

Brexit and Trump: Genuine Anti-Globalisation Revolution?

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Abstract

The year 2016 saw several tumultuous political developments. Brexit, the de facto end of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the concurrent signing of the CETA, and Donald Trump, with his “America First” counter globalization, counter immigration agenda may well have shaken the well-established mechanisms of the transnational capitalist class. The paradox of these developments lies in the fact that the so-called “globalization losers” in the U.S.A. and the U.K. voted for reviled “one percent”, usually blamed for the transnational financial capitalism that produces severe inequality. We consider the counter globalization and nationalist processes from states deemed the chief proponents of “globalization” (actually internationalisation) and challenges represented by Bannonomism (after Steve Bannon) and the Brexit movement. While superficially radical, supplying a critique and contest of the global order, it is questionable whether the inequalities and atomisation produced by global capitalism will be redressed by the managers of Brexit or the stewards of the Trump revolution. The “post-truth era” has made actual changes even more formidable, suggesting change even as the order ossifies. In doing so, genuine socio-economic revolutions will be stifled, the voices of resistance absorbed in ways similar to previous revolts. By way of contrast and comparison, 1848’s Year of Revolutions is suggested.

Introduction

In 2009, Dani Rodrik noted the “remarkable turnaround in the intellectual climate” among mainstream economists: “Today the question is no longer, ‘Are you for or against globalisation?’ The question is: ‘What should the rules of globalisation be?’” As Rodrik points out, the model of liberalization and economic integration of the 1980s and 1990s “is unsustainable. If globalisation is to survive, it will need a new intellectual consensus to underpin it. The world economy desperately awaits its new Keynes.”¹ Nevertheless, globalisation, as understood by politicians, policy makers, academicians, and the public has failed to satisfy its expectations and promises made by its advocates – as Karl Polanyi predicted in his book *The Great Transformation*, further stating that the failure of globalisation to deliver on its promises² is driving the rise of nationalism and protectionism across the globe. Contrary to Friedrich Hayek’s assessments, financial globalisation has proved that it is market fundamentalism, not the regulatory state, that has led the world into an era of greater authoritarianism – in the US, Eastern Europe, India, and China.³ The rise in inequality⁴ is one of the main drivers of the grievance of the middle class in the West, combined with the moving of productive jobs to countries with lower wages, as well as increased levels of immigration. All of these developments have been blamed on processes of globalization.

¹ Jerry Harris and Carl Davidson “Obama: The New Contours of Power”, *Perspectives on Global Development & Technology*, (9) (2010): 211-231, 225.

² The decrease in the levels of absolute poverty was similar during the Keynesian era as it is during the neoliberal capitalism era, the numbers of those living on less than \$1 a day fell most rapidly between 1950 and 1970. (...) The average annual increase in world GDP – the expansion of economic activity– was higher in the period 1952-75 than in the period since 1975, although that expansion in economic activity was somewhat faster in the advanced economies.

More in: Ann Pettifor “The neoliberal road to autocracy”, *International Politics and Society*, May 17, 2017, <http://www.ips-journal.eu/opinion/article/show/the-neoliberal-road-to-autocracy-2046/> (accessed August 13, 2017).

³ Pettifor, *ibid.*

⁴ Whether we use Gini coefficients or other measures, it is clear that the polarization has increased considerably since the 1970s, and is increasing still. This is particularly true of those parts of the world-system that have been showing high growth rates, such as Northeast Asia. See: Immanuel Wallerstein, “North-East Asia in the Multipolar World System”, *Asian Perspective*, 34 (4) (2010): 191-205, 196-197.

Nobel prize-winning economists Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman, while remaining supporters of expanding trade and transnational integration, have on numerous occasions called for greater financial regulation and attention to global inequalities. Krugman suggests the global slump can be fixed, at least in part, with public works' spending: "The answer, almost surely, is good old Keynesian fiscal stimulus."⁵ At first, it would seem preposterous that the administration of G.W. Bush, led by the most right-wing president in living memory, took the unprecedented step of pursuing a form of "financial socialism"⁶, rescuing private finance with public finance⁷. The Obama administration continued where the previous administration, which is the most to blame for the situation, had already taken off.

However, in 2017, after the results of the good old fiscal stimulus used in coping with the Great Recession have been known, the real question remains: Has anything substantial changed in the regulations of the world's most prominent Western economies and especially their obese financial sectors, which have been the cradles of the crisis, ruining millions of jobs, causing panic on the financial and real-estate markets, making hundreds of thousands of families homeless, and still mostly been able to survive (or even become richer) thanks to the tax-payers' money from that same miracle-working Keynesian fiscal stimulus? Mayer calls this state of denial "business as usual", as if the Great Recession never happened and there are no prospects that it will happen again: "The truly remarkable feature of the Great Recession, though, is not its dramatic global scope or the speed with which it has unfolded, but how little constructive reform response it has elicited from the leaders of the source countries for this global economic crisis." What raises most concerns is the following: "We are hardly witness to a New New Deal of some leftist dreams, not even one "right-sized" for the shallower depths of the Great Recession."⁸

Vanaik also warned of the more or less back to "business as usual": "Indeed, despite the several crises that have peppered the neoliberal era, culminating most recently in the 'Great Recession' globally, it is 'business as usual'." (...) Those calling for an international monetary managerialism of a serious kind and not just for greater and better 'regulation of the world financial system' remain a small minority among decision makers and shapers."⁹

After Brexit and Trump – we have to ask a rhetorical question: Are New Deals of any kind bound to happen, and was "business as usual" (for the financial sectors and elites of the West, after the Great Recession) maybe the key factor that made these development possible? Both Brexit and Trump can be perceived as reactions of the demos in two significant states, one formerly dominant globally; the other currently hegemonic (albeit being challenged). Both powers were salient promoters of free trade ideologies, open borders and an unstable international financial system. The

⁵ Harris, Davidson, 2010, *ibid*, 217.

⁶ See: Peter J. Taylor et al. "The way we were: Command-and-control centres in the global space-economy on the eve of the 2008 geo-economic transition", *Environment and Planning A*, (41) (2009): 7-12.

⁷ Allan Watson "US Hegemony and the Obama Administration: Towards a New World Order?" *Antipode*, 42 (2) (2010): 242-247, 245.

⁸ Bradley L. Mayer "The Hegemon That Failed", paper submitted for the Inaugural GERG Conference, Winnipeg, September 25-27, 2015, <http://gergconference.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Mayer-Bradley-The-Hegemon-That-Failed.pdf> (Retrieved 24/01/2016).

Mayer also suggests that the capitalist state could act in the positive sense of (8) combined development in counteracting the tendency towards disequilibrium accumulation, if only to ensure its own survival. This can result in a new regime of accumulation in precisely a Gramscian "passive revolution", and this precisely characterizes the New Deal in the U.S., as well as its extension in the post-war "Golden Age".

⁹ Achin Vanaik „Capitalist Globalisation and the Problem of Stability: enter the new quintet and other emerging powers“, *Third World Quarterly*, 34 (2) (2013): 194-213, 210.

As the second factor making the job of reforming the financial institutions and the world economic order difficult if not impossible, Vanaik mentions „a very unfavourable historical transformation from below that negates the prospects either nationally or globally of a new social democracy. The vital political mediations built up over decades no longer exist.“

only possible positive features of these developments are the “shake-ups” these have caused to the transnational elites of the U.S.A. and Europe.

Hence by 2025, six emerging economies—Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Russia—will collectively account for about one-half of global growth¹⁰, the real question for the West, and especially the U.S.A., as a still dominant state, remains – how to keep and try to raise the standard of living, while at the same time cope with increased productivity and lower production expenses of the emerging economies. Trump’s promises of protectionism, i.e. keeping and returning “US jobs” to America, respectively, attempt to address these realities. Although it has one key flaw – in an internationalized economy, which has been, promoted from the West, if not by power of “peaceful persuasion” and regulations that favour the developed economies of the West¹¹, then by force, there are no guaranteed “US jobs” or “UK jobs”. There are only capitalists and the regulations of the states that should limit the potentially hazardous effects of capitalism’s search for profits. It is precisely in that aspect that the elites of the most powerful Western states have ultimately failed.

Brexit and Trump: False Setbacks to Neoliberal Geopolitics?

At present day, we can still witness a continuous success of neoliberalism and neoliberal geopolitics, although its demise has been prognosticated due to the Great Recession, and consequently the revival of Keynesianism in the economic science. Keynesianism has indeed been the last resort of non-Keynesian economic theorists every time market dogmas fail; the state takes the role of stabilizer of the banking sector, and the economy in general. Despite these well-known, historical recurrences, the spatial practice of neoliberal geopolitics, at the insistence of its ideologues, prospers: the mantra of “free markets”, a minor interventionist role of the state in the economy, free trade agreements and so forth.¹² With some minor, however not very functional exceptions, mainly located in Latin America (e.g. Venezuela), neoliberal capitalism still thrives in the majority of the world’s regions, and risks overwhelming those final oases of the functional welfare state (Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, France, and Benelux i.e. the developed states of continental Europe), with other parts of world already incorporated. Further deterioration of workers’ rights, especially of the blue-collar middle and low paid workers, the ones who proved essential in sending Donald Trump to Washington and voted to pull the United Kingdom (the UK) out of the European Union (the EU), has to be expected. The masses of White (this is important, due to the role of the immigration in Brexit and Trump campaigns, respectively), primarily blue-collar working class or retired Britons and Americans, respectively, were faced with a choice between two types of oligarchies, one supporting free trade and globalization and against restricting immigration, the other seeking more protectionism and strict restrictions to immigration. In 2016, a certain demographic of White voters, when faced with choice between “Leave” and “Remain”, Clinton and Trump, respectively, overwhelmingly chose the type of oligarchy that promised to protect their jobs and/or pensions. This near tragic, if not comic outcome, suggests the levels of disappointment with the transnational capitalist oligarchy/class, the TNC, that has ruled them for

¹⁰ Justin Yifu Lin and Mansoor Dailami “The Coming Multipolar World Economy: Is the Developed World Prepared?” *The International Economy*, (Summer 2011): 30-31, 30.

¹¹ Take for example the Uruguay Round (1985-1994), which accelerated globalisation 3.0: “The driver of its initiation was fear of a global breakdown, similar to the Depression of 1929-1938, that could set off another round of beggar-thy-neighbor policies, and a renewal of greatly increased protective tariffs and quota restrictions.” (...) “Details of Uruguay Round deals strongly favored MNCs and lower wage exporters. Broader U.S. gains for farmers, intellectual property, finance and services, and a level playing field for manufacturing workers had been trumpeted as goals for the Office of the United States Trade Representative negotiators.”

See: William A. Lovett “Beyond Doha: Multipolar Challenges for a Globalized World”, *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 17 (1) (2008) 3-37, 8.

¹² For more, see: Petar Kurecic “Social movements and Neoliberal Geopolitics”, *Revista ORBE*, 1 (7) (Dec. 2016) 14-20, 14.

decades. Instead of choosing the ones that have promised to change the social relations and restrict the power of the oligarchy, they have simply backed the other type of oligarchy.

It is clear, either from the rise of populists and/or voter abstention, that the bourgeois state, invented to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie (at present day, primarily neoliberal capitalists, the TNC etc.) legitimized through “democracy” (in most aspects reduced to the fact that a voter can choose between a bigger and a lesser evil every four years while his/hers economic freedom is reduced constantly), has been losing its attractiveness. As Jacques Rancière posed in 1998, “Marx’s once scandalous thesis that governments are simple business agents for international capital is today an obvious fact on which ‘liberals’ and ‘socialists’ agree.”¹³ Such political inertia has also been considered as post-democratic, with citizens disengaged and estranged from political and economic processes that eliminate genuine social and political antagonism. This neutralisation keeps, or at least kept, the liberal democratic edifice unchallenged.¹⁴ Historians have already spoken about the similarities with the 1930s Europe and warned that the events from the Great Depression era could be repeated, though other comparisons point to earlier populist phases in US history.¹⁵ In that context, the implications of Brexit are yet to be seen, though it can be argued that contestation and grounds for being antagonised have been revived. The UK has clearly stated that it wants to pursue free trade (the point is reiterated later in this paper); with the main difference comprised in the fact that now it would make its own free-trade agreements with states and free-trade areas, independently of the EU. The grounds of contestation and challenging the post-democratic state were also revived through Trump’s negative views towards free trade and protectionist intentions, some of this having already taken form with the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Its consequences, however, are still not quantifiable. The second key issue that decided the US elections, besides opposition to free trade and off-shoring of US jobs, is immigration and undocumented labour. US economy depends to a large degree on low-paid legal and illegal immigrants, mainly originating from Latin America.

Why Brexit and what Kind of Brexit?

Brexit is a product of two main factors: the neoliberalization of British society, and the rising influx of immigration, both EU and non-EU originated. It is intriguing that the UK was the only current EU member state that did not impose any transitional period for free movement of labour force after the 2004 “Big Bang” EU enlargement, therefore opening its labour market to the workforce from new member states: “In the second half of the 2000s, net migration to the UK fluctuated between 300,000 and 400,000 per year, reaching a peak of over 400,000 just before the onset of the 2008 financial crisis”¹⁶.

The neoliberalization of the British society, whose beginnings can be traced to the Thatcher era, has rendered divisions through UK society along lines of age, education, regional affiliation, and sectors of economic activity. The New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown continued most of the policies from the Thatcher era, visible even in spatial policies, such as gentrification of the parts of the cities and the deregulation of housing markets¹⁷. It has also left its imprint on other

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 113.

¹⁴ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson prefers to see 1873 as more accurate, with the anti-elitist demagogue William Jennings Bryan resembling, superficially, positions similar to Sanders and Trump: “The Populism Bomb: The Trump Phenomenon Explained,” *Hoover Digest* 3 (Summer, July 11, 2016): 23.

¹⁶ Stuart Gietel-Basten “Why Brexit? The Toxic Mix of Immigration and Austerity”, *Population and Development Review*, 42 (4) (Dec. 2016) 673-680, 674.

¹⁷ More in:

Andrew Cumbers, Gesa Helms, and Kate Swanson “Class, Agency and Resistance in the Old Industrial City”, *Antipode*, 42 (1) (2010) 46-73.

Stuart Hodgkinson “Housing Regeneration and the Private Finance Initiative in England: Unstitching the Neoliberal Urban Straitjacket”, *Antipode*, 43 (2) (2011) 358-383.

aspects of social life: “This counter offensive by capital and state actors, including the emasculation of progressive local and city governments and assault on trade union power (especially in the USA and the UK), allied to the flight of capital away from the industrial cities of the north to low wage locations elsewhere, represented a response to an upsurge in class politics.”¹⁸ The results of the divisions are visible in the results of the vote on Brexit. The groups that supported Brexit the most were the elderly, blue-collar working or retired people, mostly living in Northern and Central England, and completely untouched (except in the negative context) by the financialization and globalization of Southern England – London and the City particularly: “Britain’s Gini coefficient, the measure of its inequality, has risen from about 0.26 in 1979 to over 0.4 today. It has divided Britain geographically into a prosperous London and South East, an especially depressed North with its deindustrialized run-down cities, and a mildly more social democratic Scotland able to avoid some of the worst of the social breakdown visited on the north of England, with the rest of the country performing indifferently.”¹⁹

The protection of the National Health (NHS) system²⁰ and the implied promise that 350 million pounds per week could be injected into the NHS instead of being sent to “Brussels”, along with anti-immigration fears were probably decisive among the elderly and mature, blue-collar population of Northern and Central England, and Wales. Such a claim was disavowed by the current British Prime Minister, Theresa May, although she never promised it. Nevertheless, the current foreign secretary Boris Johnson, who was part of the Leave campaign, was very happy to make reassurances that a “hard Brexit” would be in the offing.²¹

As Clarke and Newman have outlined, Vote Leave Campaign emphasized themes of betrayal and alienation stemming from three groups:

- The metropolitan–cosmopolitan liberal elite (out of touch Europhiles, the architects of political correctness, insulated by wealth and social position from the effects of Europeanization);
- The European elite (embodied in German Chancellor Angela Merkel but more frequently invoked as the Brussels bureaucrats strangling British liberty);
- The migrants, enabled by Europe’s free movement rules and consuming scarce resources (jobs, housing, welfare, and other public services).²²

Why Trump?

The groups in the British society, which felt they were left behind by the globalization, financialization, the City, and Brussels, made “their voice heard”. Such themes were repeated in the 2016 US presidential election. The key for winning the support in the “battleground states” was speaking as the voice of the same forgotten, blue-collar workers, whose relative position in the society was declining. Like the Brexiteers, Trump correctly identified the grievance of the White, mostly blue-collar majority²³ in the battleground states of the US Great Lakes Region (Ohio,

¹⁸ David Harvey “*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

¹⁹ Radhika Desai and Alan Freeman “*Brexit, the City and the Crisis of Conservatism*”, Valдай Discussion Club Report (2016), 1-19, 15.

²⁰ “Brexit was about gut-wrenching issues like borders, culture, and the homeland. Remarkable to many outsiders, the NHS is almost a religion in the UK; its “overstretching”—especially by foreigners—presented as a blasphemy.”

See: Gietel-Basten, *ibid*, 678.

²¹ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/theresa-admits-350-million-pledged-10124021> (Retrieved July 18, 2017).

²² John Clarke and Janet Newman “People in this country have had enough of experts”: Brexit and the paradoxes of populism”, *Critical Policy Studies*, 11 (1) (2017): 101-116, 107.

²³ “The only time in the last four decades in which workers at the middle and bottom of the wage distribution saw consistent gains in real wages was the period of low unemployment in the 1990s boom”.

Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Pennsylvania) as well as Florida, where the anti(Latino)-immigrant views he constantly expressed during the campaign found a fertile ground. Although Trump did not win in Minnesota, the victories in all the other battleground states brought him the victory.²⁴

Many blue-collar, middle-class voters cared little about plutocracy and financial capitalism running through the US main parties, as well as reactions of the other groups in the demos, such as Occupy Wall Street, which they certainly did not support. However, the message of the Republican candidate Trump and his anti-free trade, job losing, anti-immigrant stance was one they could understand.²⁵ The reaction of the demos potentially represented a setback for neoliberalism and transnational capitalist class. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, it is difficult to imagine any improvements in workers' rights, especially for blue-collar, middle- and low-paid workers, who are exactly those who elected Mr Trump to the White House. This has been compounded by the absence of a clear, strong economic agenda from the Democrats, despite the Obama Administration's efforts to pull the US economy out of the worst recession in over 70 years. This narrative was lacking in the campaign, replaced by conspicuous targets of economic culpability (the neo-liberal system) across the electorate. Hillary Clinton, by virtue of that, did poorly in crucial battleground states in 2016, effectively breaching her "firewall" in the US North-east.²⁶ Trump's vigorous messages against the free-trade and illegal immigration resonated, and offered possibilities for a genuine change. The message behind these narratives is further explored in the next section.

Populist "revolutionary" narratives

The rhetoric in the 2016 campaigns that characterised Brexit and the ascendancy of Donald Trump in the United States, critiqued and challenged the liberal free market assumptions that has girded the global economy. What such challenges also incorporated was an Occupy Wall Street narrative retooled and refurbished for the offensive against the neoliberal establishment: that the system's very notions needed challenging. According to Brent Budowsky, former aide to former Sen. Lloyd Bentsen and former Chief Deputy Majority Whip Bill Alexander, the 2016 campaign saw a series of vectors operating in the electoral scape, dramatically challenging orthodox party structures. "There is a direct lineage between the Occupy Wall Street movement, the enormous and historic contribution that Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) made in the 2016 presidential campaign, and what some call the progressive Tea Party movement that, along with other Americans, has besieged Republican officeholders at town meetings across America."²⁷

As with the challenge posed by the forces of the Left and Right in Europe during the 1930s in the form of communism and fascism, social discontent was mobilised as a response to the symptoms of the system (unstable capitalism). Totalitarian fascism, however, won out, entailing, a refusal on the part of the power holders to alter the nature of social relations and processes of capital itself. George Orwell and Walter Benjamin had, at stages, observed that fascism's very premise is not merely its strongman, cult obsession, with the State rendered organic and reactionary: it relied upon the very fact that capitalism would only be tempered in a limited way. Economic relations, in other words,

Dean Baker "*Rigged: How Globalization and the Rules of the Modern Economy Were Structured to Make the Rich Richer*", Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, D.C., 2016: 28.

²⁴ Filip Kokotovic and Petar Kurecic "An Empirical Analysis of Voting Patterns in Four Battleground States of the 2016 US Presidential Election", *Teorija in Praksa (Theory and Practice)*, forthcoming paper.

²⁵ Christine J. Walley "Trump's Election and the "White Working Class": What We Missed", *American Ethnologist*, 44 (2) (2017): 231-236, 232.

²⁶ Cheng Wu "*Economics and How Obama Could Have Lost the 2016 Election Too*", MPRA Paper No. 75107 (2016), https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/75107/1/MPRA_paper_75107.pdf (Retrieved January 7, 2017).

²⁷ Brent Budowsky, "Sanders, Occupy Wall Street and the liberal Tea Party surge," The Hill, Mar 3, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/campaign/322171-sanders-occupy-wall-street-and-the-liberal-tea-party-surge>.

would remain conservative. Benjamin would go even further, insisting that fascism was revolutionary in one fundamental sense: its association with aesthetics.²⁸

The role played by Bernie Sanders, and piecemeal efforts to incorporate his agenda into Trump's platform, demonstrated the appeal posed by the other side of the divide. In the UK, the same could be said with Jeremy Corbyn and the re-emergence of traditional labour values, emphasising greater state intervention in the economy and deficit spending. The Canadian newspaper tycoon Conrad Black, persistently defending the nature of the capitalism, suggested that these movements were unmistakably the result of poor leadership. "Though many do not formulate it in this way, the rise of Trump and the Sanders challenge show that the heavy failings of the Bush-Clinton-Obama joint regency will not be accepted."²⁹ What mattered was that such candidates as Sanders and Trump had a common target, at least till Sanders fell out of the race and reneged on much of what he had said. (This point, it is argued here, is a salient one in suggesting change as "no-change".)

Clinton loomed as the establishment figure, near totemic in terms of target and object of obloquy. Ironically, while Trump had been every much the "nasty" capitalist in his casino and property ventures that Clinton was portrayed as being, the former First Lady and Secretary of State became a supreme alibi about the ills of international capitalism. The release of the Podesta emails and those of the DNC by WikiLeaks showed Clinton to be soft on reforming the banking sector after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.³⁰ Despite the deep ironies of a property tycoon casting aspersions against the Democrat candidate for being accommodating to plutocrats and the banking sector, the inroads made by Trump were effective.

The challenge of Bannonomism

In the United States, the America First notion of Donald Trump unmistakably suggests a return a period when that particular name was also used: prior to the US entry into the Second World War. The ironic reversal of the term here is that the United States, far from showing any desire to move to a "normalcy" marked by the isolationism of the inter-war years, is simply posing for a more unilateralist pose for international action in international markets and the geopolitics. It suggests a fear that hegemonic credentials are being challenged. (Trump having accused the Chinese for predatory currency manipulation.)

Steve Bannon, briefly security White House advisor and the Breitbart shock advisor most influential in setting the tone of Trump's campaign, would be undoubtedly familiar with the historical appellation of "America First". What matters to Bannon and the recently departed deputy White House advisor Sebastian Gorka, is the notion that the west is at war with Islam.³¹ These forms of supposedly radical challenges betray a conservative, rather than revolutionary perspective, the policy of Make America Great Again (MAGA). But while he insists on a return to power politics as reality, Bannon also sports a strong anti-elite, anti-corporate perspective. To that end, he has made it a crucial aspect of Trump's rhetoric to target the predations of the un-elected agents of boardroom, corporate globalisation. As Bannon explained to *The Economist*, an establishment paper of economic opinion, "You're are the enemy." The reason was simple enough: "You support a radical idea, free trade. I mean it, that's a radical idea."³²

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Theorien des deutschen Faschismus," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), vol 3.

²⁹ Conrad Black, "Political Vacancies," *New Criterion* (Sep. 2016): 36-44, 44.

³⁰ WikiLeaks, "HRC Paid Speeches," available at: <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/927>.

³¹ Flemming Rose, "I Told Steve Bannon: 'We are not at war with Islam.' He Disagreed," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 34, 2 (May, 2017): 17-20.

³² *The Economist*, "The Future of Bannonomism," Aug 25, 2017.

The economic agenda of re-ordering of challenging the unaccountable globalists also comes in step with fighting a rival religious world view, the need to re-impose Judeo-Christian values against Islam, deemed by Bannon to be, “not a religion of peace but submission.”³³ “Yes, it was jihadi terrorism,” argued the former Trump advisor in describing the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States, “but more importantly, that event was linked to communism. Because al-Qaeda, ISIS, all of these groups are totalitarians – either you surrender to them or they will kill you.”³⁴

What America First, however, entails is a reassertion of borders (notably against Mexico), and a sympathy for shades of authoritarianism (the sympathetic response to Russia’s president Vladimir Putin). It also suggests assertiveness, brashness, independence, a superpower’s effort to keep the mantle against any potential challengers.

This same hyper-nationalist rationale had similar forms across the Atlantic, though it was configured somewhat differently. The figures who led the Brexit campaign could hardly be said to be Bannonites from the perspective of opposing global free trade interests or financial oligopolies. Their concern, rather, was that such trade and market values be parochial and self-serving. Dominant emphasis was placed on the social consequences of an open trade bloc: the principle of free movement. Critics such as Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party, and Boris Johnson of the Conservatives, insisted that the UK had not merely become a place of asphyxiating migration typified by traffic jams and high crime rates, but one for which the State had to compensate Europe for.³⁵ Never mind the fact that such mobility had, in fact, supplied much needed labour to the UK economy in unprecedented levels, be it in low-skill jobs, to those in the research and tertiary sector.

Avoiding Revolution and Change

The very fact that Brexit is being steered by a former Remain figure, Theresa May, says much about the central point that promised changes have been more superficial than not. A system is shocked in order to return to a semblance of what went before. The capitalist status quo, however ruffled and battered, is to be maintained. May has made it clear that she wishes to embrace the trade and market agenda inherent in the current system (free trade, cheaper goods and services despite being outside the EU), while altering the social welfare and human rights aspect inherent in EU membership. The perceived negative effects of free trade, in other words, are not going to be redressed, because there are, in the opinion of May’s officials, none to speak of. Indeed, she has promised, very much in hope, that Britain will find new markets, that the neo-liberal agenda will continue its way.

The appointment of Boris Johnson, a key Brexiteer, may well have suggested a challenge to the orthodox approaches to the market logic of the EU, and its policies. It actually signalled the reverse. Britain was to become more entrepreneurial than ever, to engage, as it were, the markets in a way that was far more aggressive than it would have otherwise been. Indeed, Johnson insists that the system is going to be improved by Britain looking in, rather than being a member looking out: “with the help of the excellent negotiators on both sides I have no doubt that we will get a great deal that preserves and even enhances the frictionless movement of goods that is in the interests of both sides of the Channel; and I am sure that will get a solution that does nothing to undermine the interests of London’s financial sector, because the real rival of the City are not in Paris or Frankfurt;

³³ Matt Shuham, “Talking Points Memo: Spicer Sidesteps Question On Steve Bannon’s Past Comments about Islam,” Talking Points Memo Blog, New York, Newstex, Feb 1, 2017.

³⁴ Greg Jaffe, “Gorka’s views on Islam drive Trump’s security agenda,” *The Washington Post*, Feb 21, 2017, A1.

³⁵ Kevin Rawlinson, “Farage blames immigration for traffic on M4 after no-show at Ukip reception,” *The Guardian*, Dec 8, 2014.

they are in Hong Kong and New York and Singapore – and in the end I think everyone understands that London is an asset for the entire continent.”³⁶

Much in the way of Britannia unchained, if not reclaimed, opportunities await, according to the Brexit managers, in the form of agreements in Asia, Africa and Australasia. These do not suggest a revolution in the global capitalist system as its advancement, its logical progress by being rid of intrusive regulatory frameworks. Countries of the commonwealth will be wooed. In a Raisina Dialogue event held in January 2017, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson insisted that the UK-India relationship would be conducive to a free trade agreement, suggesting that Brexit had little to do with a parochial dispirited backlash against the effects of globalisation. On the contrary, he is insisting on encouraging it. The relationship with India, amongst other countries, needed to be “turbocharged”. “We can’t do it now but we can sketch it out on the back of an envelope.”

In the United States, Sanders promised a revolution, only to succumb to the Clinton machine³⁷ in the way that previous candidates had done (Ted Kennedy in 1980; Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988; Dennis Kucinich in 2004 and John Edwards in 2008). That reality became a bitter one: democratic socialism would be, if not dismissed altogether, then nipped, trimmed and packaged for electoral advantage. “The agenda of the Democratic Party,” as Barry notes with conviction, “is determined by its corporate financiers.”³⁸ There was little chance of breaking with the elephant, the ass or the working class, and Jason Schulman wished that genuine Marxists step outside Democratic Party politics to establish its own party.³⁹

It is certainly true that Sanders managed to sanitise such terms as “socialist” and socialism providing US socialists “an opening”, as Schulman, terms it, not open previously.⁴⁰ And to take advantage of the Democratic primary system to capitalise in creating the conditions for a separate political party, in appearance, seemed to be gathering pace. But it was simply not to be. “Bernie Sanders and the Dilemma of the Democratic ‘Party’,” *New Politics* 15, 4 (Jan 1, 2016): 7-12
“On this one central issue – Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have a surprisingly similar message: The American economy has failed.”⁴¹

He also played into the image of the public relations magic, retaining Revolution Message to craft his image, attempting to draw out a voter base with a smaller donations message that might decorporatise funding interests in favour of more “working class” sources and small donors. The language of his campaign team suggested the possibility that a revolution had, in fact begun, though in many ways it seemed to participate, mimic if not ape the very same defects of the system he wished to alter. Consider the remarks of Zack Exley of the Sanders campaign: “The campaign is changing people’s lives and changing everyone’s idea of what’s possible. No matter what happens,

³⁶ Boris Johnson, “The 2017 Lowy Lecture,” Sydney Town Hall, Jul 27, 2017, transcript available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2017-lowy-lecture-uk-foreign-secretary-boris-johnson>.

³⁷ According to Chris Hedges, “The cowardice of the liberal class meant it lost all credibility, much as Bernie Sanders did when he sold his soul to the Clinton campaign. The liberal class proved it would stand and fight for nothing. It mouthed words and ideas it did not truly believe. It bears significant responsibility for the phenomena that created Trump. It should have had the foresight to abandon the Democratic Party after President Bill Clinton passed the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, to build parties and institutions that defended the interests of the working class”: “It’s Worse Than You Think,” Nov 14, 2016, Information Clearing House (orig. TruthDig), <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article45841.htm#.WCpCf9I4vAA.wordpress> (Retrieved July 30, 2017).

³⁸ Barry Finger, “Further Reflections on the Sanders Campaign,” *New Politics* blog, May 26, 2016.

³⁹ Jason Schulman, “Bernie Sanders and the Dilemma of the Democratic ‘Party’,” *New Politics* 15, 4 (Jan 1, 2016): 7-12, 12.

⁴⁰ Schulman, “Bernie Sanders and the Dilemma of the Democratic ‘Party’,” 10.

⁴¹ Fareed Zakaria, Trump & Sanders agree on one thing: The American economy has failed,” *The Enterprise* 45, 32 (Mar 21-7, 2016): 14-15, 14.

people are going to keep fighting for the political revolution that Bernie helped us start.” For Exley, the fire, once started, would burn. How it would do so, amidst the “organizing teams, structures, and processes” was less clear.⁴²

After the bruising primaries, and Clinton’s victory successful nomination, Sanders responded with the Our Revolution movement, suggesting during its launch to an audience in Burlington that the centre of US politics had moved to the left, and “seven key ballot initiatives” along with “over a hundred candidates” could be backed. None of this could conceal an internal revolt by such figures as Tim Canova, a congressional challenger with Sanders’ backing, who suggested prior to the launch that he had been left high and dry.⁴³ Eight of the initial fifteen organisers of Our Revolution departed before the launch, citing the arrival of former campaign manager Jack Weaver was the last nail in the revolutionary coffin. Another revolution and attempt at reform risked being stymied.

The repeated conversations about revolution eventually become matters of absorption into the establishment structure, tempering, if not subjugating the indignation that was initially meant to inspire it. As Capehart suggests, “those fired-up folks go home – and stay there for the next four years.”⁴⁴ Scholarship by Steve Phillip, utilising material from the Office of the Clerk of the US House of Representatives, shows the pattern of euphoria, apathy and disillusionment, examining Democrat ballots from their initial highpoints of enthusiastic casting to a significantly reduced turn-up by the next election. In 2008, 65 million Democrats cast ballots for House candidates, a number that shrank dramatically in the 2010 mid-term elections (39 million). Republicans capitalised, and the Tea Party made its own tilt at revolutionary fervour. In 2014, the Democrat voters who turned up to vote for the Senate in the mid-term elections had fallen by 43 percent: down by 15 million.⁴⁵

1848 as a parallel

In the context of revolutions that fail, or are, in part, tempered by the establishment, one historical parallel is useful. The populist revolutions taking place in 2016 within the western democratic context were to have a parallel result to those of 1848 – an attempt initially undertaken to alter a system, only to see a re-imposition of absolutism and reactionary, monarchical conservatism. Instead of getting true accountability and constitutionalism, uprisings were put down, and the fire of reform snuffed.

Instructively, this took the form of military repression: Louis-Eugène Cavaignac’s efforts against insurgents in June 1848 signalled the mood. Alfred, prince von Windischgrätz, obliged with similar actions in Prague on June 17 that year. Russian intervention took place in Hungary, while Lombardy and Vienna saw Austrian military efforts to reverse the order. Liberals were left dispirited and demoralised, though it should be noted that certain countries (Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands) did see a reform of institutions without bloodshed. But Italy, Germany and Austria saw a return of absolute monarchy, a point backed by a clergy and middle class suspicious about the excesses of reformist fervour. What mattered was the striking abandonment of concessions that had been promised in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. The Convention of Olmütz in 1850 saw a reactionary counter: the withdrawal of concessions linked to crucial liberties, including universal manhood suffrage, press liberties and freedom of assembly.

⁴² Jonathan Capehart, “Democrats aren’t good at the political revolution thing,” *Washington Post*, Apr 12, 2016.

⁴³ David Weigel and John Wagner, “Bernie Sanders launches ‘Our Revolution’ with electoral targets – and a few critics left behind,” *Washington Post*, Aug 25, 2016.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Capehart, “Democrats aren’t good at the political revolution thing,” *Washington Post*, Apr 12, 2016.

⁴⁵ Steve Phillip, *Brown is the New White: How the demographic revolution has created a new American majority* (New York: New Press, 2016).

The promise of reform, in other words, became not just a stifling but a reversal, a consolidation of state power in the face of change, usually buttressed by the support of a threatened middle class and the fears of the clerical authorities. The spectre of socialism was haunting enough to warrant the restoration of monarchical systems of government, a point the traditionalists had some reason fearing: Marx and Engels had, in distinction to their socialist colleagues, insisted on the destruction of monarchical absolutism as an essential pre-requisite to realising their vision of proletarian bliss.⁴⁶ Sperber makes the salient point that the authors in *The Communist Manifesto* (1847) go even further in insisting that a socio-economic socialist order would require stringent political revolution and a Jacobin republic.⁴⁷ The danger to the traditionalists, in other words, was all too real.

While it would be inaccurate to dismiss the efforts of 1848 as entirely fruitless (legacies exist in their honour across the continent), the European revolutions provide an ample international example of a counter-movement that becomes absorbed by the promise of change for populist causes. The revolution is tamed; its more revolutionary promises are hemmed in and curtailed. But it also shows another more direct response: heavy-handed, fearful and directed by the organs of police and military.

The changes promised in the context of Trump and Sanders in the United States; and by the populist upsurge in Britain, also had a focus on liberties, though there, the focus was regenerative: to attack the plutocracy, the corporatocracy, the nastiness of the establishment swamp that needs draining. Hillary Clinton became the greatest target in the approaches of both candidates.

In Britain, it was the *restoration* of liberties, an idiosyncratic notion when considered alongside the fact that the Human Rights Act was a derivation of both UK and European legal principles. Trump spoke about the restoration of rights and security of US citizens fearful of immigration, a theme similar echoed in the campaign of Nigel Farage in the UK. Promises on deportation (both in the UK and in the US) and the construction of a vast wall preventing porous movements through the Mexican-US border, were also made, while UKIP issued flyers and leaflets through the constituency depicting hordes coming through with menace from Turkey in the event that it might be admitted to the EU. In Britain's case, there would be promised change (May's idea of Brexit entailed the colours of the Union Jack, a patriotic varnish), but the content of this is unclear, with a stance so vague as to be infuriating to the voter base. Electoral losses suffered in the 2017 British election also suggest that voters were far from convinced that the prime minister would be a figure for genuine radical change. This feeling was also replicated by EU Representatives unconvinced and confused in equal parts about the Brexit negotiating strategy of May and her team.

The more belligerent Trump may well have spoken about draining the swamp of Washington corruption, but such a metaphor does little to actually remove the water altogether. What merely happens in this context is populating the swamp with one's favoured confidantes, be they friends or family advisors. The Trump family has simply outed the capitalist system in such spectacular fashion, going so far as to admit that the presidency is not inconsistent with the promotion of personal wealth creation. His very election showing that a billionaire with business interests can still become a servant of the people. To that end, the system does not so much improve and reveal itself as disfigured, defeating the democratic project.

In another sense, Trump has not succeeded. Mirage, image and perception have given the impression that change is occurring, "reform" taking place. Promoting himself as the anti-establishment figure keen on altering the landscape of immigration, imposing restrictions from Muslim majority countries, he has been a failed reformer. His attempts at deportation have failed to

⁴⁶ Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 86.

⁴⁷ Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851*, 86.

manifest in a genuinely effective way. Internal resistance in the United States, notably from some states and the efforts of sanctuary cities, have made efforts difficult. Another important feature to note is that deportations were already at a high level in the last few years of the Obama administration suggesting that Trump had done little to realise his supposedly more muscular response.

Reflections

These two years have seen challenges to the international capitalism system that suggested a challenge to its very basis. They have taken place in countries had the forefront of the globalising, neo-liberal narrative of open market and minimal government interference. But Brexit and the era of Trump suggests that such processes depoliticise citizen participation, falsely using citizen rage to convey a false sense of reform. The emergence of such figures as Trump, Sanders and Corbyn posed a return of relevant politics, a form of “forgotten people” discourse at times powerful and relentless. But Trump’s victory in the US, and the Brexit ascendancy in Britain, point to an absence of genuine radical change in the way the State relates to the international capitalist system. Indeed, there is a suggestion that the free market should be, if one is to take the perspective of the May government, encouraged further. Across the channel, the post-democratic illusion has incarnated itself in the Macron government, which has more or less surrendered to the idea that to succeed and prosper, France must not so much disentangle itself from the European system and entangle itself further, embracing a more aggressive market-based agenda. French firms are to be encouraged in their competitiveness; an inflexible French labour market is waiting to be reformed in terms of work hours and an inflexible hire-and-fire scheme.⁴⁸ The idea, reminiscent of ideological defences of communism, was not the ideology itself, but its imperfect application. His case against the US president is simple: we are not to make the US great again, but the World great. We still await a new consensus, and most certainly, the new Keynes of Rodrik’s consideration. But antagonism and civic debate, the sort that interrogates liberal democratic institutional behaviour, has returned.

⁴⁸ Richard Maher, “What can Europe expect from a Macron government?”, *The Conversation*, Jun 20, 2017.