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DISUNITY IN THE EU

THE NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

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Capitalism is increasingly in political crisis. Theresa May can't govern and, at least till now, seemed immovable. Donald Trump is besieged by investigations into his political and business dealings, but is untouchable. Emanuel Macron's lack of substance shows as he struggles to deal with the Gilets Jaunes protesters and even the most capable of them, Angela Merkel, is increasingly powerless as she makes her slow exit from German politics.

Ruling class crisis

Brexit drags on. It is difficult to know what May thought she would achieve by opening negotiations with Labour when she was unwilling to compromise and against the wishes of many in her own party. The Tories intransigence and instability led to the inevitable collapse of the talks. Then May made a bad situation worse by proposing her own "compromise", infuriating Tory MPs even more and failing to win Labour support. No amount of manoeuvring changes the parliamentary arithmetic. With insufficient support from her own side and the DUP, no version of May's deal could succeed, nor was there a majority for any other plan.

Yet, as Alex Davidson points out in *Brexit and capitalist rivalries*, fearing a worse outcome the Tories resisted replacing May and cannot face a general election. Their dreadful results in the English local elections, analysed by Steve Howell in *Local elections – what are voters telling us?* and, as we go to press, a predicted dire result in the European elections adds to the crisis. May's demise as Prime Minister is now in sight.

Among the many conflicting interests between capitalist countries Alex Davidson deals with the response to the rise of China. This has also caused further splits among the Tories. May's decision to allow the Chinese company Huawei

to be involved in developing Britain's 5G network led to the sacking of the Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, for allegedly leaking confidential information. The ruling class is divided over this issue just as they are on Brexit. The United States is at loggerheads with other nations over China, with Huawei centre-stage. It is putting significant pressure on Britain to reverse its position on Huawei, threatening to end intelligence sharing.

As well as China, the US has Iran in its sights. After scuppering the Iran nuclear deal, against the wishes of the EU, it is now engaged in an aggressive military build-up, citing unspecified "credible threats" from Iran. Others have contradicted this, including a British general, pointing to further divisions between capitalist powers.

Competition and conflict

Davidson and John Moore in *Disunity in the European Union*, look at conflicts within the EU and between the EU and other countries, especially the United States. As we are absorbed in Britain with the difficulties of Brexit, it is worth remembering that the EU is not a harmonious club, but an alliance under strain from competing interests. Nevertheless, despite the problems in and between countries, the business of promoting capital's interests abroad continues. The relentless hunt for natural resources and profits is exemplified in *The new scramble for Africa* by Simon Korner. Multiple competing states have economic interests on the continent which they are supporting with a growing diplomatic and military presence.

With the development of information and communications technology, conflict has entered a new dimension. In *The West's cyber wars*, Alex Mitchell refutes the argument that it is only states like Russia and China that have engaged in cyber

warfare. Britain, the US and others have been involved in hacking and interfering in the politics of other countries.

Nor should we allow the 70th anniversary of NATO to pass without noting its role, founded in the cold war to advance the West's interests. As Pat Turnbull points out in *NATO – 70 years of aggression*, despite the end of the Soviet Union, NATO lives on still playing its part in promoting western power.

Neo-liberalism hits communities

The early promise of municipal socialism and the progressive work of Labour councils in the 1980s and 90s was effectively destroyed by successive Tory and New Labour governments. Brian Topping traces this history in *The Private Finance Initiative rip off*. Now a half of all council tax receipts go on PFI interest payments. The ability of councils to act in the interests of the communities they serve has been severely limited by budget cuts and constraints on undertaking capital projects such as house building. Tendering regimes were introduced based solely on cost, ignoring other issues round contracting. All this culminated in PFI which is sucking cash out of councils and local economies and into the pockets of big business.

But there are struggles against the cuts and impoverishment of our communities. In *Dundee fights back* Marion Spöring contrasts the PR image of the city with the stark realities of working class life. Like so many, a once thriving industrial city has been gutted and continues to lose jobs. Local government and health services are experiencing cuts, but trade unionists have fought back with some success and Labour is challenging the Scottish National Party's austerity policies in the city.

BREXIT

& capitalist rivalries

by Alex Davidson

In Britain, a Prime Minister who loses control of Parliament would usually have to call an election or be replaced as leader by someone more able to govern. However, the Tories can't bring themselves to face the voters in a General Election, or get rid of Theresa May. Stuck with a leader who has lost all authority, the Tories are imploding.

Meanwhile the EU gets on with other business.

Brexit has been delayed until 31 October unless a deal is agreed before that date. The date is significant as that is when Jean-Claude Juncker stands down as President of the European Commission. As we go to press, the European elections have still to be held but we already know the favourite to be Juncker's successor. He is Manfred Weber MEP of the German Christian Social Union (CSU) and currently Leader of the European Peoples Party (EPP), the largest grouping in the European Parliament. Juncker is also a member of the EPP as are Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and Michel Barnier, EU Chief Negotiator for the 'UK exiting the EU'.

The EPP is a right-wing Conservative grouping comprising Conservative parties from across the EU including the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU). There are no British parties in the EPP. The UK Tory party is a member of the "Conservatives and Reformists" group.

Manfred Weber, in responding to David Cameron's long since forgot-

ten pathetic negotiations with the EU prior to the Referendum, stated: "The EU is based on an ever-closer union of European peoples. That is set out in the treaties. It is not negotiable for us," Weber told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*. "We cannot sell the soul of Europe," he added, also rejecting any demands to let national parliaments win rights to stop European laws. "If we grant every national parliament a veto right, Europe would come to a standstill," he said. [1]

EU Defence Force

President Macron has been arguing for an ever-closer European Union since he became President of France. He has been pushing especially for an EU Defence Force and he has praised Juncker as being the architect of the project. Nine EU nations, including Britain, have formalised a plan to create a European military intervention force. The force, known as the European Intervention Initiative, is intended to be able to deploy rapidly to deal with crises. [2]

While Germany has been steadily militarising and playing a prominent role in the NATO deployment in Eastern Europe in recent years, Macron is intent on putting France into pole position in the EU military apparatus. At the moment, Britain is the EU bloc's biggest military power. If Britain leaves the EU then France will be the only nuclear armed member. The current EU Multinational Financial Framework (MFF) ends in 2020. For the next MFF (2021 – 2027) the EU Commission will allocate €500 million per year for research in defence and an additional €1 billion



Former Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson

annually in co-finance to help member states turn potential new innovations into prototypes. Together with national contributions the EU Commission expects to mobilise €5.5 billion per year for so-called defence spending after 2020.

Since 2002 the EU has intervened abroad thirty times in three different continents. The EU High Representative, Federico Mogherini, who is the bloc's foreign and security chief, in arguing for the EU Defence force, stated: "There are competences and tools that the EU has and NATO doesn't have. Think of Africa, the security of Africa, EU is more present than NATO, when it comes to training, when it comes to the delicate link between development and security."

NATO

However, the US and NATO are wary of this EU Defence Force. Using the argument of avoiding 'duplication' and demanding 'complementary' capabilities, the US and NATO's leaders continue to put up resistance allowing the EU to operate outside of the alliance's existing umbrella. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General, said, "For me there is no contradiction between EU efforts on defence and a strong NATO. Actually, that works perfectly hand-in-hand, as long as the EU efforts are done in the right way, meaning: not competing, not duplicating with the NATO efforts, but complementing. Then these efforts will strengthen the European pillar in NATO."

However, he also firmly rejected the notion that the EU could ever - or would ever - be able to defend itself. "The only thing we have to be focused on, or aware of, is the risk for any duplication or any misconception that this is something that will replace NATO, because, of course, the EU can never replace NATO when it comes to collective defence and protecting Europe." Stoltenberg added, "What I think is important is that we need to avoid any perception that Europe can manage without NATO, because two World Wars and the Cold War taught us that we need a strong transatlantic bond to preserve peace and stability in Europe. Especially after Brexit, it's obvious that EU efforts cannot replace NATO, because after Brexit, 80% of NATO's defence expenditure will come from non-EU members." These comments came after German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, floated the idea of a "real, true European army" to complement NATO. Her remarks, made during a session of the European Parliament, virtually echoed Macron's call. Stoltenberg stated, "It will be not a wise decision by all those nations who are members of both NATO and the European Union to start to have two sets of command structures, or duplicate what NATO is doing."

Chair of NATO's Military Committee, Air Vice Marshall Sir Stuart Peach, formerly Chief of Britain's Defence Staff, referring to Stoltenberg's remarks, said: "Of course, as chairman of the Military Committee, I agree with [Stoltenberg]. It's unwise to duplicate." Peach emphasized that NATO has a "single set of forces, and in our processes, those forces are trained and assured and certified by NATO." In this interview at the Halifax International Security Forum in November 2018, Sir Stuart Peach, speaking as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, pointed to NATO's strength as a single set of forces, with a unique command-and-control network and planning process. "It's not rhetoric-based. It's real planning based on real data," Peach said. "And therefore, why would you wish to duplicate or replicate the strengths of an existing strong alliance?" [3]

At NATO, no one wants to be seen discouraging greater EU military investment or cooperation but equally they want to defend NATO's command-and-control set-up and maintain US leadership. President Trump has tested the strained bonds with some of America's closest allies by pressuring fellow NATO members to rely less on the U.S. and dedicate a greater percentage of their gross domestic products to defence.

EU / US conflicts

Besides differences over an EU Defence Force there are several other critical areas of difference and conflict between the US and the EU. These include the US pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and imposing sanctions against EU companies; the US ending the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty; the tariffs imposed on EU companies related to the US initiated US-China trade war; and US pressure to stop EU countries buying Russian gas via the Nord Stream pipeline. The US opposition to Nord Stream 2, which will bring Russian gas to Germany is a source of high tension between the US and

Germany. The US is using sanctions against companies involved in the project which has been met with a furious reaction from Germany.

Nord Stream

The Nord Stream pipeline carries natural gas from Vyborg in Russia to Griefswald in Germany under the Baltic Sea. The first pipeline was officially inaugurated on 8 November 2011 by German Chancellor Merkel, Russian President Medvedev, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon and Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte. The pipeline, 759 miles in length is the longest sub-sea pipeline in the world and has a capacity to carry 55 billion cubic metres of natural gas.

Nord Stream AG shareholders are the Russian company Gazprom (51%), the German companies E.ON (15.5%) and Wintershall (15.5%), the Dutch company Gasunie (9%) and the French company Engie (9%). The Chair of Nord Stream's Board is Gerhard Schroder, former German Chancellor (1998-2005).

Nord Stream 2 will double the capacity to 110 billion cubic metres and is scheduled to come into operation in late 2019. Nord Stream AG signed a financing agreement for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project with the German company UNIPER, the Austrian company OMV, Royal Dutch Shell, the German company Wintershall and the French company Engie.

The aim of the US sanctions is to block Russian gas supplies to Europe and instead to sell shale gas from the United States. The Nord Stream project has split the EU, which the US is using to its advantage.

The Nord Stream pipeline bypasses countries like Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States. 9 EU countries signed a letter criticising the project. [4]

■ Ukraine fears the loss of transit revenue if Russian gas supplies don't



Angela Merkel at the Nord Stream opening ceremony 2011

pass through their territory anymore once the new pipeline is built.

■ Lithuania's state-owned gas trader signed a deal in May 2017 to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) directly from the United States and is part of Lithuania's efforts to diversify its gas suppliers and reduce its reliance on Russia's Gazprom.

■ Poland's state-run gas firm PGNiG received its first U.S. spot delivery of LNG from Cheniere Energy in June 2017.

■ Croatia is planning to complete the building of an LNG terminal in 2019.

Three Seas Summit

12 countries bordering the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas formed a consortium, dubbed the "Three Seas Initiative", in 2016 to develop regional infrastructure, trade and energy projects. [5] On 6 July 2017 a summit of the presidents of the countries involved gathered in Warsaw, hosted jointly by Poland and Croatia. The Three Seas Initiative is seen as a Polish bid to carve out influence outside the European Union with which the nationalist government has repeatedly clashed.

US President Trump visited Poland to take part in the "Three Seas Summit" of leaders from central Europe, Baltic states and the Balkans. At the "Three Seas Summit" Trump promoted U.S. natural gas exports to the leaders from central and eastern Europe, a region currently heavily reliant on Russian supplies.

Inter-capitalist rivalries

These various inter-capitalist rivalries are a reflection of the new era of great power politics in which American power is waning; China is becoming a bigger and bigger player; Russia is defending itself and its interests; and the EU bloc, under the hegemony of Germany, and despite internal differences, is striving for ever-closer union.

Britain's place, as an imperialist power, in this scheme of things has long been diminished. After World War 2 British capitalism tried to ride three horses at once, that is, be the USA's closest ally; operate as a key player in Western Europe; and still keep special relations with its old Empire through the Commonwealth.

The decision to give priority to London's Western European interests over the preservation of special

trading and financial links with the Commonwealth was taken by the Macmillan Government in the early 1960s. After several rejections Britain gained entry to the Common Market, the predecessor of the EU.

However, the question of priority between Western Europe and the United States remained unresolved and has been a continuing cause of division within the Tory Party. The latest example being the sacking of Tory Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, by Prime Minister Theresa May over the leak about the Government's intention to use the Chinese company Huawei in the development of the 5G network, despite heavy US pressure to boycott Huawei.

Although the dominant position within Britain's ruling circles has been to remain in the EU, and remains so, these divisions in Britain's ruling circles have been reflected in the Tory Party over decades. The divisions erupted over the EU Referendum and in the three years since have intensified to the point where the Tory Party, the party of choice of the British ruling class, is engulfed by them.

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[1] *UK reuters.com* 7 June 2014.

[2] The nine EU nations are France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Estonia, Spain and Portugal

[3] Interview with *Politico*, 16 November 2018.

[4] The EU countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania and Ukraine.

[5] The 12 countries are Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria.

DISUNITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

by John Moore

The growing tensions between EU countries reveals the true disharmony at the heart of the Union. Below are some of the main areas of dispute:

FRANCE VS GERMANY PART 1

France is under pressure from Germany to give up its permanent seat on the UN Security Council and convert it into a European Union seat. Nuclear-armed France has been one of the five permanent Security Council members since 1945 – along with the US, China, Russia (formerly the Soviet Union) and Britain. Germany wants to take its place at the world's top table, using the cloak of the EU to disguise its national ambitions. German finance minister Olaf Scholz has offered France the position of permanent EU ambassador to the United Nations as a sop to get it to agree. But France is guarding its Security Council position jealously – with the French Embassy in Washington saying that adopting the proposal would violate the UN Charter.



FRANCE VS GERMANY PART 2

Meanwhile, Angela Merkel's successor as CDU leader, Anna Kramp-Karrenbauer, has rejected Emanuel Macron's call for closer EU integration – contradicting Germany's call for a single EU seat at the UN. Kramp-Karrenbauer argues in *Die Welt am Sonntag* that "European centralism, European statism, the com-



munitisation of debts, the Europeanisation of social systems, and the minimum wage would be the wrong approach." Germany fears Macron might give away further reforms to try to buy off the ongoing protests in France. In doing so, France would be letting the EU austerity side down.

FRANCE VS GERMANY PART 3

A defence export agreement between France and Germany to produce joint weapons systems – principally a new combat tank and a fighter plane – is under threat after Germany halted arms exports to Saudi Arabia following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This move threatens French/British/Italian Eurofighter sales of jointly produced weapons to the Saudis. One French official said: "We are basically betting the future of the French defence industry on co-operation with Germany... What we do not agree to is that Germany decides unilaterally for us." France, which regards itself as a world military power, is determined to resist any impediment to its global role.



Underlying these tensions is the fact that Germany clearly dominates the rest of Europe and has been the biggest beneficiary of the Euro by far, according to a recent study by the Centre for European Policy Studies, which estimates that Germany earned €1.9 trillion from adopting the Euro in its first 20 years. The equivalent move has cost France €3.6 trillion and Italy €4.3 trillion.

FRANCE VS THE NETHERLANDS

France has reacted angrily to a Dutch government decision to take a 13% stake in the Dutch KLM airline. French airline Air France and KLM merged in 2004. France says the Netherlands is acting like a corporate raider. The row is linked to the fierce competition between the two countries over airport business. Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, which is continental Europe's second busiest airport, wants to overtake the leader, Paris Charles de Gaulle airport.

ITALY VS EU PART 1

Italy has held non-binding talks with China about joining the huge Chinese belt-and-road infrastructure project. The project includes the building of a high-speed rail link to the east from Italy via the Balkans and expanding four major Italian ports. Such a move would give Italy, which is in near-zero growth, much needed inward investment from China. The belt-and-road initiative is already building projects in eastern Europe and most recently Portugal. But so far Italy is the only G7 country to involve itself.

Both Manfred Weber, leader of the conservative group in the EU parliament, and German foreign minister Heiko Maas have issued warnings against too close a relationship between EU countries and China. Italy's two deputy prime ministers – Di Maio of the populist 5 Star movement and Salvini of the harder right Lega Nord – are at odds over the deal. Eurosceptic Di Maio wants to press ahead, whereas Salvini fears alienating the EU and the US by moving closer to China.

The deal, if signed, would mark an advance for Chinese influence in Europe, and a setback for the US and Germany.

ITALY VS EU PART 2

Italy is diverging from the EU over policy in Syria, where it is seeking a negotiated settlement with President Assad. In contrast, France, Germany, and the UK are taking a tough anti-Assad line. Southern European countries through which most refugees have been passing over the past eight years believe an Assad reconstruction of Syria would be the best way of reducing the number of refugees. One Italian diplomat said: "If you want the refugees to leave, if you want to stop the second wave of refugees... then you need to deal with the Syrian government."



Also on the refugee issue, Italy has insisted on a suspension of EU naval patrols in the Mediterranean, in protest over its unfair share of migrants, with no other countries opening up their ports to migrants. The EU has agreed to suspend the patrols – handing out a potential death sentence to thousands of desperate people.

ITALY VS FRANCE PART 1

Italian-French relations have sunk to their lowest point "since the end of the Second World War" according to one French official. This was after Italian deputy prime minister Salvini met with French "yellow vest" protesters and directly criticized Macron, saying: "I hope the French will be able to free themselves from a terrible president." In February this year, France withdrew its ambassador in protest. The row began when Italy accused France of returning migrants to Italy and not helping with the costs of migrant arrivals.



ITALY VS FRANCE PART 2

Another dispute centres on Libya, where France backs the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army, under General Haftar, which controls the areas of Total oil production. Italy, on the other hand, backs the rival Tripoli-based Government of National Accord – which controls the areas exploited by the Italian-backed National Oil Co of Libya.

ITALY VS FRANCE PART 3

France and Italy are also in dispute over the construction of a major EU infrastructure project, a Lyon to Turin high-speed rail link, joining two of Europe's most economically important regions. Italy is stalling because of the high costs involved, with the Eurosceptic deputy prime minister Di Maio of 5 Star expressing doubts, while the more pro-EU Salvini supports the scheme.



GERMANY VS THE EU

Germany is refusing to follow the UK (and US) in outlawing Hezbollah's political wing. This should be understood in the context of German attempts to work around US sanctions against Iran. As Iran's biggest European trading partner with exports worth €3.5 billion in 2017 – though now falling due to US pressure – Germany is leading the European drive to keep the Iran nuclear deal alive. It is setting up a new mechanism to allow financial flows to be sent to Iran that would not violate US sanctions. This special-purpose financial vehicle will allow European firms to use barter with Iran, and concentrate on areas not covered by US sanctions – such as pharmaceuticals and agri-business.

GERMANY VS THE US AND EU

Finally, the growing intensity of Germany's disputes with the US reveals its serious ambitions on the global stage (see its UN claim, above) – further destabilising the EU.

The vice speaker of the German parliament, deputy leader of the Free Democrat Party, Wolfgang Kubicki, has called for the expulsion of US ambassador Richard Grenell for his threats to apply sanctions against German companies participating in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline deal with Russia and against continuing German-Iranian trade. Germany is nonetheless pressing ahead with its Nord Stream project which is costing €11 billion in construction and is 70% complete. Germany needs energy security, and is using the two Russian pipelines, Nord Stream 2 and Turkstream to get it. In direct contradiction, France has recently supported a European Union directive to severely restrict the pipeline project.

The US is also threatening to reduce German access to classified security information because of Huawei's bid to supply Germany's 5G networks. The US argues that software updates would allow Chinese security services access to European information. If Germany were to allow Huawei to build its 5G network, US security agencies would work on the assumption that any information they transmit would end up in Chinese hands. But Germany needs Huawei for its 5G infrastructure, so is likely to press ahead anyway. These German-US disputes are clearly adding to the tensions within the EU.

They also come as part of the widening gap between the EU and the US over trade and NATO spending. At a security conference in Munich last year German foreign minister Heiko Maas said that Europe faced a choice: "Subject or object of world politics—this is the crucial issue of the future confronting Europe."

LOCAL ELECTIONS

what are voters telling us?

by Steve Howell

Fact-free political commentary is now so instantaneous that perceptions of political events are shaped before the outcome of those events is even known or, in the case of elections, before most of the votes are counted.

The spin

The media has, of course, always tried to contain debate within parameters that don't threaten capitalism. As Noam Chomsky puts it: "The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum." However, the speed with which news travels now means that even a cursory attempt to assemble some facts to support a view is sacrificed in the drive to establish it as the pervasive 'narrative'. The recent local elections in England were a classic case of this. With very few results in, TV political commentators started talking about "a plague on both your houses", implying that the Tories and Labour had done equally badly.

Meanwhile, protagonists for a so-called People's Vote, such as Tottenham Labour MP David Lammy, were using gains made by the Liberal Democrats and the Greens as evidence of a 'swing' to Remain. "The only parties that did well," he tweeted, "are unambiguously pro-Remain. The message is clear. We need to square up to the country and tell the truth. Brexit is a disaster and the Leave campaign lied to you." Another Labour MP, Bridget Phillipson, said: "Both Labour and the Tories saw votes that have



previously been cast for them move elsewhere, *above all to the parties that want us to stay in the EU*" (my emphasis). The Houghton and Sunderland South MP highlighted the fact that the Liberal Democrats and Greens had won Sunderland council seats from Labour – two and one respectively – but glossed over Labour's loss of more seats to UKIP and the Tories – three and four respectively.

Sunderland's Labour council leader Graeme Miller was not impressed. He told the BBC that it was actually the behaviour of the city's Labour MPs that had caused the losses. He said: "Sunderland voted as a city to leave in June 2016 and, having had a Labour message across the city from MPs saying we need to be having a second referendum, the people of Sunderland have said we're just not accepting that from the Labour

party. And I have lost ten councillors tonight because of that situation where the Brexit message has stepped into and over local politics."

Labour – gains and losses

So, what are the facts? And are there any trends or lessons we can draw from them?

Once all the results were in, Labour ended up with a net loss of 63 seats – 244 gains outweighed by 307 losses – compared to a 1,269 Tory net loss. The Tories losing twenty times as many seats as Labour is hardly a plague on both your houses, but it is fair to ask why Labour did not make a net gain, building on its electoral advance in 2017.

The pattern of Labour results is key. The 248 Councils where seats were

contested split three ways: in just over a third Labour made gains, in under a third we made losses, and the rest saw no change for Labour or were where Labour didn't hold seats.

Of the seventy or so councils in England where Labour lost seats, 22 saw losses of five or more. Labour's problem was geographically and politically very concentrated: the 22 councils were ALL in Brexit voting areas in the Midlands and North of England, with the north east, Cumbria and former mining areas such as Barnsley, North East Derbyshire and Bolsover to the fore.

Crucially, in 21 of the 22 districts where Labour lost five or more seats, only 22% were taken by the Liberal Democrats or Greens. The rest went to independent, Tory or UKIP candidates.

Labour's 244 gains were spread fairly evenly across nearly 100 Council districts. There were, though, 14 districts where Labour gained five or more seats. Half of these were in the South, but there were also some Northern/Midlands councils with Brexit-leaning voters where Labour gained five or more seats.

Tory collapse lets in Lib Dems

So what about the Lib Dems? They made a net gain of 676 seats, but this was from the trough of 2015 when they had one of their worst ever results after five years of delivering austerity with the Tories. Their gains were mostly from the Tories and were as geographically concentrated as Labour's BUT in a different part of England - Bath, Somerset, Devon, Chelmsford, Bournemouth, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Dorset, Surrey, Hampshire and other parts of the south and south west. Chesterfield - where they won 7 seats from Labour - was an exception.

The Liberal Democrat gains in the south appear to have had more to do with a collapse in the Tory vote than

any or many switching to them for Remain reasons. When Britain Elects statistician Simon Briscoe analysed the Chelmsford results, where the Liberal Democrats gained 26 seats from the Tories, he found that aggregate Tory vote had fallen from 97,000 in 2015 to 40,000 while Liberal Democrat support had increased just 3% from 38,000 to 39,000. "Very little of the repeating narrative of a Lib Dem vote surge is true," he concluded.

Contrary to the impression given by much of the media, the second biggest gainers in the elections were not the Greens but 'independents' who made a net gain of 285 seats, mainly from the Tories and Labour in pro-Brexit areas. Independents have in past elections mostly been right-leaning - the term has often been a guise for Tories to challenge Labour in areas where showing their true colours would be electoral suicide. There is, as yet, no definitive analysis of the politics of the independents in this election, but there is also no evidence either to suggest they are Remainers and some indications anecdotally that many are not.

No shift towards Remain

So what does this tell us? Firstly, the election was beyond doubt a disaster for the Tories, not only in the net number of seats lost (20 times as many as Labour) but also because the Lib Dem revival is concentrated in the South West and South, which is the traditional Tory-Lib Dem battleground, and therefore threatens Tory chances



of gaining an overall parliamentary majority in a general election. Secondly, while Labour cannot claim to have had a good night, the party did well in complicated circumstances to hold its support base together and make enough gains to largely offset losses in Brexit-voting areas.

Finally, there is no evidence in the results to support claims of significant voter movement from the Tories and Labour to Remain parties, as claimed by Phillipson and other supporters of a second referendum. On the contrary, for Labour, the pattern of the results suggests that the more Leave-leaning an area is, the more difficult the party found it to mobilise voters. It's not possible to say definitively that the party lost seats because it was perceived as thwarting Brexit or as too Remain, but there is more evidence for that view than the opposite.

Steve Howell is author of *Game Changer: Eight Weeks That Transformed British Politics*, published by Accent Press and available on Amazon, Hive, BooksEtc and his own website: www.steve-howell.com

From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

"Son of a Conservative Party organiser in the north east of England, Tony Blair was the safest pair of "Labour" hands Britain's ruling class has ever had. From the ruling class' standpoint Labour without Blair is less predictable and malleable and a bit more prone to trade unionist, working class, Keynesian and liberal economic influences."

Summer 2009 - **Britain's ruling class want the Tories back**

James Thomson

DUNDEE FIGHTS BACK

by Marion Spöring

Dundee is Scotland's fourth largest city with a long history of technological innovation and industry, not just 'Jam, Jute and Journalism', but whaling, trading, jute processing, fruit farming, Timex, Michelin, the design and production of comics, newspapers and computer games. A city with a proud tradition of education with two internationally renowned universities, research Centres, and a thriving art and design scene with museums, galleries, theatres and cinemas. Dundee is a UNESCO City of Design and location of the V&A Design Museum in a landmark building on the river Tay, opened in 2018.

A tale of two cities

But there is another side to the 'City of Discovery', which is camouflaged by the promotion of, latterly, the V&A and the waterfront development.

A CITY WHICH HAS:

- the highest unemployment rate in Scotland in 2018 of 6.5%
- 28.4% of children living in poverty (after housing costs, 2017) or 18% before housing costs
- one of the biggest foodbanks in Scotland, open 5 days a week
- the highest rate of drug related deaths in Europe per population
- high rates of homelessness
- life expectancy is lower than in Scotland as a whole
- 37% of households living in fuel poverty, the highest level across all Scottish cities
- areas of high social deprivation – 28.6% of the population live in households in areas classed as the 15% most socially deprived in Scotland.

→ over 27% of pupils living in the most deprived areas, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), more than double the Scottish average

→ is one of the 9 'Challenge Authorities' in Scotland, part of the Scottish government's Attainment Challenge to 'narrow the poverty-related attainment gap'.

→ and whose new V&A Dundee museum was built by the construction company BAM, which was involved in blacklisting of construction workers.

In addition to this already grim picture, a number of job losses have been announced which reduce the availability of jobs in the industrial sector even further: the closure of the Michelin factory by 2021 with a loss of 800 jobs, the closure of McGills construction company, a reduction in NHS Tayside employees by 1200, which equals 10% of the total workforce and the cuts imposed by SNP led Dundee City Council reducing further jobs in schools and other public services.

The SNP Dundee City Council majority councillors voted through cuts in provision of primary school teachers, support workers in schools and in school budgets. The price for school meals has also increased and, in addition, parents now have to pay £2 a day for the Breakfast Club. The Council Tax was increased by 3%, hitting all households, indiscriminately of income and thus affecting the poorest disproportionately. The budget for voluntary organisations, providing essential services, such as Barnardos and others was cut by 5%, at the same time Council workers' terms and conditions are being attacked. Cultural providers in Dundee, other than the V&A, are



Labour candidate for North East ward Jim Malone with supporters

suffering cut-backs, among them the Dundee REP and Scottish Dance Theatre, renowned for their community outreach work, the DCA (Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre), the Dundee Science Centre and the Dundee Heritage Trust.

Trade unions fight back

There are, however, also positive signs of fightback by the trade unions, such as the social care workers who challenged an attempt to introduce split shifts which means a reduction in working hours and a loss on average of £4500 a year for a workforce of mainly women care workers. Because of strong union representation, management were sent back to come up with alternative proposals, but instead it threatened privatisation of services. This resulted in unions balloting for industrial action with an 80% turnout and more than 80% in favour of action. Consequently, the care workers won this dispute.

Unite and Unison have balloted Dundee City Council and Dundee Leisure and Culture workers in April because of proposals described by unions as a toolkit for job losses and cuts to pay and working condi-

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CAMPAIGN TEAM

tions. Industrial action has now been agreed overwhelmingly with support of between 82% and 92% of the membership. The Council has voted to remove the commitment against compulsory redundancies, reduced pay protection for workers moving to lower grade jobs and changed the conditions for flexible retirement, all pushed through with the votes of the SNP councillors and the (independent) Lord Provost in February.

The promised influx of jobs because of increased tourism to Dundee has not been evident. In any case, most jobs in the service industry (hotels and restaurants) are low paid and part-time and therefore not providing a solid basis for family income. The Scottish government has released additional funding for Dundee to close the poverty related attainment gap in education, however, there has been only a slow improvement (1% since 2011-12). The allocated funding will run out in 2021 and secondary pupil attainment remains the lowest of all 32 Scottish Local Authorities.

Furthermore, the Council is proposing to remove Principal Teachers and to replace them with Curriculum Area leaders, a move strongly opposed by the EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland) representing secondary school teachers.

Dundee is part of the Tay Cities deal, involving Dundee, Angus, Fife and Perth and Kinross councils which promises to develop the economy of these areas between 2019-2029. In fact, it turns out that the deal delivered falls short of the money and investment promised and that, for example, there is no provision to counteract the severe job losses in Dundee. In response to this, Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard at the STUC in Dundee earlier this year called for devolution of employment law powers to the Scottish government in order to protect workers' rights and to create a new cabinet post responsible for labour.

Labour challenges the SNP

The last Council By-election on 2nd May was in the North East ward of the City which is the third safest SNP Council ward in the country. It showed an increase of 11% in the Labour vote, following strong campaigning on local issues. Unfortunately, this was not enough to overturn an SNP majority in the city which voted overwhelmingly for Independence in the referendum in 2016. In fact, the SNP now gained the majority on the City Council. But this has to be seen against the backdrop of the Labour vote increasing in areas most hit by Council austerity policies and the SNP winning overall, but losing in poorer areas. The Tory vote, alongside the Greens and others, was comparatively small and the Lib Dems did not even contest the seat. In order to increase the Labour vote we need to learn the lessons of working together with the community on local campaigns and labour activists with trade union experience to lead this. Issues highlighted in the by-election campaign were: improvement of community based public services, better bus services, against the closure of the only GP practice in the ward and the rebuilding of the community pavilion in Mill O Mains as well as fly-tipping, job losses and cuts to public services. This campaigning will need to be continued beyond the election period if Labour is to make gains against the SNP.

Dundee has a longstanding history in the labour movement with strong campaigners, in particular women, fighting for better working and living conditions. The TIMEX dispute in 1993 which ultimately led to the closure of the factory after 47 years in Dundee was an attack on the trade unions, defending low paid, mainly women workers.

Currently, the Labour Party in Scotland has the opportunity to fight back as we have a committed socialist leader in Richard Leonard. However, the fight-back is even harder

than in England as the Labour Party had slipped into third place behind the SNP and the Tories in Holyrood. The minority Green party is propping up the SNP government by always voting for nationalist budgets and is therefore jointly responsible for the austerity policies which Holyrood, not Westminster, is imposing on Scotland. Scotland's new tax raising powers could have prevented severe cuts to Council budgets, but the government shied away from a more radical agenda such as that proposed by Labour in taxing the highest income earners.

The SNPs so-called 'Growth Plan' for Independence is in fact a plan imposing further austerity on Scotland. We need to unite to fight towards a socialist Scotland and not be distracted by nationalist and Brexit pre-occupations, with divisive 'Indyref2' or the so-called 'people's referendum'. The origin of inequality is not a regional or national question, it is class-based.

The two tales of Dundee describe polar narratives of a city, one that of an exciting city being transformed from industrial decline into an era of 'creative industries' based on speculative promises, and that of a local population struggling amidst declining services, ruptured communities and poverty.

Dundee's current situation is one of smoke and mirrors – the nationalist agenda, delivering maybe for a few, but not the many, illustrates the urgent need for change to a socialist government which puts the needs of the people and community first.

The V&A museum in Dundee with the RSS Discovery.



The new scramble for Africa

by Simon Korner

The major powers are once again competing over Africa. Like the earlier Scramble for Africa between 1881 and 1914 – when the European imperialists divided up 90% of the continent between them – this is about gaining valuable resources and controlling them against rivals.

The United States

Despite promises from Trump to reduce the US military presence – along with claims of a “light footprint” in Africa – the US is increasing its military presence there. AFRICOM, the US Africa Command, has 7,500 American troops active in all but one African country, up from 6,000 in 2017. The main concentration is in the Horn of Africa, where its huge Djibouti base, Camp Lemonnier, houses 4,000 troops.

Djibouti’s strategic position on the narrow Bab-el-Mandeb strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden gives it control over the vital chokepoint through which all shipping using the Suez Canal has to pass – most importantly (for the Americans) Chinese shipping. 20% of total global exports and 10% of total oil exports pass through Bab-el-Mandeb. In 2014, the US signed a new 20-year lease on its base and is spending over \$1.4 billion on expanding it.

China has also recently built a base there, almost next door to Camp Lemonnier. And France, with 1,500 troops. And Japan. And Italy. And Russia will build its first base in nearby Somaliland, where the UAE and Saudi Arabia also have bases, along with Turkey, which has bases in Somalia and Sudan.

Former US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter called Camp Lemonnier “a hub with lots of spokes out there on the continent and in

the region.” It is where attacks on Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria are coordinated. The US has other east African bases – such as the world’s biggest drone base, also in Djibouti, five bases in Somalia including a special forces base, four bases in Kenya, and Camp Gilbert in Ethiopia. To connect them up it has built a sophisticated transport system dubbed the “new spice route”.

In west Africa, another massive drone base is being built in Agadez, Niger, with 800 military personnel. *The Hill* journal called it “the largest US Air Force-led construction project of all time.” Hundreds more US troops are active elsewhere throughout Niger, operating from five bases there, as well as across Mali and Nigeria. Over 60 smaller bases have been built. Agreements known as SOFAs (Status of Forces Agreements) made with African states allow the US to deploy troops at short notice to these small flexible bases called lily pads – some active, some dormant. Each lily pad can house 200 personnel, with stores of weapons and vehicles, and a runway for transport planes.

Commentator David Vine, in his book *Base Nation: How US Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, says this lily pad strategy allows the US to conceal the true extent of its military power in Africa, pretending the bases are merely temporary, whereas in aggregate they “signify an enduring and imperial-scale military presence” (Eric Schewe, *Jstor Daily*, 11/4/18).



Africom’s commander, General Waldhauser

Africom’s commander, General Waldhauser says openly that the aim is a strong US military capability “without creating the optic that US Africa Command is militarizing Africa.” Overall, the US now conducts 3,500 exercises and military engagements in Africa every year, according to *VICE* journal, a figure confirmed in 2017 by Waldhauser.

Although during the Cold War the US backed African dictators to the tune of over \$1.5 billion, US boots on the ground were relatively few – until AFRICOM’s establishment in 2007. The policy of militarisation represents a shift away from soft power. All US diplomatic business in Africa now goes through AFRICOM. Military attachés outnumber diplomats at most US embassies and officials from civilian US government departments operate within AFRICOM.

Extracting resources

What is driving this US military expansion? The official explanation is to help weak African states deal with terrorist threats. But US policy changed markedly from 2001 onwards after the discovery of massive new oil and gas reserves. “West Africa’s oil has become of national strategic interest to us,” the then US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Walter Kansteiner stated in 2002. Under George W. Bush, US oil companies invested heavily in Angola, Nigeria, Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon. ExxonMobil for instance has invested over \$24bn in the region. Such investment required military protection.

The west side of Africa now has five of the top thirty oil-producing countries in the world. And recently, Mozambique and Tanzania have also discovered major gas fields. In 2013, six out of the top ten global energy discoveries were in Africa, with over 500 oil companies involved.

Other valuable resources include gold, diamonds, copper and, more recently, rare earth elements. China currently controls most of the world’s supply of rare earth metals used for military equipment and superconductors, leading to a race by western powers for alternative sources. With electric car production rising, conflict over cobalt in particular, used to produce lithium-ion batteries, is set to intensify, with the Congo’s vast cobalt production, employing 100,000 miners, the main target. Meanwhile, Niger’s massive uranium deposits also make it a predatory target – particularly for France, which needs uranium for its large-scale nuclear power production.

Overall, competition for control over vital resources lies at the heart of the new “Scramble for Africa”.

The *World Defense Review* outlined AFRICOM’s objectives a decade ago as “protecting access to hydrocarbons and other strategic resources

which Africa has in abundance, a task which includes ensuring against the vulnerability of those natural riches and ensuring that no other interested third parties, such as China, India, Japan, or Russia, obtain monopolies or preferential treatment.” As *Third World Quarterly* put it in 2006: “Washington has become deeply concerned by China’s growing interest in African oil, provoking an intense competitive contest between the two, with growing military overtones.”

Over a decade on, in spite of the growth of domestic fracking, the US still wants to dominate African energy, worried that “China is gaining near-monopolistic control of extractive resources such as oil and minerals,” according to the Defense One website. Chinese control of rare earth elements likewise exposes “vulnerabilities and gaps in America’s manufacturing and defense industrial base” (*Breaking Defense*). A recent report from a NATO-aligned think-tank the *Atlantic Council* also pointed to fears of China’s military presence in Africa – supplying more peace-keeping troops than other UN permanent Security Council members.

With US-sub-Saharan trade falling from \$100 billion in 2008 to \$39bn in 2017, partly due to the decreasing US demand for African oil, there is a growing fear that the US is losing economic influence on the continent. US senators recently accused Beijing of “weaponising capital” in Africa, using debt to create a Chinese economic order. Hence Trump’s decision to boost the US’s Overseas Private Investment Corporation, whose lending limit is to be more than doubled to \$60 billion. More recently, John Bolton, National Security Adviser, unveiled the new US Africa strategy called the Prosper Africa initiative, whose stated aim is to challenge “great power competitors, namely China and Russia.” These powers, he says, “pose a significant threat to US national security interests.”



Camp Lemmonier - US base in Djibouti

Effects of US militarisation include AFRICOM-orchestrated military coups, such as the 2009 assassination attempt on Guinea’s President Camara, after he’d agreed for China to take over bauxite mining from US and French companies, with refining done domestically rather than abroad. Toppling Gadaffi in 2011, alongside France and Britain, marked a further stage in military interference. More recently, in 2016, the US supported Islamist attacks in Cameroon and Burkina Faso – giving the lie to its claim of protecting Africa from extremists. Currently, the main American campaign is bombing al-Shabab in Somalia – to ensure control over the Bab-el-Mandeb strait rather than to defend democracy.

France

Meanwhile, France, which has long been the dominant neo-colonial power in north and west Africa, is also expanding its activity. Macron made clear his intention to break into anglophone Africa by visiting Ghana in 2017 and Nigeria in 2018 – alongside consolidating French dominance over francophone territories. Stating that “the future of the world will largely be played out in Africa”, he has set up a new Presidential Council for Africa. On a visit to Senegal in February 2018, he promised €200 million to fund schoolchildren in developing countries – expanding French soft power. He also promised a €65 million fund to promote digital startups in Africa. Macron is fighting on behalf of French oil giant Total, which lost out in the oil free-for-all after the Iraq war which France had not

supported, and instead invested in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon.

Other French businesses include supermarket chain Carrefour; Orange; infrastructure group Bouygues; and nuclear and renewable energy company Areva. French EU Commissioner, Pierre Moscovici, summed up French interests: “Africa is booming. Sub-Saharan Africa will have the second highest regional growth after Asia in 2012 with a rate of 5.5 percent... African growth has the potential to stimulate growth in France.”

Meanwhile, France is, like America, increasingly wary of China’s presence. Here’s Moscovici again: “It’s evident that China is more and more present in Africa...[French] companies that have the means must go on the offensive... They have to fight.” Macron recently echoed this, saying France must now allow global competitors to “encroach on our historical partners’ sovereignty”.

France still controls the economies of its 14 former African colonies, using its Central Africa Franc (CFA), a position it won’t relinquish without a struggle. Militarily, France, with its array of bases, housing 4,000 troops in West Africa alone, has long acted as the regional gendarme for all western forces, intervening more than 30 times since 1960, leading the destruction of Libya and operations in Mali, Central African Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Macron has praised US military support against jihadists (in Mali and elsewhere), yet the US presence also represents a challenge – how to keep “American hard power as far as possible from... France’s exclusive sphere of influence,” as Niagala Bagayoko puts it in *Contemporary Security Policy* journal (2009). Franco-US rivalry saw the two powers backing different sides in Rwanda in 1994 – at a terrible human cost. France’s lead in the Libya campaign

– and the continuing aftermath across the Sahel – demonstrated its determination to preserve a key military role.

A recent Franco-Italian diplomatic spat can be viewed in part as a tussle for control over Libyan energy, with each power backing different militias.

Britain

Britain is also targeting Africa. In 2018 Theresa May visited former colonies South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, calling them “key partners”. May said she wants Britain to overtake the US as the biggest G7 investor in Africa. The current ranking (2015) is the US at \$57 billion, Britain at \$54 billion, and France at \$52 billion. China leads, with \$66.6 billion of investment. British investment will be channeled through the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which has been criticised for building hotels and shopping centres in Kenya, lining the pockets of British business rather than providing aid.

May also plans to “radically expand” Britain’s diplomatic presence in Africa, especially in francophone west Africa, with the first-ever British ambassador to Mauritania and the first British mission in Chad. High commissions will be opened in the south too, in Lesotho and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). At the moment Britain lags behind its rivals, with only 31 missions compared to the France’s 61, the US’s 49, China’s 46, and Germany’s 39 – part of the huge boom in new African embassies over the past decade. May also plans greater military involvement, on top of the training it already provides Nigeria and Kenya.

Germany

Germany too has growing African interests, with 900 troops in Mali and Niger, and hundreds of others deployed elsewhere. Merkel visited Africa last year, accompanying vari-

ous German CEOs and investors to Senegal and to Ghana and Nigeria in the old British sphere. In Ghana, VW is setting up a factory, joining others in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa – as well as Rwanda. Germany’s former colony Burundi is now being exploited by ThyssenKrupp after the discovery of rare earth minerals there in 2017.

The EU

As for the EU as a whole, Jean-Claude Juncker has declared it is in the EU’s interest to “engage with Africa on a more significant basis, with other global powers – particularly China – having already made their imprint there”.

The EU’s free trade deals such as its Everything but Arms deals, made with Least Developed Countries, purportedly allow African agricultural produce into Europe tariff-free. But the Common Agricultural Policy in effect cancels out most benefits to Africa – by giving subsidies to EU farmers and imposing food standards designed to exclude African produce. The EU’s real aim is to gain preferential access to African markets and to ease European exports.

China

What about China? China is now Africa’s biggest economic partner with total trade worth \$215 billion. It issued \$86 billion worth of commercial loans to Africa between 2000-2014, with President Xi pledging a further \$60 billion in 2015. This makes China the region’s biggest creditor. In Kenya, for instance, Chinese loans to the government are six times higher than the second biggest creditor, France. China has so far financed over 3,000 major infrastructure projects, such as the Mombassa-Nairobi high-speed railway. Africa is China’s second-biggest source of oil. Sudan alone provides 8% of China’s oil – the majority of Sudan’s production. Much of the Congo’s cobalt production is Chinese owned.

But China's relationship with Africa is not neo-colonial. Unlike the IMF and World Bank, which impose conditions on borrowers such as privatisation, welfare cuts and cuts to subsidies, China imposes no such strictures. "Many African governments like to work with the Chinese because it's traditionally been a strictly business-to-business relationship," according to Richard Downie, Center for Strategic and International Studies. A report from John Hopkins University found that of 17 African countries in debt distress, eight had either no debt or barely any debt to China. Ghana, for example, has debts of \$25 billion, but less than \$4 billion of that is owed to China. Most Chinese investments are made by state-owned enterprises seeking a long-lasting connection – very different from western short-termism.

China's relations with South Africa – its biggest trade partner on the continent – show the potential role of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in offsetting the western scramble for Africa. A coordinated approach rather than "trampling each other" is how one South African official described it. For instance, a decade ago, China agreed to limit exports of cheap clothes and textiles that were damaging the South African industry.

Yet the win-win model for the past 20 years that provides China with resources and African economies with infrastructure is inevitably subject to capitalist pressures. A country like Zambia – once the exemplar nation of 'Africa Rising' – is suffering due to the slowdown in the Chinese economy and the fall in copper prices. Nevertheless, overall China is creating what Horace Campbell in *Monthly Review* calls an "imperfect alternative" to imperialist domination and is by and large seen in Africa as providing a "counterpoint" to it. As commentator Carlos Martinez (Invent the Future, October 2018) says: "China's engagement with Africa...

stimulates development rather than underdevelopment. In that crucial sense, it is profoundly different from the relationship that the US and the major European powers have had with Africa. China's aid and investment packages promote host countries' modernisation, technical knowhow and infrastructure." Moreover, China represents a potential development model for African nations to follow.

Other BRICS

Other BRICS countries are also active in Africa. Brazil's two-way trade with Africa stands at \$26 billion. India, is now Africa's fourth biggest trading partner, and the second biggest importer of African oil after China. It is also building military bases in the Seychelles and on the Mauritius island of Agalega, alongside its existing intelligence-gathering base in Madagascar.

Russia – which as the USSR provided solidarity aid to progressive governments and movements during the cold war – expanded trade and investment with Africa by 185% between 2005-2015, according to *Comtrade*. Apart from resources, it is focusing on arms – and is now sub-Saharan Africa's biggest supplier, selling cheap weapons to the Central African Republic, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. It has recently concluded a \$1 billion arms deal with Angola, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's 2018 visit to southern Africa ended with a military co-operation agreement with Mozambique. Such a focus on arms – along with China, which outstrips the US in supplying weapons to Africa – ensures ongoing military influence in Africa, an important counterweight to the West, though there are also potentially negative effects.

Finally, trade between Turkey, a non-BRICS country, and Africa, has reached \$17 billion – and Erdogan has visited the continent 30 times as president.

Africa's Response

What has been Africa's response to the Scramble? 14 countries – led by Libya – protested against AFRICOM's formation, and popular protests forced then Nigerian president Yar'Adua to distance himself from the US Command. More recently, the South African Minister of Defence has expressed concern about the continent's growing militarisation. A recent Status of Forces Agreement between the US and Ghana provoked "Ghana First" protests in Accra.

Facing African reluctance, the US hasn't dared move its AFRICOM HQ from Stuttgart to Africa. Senator Jim Inhofe said: "It's about perceived colonialism". Interestingly France was early on active in deterring francophone countries from hosting AFRICOM. Dr Carl LeVan, in a study published in *Africa Today* (2010), concluded that the poorer and more dependent a country was, the greater its support for AFRICOM. Faster-growing countries less reliant on foreign aid – even US allies – felt more confident in taking a critical stance. Yet overall, there is no clear, unified strategy, or even political will, evident among Africa's leaders to resist imperialism. Many face Islamist insurgencies and look to the West to guarantee their rule.

Over the next 35 years, Africa will account for more than half of the world's population growth. Yet more than 40% of sub-Saharan Africa still lives in poverty. The continent currently pays out over £32 billion annually to the world's richest countries, according to Global Justice Now (Guardian, May 14, 2017). Clearly a new phase of development and decolonisation is needed.

In the meantime, Africa will continue to be a flashpoint for regional wars, and could become an arena for great power conflict.

VENEZUELA

right wing coup defeated

by Frieda Park

Though the US threatens invasion, so far the tactics to achieve regime change in Venezuela have been to pump support into the violent right wing opposition and ramp up economic sanctions. As the notorious Elliott Abrams said recently: “We have no ability to predict when regimes collapse. But we’re heightening the contradictions.”

It is no coincidence that Abrams was appointed as Trump’s envoy to Venezuela. He was involved in the Iran-Contra scandal in the 80s when officials in the Reagan administration sold arms to Iran in contravention of their own sanctions. They secretly used the proceeds to fund the right-wing Contras in Nicaragua who were waging an armed struggle against the elected Sandinista government. The destabilisation caused eventually led to the downfall of the Sandinistas. Job done, Abrams pleaded guilty to two counts of lying to Congress about the affair and was later pardoned. He was recently challenged by Democrat Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. She asked “...would you support an armed faction within Venezuela that engages in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide if you believed they were serving US interests, as you did in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala?” Abrams refused to answer.

No doubt such destabilisation is what he means by “heightening the contradictions”. The aim, as in Chile and Nicaragua, is to make life harder and harder for ordinary Venezuelans, to undermine the economy and to overthrow the



Right wing violence in Venezuela

government. Things are very tough already and further sanctions and seizures of assets will make things significantly worse.

Fake President Guaidó’s recent abject failure to launch a coup against the government showed up the true nature of his agenda and the involvement of the US administration in orchestrating events. The first obvious lesson is that he simply did not command the support required, among the military, the state nor the population. Secondly in freeing Leopoldo López from house arrest he demonstrated clearly that he is not a clean pair of hands, but actually closely aligned to the violent and anti-democratic right-wing opposition. Finally US national security adviser, John Bolton, has made clear in statements that he and the Trump administration were fully cognisant of Guaidó’s plans – their finger prints are all over this.

The Venezuelan government has made mistakes over the years, however, the country absolutely would not be in the situation it is now without the active interference of the US. There are two options for Venezuela – US sponsored destruction, chaos and regime-change, or non-intervention and talks with the opposition. The Labour Party has stated its opposition to foreign intervention in Venezuela but there are Labour politicians who do not share that view. For the sake of Cuba as well as Venezuela lobbying is important to avert another dangerous and misguided intervention and to urge talks and engagement.

It is essential that we resist imperialism’s attempts to sow oppression, chaos and war, to seize oil and other resources for itself. Our top priority must be to defend Venezuelan sovereignty and its right to determine its own future.



by Frieda Park

The Cuban revolution has defied the enormous odds stacked against it and this year celebrates the 60th anniversary of the overthrow of the US-backed Batista regime. The Cuban people have reaped the benefits of this in every aspect of their material, cultural and social lives. Its importance is immense to all of us as an example of what can be achieved, even with relatively few resources, if the will is there. We should remember that when the question is asked how will Labour pay for its radical programme of change. If the wealth of the country is not being sucked away as profit and if people have the opportunity to develop their abilities and contribute their talents a great deal can be done.

Furthermore it is not only an example, but has been a practical support to millions of people across the third world and beyond. A country of 11 million has fulfilled 600,000 internationalist missions. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans have lived, worked and fought in 164 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Countries where they have seen the realities of capitalism. They have helped bring liberation, disaster relief, literacy and healthcare to people who had never before seen a doctor.

US hostility

Incredibly all this was done in the face of the unending hostility of

Cuba's near neighbour the most powerful and aggressive country in the world, the United States. Its active attempts to defeat the revolution have included:

- The invasion at the Bay of Pigs
- Hundreds of terrorist attacks against the Cuban people and assassination attempts on the life of Fidel Castro
- The illegal US blockade which is nearly as old as the revolution itself and which has enacted sanctions against third countries and agencies for trading with Cuba. Let us be absolutely clear, though Trump is now rolling back Obama's measures

which loosened some aspects of the blockade, the blockade never went away. Even under the rapprochement during Obama's time the blockade was largely still intact

■ And, of course, the billions of dollars poured into subversion and attempted regime change

With the end of the Soviet Union the Cuban economy virtually collapsed. The gross national product almost halved between 1991 and 1993 and what followed was called the special period. Cuba also faced some inherent and inherited problems in building socialism, starting out with a monoculture of sugar and as the playground of rich Americans. It also experiences adverse climatic conditions with the island frequently ravaged by hurricanes.

A revolutionary people

How has it survived these multiple challenges which should have floored the revolution 10 times over?

Of course, there was the clarity and leadership of Fidel and the Cuban Communist Party. This ensured that Cuba remained true to its socialist principles, but pragmatically also did what it had to do to survive. This meant on occasion making difficult compromises like opening up the island to tourism during the special period and legalising holding dollars. But Cuba's survival is also the story of a liberated and empowered people, particularly those formerly most oppressed – working class black people and women. Cuba's record on women's rights and LGBT rights is way better than most countries on the continent and access to abortion is certainly the best.

The Cuban revolution freed the people not only to build a new society but also freed them from imperialist domination. The revolution is not only socialist, bringing all the benefits of a social and economic system which works for people rather than for profit, it is

also synonymous with the dignity of a people who have thrown off the domination of a power which treated them as though they were second class human beings. Even more than that this tiny country, once a plaything of the US has become a major force on the world stage.

The pride of the Cubans in being able to determine their own future, not live to be exploited at the behest of the US and to be respected across the globe has generated great strength and resilience. These qualities are a major factor in how Cuba has survived against all the odds.

The approach of the revolution has been to value people above all else, creating high levels of social cohesion. The people are what maintain and sustain so much of everyday life that is the fabric of the revolution. That is how they can survive huge adversity such as the special period, because people collaborate socially to help each other.

Big challenges ahead

Ten years ago in surveying the prospects for Cuba at 50 things looked better than they do now. Since then Cuba has lost its iconic leader and great intellect Fidel. The revolutionary generation has moved on. Obama's rapprochement has come and gone with the blockade still in place and Trump rolling back the gains from the Obama period. The "pink tide" of leftist governments which was sweeping Latin America then has been in full scale retreat with coups – soft and hard - right wing victories and the onslaught against Venezuela.

Internally Cuba has embarked on a massive programme of change, encouraging the development of the private sector and instituting a new constitution.

The turmoil in Venezuela means that once again Cuba does not have a reliable economic partner providing it with essential resources. The

current fight for the survival of the Bolivarian Revolution is also a struggle to aid Cuba. Trump is not wrong when he links sanctions against Venezuela to the defeat of Cuba too.

Recently Cuba was forced to pull out of the Mas Medicos programme in Brazil as the extreme right wing President, Jair Bolsonaro, placed unacceptable conditions on their work. 8,500 doctors have returned to Cuba, leaving 10s of millions of the poorest Brazilians without health care.[1]

President Trump has partially activated Title 3 of the Helms Burton Act, which had been suspended by every previous president since it was passed in 1996. This will allow Americans to sue foreign companies that have used assets nationalised after the revolution. This is designed to prevent companies trading with and investing in Cuba. Although the EU and Britain are unhappy about this – Britain recently sending a couple of members of the Windsor family over to build links - it is difficult to combat the US's economic might. A former US official was recently quoted as saying, "The message to Cubans is 'You're next'" – that is after Venezuela.[2]

Cuba has met many challenges in its history now it has a new set to deal with we must continue to offer our solidarity with the revolution and its people.

.....

[1] Cuba withdraws from "More Doctors" programme in Brazil – *Cuba Si* Winter 2018-19

[2] Breaking the stalemate, *The Economist* 6/4/19

Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions piles pressure on Israel

by Brian Durrans

Writing in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 3 September 2018, veteran Israeli journalist Gideon Levy declared: “More than the achievements of the economic, academic and cultural boycott, BDS (the Palestinian-led campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel) has succeeded in undermining the greatest asset of Israeli public diplomacy: Israel’s liberal and democratic image in the world.” [1]

On 10 April 2019, the US denied entry to prominent BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti for undisclosed ‘immigration reasons’ despite his possession of a valid visa. He was forced to cancel both a planned speaking tour and attendance at his daughter’s wedding. In an interview from his home in Ramallah (Occupied West Bank) with progressive US channel *Democracy Now!* he interpreted his exclusion as Israel outsourcing part of its anti-BDS blowback to its US ally. [2]

Anti-BDS actions backfire

But restricting free speech so conspicuously comes at a price, not least in the form of a prominent op ed piece in the *Guardian* in which Barghouti was able yet again to promote the movement he helped establish. Since about 2014, when Israel responded to the growing threat of BDS by setting up its Ministry of Strategic Affairs to try to combat it, the US has played along by authorising anti-boycott laws, or governor-issued executive orders, in at least 27 US states. Earlier this year the Senate outsourced to individual states the power to sanction any US

company deemed to boycott Israel. These examples of anti-Palestinian ‘lawfare’ are opposed by many concerned to protect free speech provision (First Amendment) of the US Constitution and, contrary to intention, encourage wider support of the Palestinian cause among rights-based campaigns in other fields.

Intemperate opposition to Palestinian rights also encourages supporters of BDS to ensure their arguments don’t just express outrage but are fit for purpose. For example, by taking part in Israeli Apartheid Week in March 2019, students in over 30 UK universities signalled not only their support for Palestinians and BDS but also their rejection of the delusion or anxiety that such support can be reasonably dismissed as anti-Semitic. The free ride which this accusation has enjoyed in the last few years means that those who advocate equal rights for all in Israel-Palestine, and are sometimes called antisemitic for doing so, can only conclude that in the great majority of cases

where it is wholly unmerited, such an accusation serves only to deter legitimate criticism of Israel. The growth of support for BDS worldwide suggests that most people appreciate that such support expresses respect for human rights and international law.

Since the original BDS call in 2005, campaigners have, for example, persuaded many UK councils to deny contracts to companies complicit with Israel’s breaches of international and humanitarian law or to divest their pension funds from such companies. In January campaigners secured permission from the Supreme Court to challenge the Appeal Court’s misguided ruling that ethical divestment by Local Government Pension Schemes is unlawful. Given that the movement has had to raise substantial funds to press its case with no guarantee of success, this might seem a setback for the Palestinian cause. That, however, would be a foolish mistake for by making the case yet again for Palestinian rights and for



respect for international law and by linking both to the principles of local democracy itself, the BDS movement wins new friends and extends its influence among wider circles of people whether or not the Supreme Court finds in its favour. Heads it wins (great); tails it can't lose (but would have risked it by not rising to the challenge).

Commenting on his travel ban, the anti-BDS blowback in the US, Israel's adoption of the (Jewish-only) Nation State Law and the re-election of Benjamin Netanyahu in April 2019 for a fifth term as Israeli prime minister, Omar Barghouti makes precisely the same point as Gideon Levy did a few months before (quoted at the beginning of this article). Whatever flagrant outrages or hidden (because slower-paced) attrition Israel has in store for the Palestinians, its mask of liberal democracy can only slip further leading to further erosion of its own support-base and corresponding advances of the BDS movement itself. [3]

The secret of BDS success

As Israel's apparent immunity to criticism provokes increasing dismay there is a risk that some activists will grow impatient with the tried and tested methods set out by the Palestinian Boycott National Committee (BNC) in 2005 and field-tested in the meantime. It may therefore be helpful to spell these out.

The movement chooses targets that are:

- seriously complicit with, or profit from, Israel's breaches of international law
- operate globally so that actions can likewise span the world
- offer opportunities for critical cross-sector alliances (eg on women's rights, environment, anti-war, etc.)

- vulnerable to reputational risk
- not so heavily invested in Israel that they can't easily extricate themselves
- invite a good chance of winning even with the resources the solidarity movement has at its disposal

Most targets are companies, but they also include groups, institutions or individuals where talent or personal views are not at issue but complicity with breaches of international law is. Actions are taken by individuals, private and public bodies, at local, national, transnational and international levels and make the fullest possible use of mainstream and social media channels to promote the Palestinian cause. It should be obvious, for example, that even a company that trades with Israel or whose CEO is a known pro-Israel apologist – or simply one that some activists don't happen to like – doesn't necessarily qualify a company as a suitable BDS target given that, on the above criteria, some other company is a better bet. Moreover, BDS is never just 'against' its campaign targets but always 'for' the united Palestinian call for Freedom (from Israel's illegal occupation), Justice (the right of return of refugees) and Equality (the same rights for all within the boundaries of 1948 Israel). Despite the political divisions among Palestinians, these demands express their shared right to self-determination which, from its establishment, Israel has consistently denied them. Freedom, Justice and Equality make sense as rights of persons not of states. Critics of BDS like (or pretend) to belittle its achievements, though if these are so negligible, why bother to criticise them? In fact, BDS has a growing list of successful campaigns under its belt, such as SodaStream, Veolia, and G4S. An array of lawmakers, campaigners for social justice, students, women, Christians, musicians, BAME activists, parliamentarians, political parties, pension fund administrators,

trade unionists, university senates and national, state and city officials, between them have endorsed BDS, announced or called for bans on settlement goods, urged an end to military aid or trade, promised divestments or recognised the role of BDS in combatting anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. [4]

As campaigning continues on present and future targets, and continues to defy the attempted blowback, so the roll-call of BDS successes will grow until the 'tipping point' is reached. That's when things get really interesting.

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[1] <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-bds-success-stories-1.6455621> For more on the rise of BDS, see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/israel-72m-war-chest-fight-bds-arrives-europe-181113115929627.html>

[2] https://www.democracynow.org/2019/4/16/denied_entry_to_us_bds_co.

[3] The report of the United Nations Independent Commission of Enquiry into the casualties during "Great March of Return" in Gaza, issued on 28 February 2019 and covering the last 9 months of 2018, further undermined Israel's "liberal and democratic image in the world": <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24226&LangID=E>. It found that Israeli snipers killed 189 Palestinians [including 35 children] and used live ammunition to injure over 6,000 unarmed civilians while over 3,000 more were hit by rubber-coated or fragmenting bullets or tear-gas canisters; and four Israeli soldiers lost their lives. According to its Chair, "The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that during the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and must be immediately investigated by Israel." Both the behaviour it documents and Israeli attempts to dismiss the Report have provoked almost universal condemnation.

[4] <https://bdsmovement.net/news/18-highlights-bds-impact-2018>. In the last week of 2018, news came through that HSBC will divest from the Israeli arms company Elbit Systems (for background, see HSBC – drugs, arms and money in *The Socialist Correspondent* Issue 32).

READER'S LETTER

Dear Comrades,

At a time when charges of anti-Semitism have become a major weapon for attacking Corbyn, it is important for socialists not to retreat on the issue for fear of inflaming tensions. Doing so cedes ground to the Right and to Israel's apologists. As Chris Williamson MP has pointed out, the Labour Party should stand by its excellent record of anti-racist campaigning. By retreating before the orchestrated campaign of smears, these lies have been allowed to become the dominant media narrative. It is useful, therefore, to deconstruct the myth that the Jewish 'community', as apparently represented by the Board of Deputies, has been offended by Corbyn and Labour.

According to a Jewish activist, Shraga Stern, who belongs to the Satmar group of Charedi (ultra-orthodox) Jews in Stamford Hill north London, there are 263,000 Jews living in the UK (2011 census). Of these, 50,000 are Charedi, many of whom are anti-Zionist for religious reasons, support Corbyn and believe that the vilification of Labour as an anti-Semitic party is a smear campaign

"with a Zionist agenda".

A letter last year, signed by 29 rabbis, praised Corbyn and pointed out that criticism of him by the Board of Deputies did not represent the opinion of most British Jews. According to Stern, this self-appointed Jewish community body does not represent the Charedi communities. Nor does it represent the roughly 100,000 mostly secular Jews who do not attend synagogue. As voting rights on the Board of Deputies are reserved almost entirely for mainstream synagogue representatives, Stern estimates that overall 181,000 out of the total 263,000 Jews are not represented by the Board of Deputies. There is clearly no such thing as a homogenous Jewish community in Britain.

Stern has received death threats for daring to challenge the Jewish establishment. *The Jewish Chronicle* ("Israel's candid friend" according to its editor Stephen Pollard, ex-*Daily Express*) and other media have tried to dismiss the rabbis' letter, by saying the rabbis were not fully aware of its content when they signed it. Stern, however, has countered this, pointing out that some of the

signatories suggested amendments of their own. Some have been so intimidated and upset by the reaction to their letter that they are, understandably, refraining from further public comment.

The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregation (UOHC), which represents many Charedi congregations, has publicly supported Stern over the issue. More recently, in March 2019, another letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* signed by 12 British Jewish Holocaust survivors stated that they did not "believe that any prejudice against or hostility towards Jews is being perpetrated by Labour." Predictably, the newspaper tried to discredit them, expressing doubts that some were bona fide 'survivors' – a smear that has since been comprehensively refuted.

MPs such as Margaret Hodge and Luciana Berger, who have attacked the Labour leadership for its "toxic anti-Semitism", have failed to convince a large number of other British Jews that this is the case.

Tracey Lindner, London N16

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The West's CYBER WARS

by Alex Mitchell

On March 7th the electricity system in Venezuela experienced its worst-ever blackout as a result of an American cyber attack. Mainstream media devoted little coverage to the event, and the sparse attention extended to this new dimension in covert warfare was weakened by highly partial reporting.

In late 2018, Conservative foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt condemned Moscow's "reckless and indiscriminate" cyber attacks, which tried "to undermine and interfere in elections in other countries" and flouted international law. A statement issued by the UK's secretive Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) accused Russian's military intelligence of hacking the US Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 2016, and the World Anti-doping Agency in 2017. Maria Zakharova, the Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman, described the British allegations as "fantasy". [1]

On the same day, 4 October 2018, in a clearly coordinated press statement, the Dutch defence ministry revealed that its government had expelled four Russian diplomats six months earlier for an attempted intrusion into the computer network of the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is located in The Hague. The diplomats had been apprehended in a hotel near the OPCW, around the time the UN agency had been analysing the nerve agent discovered in Salisbury, which Britain alleges was manufactured in Shikhandy, a formerly closed city on the Volga river in central Russia. They were



Government Communications Headquarters - Ministry of Defence

said to be officers of Russian military intelligence. [2]

Cyber attacks have taken on a distinctly geo-political hue in the last few years. Electronic communication emerged in the 1970s driven by American and Soviet efforts to build nuclear bomb-proof telecommunication networks. Cyber espionage soon followed, with claims that the US Advanced Research Projects Agency, which developed a precursor to the Internet, had been hacked by the USSR. By the mid-1990s hackers were on-line in ever larger numbers, government agencies included [3]. Anonymous, the loose network of anarchist hackers, emerged in 2004 adopting the tag line: We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us! [4] Hacking became more political in support of the Occupy Movement in 2010/2011 and the release of American diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks.

UK involvement

The threat from Anonymous probably galvanised the authorities into trying to track down those involved. As is well known, in order for the police to infiltrate a subversive group, the agent must encourage and participate in illegal activities. To avoid later exposure, the agent provocateur must also be arrested and punished when the group is rounded up. Entrapment techniques have been used to track child pornography rings operating over the Internet, for example. It is not clear exactly when GCHQ started proactive interventions in cyber space, either against hackers or other governments, but it is certain that the agency has now been engaged in this for some years. GCHQ appears to have also been tasked with assisting social media users to organise against the governments of Iran, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Whistle blower Edward Snowden, who released information from the US National Security Agency (NSA) in 2013, revealed the extent of government Internet snooping by the 'Five Eyes' governments: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and USA. [5] Documents obtained from Snowden by broadcaster NBC showed that Britain's GCHQ was undertaking operations "traditionally associated with MI6", according to *The Independent* newspaper. These included Deny/Disrupt/Degrade/Deceive activities targeted at advanced persistent threats, in other words, foreign governments, as well as domestic threats, like the hackers from Anonymous. In particular, GCHQ, according to NBC, had been involved in disrupting Iran's uranium enrichment programme in 2010. [6]

If you go down to the woods today

The DNC hacking is perhaps the best known allegation of state-directed cyber intrusion (see *The Socialist Correspondent* 30, Spring 2018). But other cases have been cited by cyber security specialists. Attributing responsibility for a hack is never easy since the hackers usually wish to avoid being traced. Cyber security experts look for similarities in the hackers' modus operandi (MO). When the DNC intrusion was detected, the Democratic Party called on the services of CrowdStrike to disinfect their network. All staff were told to leave their laptops at work over the weekend. CrowdStrike discovered two sets of hackers had got into the network, whom they dubbed Cozy Bear and Fancy Bear. [7] The nicknames stuck and soon Fancy Bear was revealed to have been active on the Internet for several years.

According to cyber security consultants ThreatConnect, Fancy Bear had attempted to discredit the results of Ukraine's presidential election in 2014 through an attack on the Ukrainian Central Election Commission. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by CyberBerkut, supposedly

a group of former Ukrainian police officers who had been dismissed as a result of their role in trying to clear the Maidan protesters in Kiev. Fancy Bear, alias CyberBerkut, is alleged to have attacked the Bellingcat website run by Eliot Higgins, which later revealed the identity of the Russian special forces officers accused of the assassination attempt in Salisbury. Higgins is himself accused of links to British intelligence. He set up his website to coordinate social media posts coming out of Libya in 2011. [8]

To avoid being tracked down, ThreatConnect allege, Russian military intelligence set up part of its operation at a Romanian web hosting service that supplies Bitcoin. Paying in Bitcoin allowed hackers to buy Internet services anywhere in the world without fear of being traced through a normal financial paper trail. [9] In order to load their Bitcoin wallet, the hackers used malware to hold companies' networks to ransom, along the lines of the WannaCry attack in 2017. Cyber security consultants call government hackers 'advanced persistent threats' because their MO uses sophisticated malware that is not generally available to hackers from civil society. The WannaCry malware is thought to have been stolen from the NSA.

Responsibility for the DNC hack was claimed by DCLeaks, a self-proclaimed "American hacktivist group". DCLeaks posted emails to and from Hillary Clinton on its website but these proved to be hard to search. So 'Stephan Orphan', who posed as the person responsible and went under the moniker of Guccifer 2.0, and based supposedly in Romania and France, gave the data to WikiLeaks to unscramble and post in a format that journalists could analyse. ThreatConnect alleges that DCLeaks, Guccifer 2.0 and Fancy Bear are all parts of Russian military intelligence.

Lulz Security

In May 2011, a group of hacktivists who called themselves Lulz Security

claimed responsibility for hacking the Fox Broadcasting Company to steal the details of 73,000 US X Factor contestants. They then stole personal data from the American Public Broadcasting Service and Sony Pictures. They also hacked into the US Senate and took the CIA website offline for several hours. Then, after 50 days of mayhem, they stopped.

A number of things are unusual about Lulz Security. The group set out to expose lax cyber security at major American companies and government organisations, then revealed the techniques they had used so that the security breaches could be fixed. A BBC report stated that "many security specialists say privately that they are happy LulzSec is running amok online, highlighting the need for a renewed focus on data protection." [10] The public spiritedness of the group's activities raises questions as to whether they really were just a bunch of anarchists having fun at the expense of big corporations. Furthermore, ThreatConnect says that Lulz Security, "conducted operations to help people communicate outside of Iran during the attempted Green Revolution in 2009 and access the Internet in countries involved in the Arab Spring protests" in 2011. [11]

Later court testimony shows that Lulz Security comprised several British and Irish nationals, and one American. The apparent leader was Ryan Ackroyd (moniker Kayla), a former British Army Iraq War veteran and electronic warfare specialist, who recruited a couple of teenager hackers from Shetland and London to join the enterprise. Unfortunately he also linked up with one Hector Monsegur (aka Sabu), a Puerto Rican living in New York who was an FBI informer. All were arrested but received unusually light sentences. All except Ackroyd pleaded guilty and were given suspended sentences. Ackroyd, from South Yorkshire, used a 'trip wire' programme to erase his computer history at the point he was arrested. He pleaded not guilty



Edward Snowden – The WikiLeaks Channel
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so that he did not have to reveal anything to the court. He was sentenced to 30 months, rather than the maximum penalty of 24 years, and is now an associate lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, while Monsegur works for a cyber security consultancy based in Seattle. [12]

In February 2019, the UK Government's own Investigatory Powers Commissioner reported that GCHQ had infiltrated foreign computers and networks, to conduct operations that would have been illegal had they been undertaken in the United Kingdom. It is the first time such an admission has been made, although no details were provided as to which countries GCHQ was targeting. [13]

Manipulating popular unrest

Smart cell phones have enabled people to organise protests and act as citizen reporters, by uploading pictures, videos and blogs to the Internet. Political parties campaign legitimately through social media to influence public opinion, but so can covert actors from outside the country seeking to destabilise 'the regime'.

A people power "colour revolution" was anticipated in Iran following the 2009 presidential elections. In the event, police and militia were able to disperse the protesters rapidly. The Iranian government accused the UK

of meddling in their internal affairs. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Britain a treacherous "Little Satan". Foreign secretary David Miliband described the allegations as "wholly without foundation". [14] No doubt the British authorities learnt lessons from this episode and were able to work more effectively with protesters during the Arab Uprising in North Africa and, more recently, in Syria, to facilitate news gathering from non-government sources in conflict zones and spread propaganda. (On the Arab Uprising and Iranian protests, see *The Socialist Correspondent*, 11, Spring 2011, and 30, Spring 2018.)

It is likely that the UK has been a major player in attempts to destabilise other governments in the pursuit of regime change, employing apparently independent civil society groups to ensure deniability. Some of these attempts may even have been directed against the Russian state, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the 'push back' we warned of a decade ago has now occurred (*The Socialist Correspondent*, 3, Autumn 2008, p18). Over this period, there has been an expansion of foreign language TV news by broadcasters from China, Iran, Russia and Saudi Arabia in order to compete with the BBC and CNN, to the alarm of some in the West who claim that only their story is the truth. [15] Cyber space opened up further possibilities for countries feeling threatened by the USA and its close allies. Cyber security consultants working for the UK government hint that the most active advanced persistent threats to public and private computer networks in the NATO countries originate from China, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Saudi Arabia. As already mentioned, some of these countries are also alleged to be behind social media campaigns that have copied the tactics used by Western promoters of the colour revolutions.

Cyber space has become one of the battlegrounds between the old imperial powers. Indeed, cyber space is viewed by the 'Five Eyes' security

establishment as a theatre of operations to gain influence and intelligence, and to establish positions 'behind the lines', that will advance their strategic and class interests. And Venezuela is only the latest to feel the heat.

[1] Russia GRU claims: UK points finger at Kremlin's military intelligence, *BBC News*, 4 October 2018.

[2] Russia's GRU 'targeted chemical weapons watchdog OPCW', *BBC News*, 4 October 2018; Pippa Crerar, Jon Henley and Patrick Wintour, Russia accused of cyber-attack on chemical weapons watchdog, *The Guardian*, 5 October 2018.

[3] Angus J Kennedy, 1999, *The Rough Guide to the Internet*, London: Penguin: pp. 443-445 and 453-454.

[4] See Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_\(group\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_(group))

[5] The Five Eyes operate their own classified wide area network, a parallel Internet, and reportedly have intelligence sharing agreements with several other countries, including Israel.

[6] Snowden leaks: GCHQ 'attacked Anonymous' hackers, *BBC News*, 5 February 2014; Cahal Milmo, Edward Snowden revelations: GCHQ 'using online viruses and honey traps' to discredit targets, *The Independent*, 9 February 2014.

[7] Vicky Ward, The Russian expat leading the fight to protect America, *Esquire*, 24 October 2016.

[8] ThreatConnect, What is a faketivist? <https://threatconnect.com/blog/faketivist-vs-hackivist-how-they-differ/> Jamie Doward, How a college tech drop out became the champion of new investigative journalism, *The Observer*, 30 September 2018.

[9] ThreatConnect, What is a Name Server? 7 July 2016 at <https://threatconnect.com/blog/whats-in-a-name-server/>

[10] Ian Mackenzie, Who loves the hacktivists? *BBC News*, 22 June 2011.

[11] ThreatConnect, What is a faketivist? <https://threatconnect.com/blog/faketivist-vs-hackivist-how-they-differ/>

[12] Information from Wikipedia pages for Anonymous group, LuizSec, Hector Monsegur, Mustafa Al-Bassam, Topiary (hacktivist) and Ryan Ackroyd.

[13] David Bond, Foreign Office rapped for oversight of top secret spy missions, *Financial Times*, 2 February 2019.

[14] Robin Oakley, Why is Iran so upset with Britain?, *CNN*, 23 June 2009; Damian McElroy and Ahmed Vahdat, London-based activists 'coordinating' Iranian protest movement, *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 July 2009.

[15] CCTV is owned by the Chinese government, Press TV is a subsidiary of the Iranian national broadcaster, and RT is part of Sputnik, a Russian government funded news agency (formerly Novosti). Al Arabiya is broadcast from Dubai but is owned by MBC Group, based in Saudi Arabia and owned by member of the Saudi royal family.

NATO 70 YEARS OF AGGRESSION

by Pat Turnbull

This year is the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - NATO. The military alliance was set up on 4th April 1949 in Washington DC, USA. To mark the anniversary year the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Stop the War Coalition are calling for a huge protest, with international participation, on 7th December 2019 on the occasion of the London summit of the NATO heads of state. They are calling it No to Trump - No to NATO.

NATO was set up by the United States and included also Great Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal and Luxemburg (which had already, in March 1948, formed the first post-war military bloc, the so-called Western European Union). Turkey and Greece joined in 1952 and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955. From its inception, NATO was a baleful presence, its aim being to stop the tide of progressive advance after the end of the Second World War and to further the interests of the leading capitalist nations, in particular the USA.

The legacy of World War Two

In 1945 all over Europe the people were emerging from the horrors of war with a strong desire for peace and progress. In the countries of Eastern Europe liberated by the Soviet Red Army, people's democracies were being established, taking the major means of production into the hands of the people, and redistributing the land to the peasants. The Soviet occupied zone of defeated



Germany was de-nazifying with determination, as shown in the 1946 plebiscite in Saxony which approved the expropriation without compensation of properties owned by war criminals and active Nazis.

In Western Europe too, the people's wishes were expressed in electoral form. A huge defeat of Churchill's conservatives in Britain put a Labour government in power. Communist parties gained big votes in the first post-war elections - in France 28.6 per cent, in Italy 20 per cent, in Finland 25 per cent. In 1945, 1946 and 1947 communists were members of governments of nine European countries: France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Iceland,

Austria, Finland and Luxemburg. A World Federation of Trade Unions was formed in September 1946 with members from 56 countries, including the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, France, Italy, Poland, China, India and Indonesia.

During 1945 and to some extent during 1946 and 1947, representatives of the USSR and the western powers were still able to reach agreement on many important international political problems. The United Nations Organisation was created, the Potsdam Conference took place, peace treaties were signed with Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Finland, the countries which participated in the Second World War on the side of Nazi Germany. But already on March 5th 1946, Winston Churchill, still a major western political figurehead, made his 'Iron Curtain' speech at the US town of Fulton, Missouri, in the presence of US President Truman. He implied the division was the responsibility of the Soviet Union, but was in effect announcing that the west was drawing an 'Iron Curtain' across Europe. It was a declaration of political war on its wartime ally the Soviet Union the chief force which, at immense cost, had defeated fascist Germany.

In March 1947 came the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine. In a special message to the US Congress, the president claimed the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. Financial and military aid was given to the reactionary monarchist regime of Greece and the government of Turkey and in return the US obtained the right to establish military bases in both countries, stra-

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NATO_OTAN_Landscape_Logo.svg

tegic gateways to the Black Sea and the heart of the Soviet Union.

Attempts to use US Marshall Plan economic assistance to lure the European people's democracies, especially Czechoslovakia, into re-joining the imperialist camp failed. But in Western Europe and the US itself measures were taken to curb communist parties and other progressive and peace organisations. Marshall Plan aid accomplished one of its main objectives, the economic reconstruction of West Germany as the imperialist spearhead in Europe.

West Germany

As early as 1945, when the subject of anti-Soviet military blocs was first broached in the western press, discussion began of the possible inclusion of West Germany in such blocs. This could only be done by thwarting the aim of the Soviet Union and progressive Germans for a united, truly democratic and de-nazified Germany.

Between 1946 and 1948 the three western zones under US, British and French administration joined up and on June 20th 1948, with no warning or discussion, announced a unilateral currency reform. On September 7th 1949 the first West German Parliament, the Bundestag, proclaimed a Federal Republic of Germany. Among its leaders were people who had only recently collaborated with the Nazi regime. These included Hans Globke who was Secretary of State and Chief of Staff of the West German government from 1953 to 1963 but had been a Nazi civil servant and co-author of the laws designed to persecute and annihilate the Jewish people. With unbelievable impudence West German government called for a revision of the state frontiers established jointly by the victorious powers after the Second World War, refusing to recognise the Oder-Neisse line as the border between Germany and Poland. The division of Germany was a fait accompli, and on October 7th 1949 the German Democratic Republic was

founded in what had been the Soviet occupied zone.

In 1951 the rebuilding of the West German military machine was begun, and many Nazi generals were called back into service. One of these was Adolf Heusinger a high-ranking colonel in the Nazi army who became not only a general in the West German Army, but went on to chair the NATO military committee from 1961-64. In 1955 the Federal Republic of Germany was admitted into NATO. And only in that year, in May, did the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies - the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Bulgaria and Hungary - form the Warsaw Pact as a treaty of mutual assistance in the event of aggression against any one of them and creating a joint military command of their armed forces. Throughout the existence of the Warsaw Pact, its member countries consistently worked for general and complete disarmament, for the prohibition of nuclear weapons and for the dismantling of foreign military bases.

NATO expands

Fast forward to 1990 and the end of socialist Europe and the Warsaw

Pact. Soon there was once more war in Europe, with NATO a major force in the break up of Yugoslavia, involved in military interventions in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995.

As part of the agreement to unify Germany in the capitalist camp, NATO promised not to advance to the borders of Russia. Before the decade was out, this promise was broken. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO in 1999 and ten days later they were at war with their neighbour, Yugoslavia, as part of the NATO bombing campaign. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009, and Montenegro in 2017. Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are next in line. NATO arms are on the borders of Russia. Frequent exercises simulate attack; exercises like Anakonda 2016, when 30,000 troops and numerous vehicles, aircraft and ships put on a ten-day show of force.

The Soviet Union asked to join NATO in 1954 but was rejected. A document which has since come to light indicates the response from the west was that 'the unrealistic nature of the proposal does not warrant

The Red Army raising the Soviet on the roof of the Reichstag, Berlin, 1945



HTTPS://RAREHISTORICALPHOTOS.COM/soviet-flag-reichstag-berlin-1945/

discussion'. In 1991, 2000 and 2003 Russia asked to join, but to no avail. Russia as a chief NATO target is plain to see.

NATO has thrown off the mask of being a defensive body. On its fiftieth anniversary in 1999, NATO adopted a new 'Strategic Concept'. Henceforth it could conduct 'out of area' offensive operations anywhere on the Eurasian landmass. The war in Afghanistan, begun in 2001, involves all NATO countries and, although NATO's mission officially ended in 2014, it has since launched a new 'non-combat resolute support' operation, with thousands of troops still in the country. As the "No to war - No to NATO" network's 2008 founding document states: 'Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has reinvented itself as a tool for military action by the "international community" including the promotion of the so-called "war on terror".'

US domination

The US arms industry is well served by NATO. There are over 1300 military standardisation agreements and standardisation of NATO countries' military technology means buying US equipment. This is also true in the field of nuclear weapons, a core component of NATO's policies. 'Nuclear sharing' means non-nuclear weapons states are also involved in planning for the possible use of nuclear weapons by NATO, including their delivery. In the event of war, the US has informed NATO members that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty would no longer operate.

Some 150 non-strategic gravity B-61 bombs are stored in six US nuclear weapon facilities in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey. Updated warheads will enter full production in 2020 and be deployed by 2024. Turkey, the Netherlands, Italy and possibly Belgium have plans to buy the nuclear-capable F35A Joint Strike Fighter from the US. Germany will extend the life of

its nuclear-capable Tornado planes through the 2020s. Britain's nuclear contribution is Trident.

Militarising the globe

In 2014 the NATO summit in Wales agreed a Readiness Action Plan to 'respond swiftly and firmly to security challenges from the east and south', establishing a 5000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. NATO Force Integration Units have been established in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia and a Headquarters for a Multinational Corps Northeast has been created in Szczecin, Poland and another for a Multinational Division Southeast



Winston Churchill

in Bucharest, Romania. The US and NATO are installing ballistic missile defence systems in Europe, a policy started under the presidency of Barack Obama. The system was declared operational in 2016. Russia says the activation violates the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

NATO will also continue to help further militarise the European Union, which has been developing its own military since the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 and there has been a Joint Declaration to take the partnership between the EU and NATO 'to a higher level'.

NATO's 'Global Partners' include Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia

(since May 2018), Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan. Brazil is mooted to be next. NATO has also been working with the African Union (AU) since 2005, when it provided support to its mission in Darfur, Sudan - the first NATO mission on the African continent. Currently NATO is supporting the AU mission in Somalia and a long-term 'peace-keeping' capability, the African Standby Force. There are now nearly 40 non-member states that work with NATO.

NATO is extending its reach. The 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw agreed to recognise cyberspace as 'an operational domain, alongside air, land and sea'. Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty requires member states to come to the aid of any member state subject to an armed attack. So cyber-attacks could be used as a trigger for war.

There is precedent for leaving NATO; France left in 1966, though it re-joined later. A Labour government truly committed to an international policy of peace and cooperation would do well to leave. NATO accounts for three-quarters of all military spending in the world. NATO and its leading force, the United States, are the biggest danger to peace.

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Creating places of beauty & opportunity

review of **Planning 2020** by Peter Latham

(Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), November 2018) [1]



Socialism means planning, of services and facilities, of the economy, and of towns, cities and villages. Few realise today what good town planning can do for people, in neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces. Most regard it as an opaque practice, or an obstacle to extending their home.

How Planning has changed

Yet in 1947 it began with fine ideals. The development rights of land were nationalised. The rise in land value after planning permission (“betterment”) would accrue not to the landowner, but to the community. This provision did not survive the 1951 Tory Government. Later, in 1961 the Conservatives gave landowners the right to expect “hope value” when their land was developed [2], putting paid to early ambition and letting land speculation increase. (Hope value is the term used to describe the market value of land based on the expectation of getting planning permission for development on it.) In 2014 land acquisition costs could be 40% of the cost of a new house, whereas in Milton Keynes after 1970 they were only 1%. [3]

In 1947 comprehensive land use planning control was introduced. Responsibility was delegated to local councils, who would prepare a plan and manage development in accordance with it. Unfit areas would be redeveloped using compulsory purchase powers. This framework survives today except that big holes have been punched in it centrally by extra permitted development, allowing empty commercial buildings to be freely converted to flats on unsuitable warehouse parks with

no minimum standards. These are the slums of the future. Compulsory purchase has all but vanished.

To make matters worse, local government has been carved up piecemeal, forming a chaotic patchwork. Powers are now split between counties and districts in some places or sit with unitary authorities in others. Elsewhere some powers are devolved to combined authorities to promote elected mayors. Funding has been repeatedly cut. Regional ministry offices have been closed and regional planning scrapped. Permission in principle has since been centrally imposed on brownfield sites for house building, with the local planning authority only able to assess the details of such schemes. The change represents an erosion of local democracy, and a further bias towards developers. Today we have a centralised, fragmented and understaffed system hardly capable of carrying out its duties.

The Review argues that today’s planning is little more than a land-licensing system for private housebuilders. Public intervention is insufficient to provide happy outcomes for people where they need it. Other regulatory regimes, such as licensing, building control and housing standards have been changed for the worse over a long period.

Ambitious proposals

Imagine working under such constant, regressive change. Yet the Raynsford Review refuses to be cowed, arguing for ambitious reforms. It makes 24 recommen-

dations for action by Parliament, national and local government, professional bodies, universities, the Law Commission, communities, the private sector, and civil society groups. It suggests a road map for change, starting with achievable measures, building confidence for necessary radical solutions as soon as possible.

The suggested improvements are:

- A new legal purpose to promote long term sustainable development, social justice, and the well-being of individuals; to reduce inequality and to increase resilience to climate change. “Sustainable” means without compromise to future generations, not “economically viable.”
- An extensive dialogue about the values of democratic planning between all cross-sector partners: professions, private and public sector organisations, amenity bodies and government ministries.
- An enhanced people-centred Local Plan, positive and powerful, with more efficient preparation.
- A new role for local authorities as master developers, with a strengthened public sector lead, as recommended by the Letwin Review. [4]
- The power for communities to plan effectively, along with increased accountability and community participation.
- People to be given the rights in the Aarhus Convention 1998: access to information, a right to participate and a right to challenge. A transformation in public awareness of planning and our development needs.
- Higher space and accessibility standards, so people benefit directly. A legal duty for Councils

to plan for decent and genuinely affordable homes.

- A new building code to shape the quality of places, protecting peoples' health, safety and well-being, consistent with new national standards on space and accessibility. Not subject to viability testing, and in tune with local and strategic plan policy.

- A simpler hierarchy of national, sub-regional, and local development plans. Optional neighbourhood plans, locally produced, would not be over-ridden when challenged by vested interests, as can happen today.

- Special delivery bodies, such as Development Corporations, to implement plans and projects in areas with long term economic challenges.

- A new Sustainable Development and Well-Being Act, consolidating 28 years of piecemeal legal amendments. Integration of the various legislative regimes: town and country planning, nationally significant infrastructure projects, and new towns.

- Realignment of the agencies of English planning, distinguishing policy making bodies from delivery agencies. A re-purposed National Infrastructure Commission and an enhanced role for Homes England.

- Effective powers of land assembly and land value capture for public authorities, with a strengthened status for the development plan to enable it to socialise betterment values.

- Redistribution of national land tax revenues to low demand areas, by using revenue from stamp duty land tax, and by a review of the total revenue stream presently derived from land taxation.

- Finally, the creation of innovative, visionary planners with the skills, enthusiasm and ethical commitment to create places of beauty and opportunity. University planning schools should have a social mandate to support good outcomes for people. Planners should have improved standing especially in local government, and a "Do No Harm" obligation should be included

in built environment professional codes of conduct.

The Town and Country Planning Association

The Association's purpose is to pursue better place-making, with better life chances for everyone.

Founded by Ebenezer Howard in 1899 as the Garden City Association, the TCPA has long campaigned for healthier new settlements and better planning generally. Its thinking is deeply sceptical of neoliberal economics, and has a strong utopian current, including around land reform. In the last 10 years its work has been notable for vigorous campaigns on sustainable infrastructure and a return to garden city thinking. This effort has borne fruit in Parliament, in the professions and development sector. One result has been the report of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government Select Committee on Land Value Capture [5], widely regarded as authoritative, and useful to progressive opinion.

Visionary Planning

The wide-ranging recommendations illustrate both the complexity of capitalist society in its development sector and the extent of the crisis we are living through. Disjointed, backward looking government prevails. Sadly, proper planning is seen as unnecessary nowadays. The challenge is enormous, even for modest gains. There are vested interests to be confronted, and silo thinking to be broken down. Many players should improve their game if good planning is to be inspired by social principles rather than pragmatism.

The discussion allows a glimpse of how building a new planning system, with its focus on health, well-being and freedom from current contradictions, could be akin to the making of a new society on a socialist economic base.

A Labour government committed to redistribution will have much to do in the planning field. The desired improvements in housing, health, public transport, employment, open space, recreation, retailing and distribution, utilities, carbon reduction as well as science and manufacturing must be brought about locally by the good use of land, minimising inefficiencies and harm; in short a new way of living on the ground.

Thus arises the vexed question of land reform. Land value capture offers exciting possibilities with land costs and speculation much reduced. Land value capture is a policy approach that enables communities to recover and reinvest land value increases that result from public investment and other government actions.

The present uplift in value captured of about 50% [5] should be increased, but must go mostly to local authorities, rather than the Treasury. However, as long as development land remains privately owned, socialisation of the benefits will be limited.

In 1945 there was a push for nationalisation of development land, but even then the balance of forces would not permit it. The result was the high taxation of betterment, a system that was readily scrapped by the Conservatives in the 1950's after the Labour upsurge had died down. Good planning needs more socialist awareness.

[1] The Review Team spent 18 months taking evidence in seminars, discussions and meetings, receiving 200 submissions from public, private and third sector organisations, and individuals. It was chaired by Nick Raynsford, TCPA President and former Labour Housing Minister.

[2] Land Compensation Act 1961

[3] Ellis H and Henderson K. *Rebuilding Britain: Planning for a Better Future*. Policy Press 2014. P.128-9.

[4] Letwin, O: *Independent Review of Build Out: Final Report*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury 29 October 2018.

[5] Land Value Capture HC766. Tenth Report of Session 2017-19 Housing, and Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Sept 2018 para 28.

THE PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE

RIP OFF

by Brian Topping

Half of all Council Tax now goes in interest payments for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects. How did we get to this situation?

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, local government in Britain became a key area for competing class interests. Many progressive and left elements in the Labour Party and trade union movement developed a passionate but essentially naive political commitment to a form of radical, municipal socialism. In many areas of the UK, the municipal socialist forces took control of the local state apparatus, winning elections, and challenging the professional establishment and officer class in occupying key positions in the local state. This process was often supported by left advance in local government trade unions. It wasn't a uniform trend, as significant parts of the country outside the metropolitan areas were largely untouched. These remained under Conservative political control, supported by a right wing ideological civil service and the lead council officers.

Local progressive programmes of social reform were implemented, particularly benefitting working class areas and supporting the aspirations of minority groups in the community. However, these were largely based on the views of Labour's post war local government guru, Herbert Morrison, who advocated the socialisation of services rather than a socialist programme of transformation.

Neo-liberalism takes back control

The now non-existent Greater London Council (GLC), under a left Labour leadership, was often in the vanguard of this advance. However, with all local government in the UK being constitutionally denied the power of local competence to determine its own revenue from taxation, and being dependent for more than 50% of its income on central government, the position of municipal, socialist reformism was always fragile. When central government under the political control of the Conservatives imposed strict controls on the ability of the local state to raise capital through commercial borrowing or use its reserves, the position became even more precarious. This tension continued to gather pace throughout the 80s and early 90s.

It could be argued that while the progressive advance in local government at this time reflected the interests of the working class, the character of the social and economic policies of the central state and government clearly mirrored the concerns of the bourgeois ruling class. Restrictive, anti-union legislation came thick and fast, as did laws such as Section 28 which limited education on Gay/Lesbian relationships, aimed at restricting the progressive activities of local government. The first line of strategic attack by the state came in the form of reduced or variable central

funding. General and specific grants were cut, and legal restrictions were introduced on the ability of local councils to fund capital projects such as social housing. Additionally, the ruling class stepped up its ideological campaign through the mass media against local government as self-indulgent over-spenders of public money. The climate for an incremental offensive against public, local and community services gathered pace.



Herbert Morrison

The great Miners Strike of 1984-85 saw many local government agencies joining with the striking miners and their families, to support and fund resistance to the capitalist offensive against the coal industry and surrounding communities. This

informal alliance helped bring tensions between the local and national state to a head. In 1986 the Thatcher led Tory government abolished the GLC entirely. From that moment, the ruling class attacks on local government, especially metropolitan councils serving the majority of the population, were stepped up. Privatisation became their weapon of choice and its method of delivery was principally Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT).

Acronyms spell cuts

CCT enabled private capital to be used legally as a means to penetrate public sector services. Hospitals, support and ancillary services, educational establishments as well as social and community services, became targets. The interests of private profit would come first, and service provision second. For many left-leaning local authorities, resisting the encroachments of CCT became a major priority. When the framework for service delivery centred on the lowest price winning the tendering process, service quality was diminished. This battle was joined by cuts in central government grants and the switching of public money towards arms production and subsidies to private enterprises. Fighting such rear-guard actions became the main focus of local councils as municipal socialist practice and dreams slowly faded.

In 1997, a new beginning was promised by the election of a national Labour Government, under the banner of New Labour. For local government, not only was it largely a false dawn, there wasn't in fact much that was new in New Labour. Peddling what its architects defined as a new synthesis between capitalism and socialism - a so called "Third Way" - it soon became evident that New Labour saw free market capitalism as crucial to the efficiency of public service provision. CCT was largely replaced by a US import, misleadingly called Best Value (BV). The authors of BV



Example of PFI project. Westlands School, Torquay

unfortunately understood little of the *raison d'être* of public or community services: they understood the price of everything and the value of nothing. BV began another retreat and many rear-guard battles. It limited the possibility of innovation in public services, with its stress on capitalist methodology at each stage of its assessment process and limiting the deeper understanding of service development shared by frontline workers.

Next came New Labour's major pro-capitalist folly to be forced on the public sector, the Private Finance Initiative. At national level the New Labour government continued its love affair with Finance Capital, the City of London and its corporate interests. Keeping government capital investment in public and social facilities to a minimum became an obsession, particularly as it left more money in the Treasury for imperialist wars, and subsidies to the operations of private wealth. In effect this was a magic trick to reduce or lower national debt, while side stepping the need for the government to raise unpopular taxes.

Under PFI a private company is responsible for the up-front costs of any project instead of the govern-

ment or local council. The project, for example a new hospital or school, is then leased back to the appropriate public body which makes annual payments to the private company which provided the original capital. Contracts based on this arrangement can last up to 40 years, but most have been 30. By sleight of hand public sector borrowing was then "off the books".

For the central government, the problem of large scale borrowing and raising taxes for public good thus became more removed. It enhanced its relationship with the money markets, as well as its profile in the financial management of the macro economy. For finance and monopoly capital, it offered and still does offer the best of both worlds. Under PFI finance capital spent its money by lending it, not to the government, but effectively to communities. If people needed a new hospital or school, PFI funding was used, with the lenders leasing the building to the community or local council at vastly inflated rates for decades into the future. The community no longer owned its local school but would rent it, and pay high fees into the long term. A "nice little earner" as Del Boy might say and neatly packaged through public relations

propaganda as a public-private partnership. This practice continued without hindrance until the impact of the international banking crisis of 2007-09 put the squeeze on the British economy. The Tories had to resort to more draconian measures in an attempt to manage the crisis, ensuring that the burden fell on the people and not the bankers. Enter the era of so-called austerity.

Like CCT and BV, PFI opened up new opportunities for capitalism, exposing local government to the vagaries of the marketplace, while placing new limits on democratic participation in the planning and delivery of local resources. However, more than any of this, it has been the austerity programme imposed by the Tories and the EU which has dismantled many of the progressive measures achieved over decades by local government. Massively reduced central government grants have served not only to limit local democracy, but have seen entire services such as youth

services disappear in working class, metropolitan areas.

Progressive localism not enough

So what are the lessons? For many left reformists in the Labour Party or green movement, the possibilities of creating lasting social change and securing local services to meet community needs have been seriously cut back, reducing their ability to defend such services as populations become increasingly alienated from local government. A Labour government will need to loosen the chains on local government and put service provision first and not the cost of providing it. However, a dependency on representative democracy alone will not cut it. For revolutionary socialists the limitations of the local state are clear. In the short and medium term, a programme to reverse the capitalist measures of the last 30 years protecting the interests of private profit, would be a start.

In the long term, we will need to go beyond the relatively isolationist hegemony of winning positions, and achieve a broad mobilisation of class forces based on community and working class control of local resources. Such working class struggle is the road to real democracy. However, it should be recognised that such local programmes which can help mobilise the working class and its allies, remain limited if they are not related to a revolutionary programme which challenges ruling class power. Furthermore, such a progressive socialist programme based on social ownership of the means of production, community resources and mainstream media must have at its strategic heart, the fundamental aim of rejecting Britain's imperialist role in world politics, and the military, industrial, political, economic alliances which underpin it.

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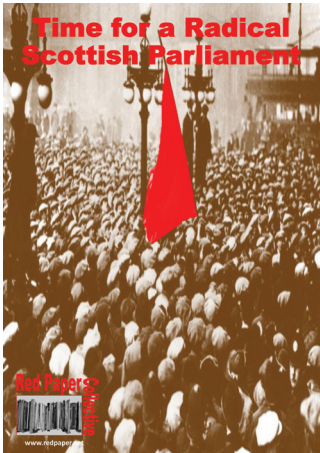
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Hope and radicalism

the future of Scotland

reviews by Paul Sutton



Time for a Radical Scottish Parliament (Red Paper Collective), 2019

The Scottish Parliament has now been in existence for twenty years. It was a Labour Party initiative and its first two governments were Labour Party-Liberal Democrat coalitions; the last three have seen the Scottish National Party in power, with critical support provided by the Scottish Greens. The latest pamphlet by the Red Paper Collective seeks to reflect on this experience and chart a way forward.

The Red Paper Collective was formed in 2012 to present a class based analysis of politics in Scotland to combat the nationalism of the SNP and some others on the Left who adopted a pro-independence position. It favours a decentralised UK with powers devolved to the nations and regions in a federal arrangement which would allow an active and radical economic and social policy at local level to build socialism. It would involve further

powers being devolved to the existing Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland governments, as well as to regions in England, and a recovery of, and an increase in the powers of, local government.

It calls this policy 'progressive federalism' and envisages a UK in which the centralised power of the state is limited to some economic matters such as a common currency, foreign affairs and defence, including border security, along with specific economic and social powers to distribute resources equally across the UK. These would be used to maintain common minimal standards in pensions, and labour and environmental rights, among others.

It is a superficially attractive position since it promises radical change and democratic accountability rooted in class based politics, bringing together "the Scottish working class and its institutions, principally the unions and the Labour Party, with the rest of the British Labour movement in order to achieve political control of the heart of the British state – Westminster and the City of London" (Mills, *A Radical Scotland needs a Federal Future*). Radical political change in Scotland will indeed demand this coalition of forces but it is by no means clear that 'progressive federalism' is a necessary or sufficient condition for such change. The history of radical and revolutionary change elsewhere shows that a strong centralised state is needed in the first instance to win power and above all to maintain power in the face of concerted challenges, including organised force, to the exercise of working class power.

Instead, what 'progressive federalism' offers is an enabling environment for the promotion of specific policies to tackle failures in the current system of governance. The Red Paper Collective has demonstrated this in a number of areas including health, education, and infrastructure but where it has shown its promise best is in delivering an industrial policy. In previous articles in the series and in the current Red Paper John Foster sets out a detailed analysis of the Scottish economy and the policies necessary to 're-industrialise' Scotland.

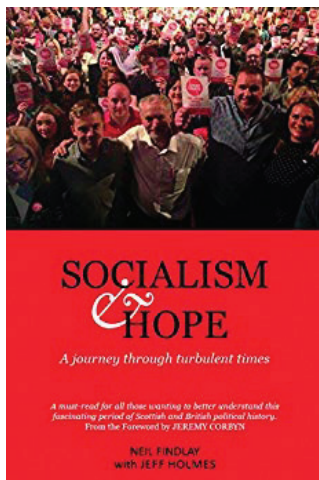
This demands, Foster argues, comprehensive ownership of public facilities; a state investment bank; state aid to endangered firms and to build coherent clusters of specialisms; an active public procurement policy to assist strategic redevelopment; strong local government to deliver a broad and increased range of services; and increased and comprehensive powers for trade unions. Since some of these powers now rest with Westminster there would need to be further devolution of such powers to Scotland. Additionally, within Scotland there would need to be a release of powers from the Scottish government to local government.

However, it is clear that for any of this to work there would need to be complementary action elsewhere, delivered by a radical Labour government in Britain and in the English regions: "Scotland's economy is closely dependent on that of England. Over sixty percent of exports go there. A similar revival of regions and economies across Britain would therefore be one key condition for economic revival in Scotland. Existing synergies are significant. They

could be much bigger” (Foster, “The Scottish Economy and Scotland’s Political Future”).

Exactly so – there is a wider synergy which is crucial for success and it is called the British state. Very few if any of the Red Papers’ policies could be advanced solely within a radical Scottish government, however much power is devolved. This is the weakness of the arguments advanced so far by the Red Paper Collective. ‘Progressive Federalism’ as set out by them is a collection of laudable policy initiatives to be pursued in a devolved Scotland and not a well thought through strategy for fundamental socialist change in the UK as a whole. How it all fits together is far from clear, and would not be credible unless and until there is a broader understanding of what ‘progressive federalism’ means for the rest of the UK.

‘What powers’ at ‘what level’ for which ‘nations and regions’ needs to be understood and agreed and this in turn embodied in a broader constitutional settlement for the UK as a whole, in which socialism is entrenched. Without it ‘progressive federalism’ could become ‘regressive federalism’, involving capitalist competition between nations and regions in a race to the bottom and/or a platform for the final break-up of the UK as further devolved powers fail to deliver what the various governments promise and only independence will do. In short, the next step for ‘progressive federalism’ is to think it through and this demands a wider perspective than the one so far offered.



Socialism and Hope: a journey through turbulent times Neil Findlay (with Jeff Holmes) (Edinburgh: Luath Press 2017)

The question of perspective also re-appears in Neil Findlay’s account of his experiences as a left Labour Member of the Scottish Parliament. The book principally takes the form of a detailed diary of his activities in 2014 and 2015, years dominated by the Scottish referendum on independence, the Scottish leadership election of 2015 where he ran for the Leader’s position but lost to Jim Murphy, and the general election in the UK. The style is not dissimilar to that in Tony Benn’s diaries (Benn was one of Findlay’s mentors), although they lack the breadth of vision to be found in Benn with his ability to set his daily activities in the broader context of the struggle for socialism.

The diary entries detail a very active and committed MSP within the wider Labour movement and provide a commentary on the faults and failures of the Labour Party in Scotland. It too can be accused of a limited vision, not only in how it fought the independence referendum but also in how it splintered in the various leadership elections. The succession of leaders in turn failed to promote policies that

posed any sort of credible socialist alternative, compounding Labour’s electoral decline in Scotland.

Findlay is merciless in his criticism of fellow MSPs and none more so than in his comments on Jim Murphy. He saw him as unprincipled and bound to ‘New Labour’, unable to develop anything of any worth during his brief time as Scottish Leader and luke-warm in his support for socialism. The end result was the catastrophic defeat of the Labour Party in Scotland in the 2015 UK elections which saw it lose forty seats, retaining only one. This despite the fact that “we knocked on 2.5 million doors and contacted 650,000 voters, delivered 20 million leaflets, two million direct mails and employed 35 organisers” (Findlay, *Socialism and Hope*, p. 194). Lack of effort was obviously not the problem – the message was!

It is here that ‘hope’ sets in and takes the form of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party. Findlay acted as Corbyn’s Scottish campaign manager in the 2015 election for Labour Leader and sets out how Corbyn’s visits to Scotland inspired and won support for socialist policies that were eventually adopted in the Labour Party election manifesto of 2017.

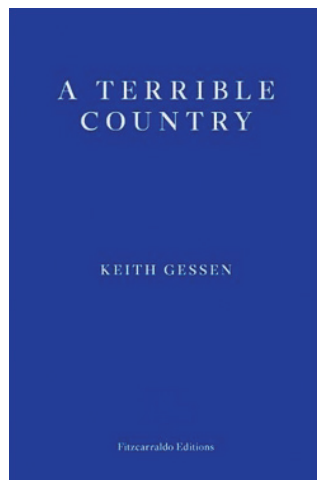
“It was” he says “a document written in Corbyn’s image reflecting the politics he has believed in all his life – fair taxes, Keynesian economics, an end to student fees, free school meals, a pensions triple lock, ending the public sector pay cap, mass council house building, public ownership of rail, water and energy, investment in health and social care, workers’ rights and a whole range of policies that put clear and deep red water between not just Labour and Tories but Labour and the rest, including the SNP. I have never been more proud to campaign on any manifesto in almost 30 years of party membership” (p. 229).

These were also the policies that Findlay had advocated for many

years in Scotland. As such they won him the support of the trade union movement and activists in the Labour movement in Scotland, but not the majority of his fellow Labour MSPs or even a majority of the constituency organisations. The Corbyn effect in Scotland does not enjoy the level of support it does in England although there has undoubtedly been a change in the balance of expectation with the emergence of a belief among Labour supporters that the SNP can be defeated and the supremacy of Scottish Labour once again restored.

This remains crucial as barring a landslide in England and Wales for Labour, a Corbyn government will need the support of a solid tranche of Labour MPs in Scotland. The prospect of any 'confidence and supply' deal with the SNP should a Corbyn government fail to gain a majority in a general election, as indicated by recent opinion polls, can only fill Findlay with dread. It is not something he or the Red Paper Collective would want to contemplate since it would once again put an independence referendum at the centre of Scottish politics.

In his 'Introduction' to the Red Paper Findlay argues that Labour is "acutely aware of our need to develop a credible constitutional offer which ensures we have a strong Scottish Parliament within a strong UK" (p.4). 'Progressive Federalism' seeks to be the constitutional answer to this problem. It merits further exploration but a strong Scottish parliament will need a strong United Kingdom Parliament to begin to deliver socialism. Scotland cannot hope to do so on its own.



review by Marianne Hitchen

A Terrible Country by Keith Gessen

This fascinating story is based on the author's year in Moscow between 2008-9, when he went to stay with his grandmother. How closely the events and people described in the novel correspond to real life is one of the central enigmas of the book.

Andrei's grandmother, Seva Ifraimovna, had lived her whole life in the USSR, becoming a history professor at Moscow State University. She was given an apartment in central Moscow by Stalin, for work she did on a film about Ivan the Great. When we meet her, she has lost most of her savings and her dacha (holiday home) following the reintroduction of capitalism in the early 1990s. She is still hanging on to her desirable Moscow flat, although Andrei's wheeler-dealing older brother Dima, who returned to Russia several years previously, has designs on it.

Andrei's parents emigrated to the US in the 1970s with their two sons, and lived in a solidly Russian enclave near New York. Dima, the elder brother, always identified himself as Russian and the two boys grow up speaking the language. Andrei becomes a scholar of Russian literature and is trying without success to obtain a secure academic post in the

US. It is then that he decides to go and stay with his 89 year old grandmother, to care for her but also to plunder her memories of the Soviet Union for publication purposes.

It turns out that Seva Ifraimovna is suffering the early stages of dementia, while demonstrating 'fluctuating capacity', as we used to say in social services. She has little interest in discussing her past, and keeps asking Andrei who he is. When pressed, she will only say "this is a terrible country".

The book follows Andrei's blundering attempts to understand and adapt to his new environment, and care for his grandmother. Both tasks prove very challenging. He falls victim to casual street violence and struggles to make his meagre income (from online tutoring) cover the high cost of living. Andrei finally joins an ice hockey team and slowly starts to make friends.

Glimpses of the Soviet past come through, for example, the habit of some Muscovites (usually older, Lada driving ones) to stop and give lifts to people standing by the roadside. Seva and Andrei live near the much-loved statue of Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife. He discovers that they both enjoy watching old Soviet films together.

Andrei becomes involved with a group of young Russian socialists and joins their public protests. They meet to study the classic works of Marx and Lenin. The portrait of Sergei, whom Andrei first meets playing ice hockey, is especially poignant. Sergei is a deeply humane, committed Marxist who is ultimately quite isolated. Andrei's attachment to this group is ambiguous. Is he just keen on one of its female members, Yulia? Does he feel genuine sympathy with their socialist aims? Or is he just mining the experience to further his chances of academic tenure back in the US?

This is a keenly observed, thought provoking and highly enjoyable book.