence of 500,000 people distributed in three major and numerous minor agglomerations." Yet three days later the US military claimed they had located only one significant cluster of people which could be identified as former members of the Rwandan armed forces and militias ...'



Opposing intervention was virtually the whole establishment of the English-speaking world.'

On 14.7.97 the *Financial Times* reported: 'Commenting on recent admissions by Rwanda's vice-president as to

... a war between Uganda and Rwanda on one side, and Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola on the other, fought on Congo soil, with the difference that the latter three countries were answering a call from Kabila's government for military aid to defeat an invading force.

his country's role in toppling former President Mobutu Sese Seko, Ms Emma Bonino [European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs] said Major Paul Kagame had exposed "one of the biggest lies of our time". She said she would like to hear an explanation from Washington of Mr Kagame's claim that the re-

bellion took place with US approval.' For months Rwanda had denied having any troops in Zaire.

Kabila did not remain friends with Rwanda and Uganda for long. On 4.8.98 the *Financial Times* reported: 'President Laurent Kabila's 15 month rule in Congo ... appeared in jeopardy last night after an army battalion in the east mutinied and he was deserted by ministers with close links to neighbouring Rwanda ...' The report then referred to 'Rwandan soldiers ... based in Kinshasa.'

This was the start of what would eventually become a war between Uganda and Rwanda on one side, and Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola on the other, fought on Congo soil, with the difference that the latter three countries were answering a call from Kabila's govern-

ment for military aid to defeat an invading force.

On 24.8.98 the *Financial Times* referred to 'growing regional wariness towards Rwanda and Uganda, both seen as overly keen to dictate their neighbours' futures' and 'Kigali and Kampala's ruthless determination to establish a "greater Tutsi empire".'

Present day Rwanda has a population of 11 million. 80 per cent are still employed in farming. You are not allowed to ask whether a person is Hutu or Tutsi or to question whether the true story of Rwanda is only one of genocide by Hutus on Tutsis.

Paul Kagame is still in charge, as President - he was elected to a second and constitutionally final presidential term in 2010, so his presidency lasts till 2017, unless he decides to extend it.

An article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 7.4.14 added: 'His secret service is accused of assassinations of allies-turned-enemies, most of whom died abroad trying to escape apparent threats to their lives ... The United Nations say Rwandan troops have been heavily involved in the conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo ... Domestically Mr Kagame's influence, direct or imagined, is felt everywhere ... "No one can speak his mind, and if your mind is not what the government wants it to be, you remain silent," says one former Kagame staffer.'



# One media story about Rwanda

In the British media there is only one story about Rwanda. The *Daily Telegraph* of 25.10.14 sums it up: 'In the course of 100 days between April and July 1994, some 800,000 Tutsi and 'moderate' Hutu were murdered by Hutu militias and civilians...' The word 'genocide' is often used.

By **JAKE THOMPSON**

The moment the story starts is on April 6 1994, when Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana - a Hutu - was assassinated.

His plane was shot down as it approached the airport at Kigali, the Rwandan capital. Not only he but twelve people in all died in the attack, including the President of neighbouring Burundi.

But in fact the story does not start there. It starts at least as early as 1990 when the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), an invading army, started a war on Rwanda.

This organization was made up mainly of the children of the former Tutsi elite of Rwanda who had fled the country, some in 1959, some later.

The war was intended to restore to the ousted elite what they had lost: the position of privilege which they had held in pre-colonial and colonial times.

The Tutsis comprised about 14 per cent of the population, the Hutus about 85 per cent and the tiny Twa minority one per cent.

At the time of the attack, according to Patrick Mazinhaka, vice chairman of the RPF, addressing the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa on May 24 1994, there was an RPF battalion stationed in Kigali.

He continued: 'On April 10, 1994 [i.e. four days after the assassination of the President] our forces started a general military campaign with the following objectives:

1. To reinforce our battalion in Kigali
2. To rescue the Rwandese population which was then under general attack
3. To contribute to restoration of law and order ...'

For all of the hundred days cited by the *Daily Telegraph* a war was going on

throughout Rwanda, a war which uprooted millions of people and cost many lives.

On 13.4.94 (so only seven days after the assassination of the president), the



**Former President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana who was assassinated in April 1994.**

*Financial Times* reported: 'Rwanda's five day old government [the successor government to that of the murdered Habyarimana] fled the embattled capital Kigali yesterday as rebels fought their way into the city in an attempt to seize power. ...The rebels ... have rejected United Nations attempts to mediate a ceasefire in the capital...'

On 4.5.94 the *Financial Times* wrote: 'Rebels of the Rwanda Patriotic Front failed to appear yesterday for peace talks in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha. A delegation of the rump government which now controls barely a third of Rwanda had already arrived in Arusha.' This was a mere month after the assassination.

The determination of the Rwanda Patriotic Front to pursue the war to victory was again confirmed in a *Financial Times* report of 25.5.94: 'In Nairobi, Mr Theogen Ruvasingwa, the secretary-general of the RPF ... said, "The UN will not be able to restore law and order in Rwanda. That is the task of the RPF." Diplomats in the region ... believe the RPF is unlikely to agree to a new peace accord while it retains the military advantage.'

Very quickly reports appeared of the mass exodus of the Rwandan people as the RPF advanced through the country.

The *Financial Times* reported on 11.5.94: 'Two weeks ago, in the largest and swiftest exodus the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has ever seen, some 250,000 people surged into north-western Tanzania in the space of 24 hours.' In the 'makeshift camp at Benaco ... children make up half the 250,000 population...'

On 25.5.94 the *Financial Times* said: 'More than a million people - an eighth of the population - are estimated to be displaced.'

On 7.7.94 the *Financial Times* reported the RPF capture of Kigali and Butare, Rwanda's second city.

On 14.7.94 the paper reported: 'Tens of thousands of Hutu refugees, mainly emaciated women and children, have begun crossing from Rwanda into eastern Zaire, to flee advancing Tutsi-led rebels ... "It is a humanitarian catastrophe," said Ms Johanna Grombach, Red Cross chief in Goma.'

By 18 July the flood of refugees into Zaire had reached between 800,000 and a million. An official of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called it 'the exodus of a nation'.

*The Guardian* reported on 15.7.94:



'Fear among Hutus is acute. The RPF ... has carried out systematic summary executions of those it identified as responsible for the slaughter [of Tutsis]. They often included government officials, whether or not they had a direct hand in the killings. The RPF has also not shown restraint when civilians get in the way of its military advance.'

On 18th July the RPF took the last government stronghold of Gisenyi and claimed victory. They named a Hutu as president, Pasteur Bizimungu, who, however, was a longstanding member of the RPF. The *Financial Times* suggested: 'Real power will almost certainly remain in the hands of General Kagame ...'

So the 100 days was over. But the suffering of the Rwandan people was to continue.

### 1.6 million refugees in 100 days

About 1.6 million refugees had fled to camps in a 'safe area' in south-west Rwanda policed by 2,500 French troops under a UN mandate; but France ruled out keeping its troops in Rwanda beyond their declared deadline of August 21st.

Medecins sans Frontieres said that 40 per cent of them were suffering from malnutrition.

The *Guardian* reported on 15.8.94: '[People] say they have heard stories of RPF soldiers killing people just outside the French zone. Some of the stories are true ...' On 18.8.94 Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu said the RPF would move into the 'safe zone' as soon as the French withdrew.

Reports appeared of the dreadful conditions of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire, hit by malnutrition, dysentery and cholera.

Galway reporter Michael Lally spent ten days there reporting for *RTE* television and described them in the *Connacht Tribune* on 5.8.94 as days spent in hell: "If you can imagine the stench of five to ten thousand bodies under a blazing sun ... The people are so traumatised they do not talk to themselves, they do not talk to us ... here you had 5,000 children and the only thing you could hear was the sobbing of tears – the awful wail when a child is in distress ... These people have nothing. They cannot even get a glass of clean water.'

On 12.8.94 the *Irish Times* reported that some 800,000 people were

stranded in Goma, Zaire, and that about 25,000 people had died during the past month.

Inside the country the government had a list of 30,000 Hutus it planned to prosecute for genocide and murder. No one knew, inside the country or in the refugee camps, who was on the list.

The *Cork Examiner* reported on 5.8.94: 'Life is slowly returning to the Rwandan capital Kigali with an influx of Tutsi refugees, some of whom have been in exile for decades. They are steadily taking the place – and the homes – of the Hutus who drove them out and who have now fled in their turn.... So far only a trickle of Hutus have headed home.' The *Irish Times* on 11.8.94 wrote: 'Right now RPF officials are claiming businesses and houses in Kigali.'

On 7.4.95 the *BBC News* would report that some quarter of a million Tutsis in Uganda, many of whom had been there since 1959, were returning to Rwanda, where each family would be given three hectares of land, half for planting, half for pasture.

The *Guardian* wrote on 24.9.94: 'UN refugee officials in Geneva suspended the policy of encouraging the two million refugees in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi to return, claiming that thousands of Hutus had been massacred by the government army of the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front ... The UNHCR, in a report published in Geneva, said that in the past week hundreds of Hutu returnees had crossed the border to camps in Zaire after seeing the widespread massacres of fellow Hutus by RPF troops ... the UNHCR investigative team ... visited 41 of the country's 145 communes and interviewed hundreds of returnees ...'

A team of investigators had uncovered evidence of recent mass graves.

On 6.4.95 - a year after 6 April, 1994

- the *Financial Times* reported: 'In Kigali ... where the Tutsi-dominated government plans to put on trial today the first of 30,000 detainees suspected of murder and other crimes, the army is on the alert ... The run-up to the anniversary has seen a surge in arrests, with the already dangerously overcrowded prisons taking in an extra 1,500 detainees each week ... 2.2 million Hutu refugees [are] still stubbornly camped in Zaire, Uganda and Tanzania.'

Finally the worst fears of those in the former French protected enclave were realised. On 24.4.95 the *Times* reported 'As the death toll soared from the carnage at Kibeho, the Rwandan camp forcibly cleared this week by the Rwandan army ... UN officials [estimated] that up to 8,000 people could have died in Saturday's crack-down ... Kibeho, which housed 80,000 – 120,000 people, was the largest of nine camps set up in south-western Rwanda as Hutus ... poured into a zone temporarily under French protection ... Soldiers were seen shooting into the crowd, bayonetting refugees trying to escape and firing heavy mortars.'

On 6.7.95 the *Financial Times* reported: 'Severe overcrowding in Rwanda's prisons, which are holding 47,000 Hutus ... is exacting a horrifyingly high death toll among inmates, the charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said yesterday. Dr Arnaud Veisse of MSF said that since last September 1,000 had died at Gitarama prison, designed for 400 but holding more than 7,000. Prisoners have less than half a square metre of space each and many are forced to stand day and night. Dr Veisse said detainees were dying from dysentery, malaria, pneumonia and other chest infections caught from constant exposure ... the courts ... have yet to complete a single genocide case ...' On

4.4.98, so nearly three years later, the *Guardian* would publish a letter from Anita Tiesser, Amnesty International, which referred to 'the 130,000 people crammed into prisons in Rwanda, in inhuman conditions ... a significant proportion are widely believed to be innocent. Many have been arrested arbitrarily.'

On 29.8.95 the *Financial Times* reported: 'The office of Rwanda's president said yesterday that the country's Hutu prime minister, Mr Faustin Twagiramungu, had been



Genocide memorial site - Nyamata, Rwanda

dismissed ... diplomats said Mr Twagiramungu had resigned in protest at reports of killing by the army. ... Mr Twagiramungu often described [the army] as an 'occupation force'.... Mr Seth Sendashanga, the interior minister, under guard at his Kigali home ... said ... crimes by both civilians and soldiers [were] going unpunished ... Since persuading Kinshasa to halt the expulsions of Hutus last week, the UNHCR has only been able to lure about 300 refugees to Rwanda.'

In October 1996 reports appeared of the war in Zaire which was to cause turmoil to the Rwandan refugees in the country. On 22.10.96 the Guardian reported: 'Almost 250,000 Rwandan and Burundian Hutu refugees in Zaire have abandoned their twelve camps around Uvira, where the army is battling against Tutsi rebels, and were suspected to be in the northern mountains.' And the first of many denials: 'the Rwandan army denied that fighters had crossed from its territory.'

Gradually news appeared, garbled at first, of an alliance, eventually successful, between Zairean Laurent Kabila and Rwanda and Uganda to overthrow President Mobutu. 1.1 million Rwandan Hutu refugees were caught in another war.

On 5.11.96 the *Financial Times* reported Rwandan troops were already in Goma. On 6.11.96 it wrote: 'Residents said journalists had only been allowed into Goma once Rwandan Red Cross workers had cleared away more than 400 bodies from the streets. The road to the airport, still scattered with bodies, was barricaded, as was the route to the west, making it impossible to discover the condition of 500,000 Hutu refugees who are fleeing further into Zaire to escape the fighting.'

On 11.11.96 the *Financial Times* said there were 'more than a million Rwandan refugees trapped in east Zaire' and referred to 'a virtual media black-out.... Many believe the reason media coverage of the conflict has been so carefully controlled is because the rebels are determined not to allow shocking television coverage of such a showdown that could force the international community to act and discredit Kigali and its friends in western eyes.'

Forced repatriation led to refugees from Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire returning to Rwanda. But in the case of Zaire, the UNHCR said the estimated 500,000 refugees who had returned were a fraction of the refugee population. On 21.11.96 they reported locating up to 700,000 missing Rwandan Hutu refugees using western satellite pictures.

On 10.3.97 - almost three years after April 6, 1994 - the *Financial Times* reported on the refugees who had not returned to Rwanda in November 1996 and had fled deeper into Zaire, and who were now trapped by the fighting with malnutrition and cholera rising among them. 'Ms Emma Bonino, European humanitarian affairs commissioner ... on her return from a visit to the region which she described as a "journey to hell"... said she had personally seen about 200,000 refugees and believed at least 200,000 more were sheltering in the Zairean rain forest.'

On 27.3.97 in the *Financial Times* there was a report of '100,000 refugees camped 30 km south of the Zairean river port of Kisangani ... since leaving their camps in Bukavu five months ago they have trekked constantly westwards, through forests and across rivers, in a

... Humanitarian aid agencies have been used repeatedly by the military to locate refugees or lure them out of the forest in order to eliminate them ...

desperate 500 km journey fuelled by terror. Now they are trapped ... With every move, the sick and old have dropped behind [sic]. Hundreds drowned crossing the Zaire river. Bodies scattered along the path south attest to the price paid ... the UN estimates that 120 Hutus are dying a day.'

On 29.4.97 the *Financial Times* reported: 'Thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees returned to a camp south of the Zairean city of Kisangani yesterday, telling of a horrific slaughter that prompted their exodus last week ... Aid officials and journalists allowed by rebel authorities to visit Biaro camp saw the bodies of many refugees who had been hacked to death. Others among the more than 5,000 refugees who emerged from the forest yesterday spoke of hundreds of dead scattered through the dense undergrowth. Aid officials said dozens more refugees appeared on the verge of death from either illness or injury. The condition of the refugees shocked aid workers.'

On 18.5.97 Laurent Kabila proclaimed himself President of Zaire, now renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 21.5.97 the *Guardian* said: 'Medecins sans Frontieres said it was

told by an alliance military commander that "all those in the forest are considered to be the enemy". The report said refugees had been indiscriminately killed in the forest or in attacks on camps as part of an "extermination strategy". "Humanitarian aid agencies have been used repeatedly by the military to locate refugees or lure them out of the forest in order to eliminate them," it said.'

On 18.6.97 Edward Mortimer in the *Financial Times* quoted from the *Washington Post*. 'Mr John Pomfret, the reporter, described how in mid-April, the inhabitants of a village called Kasese, urged on by military officers loyal to Mr Kabila, "tore through a camp of refugees, most of them Rwandan Hutus, hacking and spearing men, women and children." Armed Hutus fought them off. But "a day later, Mr Kabila's rebel forces stepped in, according to survivors and local residents, ravaged the 55,000 refugees for seven hours, firing wildly into the encampment." Hundreds died and were buried in mass graves. And this was "just one of numerous tales of mass killings ... carried out by soldiers loyal to Mr Kabila ..." One word is conspicuously missing from Mr Pomfret's report ... "genocide" ... about three weeks ago there were "no major concentrations [of Rwandan refugees] left" though some 200,000 refugees remain unaccounted for ...'

On 14.7.97 the *Financial Times* reported: '... a UN investigator banned by Congo's new government identified 134 massacres of Rwandan refugees by forces loyal to Mr Kabila [who has] rejected the claims.' On 21.9.97 the *Sunday Times* reported: 'Kabila's hands are tied because the killings were mainly carried out by Rwandan Tutsi soldiers who backed his rebellion in return for being able to slaughter Hutus in revenge for the massacre of up to half a million people in 1994.'

And then the *Guardian* reported on 25.4.98: 'Firing squads [in Rwanda] yesterday executed 22 people found guilty of genocide during the civil war in 1994.... The [public] executions took place at five sites throughout the country... Human rights groups say most of the 117 people sentenced to death so far in Rwanda's continuing trials have not been given a fair hearing. Some of them had no legal representation or were denied access to their case files. A number of trials were dealt with in just a few hours ... A statement from the Foreign Ministry spoke of the need for "punitive and educational justice".'

On 9.5.98 it was reported that Rwanda had ordered the expulsion of Jose Luis Herrero, the UN human rights spokesman in the country.

# MI5 and the Hobsbawm File<sup>1</sup>

George Heartfield reviews an essay by Frances Stonor Saunders in the *London Review of Books Magazine* - 25 March 2015

The British Security Service (MI5) released its file on Eric Hobsbawm, long-time member of the Communist Party and historian, in 2014. Personal Files (PFs) are only released after their subjects have died. Hobsbawm died in 2012 at the age of 95.

**By GEORGE HEARTFIELD**

Another rule is that MI5 only releases such material after fifty years, which explains why the Hobsbawm file deposited at the National Archives in Kew ends in the mid-1960s. The rest of the file is withheld.

Frances Stonor Saunders has delved into the part of the Hobsbawm file released so far, which nevertheless is still extensive, running to some 1000 pages, distilled its contents and has produced a fascinating insight into the secretive world of Britain's security services.

It includes MI5's links to Hitler's fascist Germany, the use of Nazi war criminals after the war, and its relationship to the BBC and vetting. Saunders has used other sources including Hobsbawm's autobiography, *Interesting Times*, to fill in gaps in the record. Her essay was published by the *London Review of Books* in March 2015.

In her essay Saunders traces Hobsbawm's life from his early years in Germany.

## Berlin 1933

On 25 January 1933, the 16-year-old Eric Hobsbawm marched as one of thousands through central Berlin to Karl Liebknecht Haus, the headquarters of the German Communist Party (KPD).

As Hobsbawm would recall much later, there was singing - 'The Internationale', peasant war songs, the 'Soviet Airmen's Song' - with intervals of heavy silence. The red flags and banners could not dispel the greyness - that which faced the beleaguered movement in the short term was a reckoning: 'danger, capture, resistance to interrogation, defiance in defeat'.<sup>2</sup>

Five days later, on 30 January, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. On 24 February, the police, aug-



Hobsbawm, aged 94.

mented by the newly enrolled 'auxiliary police' of stormtroopers raided Karl Liebknecht Haus. In anticipation of this, the KPD had been moving its records to private addresses. Its leading officials were working out of anonymous premises scattered round the city, and secret post offices had been installed in a piano store and a coal business.

But Hermann Göring, minister of the interior, was on to them - 'My mission is only to destroy and exterminate, nothing more!' - and few escaped the truckloads of SA and SS who roared through the streets and snatched them, one by one, from their hideouts. They were taken to improvised prisons, beaten up, tortured and killed.

The KPD leader, Ernst Thälmann, was arrested on 3 March, and later managed to smuggle out details of his treatment:

"They ordered me to take off my pants and then two men grabbed me by the back of the neck and placed me across a footstool. A uniformed [political police] officer with a whip of hippopotamus hide in his hand then beat my buttocks with measured strokes. Driven wild with pain I repeatedly screamed at the top of my voice. Then they held my mouth shut for a while and hit me in the face, and with a whip across chest and back. I then collapsed."

(Thälmann was held in solitary confinement for 11 years, before being shot in Buchenwald on Hitler's orders in August 1944.)

'Arrests upon arrests,' Joseph Goebbels noted with satisfaction. 'Now the Red pest is being thoroughly rooted out.' By April 1933, 25,000 communists were in 'protective custody'. Dachau, the first official concentration camp, was set up to hold them.

Hobsbawm, whose parents had died within two years of each other, was living with his aunt in the Halensee district. He was not a member of the KPD, but of the Sozialistischer Schülerbund (Socialist Students Federation), specifically designed for secondary-school students.

In early April, an uncle arrived in Berlin to remove Hobsbawm to the safety of London, where his paternal grandfather had settled in the 1870s.

## MI5 hand-in-hand with the Gestapo

The week Hobsbawm left Berlin, Guy Liddell, MI5's German-speaking deputy head of counter-espionage, arrived from London. Liddell left London on 30 March, and stayed for ten days.

He had been invited to meet officials of the German Political Police, Abteilung 1A, which had installed itself in the KPD headquarters, now conveniently vacant.

Liddell was assisted by Frank Foley, MI6's Berlin station chief, whose diplomatic cover was passport control officer. On 31 March, the two men entered Karl Liebknecht Haus, now renamed Horst Wessel Haus and decorated with a huge



swastika where only weeks earlier a picture of Lenin had graced the building.

Liddell and Foley were introduced to Rudolf Diels, head of Abteilung 1A, who explained that it was his intention to exterminate communism in its widest sense. By this he meant not only the Communist Party and its subordinate bodies but also other left-wing organisations.

It was immediately clear to Liddell that there was ‘certainly a good deal of “third degree” work going on’ and that ‘Jews, communists and even social democrats’ were being ‘submitted to every kind of outrage’.

Liddell settled down with Foley, in a room placed at their disposal, to examine the files of Abteilung 1A, while their hosts ‘interrogated’ detainees held elsewhere in the building.

Of particular interest to Liddell were documents belonging to the KPD, looted by SA men ‘who just threw [them] into lorries and then dumped them in disorder in some large rooms’. ‘If placed virtually at our disposal,’ Liddell noted, ‘[these records] will be of great assistance in establishing how the Comintern’s work in Western Europe and the Colonies is being organised.’

Diels ordered that Liddell and Foley ‘be given every possible facility’, including the opportunity to copy documents; the copies would then be forwarded to MI5 in London by Foley.

Liddell left Berlin on 9 April, after a congenial dinner with Ribbentrop the previous evening, satisfied that a crucial liaison had been established. In their present mood, the German authorities ‘were extremely ready to help us in any way they can’ – after all, were they not tied to the British by the same enterprise of saving Europe from the menace of Bolshevism?

Any normal restrictions on the ‘free interchange of information’ (what is now called ‘intelligence sharing’) had been pushed aside, and Liddell was confident that if ‘constant personal contact [were] maintained’, the relationship would persist after the current ‘rather hysterical atmosphere of sentiment and brutality dies down’. On 26 April Abteilung 1A was reformed as the Gestapo, with Diels as its first chief.

MI5’s pre-war liaison with Hitler’s political police was built on the promise of reciprocity, so there was two-way traffic in black-letters between Berlin and London.

MI5 and MI6 had information

that must have come from a German source concerning the political activities of the left-wing refugees who sought sanctuary in Britain from 1933 onwards. If they didn’t already have a Personal File, most of them acquired one within days of arriving at a British port.

The idea that the Nazis themselves – or their supporters in Britain – might pose a danger to national security was very slow to mature in the British intelligence community.

In a letter circulated to all chief constables in May 1934, MI5’s director general, Vernon Kell, explained that fascism was, to a great extent, ‘a natural reaction from communism’. Hitler’s rise to power made virtually no impression at all on the British security services, except as an opportunity to expand the franchise on anti-communist surveillance.

Hobsbawm went up to King’s College, Cambridge, in 1936 and immediately joined the local student branch of the Communist Party. After graduating in 1939 Hobsbawm remained at King’s as a student researcher until he was called up in February 1940 and assigned to the Royal Engineers as a sapper.

He was puzzled by this decision, having initially been put forward for a cipher course, but it was explained to him that this proposal had been aborted because his mother was German. His unit was stationed in Merseyside during the great

Luftwaffe raids on Liverpool in 1941, and mobilised to clear up the ruins on the mornings after. Off duty, he attended meetings of the local party branch.

### Hans Kahle

By June 1942, Hobsbawm had been transferred to the Army Education Corps as a sergeant instructor, teaching German and running a programme on current affairs at Bulford Camp in Wiltshire.

On 20 June, he wrote a letter to a friend, Hans Kahle, inviting him to give a talk to one of the local army units. Three days later, a photographic copy of this letter was forwarded to MI5 by a special investigations unit hidden deep within the General Post Office.

A request for a ‘trace’ on Kahle’s unknown correspondent was immediately sent out to Special Branch, which returned the information that a similar name, ‘Hobsdown’, appeared on a list of men in the armed forces ‘who are obviously members of the Communist Party of Great Britain in Merseyside’. This is the first page of PF 211,764. Its subject was now an official ‘target’ of MI5.

His file was opened because he had, unwittingly, served himself up as a close associate (‘My dear Kahle’) of a man believed to be a high-level Soviet agent. MI5 had long been pursuing traces on Kahle, from his communist activism in Germany dating back to the 1920s until his escape from Berlin in the 1930s.

Kahle’s file, PF 47,192, was opened in 1935, but it included close knowledge of his work for the KPD before this date, and it’s likely that some of this intelligence came from MI5’s liaison with the Gestapo.

Kahle, we learn, had escaped to Switzerland, but in 1935 he went to Moscow. A year later, he resurfaced in Spain as commander of the 11th International Brigade. According to Saunders he is the model for Hemingway’s General Hans in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

In 1939, this ‘notorious’ and ‘particularly dangerous’ man was briefly in London before being interned as an ‘enemy alien’ on the Isle of Man, whence he was deported to Canada.

Following his release in December 1940, he made his way back to London and worked to recruit anti-Nazi refugees to the Free German Brigade.

Initially, MI5’s inquiries into Sergeant Eric Hobsbawm returned little. On 4 July, they wrote to



**Joachim von Ribbentrop  
Nazi Minister for Foreign Affairs  
who had a ‘congenial dinner’ with MI5**

Southern Command HQ asking for information, including his home address 'so that inquiries into his antecedents may be made'. MI5 continued its search for traces of Hobsbawm in its own records, which were housed in the Registry. This repository, containing an estimated 500,000 files by the mid-1950s, was organised according to an elaborate system of cross-referencing between Personal Files, Subject Files and Y Boxes (highly sensitive).

### King Street bugged

In August 1942, Y Boxes 2127 and 927 yielded a few mentions of Hobsbawm's name. The extracts copied into his file from these boxes were taken from the transcribed conversations of officials of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), whose offices in King Street, Covent Garden were comprehensively bugged: the building was studded with hidden microphones (some of which fell out of the ceiling during a later refurbishment), and all telephone calls were permanently monitored.

Product received from these listening devices was codenamed Source North. The transcription centre was known as the Gristery, after its formidable supervisor Evelyn Grist.

As well as listening in to telephone calls and bugging meetings, MI5 also had its own people in King St. Julia Pirie, for example, "spent two decades as an MI5 agent at the heart of the Communist Party of Great Britain, most of it as personal assistant to the party's general secretary."<sup>3</sup>

The Y Box transcripts featuring Hobsbawm confirmed that he was an active member of the CPGB. Pressed by MI5, Hobsbawm's commanding officer returned a critical appraisal of his activities, writing that he considered Sergeant Hobsbawm to be 'highly partisan': 'He has a tendency to produce left-wing literature and to leave it lying about. He is known on one occasion to have invited a warrant officer ... to join the Communist Party.'

Hobsbawm had been reprimanded, in the presence of officers, 'for the abuse of his position as a teacher, and for continuously presenting current affairs in a partisan light', and from now on he was only to be employed in the teaching of elementary German classes. It was agreed that he be kept 'under close and careful observation'.

In May 1944 Hobsbawm was stationed briefly on the Isle of Wight, where he saw the gathering of the invasion fleet for France, but it was quickly deemed 'essential' to post him somewhere else as soon as possible, 'in view of the many se-



**Nazi Colonel, Reinhard Gehlen recruited by the USA at the end of WWII to use his spy ring against the USSR**

cret and operational activities going on in and around this island'. So he was sent to Cheltenham, assigned to a military hospital to teach handicrafts while the D-Day landing craft disembarked in Normandy.

A few months later, at MI5's initiative, Hobsbawm was removed from the overseas embarkation list with the MI5 comment: 'He would be far better kept under our eye in this country.' In April 1945, just as the Red Army reached Berlin, he applied for a job in the BBC's Services Educational Unit, and was deemed 'a most suitable candidate', but MI5 stepped in, warning the personnel department that 'he is not likely to lose any opportunity ... to disseminate propaganda and obtain recruits for the Communist Party.' The BBC consequently agreed to 'arrange that Hobsbawm will not be accepted for the proposed employment ... and in the event of his applying ... at a later date, his name will be referred to [MI5] for vetting before any other action is taken'.

After demobilisation, Hobsbawm returned to his research at King's College,

but the university as a whole held him at arm's length, turning him down for several posts. However, eventually, Hobsbawm managed to secure a lectureship in history at Birkbeck College.

At the end of the war Hans Kahle had made his way to Germany, emerging in February 1946 as head of the People's Police in communist-held Mecklenburg. MI5 date his death to 1949, and kept his Personal File active until late 1954 in the hope that his traces might yet lead to live targets.

Hobsbawm's letters were steamed open with kettles in a room on the first floor of the Post Office's St Martin's-le-Grand depot, near St Paul's Cathedral. The GPO's Special Investigations Unit had a facility in every major sorting office in the country. Photostats were made of letters and the copies were then couriered to MI5's Mayfair headquarters, while the originals were forwarded to the cover address.

### Assistance from Nazi War Criminals

Saunders refers to Arthur Miller's description of the early years of realignment at the end of the war as 'this wrenching shift, this ripping off of Good and Evil labels from one nation and pasting them onto another'.

Fresh traces on suspected communists were being received daily from British intelligence outposts in the defeated territories of the Third Reich.

As staff in London struggled to cope with the backlog of new information, officers in the field pumped their 'high value' sources, which included an assortment of Nazi war criminals, among them Friedrich Buchardt, leader of an SS death squad that specialised in the slaughter of Jews and communists, and Gestapo officer Horst Kopkow, responsible for the execution of some three hundred captured British agents.

The Americans cherry-picked Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyon, and Reinhard Gehlen, whose German army intelligence unit was preserved intact to build and direct a spy ring against the Soviet Union. These men, all bought their way out of criminal proceedings with their unique currency, their expertise and files on communists.

### Full Sheep-Dip

Official British anti-communism has attracted much less attention than McCarthyism in America.

In Britain, the steps taken, with cross-party agreement, involved a much quieter programme of mass vetting and a subsidiary practice known as the 'purge procedure', by which suspect civil ser-

vants or employees of businesses working on sensitive government contracts were removed from their jobs. ‘Positive’, or ‘developed’ vetting – known as the ‘full sheep-dip’ – involved telephone checks, the opening of mail, Special Branch inquiries, employers’ records.

### BBC vetting

Vetting of sensitive posts was presented as a perfectly sensible policy, a national security matter, but it provided legitimacy and cover for a far wider programme of top secret political screening whose details are only now beginning to emerge.

At the BBC, for example, upwards of 50 per cent of all staff were vetted without their knowledge. This programme, whose existence was officially denied until 2013, was co-ordinated by MI5 and the BBC’s chief assistant to the director of personnel, later retitled manager special duties.

Working out of Room 105 (the numeral ‘5’ always denotes the mothership) this assistant, in liaison with a designated MI5 handler, arranged for the top jobs and those that involved access to classified material to be given the full sheep dip.

All other positions – current staff as well as new applicants – were processed through ‘normal vetting’, of which the subjects were unaware.

In the late 1980s, between six and eight thousand posts out of twelve thousand at the BBC were being vetted. In addition, every BBC employee was required to sign the Official Secrets Act.

Hobsbawm’s PF further reveals that MI5 had access to the BBC’s List of Speakers and Scriptwriters, a copy of which was filed in the Registry as serial 192a in Subject File 65/47.

Hobsbawm’s status on this list was periodically updated, for the BBC’s attention, with comments such as ‘Eric Hobsbawm continues to be an active communist.’ The objective was to deter

the corporation from using his services.

In March 1953, Hobsbawm managed even so to get into Broadcasting House to record a talk for the Third Programme. MI5’s response was immediate: a confidential letter was despatched to one Miss Wadsley stating that she ‘may care to know for future reference that this man has a communist history dating from 1936’.

In the final (accessible) volume of his file before he left for a three-month ex-



1941: Orwell at the BBC

change visit to Stanford University in May 1960, MI5 warned the FBI that he was ‘a long-standing member of the Communist Party of Great Britain’. In December 1962, the Security Service attempted to sabotage Hobsbawm’s planned 12-month tour of South America. It was agreed that MI6’s Washington station, armed with a ‘dossier on his communist associations’, would press the case against his appointment with the CIA and the FBI.

When this proved unsuccessful, it was decided that Hobsbawm would be monitored by MI6 agents in South America. These are the last entries in PF 211,764. For the remainder, you will have to wait another fifty years.

### Orwell’s List

George Orwell, often presented as a left winger, drew up a list of ‘communists’, divided into three columns headed Name, Job and Remarks, which is strikingly like that of the Personal Files released by MI5.

Orwell’s infamous list of 38 journalists and writers, whom he believed to be ‘crypto-communists, fellow travellers or inclined that way’, included remarks such as ‘makes huge sums of money in USSR’ (Priestley), ‘very anti-white’ (Paul Robeson), ‘reliably pro-Russian on all major issues’ (Shaw).

In May 1949, Orwell had donated his ‘strictly confidential’ list to a semi-covert branch of the Foreign Office, who passed it on to the security services.

In time, ‘communist’ came to be very widely defined by MI5 and included people who were trade unionists, members of CND, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and many other organisations.

During the Cold War and long after, there was a blindness to right-wing organisations. According to Cathy Mas-siter, who worked at MI5 from 1970 to 1983, ‘there was only one person covering all of right-wing subversion,’ while there were ‘many dozens’ dealing with communism.

By this time at least half a million people were on MI5’s files.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Saunders FS, *Stuck on the Flypaper: MI5 and the Hobsbawm File*, London Review of Books, 25 March 2015.
2. Hobsbawm E, *Interesting Times: A 20th-Century Life* (2002).
3. Obituary, Julia Pirie, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 2008.

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