

SALVAGE PERSPECTIVES 4 – FEBRUARY 2017
ORDER PREVAILS IN WASHINGTON



Not since 1943 has there been a better time to be a fascist. The 'liberal order', the demise of which has been the subject of ruling-class hot takes for some years now, does indeed appear to be in a shabby state. Trump's election – on which more within this issue – follows on from the vote for Brexit as a body blow to the politics of the 'extreme centre' in the very lands in which it was born. Victory for the far-right Freedom party in Austria's presidential election was very narrowly averted: should Marine Le Pen win the forthcoming French presidential contest, against which no sensible punter would now bet, the resulting scrap of hard-won relief will evaporate. Then the UN security council will be led by the fascist-through hard-right of US, French and British politics, plus the distinct market-Stalinisms of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. In the second rank will be the hard-right Narendra Modi of India, and the Brazilian inheritors of a soft coup for austerity. This is not a world in which it is growing easier for workers to organise economic self-defence, or develop political organisations to achieve class demands.

Salvage has always enjoyed its *schadenfreude* at the expense of the liberal commentariat, but the historical crisis now unfolding is too grave for cacchination. Since our foundation, we've argued that the right is currently better poised to build in the world ushered in by the economic crisis of a decade past: that most hopes that it would prove fertile territory for the Left were nourished by nostalgia passing for

strategy, taking 1917 as our playbook, or 1968, or 2003.

Not that this is, though they are preparing to instrumentalise it, quite the world the ruling classes had in mind, as the narratives extruded by their various *clerics* show. According to them what we witness is something called 'populism', which, as Nick Cohen and the *Economist* and the *Washington Post* and endless such others would have it, 'explains' both Jeremy Corbyn and Donald Trump, the Brexit and *Oxi* votes, Podemos and Golden Dawn. Thus the racist and the committed anti-racist, the billionaire and the socialist, are lumped together.

In part this narrative reflects how, from the perspective of the Washington Consensus, Corbyn and Trump merely look like different types of doom – though Trump, once dubbed 'Voldemort' by the IMF, is of course now making his peace with the reign of the finance capital to which he referred with barely veiled antisemitism during his campaign. But the ideological move around 'populism' is also a displacement, a refusal to acknowledge how the ascent of Trump was greased by the very political centre now eager to perform its willingness to 'give him a chance' (and how pleasantly surprised the centre's representatives have been by their cordial and productive recent meetings with the President-elect). Without the 'war on terror' and its Islamophobic soundtrack, no Trump. Without the crescendo of neoliberal financialisation, its denouement in the credit crunch, and the redoubling of

its social sadism and jubilant dancing on the graves of the system's losers, no Trump. A key task for the Left is to relentlessly lay bare this genealogy.



The Trumpocene

In the disavowal of the lineage is no small measure of paternalism: witness David Runciman writing in the *London Review of Books* that voters have thrown a 'tantrum' to which 'the likeliest response is for the grown-ups in the room to hunker down, waiting for the storm to pass'. And some storms do pass: perhaps the most tempting response to the crisis is to believe that not that much has changed, that nothing fundamental is really going on, that it won't be that bad. As a strategy for getting to sleep at night, this is understandable: as a political diagnosis, it's worse than useless.

It's true that Trump will be hedged around by the stability-valuing institutions of the US state. Part of the horror with which the new President is regarded inside the Beltway is that, unpredictable, inappropriate and untrained, he demeans the office of commander-in-chief amongst those for whom no number of dead Arabs or Guatemalans could do the same. As one liberal internationalist put it to a *Salvage* editor: 'I've lost my moral authority!'

The bruised-but-dignified US state apparatus and establishment will restrain Trump barely, if at all. Without a loyal party organisation to make

the machine his own, incompetence, incoherence and paralysis may offer a respite from some of Trump's policies – but they're just as likely to exacerbate others. Nor is he without ideological-organisational support from the hard right of the Republicans, already more akin to a European far-right formation than the increasingly befuddled technocrats of the neoliberal centre.

At its edge, of course, this base shades into the mercantilists and white supremacists of the so-called 'alt-right'. A glance at Trump's cabinet should freeze the blood: much has been written about Steve Bannon, the pound-shop Streicher elevated to chief of staff. Less boisterous but even more dangerous are Trump's appointments to offices that cascade influence down through the state: Klan-curious Jeff Sessions as attorney general; John Bolton – a man who never met a Middle Eastern state he didn't want to bomb – as (at the time of writing) potential secretary of state.

One terrifying appointment is at the Environmental Protection Agency: Scott Pruitt is a climate-change denier, reflecting Trump's insistence – sincere or not – that climate science is a Chinese hoax to hobble US growth. Trump proposes to make America great again by making America sink again. As Arctic ice reaches its lowest-ever level, its waters warm enough to bathe in, and atmospheric CO₂ levels not seen in our species' lifespan, climate-change denial returns to power in the world's largest economy.

Standing Rock protesters succeeded in temporarily blocking the Dakota

Access oil pipeline from passing through Native American tribal lands, but the pipeline will be built, and Trump – who has personal investments in the corporations building it, political contributions from the same, and a close class alliance with the energy sector redolent of the Bush era – plans to ‘cut the red tape’ which is obstructing further oil exploitation. The Paris Agreement, coming into force days before Trump’s election, is pitiful, non-binding, inadequate and almost certainly too late: its function was ideological, self-congratulation and evasion for the ruling classes. Even this minimal decorous veil, though, was too much for Trump’s death drive, and he has promised US withdrawal. Increasingly agitated scientists debate whether the window of possibility to prevent runaway, socially cataclysmic warming has closed: Trump promises to seal it shut.

On this, as on almost all issues where he has a clear policy, Trump is very much the greater evil. This is not in contention. The claim is not that the new authoritarian right are equivalent to the neoliberal centre. They’re worse. And/but it is those who have been in charge who brought us to this pass – for which they display neither reflection nor responsibility. Instead, they drone, a ‘new centre’ must be founded – presumably so it can repeat the failures of the old one.

Tony Blair, who earlier declared himself baffled by the new political conjuncture, has declared his ‘comeback’, the better to fight

‘populism’ and the ‘nutter’ Corbyn, and reinvent the centre. Joining the conga-line of vapid ‘populism’-bashers, he says: ‘The right attacks immigrants while the left rails at bankers, but ... the addiction to simple, demagogic answers to complex problems are the same for both extremes.’ Blair is betting on the idea that there is a vacuum at the centre of politics today: how right he is. And of that vacuum he is the epitome.



After Truth

The nostrum Blair expresses so clearly – that the centre and those used to governing in its name have a privileged relationship to truth and complexity – is encapsulated in the smug meme of ‘post-truth politics’.

For this supposedly new state of affairs the traditional media is clear that – of course – their newer competitors are to blame. That social media has created bubbles of the like-minded, feeding each other fake news stories, neither knowing about nor caring for the opinions of others, nor for the veracity of their own. That such an electorate will reward a man who brags about sexual assault, making him pussy-grabber-in-chief. And that the solution to this problem is mutual understanding, a search for common ground. Let the Millennial lie down with the *Daily Mail* reader, and the tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

Twitter and Facebook are, certainly, unconscionable. They are, however, no

more responsible for Trump, Brexit and Le Pen than they were for the Egyptian revolution. Implied in the formulation 'post-truth politics' is that what went on before it was the truth, and nothing but the truth.

Let's humour this idea, and ask, then, when did such politics begin? At what point did xenophobia and misdirected rage become the common currency of politics?

28 July 2002? Thanks to the Chilcot Report, we know that to be the day Tony Blair assured George W. Bush that he would be 'with you whatever' in the invasion of Iraq – just as the British public was being assured that it was not inevitable that their government would join the US invasion, and that every effort was being made to find Saddam Hussein's (non-existent) arsenal of weapons of mass destruction under UN auspices. Where is the accountability for the lie, and the incalculable pain that followed in its wake? The man responsible still walks free, with the effrontery to lecture others on their extremism.

If that seems too early, how about the UK election of 2010? To justify its austerity program, the Conservatives insisted that 'Labour wrecked the economy' by increasing public spending, living beyond the country's means, and inflating public debt to an unmanageable size. This narrative, with its poisonous demonisation of 'skivers', public-sector workers, the unemployed and the disabled, was repeated monotonously on the national broadcaster and in every major

newspaper, becoming hegemonic, a default common sense. It was also utterly false. In the wake of that falsehood has ensued the wrecking of what remains of the welfare state, a deterioration in living standards the Institute for Fiscal Studies describes as 'the worst since the last war', and a geographically mediated decline responsible in no small part for the Brexit vote. Yet those who propagated, abetted and (in the case of the Liberal Democrats) added to the big lie now present themselves as the guardians of reasonable, fact-based policy.

In the search for the source of toxic political xenophobia and authoritarianism, why not revisit September 2007, when Gordon Brown introduced the demand for 'British jobs for British workers'? Those of us who fought against this slogan warned that it would pollute working-class politics for years to come: if only we had been wrong. Anyone wondering where 'populist' disregard for democracy comes from would also do well to look to the post-crisis governance of Italy and Greece – the former subject to the direct and unelected rule of finance in November 2011, the latter's far-left experiment under Syriza crushed by a European extreme centre that held that 'against the treaties there can be no democracy'.

How long did people expect all of this to continue, without something going seriously wrong?

Yet still the anti-populist would-be populists of the hard centre persist in their catechisms. Fillon, who promises

a dose of the Thatcherite medicine France has supposedly been lacking, likely to be the main opponent of Le Pen, has already signalled his racist bona fides, by refusing to evince a shred of 'repentance' for France's colonial past, and announcing a renewed countersubversive thrust against the 'radical Islam' he claims is 'corrupting' French Muslims. The Socialist Party's candidate will probably be Manuel Valls, a pale imitation of the same, a man who derides nostalgia for the *trentes glorieuses* of social democracy. His austere politics are given their own racist-populist gloss by his obnoxious role in the Islamophobic crackdowns of recent years, making him a half-hearted opponent of Le Pen on this issue. If these comprise the frontline against fascism, the future is grim.

An absurd climacteric of neoliberal anti-populist populism was recently reached in Italy when Matteo Renzi, the unelected Prime Minister, tried to blackmail voters into voting for a programme of constitutional changes that would reduce democratic checks, remove powers from the senate and local government, and allow him to push through a fresh wave of austere reform. This was pitched as a modernisation project, a blow against corruption, a purge of useless politicians, and a re-tooling of state capacity. Renzi proposed the changes following his unpopular labour-market reforms, which, eroding working conditions more than even Berlusconi succeeded in doing, were justified as heralding a new wave of growth

by allowing large employers to hire people on less secure contracts. As unemployment rose and his party's traditional supporters abandoned him, Renzi boasted about a tepid 1 per cent growth rate. He secured the backing of the European Union and threatened that if the reforms were not voted through, he would resign his post, implicitly opening the possibility of a new election and a populist right government.

Neoliberal authoritarianism was rejected by 60 to 40 per cent. With an aura of martyrdom typical of centre-left politicians shredding their own credibility in this era, Renzi sniffed, 'we tried to give Italy a chance to change, but we didn't make it'.



Right-Populism and Capital

Is the loyalty of the centre to capitalism reciprocated? The overwhelming alignment of industrial and financial corporations behind Hillary Clinton would suggest so. Trump won as a politician of the insurgent right, threatening not only to jail his electoral opponent, but also to take down the 'global elite' he claimed – with one of those unsubtle nods to the antisemitic right – were keeping down American workers.

But already there are signs that business is warming to its supposed Nemesis. Upon his election, stock markets were sanguine, and as of writing, they remain so. 'Wall Street hits

records', the *Financial Times* reported, 'as Trump optimism continues'. Why?

To a degree, Trump has set out to neutralise the opposition of capital. Anti-Wall Street rhetoric notwithstanding, Trump's pick for Treasury Secretary is Steven Mnuchin, formerly of Goldman Sachs. (The other GS alumnus in his team is the notorious Bannon.) To chair his economy forum he appointed Blackstone CEO Steve Schwarzman, who is now dropping broad hints that Trump will conduct a bonfire of regulations and taxes. Notwithstanding his still nebulous plan to cut drug prices, the tax cuts he promises to pharmaceuticals – in the interests of encouraging them to 'repatriate' their wealth – they expect to produce a surge in profits. On trade, Trump still talks a bullish game on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, but has indicated that he will not scrap NAFTA, despite campaign claims to the contrary.

The high value of shares is also related to Trump's \$500 billion stimulus proposal to upgrade the US's antiquated infrastructure, which even the OECD anticipates will raise US growth rates by one percentage point. This will favour privileged corporations and industrial sectors, particularly energy and construction, key components of Bush's capitalist base.

Trump's support for the carbon-based economy has specific class valences. As Andreas Malm has shown, the dominance of that economy has been determined to a substantial extent by the exigencies of political class

domination. If its early supersession of alternative energy sources was imbricated with the defeat of the British working class in the 1850s, the suppression of alternative energy and the conservation of the fuel deathlock economy today is about reversing the rise of 'new economy' capitalist sectors.

Tax cuts and public-private alliances will be used to attempt to stimulate private-sector investment. Trump will also invest heavily in the military-industrial complex, as have previous Republican administrations, as a form of backhanded Keynesianism: indeed, during his campaign he spouted recommendations for Pentagon-augmentation from the Heritage Foundation, that could add \$900 billion to the Defense budget over the coming decade. Many of his appointees are drawn from the military or defence contractors, suggesting a privileged political relationship to the manufacturers of death. This will be the first stimulus programme carried out by the US government outside of a recession for over five decades. And it will be, as Bernie Sanders put it, 'corporate welfare, coming and going'.

This doesn't mean the US capitalist class is rallying behind Trump: it's rallying behind the best deal it can get from a situation it didn't choose. A right-populist stimulus plan is, unsurprisingly, better for business than a left-populist one – but it's still a serious risk, especially given the team expected to implement it.

Worse for business is that losses arising from Trump's withdrawal from

the Trans-Pacific Partnership – a retreat conducted on the fantastical basis that the US has enriched an Asian middle class by impoverishing American workers – are potentially vast. The setback to the American empire, even if Trump makes up for it with more violence, would not just be calculable in narrow economic terms. The purpose of the TPP, as *The Economist* put it, was to allow the United States to ‘shape the architecture of international trade in Asia and beyond’ for the foreseeable future. It would have rolled out a new ‘trade’ regime bolstering intellectual-property rights restricting state support for publicly owned companies. Aside from creating streams of profit for ‘new economy’ corporations, the techbros and Silicon Valley capitalists who lined up behind Clinton, this would have afforded the United States a new degree of political penetration into rival capitalist states, and stamped its authority in the coming waves of globalisation.

Trump’s first victims in all this, populist sops notwithstanding, will be the working class. Like Modi, he represents himself as a tough, business-minded fixer who can get things done. Unions, strikers, labour and environmental regulations, protesters, will be lined up as such obstacles.

What his opponents may have on their – our – side is a certain strategic opening that would not be present in the case of a more establishment-mandated candidate: the relative weakness of capitalist support for Trump. This, the divisions in the

capitalist class over how much room to give him, and indeed the divisions that are now opening up within the US state itself – with local sites of state power, from mayor’s offices to state capitals, and even the LAPD, lining up to oppose him on policies such as his plan for deportations – might afford militant protest a cleavage on which to operate, an opportunity for leverage.

Of course, any such leverage will have to be fought for, unremittingly.

Trump could be a two-term calamity: there is also the chance that he could be the weakest president in United States history.



On the Whitelash

Accompanying the aristocratic liberalism of the commentariat have been confused and truculent engagements with the politics of identity, typically oscillating between two bad iterations. In one, gains made by women, people of colour, migrants and so on, have been at the expense of, an affront to, an entity known as the ‘white working class’, which has now lashed out in anger. The Clintonite liberal Mark Lilla expressed a soft version of this, explaining to *New York Times* readers that ‘identity politics’ – by which phrase he invoked overly clamorous and hasty claims for justice on the parts of women, gays and ethnic minorities – had destroyed a broad progressive coalition that Bill Clinton assembled during the 1990s. (This claim

was in part linked to Democratic Party internal politics, as the old guard fought hard to keep the mildly progressive Muslim Keith Ellison from its chair.) In the other version of the argument, the victories of Trump, Brexit and so on are reasons to be *very disappointed* in this 'white working class'. Any economic programme that might alleviate working-class suffering, therefore, is considered akin to a concession to white supremacy and/or misogyny.

The shared assumption of these two specious arguments is that there is a cohesive, corporative entity, 'the white working class'; and, following from that, that it is racist, and that it has a true material interest in racism. Either way, this white working class should get what they deserve: more racism, or more poverty.

To dispute these claims should not be to minimise the scale or traction of white supremacy or misogyny. *Salvage* insists, rather, that while there are workers who are white, whiteness does not mean the same thing in, say, a Pennsylvania mining community as in Fifth Avenue. Whiteness does different work for different groups, including different groups of workers, most of whom, far from choosing between Trump and Clinton, simply did not vote. While Trump 'flipped' some key groups of white workers, the majority of his support came from the traditional Republican base, at the core of which is the affluent – though increasingly insecure – new middle class. *Their* reaction to 'identity politics' is an opposition to the slightest concession

to racial, sexual and gender equality, to the relative decline of the affluent white male, long in the making and long past time.

To achieve anything, it is an urgent priority for the Left to think clearly about its relationship to whiteness, the working class, and to resisting the allure of that glittering generality, the 'white working class', dangled before it on both sides of the Atlantic. Anyone on the Left who believes that Trump embodies a legitimate protest against the neoliberal status quo will likely try to placate and mollify his supporters, thus neutralising their own militancy. The unconscious assumption of such discourse is that the working class, the *real* working class, is white – notwithstanding the multiracial working class that has been mobilised in Black Lives Matter, at Standing Rock, behind \$15 per hour, and during the Chicago Teachers' Strike. On the other hand, those who believe – as was argued in *The Nation* – that Trump's victory showed that 'the preservation of white supremacy' was the 'paramount interest' of 'particularly working-class white people', are likely to be at best narrowly and ineffectually militant. At worst, they are likely to be vulgar apologists for Clinton, who can conceive of no reason other than bigotry why any working stiff wouldn't throw her a vote.

A more detailed consideration of the parameters of Trump's ascension, and the ruinous and unconscionable behaviour of the Democratic Party, and its part in that victory, follows,

in our essay 'Saturn Devours His Young: President Trump'. Here, we stress that the majority of white workers didn't vote for Trump – or at all – and that Trump capitalised on the breakdown of the inherited modes of political management in the first instance by appealing to the disproportionately affluent and even college-educated Republican base. That there is a 'whitelash' in the Trump vote, therefore, most not be confused with the idea that there is any kind of uniform 'white working class' backlash. And the 'whitelash', visible already in the terrified suburbanites of 2008 warning, amid economic *sturm und drang*, that Barack Hussein Obama is an occult Muslim, has congealed around an issue on which the Democrats do not have remotely clean hands.



The Eternal Muslim

Now that Trump has won, it seems, he is willing to row back from some of the more deranged policies he promised his base. The Muslim registry, we have been informed, was never a proposal. We misunderstood: Trump only ever wanted to improve existing surveillance practices – which are both extensive and extending. Thus Trump aimed and aims to situate himself within a mainstream, acceptable spectrum of Islamophobia, just as previously he justified his deportations policy by pointing out (correctly) that Obama had deported record numbers of migrants.

In the context of the 'war on terror', Islamophobia became the quilting point of a new global far right, taking its cue from United States empire ideologues like Robert Spencer, Debbie Schlusell, Michelle Malkin, Daniel Pipes and Glenn Beck. The Front National, Vlaams Belang, the Swiss People's Party, Pegida, the English Defence League, the Dutch Freedom Party and Anders Breivik adopted as their chief point of reference the homogenous, monolithic and menacing figure of The Muslim. The British writer Bat Ye'Or's 'Eurabia' thesis, according to which European authorities had formed a corrupt alliance with the Arab world, became the basis for polemics about 'Londonistan' – a contemporary operating equivalent of the antisemitic trope of 'Jew York' – claiming that this outpost of 'Western civilisation' was being taken over by Islam.

Liberal intellectuals played their part in this, often vaunting a 'new atheism' as the martial creed of the age. Sam Harris was not untypical in saying that "'Muslim extremism' is not extreme among Muslims', that Islamic doctrine is to 'convert, subjugate, or kill unbelievers; kill apostates; and conquer the world', and that those 'who speak most sensibly about the threat that Islam poses to Europe are actually fascists'. Martin Amis and Christopher Hitchens gave vent to the 'demographic threat' posed to Europe by Islam. Feminist Joan Smith and social-democratic author Will Hutton each claimed that the appearance of symbols of Islam like the 'veil', or the

construction of new mosques, owed their energies to the same source that produced suicide attackers and threatened civilisation. Above all, Tony Blair fuelled the Islamophobia lobby by blaming acts of political terror on the 'evil within' the Muslim community.

In the US, the Islamophobia industry was mostly aligned behind Bush, but it had no shortage of outposts in the Democratic Party establishment: one of Hillary Clinton's strongest supporters in the 2008 primary and again in 2016, for example, was General Wesley Clark, who has called for a revival of World War II-style internment camps for 'disloyal Americans', above all 'radical Muslims'. These chickens came home to roost when, during the 2008 presidential election, *Obsession*, the anti-Muslim propaganda film, was distributed in key battleground states as a companion to the Islamophobic baiting of Obama.

Undeterred, Hillary Clinton's election campaign articulated a muted version of Trump's countersubversive ideology when she argued that '[w]e need American Muslims to be part of our eyes and ears on our front lines.' As though Muslim-Americans are intrinsically knowledgeable about, and responsible for, those organising jihadist confrontations with the American empire. 'Good Muslims' tell on their bad neighbours, and 'bad Muslims' are the ones surveilled.

Trump's extrapolation from this securitarian logic – to say that since good and bad Muslims were increasingly impossible to tell apart

they should all be registered – was not a wild stretch.

For the moment, Trump is prepared to settle for electronic monitoring of everyone on the FBI's 'terrorist watch list', but should he wish to go further, he inherits a grand, labyrinthine network of executive powers. He has been gifted the ability to imprison people indefinitely without charge, assassinate American citizens without due process (it goes without saying that non-citizens are murdered by Joint Special Operations Command on the say-so of the president's kill list) and increased surveillance. All these instruments of oppression and more were consolidated by the man the cringe-inducing sanctification cult of whom among liberals proceeds at breakneck pace – Obama.



Solidarity, Graffiti and Rubble

It is shamefully the case that some on the Left have participated in the bellicose counter-jihadist strains of Islamophobia as an outgrowth of their support for President Assad of Syria. The crushing of the Arab uprisings triggered in 2011 – a brutal nadir of which has been reached with the fall of Aleppo, after barrel-bombing, chlorine poisoning, the destruction of all hospitals and civilian infrastructure, with Putin's bombers doing much of the work – is a tragedy for the international Left.

The 'goodbye' videos posted by activists and citizens are not merely

a testament to that tragedy: they are a lesson. Their spirit is echoed in the graffiti of another besieged and defeated Syrian city, Homs: 'Remember, when we were still human? Do you remember, Homs?' These are people who threw off, however temporarily and imperfectly, the rule of a neoliberal tyranny by their own collective agency, and preserved the memory of that uprising in the rubble of their homes. Who imagines that any future revolutionaries will find more favourable conditions or less savage counter-revolution? A Left that slanders and ignores such people, simply because the regime against which they revolted was not a pro-American one, is refusing to learn the lessons of *this* epoch, the epoch of collapse, rather than that of circa-2003 'regime change'.

It is common, on the anti-anti-Assad Left, to hold Turkey and other outside powers responsible for the destruction wreaked on Syria. *Salvage* holds no brief for the authoritarian thug Erdoğan. Yet the road to the destruction of Aleppo has been paved by a change in Turkish policy, not by support for the Free Syrian Army or any other rebel group. Content from the autumn of 2016 on to pursue its war against the Kurdish PYD, Turkey turned its attention away from the rebels in Aleppo, allowing the Russian-Iranian-regime advance while, as the *Financial Times* put it, 'Russia gave Turkey a free hand against Syrian Kurdish forces to whom it had offered temporary and opportunistic support'.

One can easily imagine the fate of the PYD cantons once all hands, including

Assad's, are freed. The mainstream Syrian opposition meanwhile has, according to the *Washington Post*, offered to 'work with Trump and Russia'. As if there would be anything with which to work. This follows from a long, and failed, opposition strategy of seeking alliances with states such as Turkey only to learn that these have no permanent allies, only interests. A hard lesson is being taught here, one that will no doubt soon be visited on the PYD: solidarity against rulers, not with them, is the surest strategy.

In the midst of the assault on Aleppo, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm – one of the towering Syrian Marxist intellectuals of whom Western Leftists work hard to be ignorant – died in Berlin. Al-Azm said in an interview two years into the uprising, 'in its revolution today, Syria spills this much blood in order to atone for all its past sins and erase its shame, and for this reason, I am with it'. How much greater the tally will be now, and how much worse the reckoning.

Yet there are Assad supporters who cheer on the bloodletting in Aleppo on the basis of a crude, barbarised anti-empire sentiment: witness George Galloway's valediction 'long live the Syrian Arab Republic'. If antisemitism was last century's socialism of fools, Islamophobia is this century's anti-imperialism of fools.

Indeed, as the rise of the alt-right illustrates, the dominance of Islamophobia is hardly any guarantee against the revival of antisemitism. As Enzo Traverso has argued, the segue of one into the other is not accidental.

Their raciological metaphors are incredibly similar: ‘The beards, tefellin and kaftans of the Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe [of the early twentieth century] correspond to the beards and veils of the Muslims today ... Judaism and Islam both function as negative metaphors of alterity; a century ago, the Jew as painted by popular iconography inevitably had a hooked nose and sticking-out ears, just as Islam today is identified by the burqa’. While much of the neo- and post-fascist Right has made a conscious effort to shed pre-war variants of biological antisemitism, the cultural tropes of Jew-baiting were visible in the Trump campaign and are all over the pro-Trump far-right media, most notoriously *Breitbart*.

Tellingly, some of the loudest advocates for this refulgent Streicherism are staunch apologists for Israel. The Zionist Organisation of America’s dinner date with Steve Bannon, and Alan Dershowitz’s defence of Bannon against well-founded charges of promoting antisemitism, shocked liberal Jewish opinion, but it was just the loudest of a chorus of hard-right Zionist defences of the alt-right. This is cause for disgust but not amazement: Israel and its hasbara merchants, as a logical corollary of the colonial struggle against Palestine and the identification of Israel’s survival with US global power, have been among the most vitriolic traducers of Islam as, per Efraim Karsh’s claim, an ‘imperialist’ creed.



Against the Popular Front! For a Policy of Class against Class!

The Trumpocene is, then, an overdetermined moment. It condenses an accumulation of dysfunctions and pathologies long brewing within the carapace of a liberal world order. In a new era of global capitalist crisis, the Washington Consensus is buckling, and the political parties upholding it across Europe and North America are hollowing out. America’s supremacy by dollar and bullet in the Middle East has been under strain, creating a space for recrudescing Russian imperialism. The deployment of Islamophobia to organise war and repression, solidify new political coalitions, regiment urban struggles over resources, and coordinate anti-welfare policies in the preceding era has birthed a vicious new radical right. All this in the context of accelerating climate catastrophe so precipitous that the question is not how to ‘avoid’ it, but how to fight for a world in which it is a given, worsening reality.

How do we on the Left occupy any of the spaces created by these dysfunctions, and put them to work for our own purposes? Can we break the reactionary wedge?

To defeat an energised, racist right, in the United Kingdom there is much excitable talk, as if the concept was brand new, of a ‘progressive alliance’ – a grouping that, in most versions, is supposed to include, of all possible partners, the Liberal Democrats. If pursued, this would end in a worse historical impasse than resulted from previous iterations of such alliances – or

'popular fronts' – such as the effort by the British soft left to forge an anti-Thatcherite coalition extending from Neil Kinnock to Tory 'wets'. It's one thing for Corbyn and his allies to contemplate parliamentary alliances with the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens, who will on some key issues give him more reliable votes than his own backbenchers: in an electoral system in which a clear majority is likely to elude Labour, this sort of alliance has a certain logic. This cannot be said of the Liberal Democrats, whose leader has snapped, with pup-like yaps, at Corbyn's heels since he took the leadership. To tie the fortunes of the left to an avatar of the collapsing centre, without any 'progressive' credentials, will ensure that the latter sucks everything that approaches into its diminishing space.

There *is* an urgent need for coalitions to face down the radical right, but not on the terms of an establishment centre the strategies and rhetoric of which have been found repeatedly wanting, from Cameron-Clegg, to Clinton, to Renzi. The oblivious sense of wounded entitlement with which this centre greets its demise would make its representatives spiteful and useless partners, even if such an 'alliance' meant anything more than standing down Labour candidates to give the Liberals a clear run against the Tory right. At any rate,

the very underlying social reality which demands alliances – the fragmentation of political identities, the weakness of the renescent left, the tactical conservatism of an emaciated trade-union movement – has been brought about with no small amount of help from the decaying centre that now demands the right to fix it.

A decisive and depressing factor in this situation is the left's relative backwardness, its underdevelopment, its being no match for the situation. Jeremy Corbyn's socialist leadership of the Labour Party was won in the context of a dialectic of defeats.

It was the very crushing of the organised left that ensured it was unable to create a viable nationwide radical split from social democracy, leaving Labour the only game in town, in England at least. It was the painful and protracted decline of the trade-union movement from the Thatcherite 'war of movement' to the slow euthanasia of the Blair period, and its renewed throttling under austerity, that ensured union leaders took the unprecedented step of voting for the hard-left candidate to lead Labour. It was the bitterness following from the Scottish referendum defeat that ensured the right-wing heartlands of Labourism transferred, wholesale, to the SNP. This is an incomplete dialectic, an unfinished symphony whose movements can be counted

on to catch the left's fledgling organisations by surprise.

There is, beyond the electoral expressions of the left, and its fracturing along national and party lines, a social left, a radicalising minority which is also a political and cultural counterweight – late to the game – to the dynamic force of the radical right. On various axes there is at least a potential for some increasing radicalisation to the left. On the question of living standards, Britain's wages have fallen harder and faster than at any time since the 1910s: the stabilisation of British capitalism in the twentieth century depended on long periods of average wage growth, not contraction. With the trade-union movement unable to do much to stymie the losses, there's no sign of these living-standard trends being impeded, notwithstanding the ersatz 'white workerism' of the May administration. Temporarily less-bad-than-feared economic news since the EU referendum has provoked a wave of idiotic perky boosterism from Michael Gove and conservative Brexiteers: but '[r]eality hurts', in the words of David Blanchflower, formerly of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, and 'the news is not going to get better', as business investment, already low, dips, and inflation rises – which will continue to lower real wage growth, if not real wages. The accompanying

renewal of austerity amid 'Brexit blues' will tend to exacerbate the worst dysfunctions and deprivations, including social cleansing and the locking out of growing numbers of young (especially racially oppressed) people from the housing and labour markets.

The unexpected windfall of Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party has begun, slowly and incrementally, to shift the debate on some of these issues, to hold back the tide of officially sanctioned sadism just a little bit. But weak as the left revival is, it has not begun to make a dent on the misery now deepening, to borrow Larkin's inaccurate and charming metaphor, like a coastal shelf.

The infrastructure against social misery has yet to be built. The associations needed to replace the lost cultures of trade unionism and cooperativism, not to mention communism, have to be constructed almost out of new materials. The progressive alliance we need, whatever electoral calculations Corbyn may, honourably enough, make, is not primarily of the parliamentary type. His call for a 'social movement' can become a shibboleth, but it's perspicacious to the extent that if the hundreds of thousands of new recruits to Labour can do anything useful it is to organise the working class: not just in specific defensive campaigns –

Save the Library, Stop the Cuts – but on the offensive too, in efforts to unionise the precarious, organise residents for affordable housing, occupy higher education, and so on.

With some 20,000 members, money and a media profile, the left Labour group Momentum, one could have hoped, could be the militantly organised grassroots of Corbynism. As of writing, unfortunately, it is descending into a bitter, unseemly and predictable faction fight between a weak leadership group and some of the most degenerated particles of British Trotskyism (the latter comprising a few exhausted ex-Militants, and the acolytes of Sean Matgamna). This fight, for contingent reasons, has crystallised around the question of Momentum's voting system. Most of the remnants of Trotskyism may not know that they are political detritus, ground-down particles of something that once mattered, but they do know that with a traditional structure of delegate-run conferences, they have the skills to pack meetings and get more people elected than their infinitesimal stature should permit. Opposing them, the relics of Eighties Bennism want a one-member-one-vote system in which decisions are taken by online voting, presumably on the basis that it will empower the better-known, celebrity wing of Momentum.

With characteristic tactical finesse, in their panic at the phantasmagorical threat of Trotskyist takeover, this latter group voted to cancel a national committee meeting at which they feared losing the vote on the future shape

of the organisation. The justification showed how half-hearted and bungled this effort was: the meeting had to be cancelled because it conflicted with another regional Labour meeting that day. This meant it could be rescheduled while the leadership's opponents, not without some justice, cried foul.

In their mutual escalation around this issue, the parties to this dispute have neglected to specify any other concrete issue: as if the real issue was ownership. As if any group on the Left had a proven track record, or an innate right to inherit the colossal opportunity represented by Corbyn's breakthrough.

Meanwhile, the importation of a certain seaside kitsch into official patriotism – May's plea for a 'red, white and blue Brexit' – along with the revived anti-immigrant offensive signalled by Dame Louise Casey's review into 'opportunity and integration', is yet again raising the national question. Here, there is very little space to feel encouraged. The prospect of Scottish independence, this time gained on the basis of admission to a neoliberal supranational institution rather than on radical social-democratic and anti-nuclear demands, is being met by a strained and unconvincing 'progressive' British or English patriotism from the softer end of Corbynism. Even its more laudably intransigent elements on this issue, such as Diane Abbott, feel constrained to pay at least some tribute to the idols of national belonging.

This is a strategy predicated, in many cases, on systematic bad faith. *Salvage* considers the (long-standing)

tradition of 'left patriotism' to be utterly and disastrously wrong-headed, but we don't dispute that some of its advocates are sincere – if at best muddled – in their patriotic 'commitment' to 'their' country, whatever that might mean. In most modern quasi-Corbynite versions, however, its advocates' justification for the position is that *others*, the working class, very often that 'white working class', demand it. That this discourse must be spoken, rather than that they wish to speak it. We put it to them that if they are not prepared to proclaim themselves proud to be British – as we emphatically are not – their proclaimed patriotism is a lie.

And, further, lie or not, this strategy will fail. The symbols of British nationhood are so heavily structured by racist and conservative politics as to make their capture for and by the left impossible, even if it were desirable. Meanwhile, the attempt to bask in UKIP's aura and soak up some of its swivel-eyed charisma will merely alienate the victims of resentful nationalism who should be part of any real progressive alliance. Rather, it is incumbent on the Left to argue – both for and against Corbyn(ism) – that concerns about social deprivation are real, but that the causes thereof are nothing to do with immigrants; that there is no number that would not be 'too high' for the bigots or those persuaded by them, that this is scapegoating that lets those really responsible for social decay off the hook – which is in part why they are such enthusiasts for its deployment.

For such reasons, and in the face of the Unite union's pro-Corbyn leader Len McCluskey's carefully crafted 'left' triangulation with anti-immigration sentiment, we full-throatedly support his opponent in the forthcoming General Secretary election, Ian Allinson. Allinson's platform (at ian4unite.org) of militant solidarity with migrants and defence for freedom of movement – and for a fighting union in general – deserves the support of all socialists.

Of course, we recognise that ordinary working-class people do have legitimate concerns about migration. Ordinary working-class people are concerned that they may drown in the Mediterranean when they migrate for better living conditions. They are concerned that the people with whom they share conditions of life and work will despise them because they came from somewhere else. They are worried that they may be subject to state violence because of the colour of their skin or the visible signs of their religious belief. These are working-class concerns, and *Salvage* calls for a politics that addresses them.

Our position is simple – it is that of Eugene Debs and John Maclean, namely that a patriot is an international scab. Contra the left patriots, our commitment to those aspects of British society and history that we value – and there are many – has everything to do with what they are in themselves, their concrete content, and nothing to do with the fact that they are 'British'.

The 'patriotism' schtick is merely one mode of grand strategising without

a base; would-be generals without armies, imagining that merely by hoisting the flag one can summon the troops and take power.

Another more hesitant iteration of this is the Corbynite evasiveness on the specifics of its preferred Brexit. That the *bien pensants* are furious about this, and what they see as inadequate opposition to 'Hard Brexit' (walking away from the European single market mechanisms *in toto*) largely because they are still in deep mourning for the Europe of their comforting and self-aggrandising imaginary, does not mean that there is no case for the Labour leadership to answer.

On the two key specifics – single-market membership and free movement – *Salvage* is of course militantly committed to the latter, and deeply suspicious of the former, given the strong tendency in the European mechanisms to prioritising neoliberal structures, and to EU rules promoting 'liberalisation' (that could, for example, undermine attempts to renationalise British railways). There could be legitimate debate on the Left on this (not on free movement), however, particularly given the current, no-less-and-very-possibly-more-brutal, shock-doctrine economic terrain outside the single market, the hard-right Arcadia of the WTO and the 'Hard Brexiters'. One of our tasks is to start to build a mass movement for, if not revolution, at least some new international left-Keynesianism precisely to break out of that invidious non-choice. But to start towards such a movement requires

thoughtful and open debate. And of the statements of clear positions that this would necessitate, John McDonnell and the other Corbynites are evasive, preferring to nebulously demand 'a Brexit that works for people' – in what looks at best like an attempt to play for time, at worst an underwhelming attempt at left triangulation with the pro-Brexitism of pro-Brexit workers. It will not work as such, and simply appears incoherent or indecisive.

None of us envy Corbyn's team being faced with such situations. But their only chance at building in the fracturing political system, reconstituting a solid, left Labour Party, is to stake out radical positions. These will alienate the Blairite voters – and Labour's results in Tory heartlands will suffer, as they have in Sleaford. But this would be a corollary of the necessary rebuilding and strengthening of the demoralised working-class base. At the moment, the results in the Labour heartlands are not disastrous – but nor are they inspiring, and there is a very long way to go.

This massive, years-long, arduous task will not be won by caution, still less by triangulation, even of a left variant. So far, the Labour Party leadership has not displayed anything like the urgency that, while absolutely not sufficient, is absolutely necessary for the task.

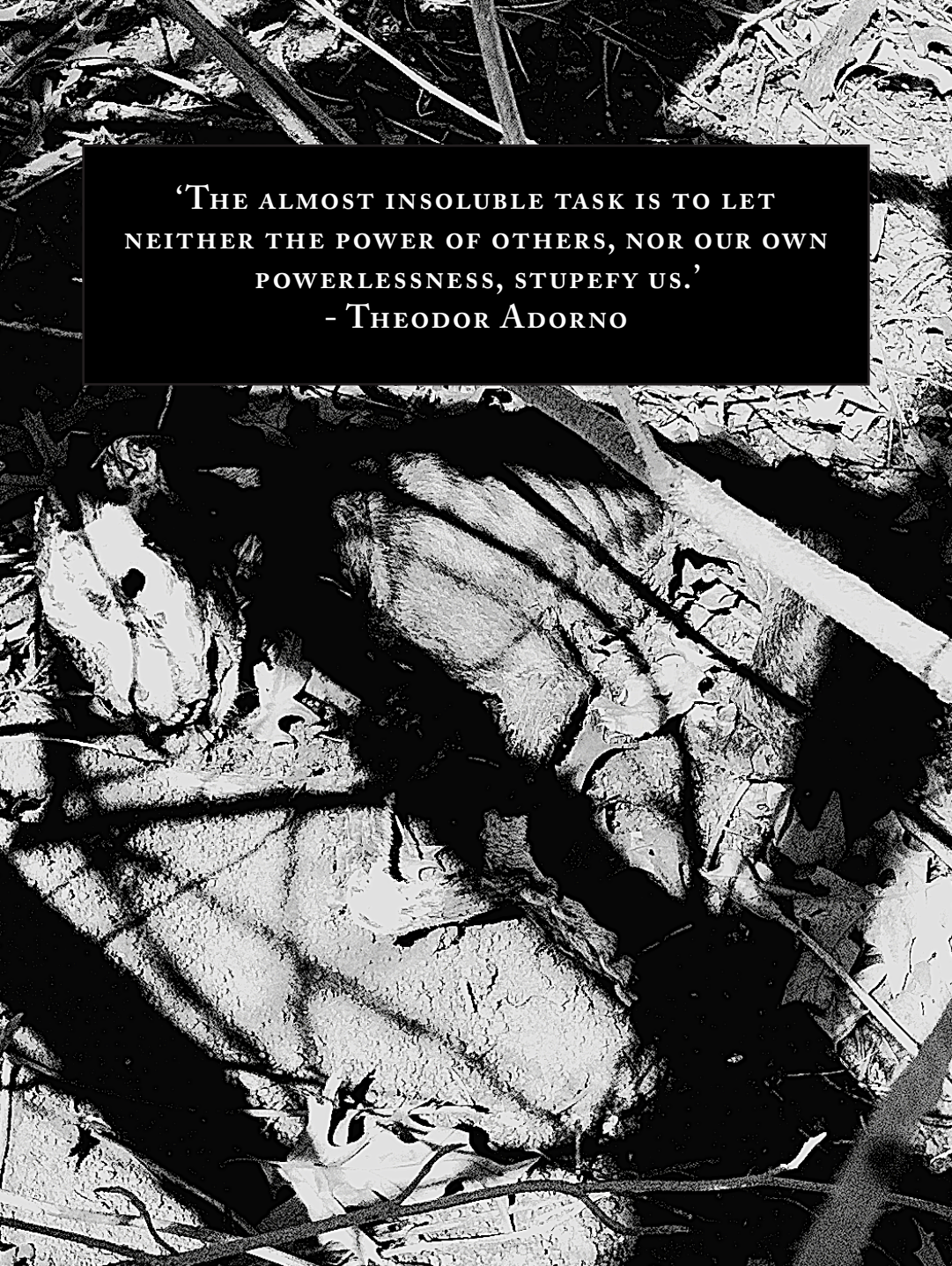
The problem that faces Corbyn – and us – is that there is no forward movement without the movement, and social struggles cannot be summoned into existence by force of propaganda. If, as Gramsci once put it, the only

scientific prediction is of struggle, we might add that there is no science without struggle. The calculation of energetics and fields of force only makes sense where there are actual quantities of movement. Until such time, the ferocity of internecine fights, and the bitterness of recrimination and denunciation, is an impetuous displacement, a sign of impatience and

political immaturity. An unwillingness to bear, *as one necessarily must*, with tragedy as it unfolds, with rapt attention, waiting for the moment at which one can best act, striving to bring it closer. It is not to advocate quietism to insist that the task is long, that we must, as the saying goes, be willing to gather our fruits in season. Otherwise, we will harvest dirt and ashes.

6 January 2017
The Editors

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