

**Mayday! Conservative hegemony
and the rise of the ‘Regressive Alliance’:
Can the Left counter with a progressive
populism?**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brexit, Conservative hegemony and the rise of the 'Regressive Alliance'

Right authoritarian populism – shaping a new global political era?

In 2016 the UK, the US and the countries of the EU entered a new political era. The Brexit vote in the UK in June followed by the presidential election of Donald Trump in November, together with the steady advance of authoritarian Right parties in Europe suggest that populist authoritarianism is becoming a global phenomenon. The rise of the Far Right is best understood in terms of the chronic crisis of neoliberalism that surfaced in the banking crash of 2008, referred to here as Neoliberalism 2.0. This economic crisis has also collided with regional wars, international terrorism and accelerating global warming. The intersection of these convulsions have set in motion migrations that regressive political forces are using to their political advantage to advance an agenda of narrow nationalism, xenophobia, racism and an assault against women. It is this reaction that is being characterized as the 'mood of the times' that the Right is successfully harnessing. This Compass think piece focuses on the rise of what is termed the 'Regressive Alliance' or Right Bloc ¹. This formation is taking on an increasingly global character that, theoretically speaking, can be understood as variants of 'regressive third force' politics. These seek to be portrayed as being above social class, but which ultimately arbitrate in favour of global capitalist elites. The immediate concern of the think piece, however, is the current balance of political forces within the UK, the continuing Conservative hegemony, the role of Brexit in redefining the political terrain and the dramatic marginalization of the Left. Given the number of occasions that the Left has been defeated by the Right in the UK in recent years one would have thought that more attention would be paid to understanding the Conservative 'adversary'. But this is not the case. The Left of all shades remains self-absorbed in internal struggles with a new tendency that seeks ideological refuge in long-term technological trends. Conversely, little attention has been devoted to a rigorous analysis of the political terrain and the strategies of the Right conservative forces who have been inflicting repeated defeats on the Left. And things are about to get a great deal worse with the rise of the 'Regressive Alliance' in the UK; an ideological and political convergence,

particularly since the Brexit vote, between the Conservatives, UKIP and an 'ecology' of Right think tanks, media supporters and Alt Right websites such as Aaron Bank's 'Westmonster'. What is taking place is a reorientation of British political economy (UK capitalism) away from a European regulatory model and towards a desperate 'Atlanticism' that seeks relationships with 'kith and kin' countries and 'strong men'.

This think piece aims to understand not only the renewal of Conservative political hegemony in the summer of 2016 in the form of "Mayism", but how this now extends beyond the boundaries of the Conservative Party as part of a 'Right Bloc' that is beginning to function as a Regressive Alliance on the electoral terrain. At the same time, a dissection of this new Right hegemony in the UK reveals its brittle nature and vulnerabilities. These are to be found in relation to the promotion of ideologically-driven policies that make economic crisis more likely; the deterioration of public services that particularly threaten its older voting groups; the potential break-up the UK; turning our back on relationship with European countries and hitching ourselves to a subservient relationship to the US that is now led by a highly dangerous individual. At the same time, however, the Conservative Party itself is particularly adaptive and will want to give the impression that it is being reasonable, realistic and addressing big future issues. This is best expressed through Theresa May's proposed industrial strategy.

In attempting to understand the character of Conservative hegemony in the new global era, the think piece proceeds to assess the scale of the threat it poses to Labour and the Left and how far it can be countered by what is termed a 'Progressive or Left Populism'. This is not referring, however, to the unconvincing attempt by Jeremy Corbyn to become a left populist by riding a wave of anger with the Establishment². Instead, what is discussed is a profound attempt at remaking a progressive, open, outward-looking and collaborative national/popular politics that seriously engages with global economic, technological and cultural futures from a position of how people actually see their lives and their identities in the present and often at a deeply local level. It is a politics that seeks to connect what Gramsci referred to as deep 'organic' trends with the 'conjunctural' terrain of politics on which futures are made³. On this terrain the concepts of future have to be connected with the present and the past where popular imaginations often reside, rather than seeking

refuge in hidden hand of history and in the words of Billy Bragg just 'Waiting for the Great Leap Forward' 4.

Beyond *The Osborne Supremacy*

Following the Brexit vote, Osborne himself may no longer be supreme but, as we have seen, Conservative hegemony certainly is. What has changed is its composition. Rather than relating to a modern liberal cosmopolitanism personified by the Cameron/Osborne relationship it now taps into an English nationalism and a 'commonsense' conservatism that is co-terminous with the redrawn boundaries of English politics. This is the centre of gravity of what can be referred to as 'Mayism' that is in a more potent political and electoral position because of its leading role in a more ideologically cohesive Right Bloc or Regressive Alliance.

In late 2015 Compass published *The Osborne Supremacy* 5; a thinkpiece that analysed the roots of Conservative political hegemony following a narrow and unexpected Conservative win in the general election of that year. The paper reflected on the ways in which the Conservative Party remodeled itself after 2005 following three consecutive election defeats at the hands of New Labour. In the *Osborne Supremacy* I argued that the Conservatives had managed to renew itself as a result of combining socially liberal and economically neoliberal strategies led by the Conservative's chief strategist George Osborne and the then PM David Cameron in order to make the party more electable. The development of Conservative political hegemony was also propelled by the proliferation of new Right think tanks and political attack organisations (e.g. Migration Watch), sections of the mass media as well as through the social modernization of the Conservative Parliamentary Party to help it resemble a more socially liberal society that had emerged in the 1990s. Moreover, the 2008 financial crash enabled the Conservatives to blend its socially liberal tendency with neoliberal economics. The combined effects of this Conservative political modernization headed by the close personal relationship of Cameron and Osborne meant that the Conservatives could politically dominate a Coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats defined and undermined by the policy of economic austerity.

The Osborne Supremacy also reflected on the condition of Labour following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader and concluded that it had little idea of the potency of the political adversary that it faced in 2015 and was totally unprepared for the battles that were to follow. This sombre assessment was more than proven by the outcome of the EU referendum and the current condition of Labour in the post-Brexit period when it is deeply divided over Brexit and other issues. It now faces the prospect of serious electoral reversals that the upcoming by-elections in Copeland and Stoke-on-Trent may illustrate all too vividly.

The prevailing analysis of *The Osborne Supremacy* in 2015 was based on the underlying assumption that the EU issue would, in the event of pro-EU position narrowing prevailing, continue to cause fissures in the Conservative Party. Given this scenario, it was assumed that the Cameron/Osborne axis would continue to dominate the Conservatives for the remainder of the Parliament. Brexit and the 52/48 split changed all that. What has happened since is that the Conservative Party has united behind Theresa May in a 'Hard Brexit' strategy. In addition and electorally, it has formed a tacit electoral regressive alliance with UKIP and it is the Labour Party that finds itself in crisis; still having to come to terms with Brexit and particularly in relation to its northern heartlands.

Brexit and the redrawing of political frontiers

Post-Brexit, the UK finds itself in a new political context that has recast the 'frontiers' of political debate ⁶. A fundamental dividing line has appeared in which political identities are being reformed by reactions to aftermath of the Brexit vote – Leave v. Remain and People v. Political Establishment or Elite. The redrawing of this political frontier, in which the fundamental antagonisms of neoliberalism are being recast in terms of narrow forms of nationalism, is being engineered by the political forces of the Right Bloc or Regressive Alliance. By these I am referring to the dominant role of the Conservative Party under the leadership of Theresa May and a Brexit-oriented Cabinet together with ideological steering function of UKIP and Nigel Farage. UKIP too has a new leader - Paul Nuttall, MEP for the North West of England - who has vowed to replace Labour as a patriotic party appealing to its working class voters ⁷.

The rise of global Right Authoritarian Populism

This political shift in the UK (or to be more precise, in England) is better understood in the context of the wider global economic crisis that started in 2008 that has now spilled onto the political terrain. Across Europe and the United States, the growing crisis of neoliberalism has seen an evaporation of the political centre. The advancement of a more activist Left, however, has been overshadowed by surge of Right Authoritarian Populism (RAP) that has been able to effortlessly harness a growing emotional rage against inequalities and decline by presenting itself as 'anti-establishment'. By 'the establishment' the Right are railing against those political and economic forces associated with globalised free trade and migration; centrist, liberal or mild social democratic politics and supporters of the progressive 'culture wars' that has seen significant advances in aspects of sexual and racial equalities.

The Trump victory in the US was Brexit on a vastly greater scale and a far more extreme response than the current UK Conservative political dominance. Being a presidential vote it crystallized opposition to both the conservatism of the Republican Party (although is now harnessing this) and, particularly, the mild reformism of the Democrats. In comparative terms, it is as if the UK had voted for Nigel Farage as PM. In the wake of the Trump victory, Farage was the first UK politician to meet Trump in person and has been driving sections Conservative Party's response to Brexit and many of May's speeches and actions can be understood in seeking to ideologically and politically lead the post-Brexit environment. And it does not end here – elections are to be held in France and Germany where the Far Right sees itself on the march towards a new global order ⁸, although for now it has been checked in Austria. These political shifts represent a dramatic new phase of the crisis of Neoliberalism 2.0 that will, in due course, contribute to a new global economic and geo-political instability ⁹.

The reactionary revolt also has its complexities, resulting from the appropriation by the Right of some of the language and policies of Left. As David Blanchflower stated 'Trump's stunning victory and the Brexit vote in the UK are the inevitable responses to the weak recovery from recession... in both countries austerity is dead and buried. Keynes was right. Fiscal stimulus here we come' ¹⁰. As we will see, however, a sense of break with austerity

and neoliberalism may be being overplayed, but something has changed within UK Conservatism and it is important to understand exactly what.

The renewal of Conservative political hegemony

The main features of current Conservative dominance are analysed in terms of 'Mayism'; the political and ideological approach of Theresa May, the new leader and now Prime Minister; its relationship with the wider Conservative Party and the wider ecology of Right ideological and political forces that have been coalesced by Brexit. Mayism might be understood as a new Conservative 'double shuffle' (see Part 3 for an explanation of this key concept) that sees the dominant role provided by a new nationalism based on Hard Brexit, reduction of immigration and trade deals with 'kith and kin' countries. Economic interventionism and political devolution play subordinate roles but they are important in helping to stitch together the Conservative-led political coalition. The new May double shuffle is the result of a shift of equilibrium within the Conservative Party by having to accommodate her now dominant Eurosceptic wing while, at the same time, needing to respond to pressures from business leaders many of whom are less than happy about Brexit and the potential loss of markets. At the same time, she is having to reach out to voter groups disillusioned with features of economic globalisation. The shifting sands of 'Mayism' and this particular form of Conservative 'combinational politics' can be presently summed up in the uneasy dynamics of the May/Hammond relationship and the lurch towards Hard Brexit.

While Conservative hegemony at the electoral level looks strong, the condition of the wider Right economic/political Bloc (theoretically understood as a historical bloc) ¹¹ looks more fragile with the potential for splits with sections of business and voter blocs, particularly if there is accelerated economic decline in the medium-term and further crises of public expenditure. Mayism is internally brittle. The Trump victory, however, has provided a new economic space for May's idea of an Anglophone free-trade bloc to underpin its argument about good prospects for economic life outside the EU. This narrow concept of free trade is being combined with a common focus on non-green infrastructure projects (e.g. Trump's rebuilt freeways and US/Mexican Wall and May's third runway at Heathrow). However, compared with the Trump's US, the economic room for manoeuvre for the UK looks very

limited. And, as recent events in the US have proved, a close relationship with Trump and his excesses may prove a constant source of embarrassment, making her look desperate and subservient.

Corbynism and the political isolation of the Left

Nevertheless, May's Conservatives may not have to pay a high political cost in foreseeable future for these tensions and contradictions. This is due to the self-imposed political isolation of Corbynism; its deep post-Brexit crisis and the apparent inability to fuse a narrative on economic renewal with a notion of the 'national popular' or 'progressive patriotism'. Overlaying this is its general unwillingness to build political alliances and consider electoral collaboration in England with other progressive political forces (the Kingston by-election was prime example).

In this paper, Labour and other progressive forces are thus analysed in terms of how far they are building (or not) a viable counter-bloc. This part of the analysis will contain a critique of traditional social democracy; the sectional nature of Corbyn's Left Turn and the imbalanced nature of Radical Modernity, the latter of which that has placed insufficient emphasis on economic transformation and the sense of identity, place and security for sections of the working class displaced by neoliberal globalization. The vacating of this vital political and ideological terrain has afforded space for the Far Right to articulate a xenophobic and atavistic vision of a secure world built behind borders and walls.

A new progressive populism?

The paper concludes with a discussion of the dimensions of an effective progressive counter bloc strategy; on an alternative redrawing of political frontiers based on a new Left or 'Progressive Populism' underpinned by a transformative economic and political vision framed in national popular terms, expressed also as a form of internationalism.

Part 1. The new Brexit context

A new socio-political geography

It is important to appreciate just how far the Brexit vote has opened up a new political era in the UK and the key contours of this emerging landscape – the new politico-social geography; a coalescing of a ‘Tory nationalism’; a set of political realignments which have extended the range of the Right Bloc and new economic and political fault-lines that could affect its cohesion.

The politico-social geography of revolt will shape the upcoming political battlegrounds. While London, some large English cities, Northern Ireland and Scotland voted ‘remain’ whole swathes of England and Wales voted ‘leave’. This new politico-social geography has also been cast in class terms between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’¹² that is feeding a new Right insurgent discourse that seeks to polarize the ‘people’s will’ against ‘political elites’. The reality of the Brexit vote, however, was socially more complex; comprising an alliance of the ‘northern poor’, socially conservative sections of the working class and the ‘southern middle classes’¹³.

The new UK politico-social geography is underpinning the rise of the so-called ‘new Tory nationalism’ in England¹⁴. This, however, is not the case in Scotland due to the dominant role of the SNPs ‘progressive nationalism’. In terms of the new politico-ideological frontier in England and Wales, people are increasingly identifying themselves not by political party, but whether they are a Brexiteer or a Remainer. The new Tory nationalism harnesses the redrawing of these boundaries and its effects on the nature and language of political life cannot be exaggerated. Brexit will be an ‘organising discourse’ for years to come, both because of its widespread economic effects and the ways in which it currently frames political identities. Even those issues that are not directly Brexit related will be cast in terms of the ‘new nationalism’ – for example, the NHS and who it serves and who works for it; immigration and who is allowed to enter the country; economic growth and who we trade with.

The most immediate effect of the Brexit vote was its impact on the leadership of political parties. With the exception of the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, all the other political parties have either replaced their leaderships or seen leadership challenges. A nationalist Right has seized control of the Conservative Party ¹⁵ and the Cabinet and is taking the UK on a Hard Brexit trajectory with the tacit agreement of the Prime Minister. While UKIP has succeeded in framing much of the political debate around Brexit it has since experienced severe internal conflict principally around its relationship with a dominant Conservative Party that is now taking both its members and sections of electoral support. Labour's own internal turbulence pre-dates the EU referendum, but the Brexit vote served to further polarize its tensions and fissures. Out of all the upheavals it was the Conservatives that emerged with the clearest advantage - a superficially coherent political strategy and a reorganized political bloc that involves taking forward much of the Osborne electoral game-plan, but adapted to a post-Brexit context.

This landscape, however, is still forming and it is here that dangers await the Conservatives. The referendum outcome served to polarize two nationalisms. The more well-formed Scottish social democratic nationalism promoted by the SNP has been fused with a pro-EU narrative – a small but proud independent country thriving within a social Europe ¹⁶. A Right English nationalism, on the other hand, has emerged as 'grievance' and isolationism that dresses itself up as globalized free trade. These two nationalisms are incompatible and the pursuit of an extreme Brexit strategy by the Conservative Government will threaten the future shape and cohesion of the UK including not only the position of Scotland, but also the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

But it is the economic sphere that remains most important. The UK economy has broadly ridden out the early economic shocks of Brexit, but problems are accumulating medium-term. The GB pound has declined and inflation is gathering pace (the Tesco-Unilever 'Marmite Price War' was just the opening round). Furthermore, there is frequent news of major companies thinking about leaving the UK to economic centres in the EU (e.g. Paris, Frankfurt and Dublin) that are very publically trying to entice them away. These tensions are explored further in Part 3 of this think piece.

The Post-Brexit landscape is not confined to the UK. The Brexit revolt travelled across the Atlantic to inform the Trump campaign with Nigel Farage making personal appearances and both have come together to create a sense of a worldwide nationalist populist surge against globalized economics and elites. The current post-Brexit landscape thus contains a central paradox. On the one hand, Conservative Party political hegemony has been strengthened and, according to all established measures, it dominates the political terrain despite having a slender majority in Parliament. At the same time, this hegemony is brittle. It is hostage to the Far Right pursuit of Hard Brexit that brings with it severe political and economic pressures that could see fissures occurring within the Right Bloc and within the Conservative Party itself.

Part 2. The renewal of Conservative political hegemony – the rapid emergence of ‘Mayism’

A new stage in Conservative political evolution – beyond The Osborne Supremacy

In her speeches at least Theresa May has attempted to signal a break with the Cameron/Osborne processes of Conservative modernisation. Following the exhaustion of Thatcherism and three consecutive election defeats, ‘Cameronism’ (2005-2010) constituted the early years of Conservative renewal with attempts to present a more socially liberal image and to build of a more socially representative parliamentary party. This period was also one marked by the diversification of the intellectual inputs into Conservative modernisation and by the formation of a number of new Right think tanks that created combinations of social liberalism and neoliberal economic strategies. The Conservatives also embraced technological modernity with their own particular takes on the digital revolution and support for entrepreneurial ‘start ups’¹⁷.

Following the 2008 Crash, the Conservative social modernisation project gave way to the neoliberal policy of Austerity that became overwhelmingly associated with the political scheming of George Osborne, as the Conservative Party focused on building its economic competency credentials and its political base with older voters. The narrow Conservative majority in the 2015 General Election suggested that this strategy had paid off and it was broadly assumed that Osborne, who had assiduously cultivated support across the Conservative Party, would succeed Cameron as leader and then as prime minister. But forces of instability were building. While the Conservative-led Coalition Government remained pro-EU, Cameron was forced to promise a referendum in order to placate his Eurosceptic wing. The four million UKIP votes at the 2015 General Election might have yielded only one UKIP MP, but according to its donor Arron Banks, it also gave them the referendum and that’s what they really wanted¹⁸. Moreover, UKIP was on the rise as the effects of austerity took hold and immigration levels remained high. It was the combination of weak economic growth, perceived high levels of immigration and the EU referendum that was to finish both the ministerial careers of Cameron and Osborne and send us on a course to crash out of the EU. Cameron left politics, but Osborne has retired to backbenches with aspirations to keep the economic and social ‘liberalism’ flame burning in

the Conservative Party, obviously with an eye on returning to the fray when it all goes wrong with Mayism ¹⁹.

From political crisis to an effortless settlement

According to a succession of opinion polls, the Conservatives enjoy a new political dominance in late 2016 ²⁰. But what has been most striking are the means by which they have achieved this latest political advantage. The adaptive ability of the Conservatives is breath-taking. Following the Brexit vote of 23 June and the resignation of David Cameron they faced a sharp crisis and could have easily elected Boris Johnson or Andrea Leadsom as Conservative Leader. In the event, Johnson self-destructed and Leadsom withdrew from the leadership contest knowing the difficulties she would face across all wings of the Conservative Party due to her close identification with UKIP politics ²¹. This left Theresa May as the 'unity candidate', who duly became Conservative Leader and then PM less than three weeks following the Referendum.

The new prime minister had not backed Brexit but, having kept her powder dry during the campaign, was willing to champion a new settlement following the vote in England and Wales to leave the EU, epitomised with the slogan 'Brexit means Brexit'. Thus far refashioning a realigned Conservative political unity has been her most immediate political priority. However, political agility has not been confined to leadership power plays. More impressive have been the apparent ideological shifts - away from Osborne's 'pure neoliberalism' towards a more traditionalist, interventionist, nationalist and small 'c' form of Conservatism that has been able to unite different fractions in the Post-Brexit context and, so far, to draw UKIP into the Conservative orbit. This new ideological and political configuration - Mayism - signalled to sections of the Conservative Party ignored by Cameron and Osborne that there was a new brand of Conservatism on offer ²².

Theresa May – a Conservative unifier of the Right shift

Initial assessments of a leader often focus personal attributes and Theresa May has been no exception. In the immediate aftermath of her elevation she was characterised as personally resolute; an experienced politician and a safe pair of hands; a break with the metropolitanism of Cameron and Osborne with which many grassroots Conservatives felt

uncomfortable; and someone more emotionally in touch with the grassroots. She is thus a potential unifier of Conservative traditions and tendencies. Nick Cohen sums up the narrative about May that still prevails in late 2016.

'Theresa May appeals to a stereotype that has a deep grip on the English psyche. Sober and commonsensical, she behaves with the moral seriousness we expect from a vicar's daughter. She may be a little clunky, but what a relief it is to have a straightforward leader from the heart of the country after the flash, poll-driven phonies of the past'

At the same time as recognizing these personal political qualities, he accused her of 'lying and lying again to become PM'²³. These complexities and contradictions can be understood in the wider context the wider Right shift. Matthew Parris, ex-Conservative MP, now political commentator and not a natural supporter of May and her political approach, reflected on the realignments taking place on the Right of British politics, 'If we don't want an insurgent, redneck nationalist party on the right, maybe we must cut a bit of slack to the traditional Conservative leader best placed to steady the Tory troops'²⁴.

May's 2016 Conservative conference speech - a 'land grab' of Labour political territory

Theresa May's speech to the 2016 Conservative Party conference staked out her ideological and political approach with its emphases on 'just managing families; opposition to corporate greed; support for the idea of the 'good' or 'smart' state and the NHS and a proposal to put workers on the boards of companies. She lambasted Labour as a 'nasty party', determined to cement in the public mind its vicious infighting. The speech in terms of political contestation was a land grab for centre politics and key features of Labour's territory. Viewed more narrowly in terms of the evolution of Conservative thinking 'Mayism' can be also be viewed as the 'decoupling of Conservative Euroscepticism from Thatcherism, creating a new fusion of Tory one-nation economic and social traditions with the reality of Brexit'²⁵.

In doing so she was using Brexit as the context for a new configuration of Conservative philosophy and policy that involves reviving the 'Chamberlainite' economic and social

agendas in support of a new 'Tory nationalism'. Known more as a technocratic and pragmatic than ideological politician, her interest in Tory one nation approaches has resulted in part from the influence of close advisers, notably Nick Timothy. Hailing from Birmingham and from a working class background, Timothy is an admirer of Joseph Chamberlain, the Victorian-era mayor of Birmingham and Liberal minister. Timothy has also argued for the regulation of immigration on the grounds that it has adversely affected the labour market and thus 'just managing families' ²⁶. This combination of new forms of economic and social interventionism and close control of immigration has become an early defining feature of Mayism. We will see, nevertheless, there is a difference between making a few speeches about the new Tory interventionist economic nationalism and doing anything meaningful in practice.

Different strands of Mayism – a new Conservative 'double shuffle'

This initial assessment of May's overall political approach is underpinned not only by her public utterances, but the emergent key strands of policy (as of December 2016). It is possible to view these through the lens of Stuart Hall's 'double shuffle' ²⁷. Used to analyse the complexities of New Labour policy at the height of 'Blairism', Hall identified dominant neo-liberal strands (e.g. flexible labour markets) and subordinate social democratic policies (e.g. introduction of the minimum wage). The concept of the double shuffle can, however, be applied to policies of different political parties as they seek to appeal to a variety of political and social forces.

In terms of May's conservatism, the dominant strand revolves around a Right nationalist position – principally a commitment to Brexit that involves significant reductions in immigration. It is this emphasis that is leading to a 'Hard Brexit' outcome. Given that this means that no deal is struck with the EU regarding access to markets (EU leaders will not want to make it easy for the UK at the risk of encouraging others), the May government seeks to create a 'kith and kin Anglophone' trading bloc including countries that were previously members of the Commonwealth. This has always been a dream of the Conservative Right and the visit to India in November 2016 was an example of this strategy action, albeit relatively fruitless. The idea of the Anglophone trading area, however, has been significantly boosted by Trump's US presidential victory, the promise of a trade deal

with the US and possibly Australia. At home, May will want to continue to cementing her voting bloc that comprises the elderly and 'just managing families', not only through economic measures, but through cultural messages about 'security'. The controversial policy to expand the role of grammar schools, for example, has had less to do with their actual impact on the education system and more to do with their totemic value that signals to older and aspiring voters that an England of the past (the 1950s) is now the vision of post-Brexit UK. Whether the policy will actually see the light of day remains to be seen but, for now, it has ideological value.

The subordinate strand concerns economic and social policy to appeal to the theme of 'governing for everybody'. By subordinate I am not referring to the absence of policy – there will be a great many policies in this area - but the prospect of their relative weakness and how they may be contradicted by the logic of the dominant strand. In the Chamberlainite mode there is an emergent industrial strategy based on a 'soft economic nationalism'. She has created a new department for industrial strategy, advocated places for workers on company boards (although this has already been reneged on) and proposed increased scrutiny of foreign takeovers of British companies, again recently played down by the Chancellor. Accompanying this has been a mild relaxation of fiscal policy and the easing of planned cuts to services and benefits, although the crisis in the NHS and social care suggests that this shift can be overstated. Social reform has refocused on the 'just about managing' classes that involves a housing policy moving from subsidising home ownership, to building homes and supporting private renters. There is also significant commitment to devolution and localism beyond Osborne's Northern Powerhouse conception. This latter strategy is not so much a break, but an extension of the Cameron/Osborne era. The complex formation of policy is underpinned by the idea not of a small state, but of a 'smart' or even 'good' state'²⁸; a more continental conservative orientation that has drawn parallels with Theodore Roosevelt²⁹. The evidence so far, however, would suggest that a 'soft' nationalist economic strategy may simply be too weak to offset the effects of the dominant strategy that in which the currently dominant Hard Brexit forces within the Conservatives seek a sharp break with the EU and a gravitation towards the US.

A renegotiation between Conservatism and neoliberalism?

Viewed in terms of the relationship between the Conservatives and modern capitalism, these policies would suggest an attempt, albeit superficial, to renegotiate the relationship between UK conservatism and neoliberalism. Although less extreme than 'Trumpism', May's 'new nationalism' is less bound to global capital as the effects of Neoliberalism 2.0 trigger revolts that have been seen to usher in a post-liberal era ³⁰. This shift of Conservatism involves appropriating policies and language from both Right and Left in order to secure the 'centre ground' ³¹. The 40+ per cent electoral reach also helps the Tories to politically dominate the broader Right Bloc and to channel UKIP towards attacking the Labour vote.

Cementing voter blocs with the new Tory nationalism

A central function of the 'new Tory nationalism' is cementing different voting constituencies that have been given new definition by the Brexit vote. The Cameron and Osborne project had initially focused on 'modernising the Conservative Party by trying to appeal to younger and energetic social and economic forces. This approach ceased as a driving force of modernization following the 2008 Crash. The Conservative electoral bloc being built in late 2016, accentuating the Osborne strategy, comprises the following overlapping constituencies that eat into both Labour and UKIP electorates.

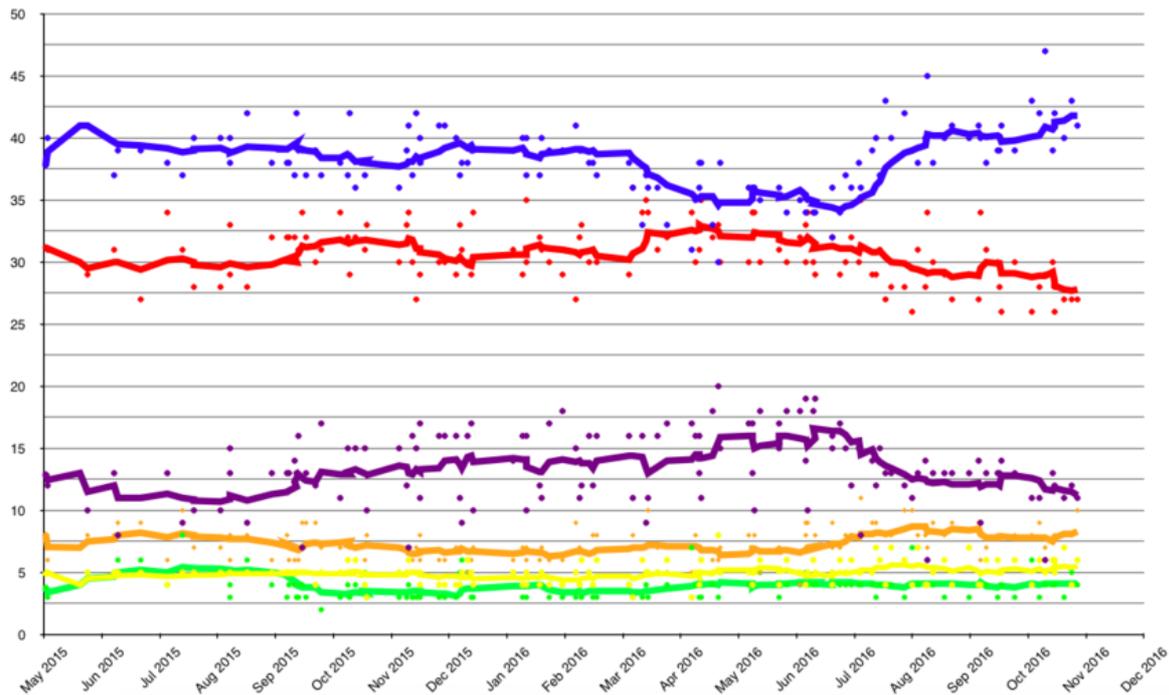
- Traditional Tory voters in the shires, the south east and now the south west.
- Older voters who have come to overwhelmingly vote Tory and who have a 75 per cent participation in elections compared with 40 per cent for younger voters.
- Working-class voters who are 'just managing' and, crucially, socially conservative groups opposed to immigration ³².

The Conservative electoral strategy continues to represent a 'social holding pattern', based on a cultural/ideological strategy to knit together disparate social groups of an ageing population rather than building a bloc that is led by the most dynamic and innovative economic, social and cultural forces.

Conservative leadership of the Right Political Bloc/Regressive Alliance

The Conservative Party narrow majority in Parliament does not fully reflect the extent of their political domination in late 2016. In the wake of their party conference they have been enjoying opinion poll ratings at or over 40 per cent with the added advantage of having redrawn of electoral boundaries that advantages them further.

Figure 1. UK polling intentions May 2015 - November 2016



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_next_United_Kingdom_general_election (accessed 15 November, 2016).

It is important, therefore, to view Conservative political hegemony not only in single political party terms, but as the leading force in a Right Bloc that electorally combines the voting intentions for Conservatives and UKIP; a tacit alliance that will show itself in upcoming by-elections in Copeland and Stoke-on-Trent. Beyond Parliament, and in the climate of a growing regressive nationalism, there is the addition of the possible formation by Arron Banks of a 'People's Movement' (a 'Right Momentum'); together with various Right 'attack organisations' that includes a virulent pro-Hard Brexit press.

In late 2016, the electoral Regressive Alliance enjoyed a total voting intention of 55 per cent (43% for the Conservatives and 12% for UKIP). Pre-Brexit in early 2015, this alignment was

polling 50 per cent and during 2014, the mid-high 40's. The main changes have been a dramatic increase in Conservative support from 36 to 43 per cent; declines in Labour from 32 per cent to 27 per cent and UKIP from 15 to 12 per cent. Brexit has thus clearly increased the political reach of the Right Bloc.

UKIP and English 'Third Force' politics

Conservative political adaptation has not only sent shock waves through Labour, it has caused an 'existential' crisis in UKIP that has also seen its electoral fortunes decline since June. It is now polling at around 11/12 per cent. This could well be the result of 'job done' following the Brexit poll, together with the potential for conflict amongst the various ideological factions³³. But the bigger picture reflects the fact that the Conservatives have succeeded in winning sections of UKIP voters to their 'new nationalism' agenda and the pursuit of a 'hard Brexit' strategy. However, by virtue of this, UKIP has succeeded in framing a major part of the political discourse for the Conservative Right.

In the *Osborne Supremacy*, I characterised UKIP as an example of 'Third Force' politics that emerges when the fundamental classes are deadlocked. In what Podemos refers to as 'a catastrophic tie'³⁴, can be understood as the simultaneous crises of both neoliberalism and the Left (the old is dying and the new struggles to be born). Into this vacuum steps, in the case of UKIP, Trump and RAP forces that are attempting to bring about a 'regressive settlement'. Brexit, and the way in which the Trump victory has reinforced the Far Right in the UK, means that the political forces referred to as the 'outer fringes' of the Right Bloc in 2015 have swiftly become more central to it in late 2016 in the form of the Regressive Alliance.

And we have not seen the full extent of the shift towards RAP or 21st Century Fascism. A formal split within UKIP has not taken place and they have a new leader who may succeed in producing greater unity. The formation of the new Aaron Banks political party or 'People's Movement' is yet to materialize, although there are plans for its launch in the New Year 2017 in the form of a populist website. One possible scenario is that a division of labour emerges within the Right Bloc – the Conservatives lead the UK towards Hard Brexit and UKIP sees its role as keeping the Conservative Party's 'feet to the flame' regarding

immigration and Hard Brexit while taking Labour votes in the north and along the eastern coast. This leaves the Aaron Banks's putative People's Movement, that could also involve Farage, not as a splinter political party, but as a new and virulent attack organization, launched initially as a digital movement using the data base of the *Leave:EU* campaign, but with a potential 'street' presence. This would make it much easier for the populist Right to embrace extreme fascistic forces in the UK such as the EDL and BNP that have been cast to the fringes by the advance of UKIP³⁵. This is only likely to emerge as an overt political force if the Remain camp puts up a serious resistance and the Conservatives show signs of division. So far that is not the case, leaving little political oxygen for Bank's as powerful force within the Regressive Alliance.

Part 3. Tensions and contradictions of the new Conservative hegemony

In *The Osborne Supremacy* it was argued that the most immediate fundamental fault-lines running through the Cameron/Osborne Conservative strategy were concerned with the effects of the policy of Austerity and internal fissures associated with Europe. A question was also asked as to whether being an English party only was sufficient for the Conservatives. The 2015 election result; the Brexit vote; boundary changes and the most recent opinion polls suggest that the Conservatives have managed to ride out these tensions to produce an advantageous political settlement. Austerity has been marginally relaxed and a new Conservative unity has been forged post-Brexit by a shift towards third force politics. They are firmly electorally entrenched in England with every chance of increasing their majority in a general election whether it takes place in 2020 or sooner. In this sense, Conservative political hegemony remains undimmed, if not actually strengthened.

Nevertheless, fundamental underlying tensions and flaws remain for the Conservative project and new ones have been added as the result of the new Right Turn and regressive settlement. There is a real prospect of economic stagnation or even decline due to the disruption of trade with the EU. Brexit is tilted against the new realities of international production. For example, car components may cross the Channel upwards of five times before becoming part of a finished vehicle and the cost of tariffs would be prohibitive for the car industry that still remains in the UK ³⁶. Not surprisingly, some international companies may choose to leave the UK, particularly if Hard Brexit is pursued to its logical conclusion and the Nissan sweetheart deal shows a level of panic in the May Government about this prospect. An extreme Brexit strategy is thus creating tensions with the economic and class allies within the wider dominant historical bloc and this is something of which a cautious and pragmatic Chancellor is well aware. If, on the other hand, the Government seeks to 'open up' the UK economy to attract new inward investment, they may be compelled to further deregulate the economy and attack working conditions and other forms of social protection that will undermine any pretence of following a Chamberlainite social strategy. The post-Brexit Conservative economic and social strategies appear incompatible.

The acceleration of devolution across the UK to forestall Scottish independence is providing more economic powers for the Scottish and Welsh assemblies. It is inconceivable that they will accept Hard Brexit lying down because it is simply too injurious to their respective economies. Therefore, the pursuit of a clean break with the EU will result in the further fracturing of the UK in which English and Scottish nationalisms are pitted against one another, possibly resulting in Indyref 2.0 in which Scotland decides to re-join Europe rather than join with an increasingly atavistic England. It is not yet clear just how much of a threat the Scottish issue will pose in the near future unless there is a marked shift in sentiment in Scotland towards independence.

The mainstay of the Conservative electoral block – the electoral pact with elderly voters – may be threatened by economic stagnation and a further crisis of public expenditure. A particularly difficult issue is the growing crisis of social care and the NHS, a destabilising factor that is hard to exaggerate. Moreover, there is already a questioning of the ‘triple lock’ on pensions that has privileged the elderly compared with the increasing privations of younger voters burdened by education debt, a housing crisis and disproportionately higher rates of unemployment. These economic tensions in part explains new lines of a cultural battle for ‘security’ in which the Government promises to create an England that older people will recognise.

This redrawing of this politico-cultural frontier will, however, place the new Tory nationalism further adrift from the younger, more entrepreneurial and outward-looking social and energetic economic forces that are mainly concentrated in cities. Despite talk of a new global movement of ‘post-liberalism’ following the Brexit and Trump victories, the underlying economic and communication trends remain deeply globalised. The question is not whether globalisation is accepted or not, but the version of globalisation on offer or to be built.

It may well prove to be the case that the Trump victory and his interventionist economic strategy creates growth in the US. John Harris has reflected on the consequences of Trump even half succeeding ³⁷. However, it is the extreme racist policies of Trumpism and the ideological unpredictabilities that already suggest that a close relationship with the

current US leadership holds danger. Moreover, if the economy begins to stall then the mood could change quite rapidly. All of this will fuel dissent coming from sections of the Conservative Party, such as Bright Blue, that still associate themselves with the Cameron/Osborne social liberalism ³⁸.

These are the tensions and contradictions that Theresa May has to navigate and resolve. In January 2017 the widely accepted public image articulated earlier by Nick Cohen just about prevails. She is seen as sensible and wrestling with difficult issues in a down to earth and common sense way; less 'Mini Maggie' and more like an English Angela Merkel. Her approval ratings as PM still reflect this ³⁹. But the gradually emerging political facts tell a different story. It is of someone being forced into contradictory positions because she finds herself caught between a Conservative Party that she now leads that has placed a narrow nationalist ideology and priorities with reducing levels of immigration above that of capitalist global economics and the prevailing terms of trade. At times she looks more like a hostage than a PM. These tensions were captured in the behind closed doors Goldman Sachs speech in May 2016 where she talked of the problems of Brexit. Since becoming leader and PM, Theresa May has found herself increasingly reversing or abandoning previously held positions in order to keep her party happy or major global capitalists on board, whether this be the third runway at Heathrow; assurances given to Nissan to continue to invest in the North East or a relatively pointless visit to India. And the effects of the relationship with Trump is just beginning to sink in.

Due to the very contradictory positions in which she finds herself, Theresa May is increasingly coming across as evasive and desperate, compelled to respond mechanically in the image of John Crace's 'Maybot' ⁴⁰. George Soros, the billionaire financier, told a forum at Davos in the winter of 2017 that he thinks May will not last long as PM due to the economic contradictions of the Brexit divorce ⁴¹. However, it is difficult to see how exactly this will happen given that she is prepared to ride 'Hard Brexit' to its logical conclusion. A revolt against her would require a sea change in public sentiment and there is little sign of that yet.

Renewed Conservative hegemony and the Right Bloc – key challenges in the Brexit era

Conservative political hegemony has been renewed with the formation of a more explicitly English nationalist bloc based on the redrawing of political boundaries, defined through the Leave/Remain dichotomy. It is this distinction that Conservative Party is using to command electoral superiority following Brexit. In this realignment the Conservatives also lead the wider Right Bloc in which their 'UKIP lite' politics create a form of exchange with UKIP itself. Mayism can thus be defined as the force that is attempting to hold the Conservative-led Right Bloc/Regressive Alliance together.

At the same time, the new Tory nationalism and this political project has fundamental flaws. Most prominent are political and economic consequences of Hard Brexit that threatens to alienate its Remain supporters and sections of business. This introduces a constant source of tension both for the Conservatives and the wider Right Bloc that could see splits occurring. In addition, there is the protracted social and health crisis, rooted in the strategy of austerity that threatens the elderly social coalition. Thirdly, and of longer-term significance, the economy continues to tread water and the Conservatives have no answer other than a mantra about free trade with an English speaking white commonwealth that constitutes a minor part of our existing trade ⁴².

However, the contradictions experienced by a dominant Bloc are only as good as the pressure being placed on them by a competent political opponent. This brings us to the analysis of the Labour Party and the wider Left in an era of repeated political defeats.

Part 4. Labour and the Left Bloc – fragmented and politically adrift

In 2015 the conservative political–ideological bloc constitutes an extensive and well-organised array of ‘ramparts and earthworks’ geared to fighting successful political and ideological ‘wars of position’ and occasional ‘wars of manoeuvre’.⁴³ This contrasts sharply with the ramshackle political and ideological ‘trenches’ of Labour and the Left, which could be characterised as fragmented and in a state of serious disrepair.

This was an assessment of the UK political terrain provided in the *Osborne Supremacy* a year ago. The situation in early 2017 is far worse. The Right is now driving the political agenda not only in the UK, but even more so in the US. Correspondingly, the Left in the UK (more precisely in England) still does not have a hegemonic project; is shockingly disorganised; politically adrift and facing severe future electoral defeat.

The paradoxes of Corbyn’s Labour

The Labour Party finds itself in a highly paradoxical condition. It is now the largest political party in Europe with nearly 600,000 members, but with poll ratings that have been hovering below 30 per cent, leading to the comedian David Mitchell’s light hearted observation that Labour has more members than it has voters⁴⁴. These contrasting measures of political performance can be read in different ways. The Corbyn plan is to transform Labour into a radical social movement based on its increased membership and organisations such as Momentum. With over half a million members the Labour Party is suddenly more financially viable with ‘boots on the ground’ and the possibility of an effective election ‘ground war’. However, recent electoral experiences suggest that electoral ground wars are relatively ineffective (they failed to deliver sufficient votes for both the Miliband and Clinton campaigns), if substitute for ideological and political hegemony in an era of digital campaigning. Labour’s current parlous position in the opinion polls, some 15 or so points adrift of the governing party at this point in the Parliamentary cycle suggests something is badly wrong. Despite a surge in membership in 2016 there are predictions that Labour could be out of power for generation and some think that it may never govern again, at least on its own, in the current political system⁴⁵. The Liberal Democrats are enjoying a

minor revival with polling now in double figures and an ability to outperform this at the local level as was the case in the by-elections in Cameron's Whitney constituency and in Richmond Park. Despite having faced their own existential crisis, they clearly see a role for themselves filling a political vacuum in parts of the left-leaning centre ground and articulating the Remain vote.

Traditional social democracy is dying

The US election proved that Northern hemisphere traditional social democracy is dying on its feet. It played along with neoliberalism and did not have the wit nor the will to make the break. Crucially it failed to provide the economic programme or the language of communication with the remains of the traditional working class, large sections of which are currently defecting to 21st Century fascism. Instead, the social democratic Left has combined neoliberal economics that saw accelerated deindustrialisation, with acts of mild redistribution and an over-focus on what has been referred to as 'identity liberalism' ⁴⁶. Important sections of neoliberal economic forces, for example Apple, have little problem with this cultural-political approach because it both appeals to their sensibilities and expands their market. But it is a settlement that has been rejected by a socially conservative and increasingly marginalised working classes and without these forces the Left cannot create winning coalitions.

Limitations of the new Left Oppositions

New Left Oppositions have broken with traditional social democracy, marked by an emphatic rejection of neoliberalism and its austerity strategies. New energetic movements have sprung up in various forms ⁴⁷. They have come as 'external surges' as new Left and often digitised parties. These include parties as Syriza, Podemos, the Pirate Parties and Alternativet ⁴⁸. The Italian 5-Star Movement is more difficult to locate on the left/right continuum. Some established social democratic parties have moved to the Left as the result of 'internal surges'. These include the social and political movements of Corbyn's Labour and the Bernie Sanders' movement in amongst US Democrats. At the same time, however, they have not always developed the necessary strategies to build cultural, political and economic alliances or hegemonic blocs. Some of the New Left have been better than others at alliance building but in the main they have emphasised their own alternative political

identities. In *The Osborne Supremacy*, Labour was described as a 'primitive political bloc' due to its focus on ideological autonomy from neo-liberalism, but with the possibility of outward-looking development. This relatively sombre assessment still applies and the situation is being compounded by a leadership that is currently incapable of uniting the different strands of Labour Party and not able to articulate a coherent strategy on Brexit.

Of course, this exaggerates what is in reality a more complex situation. Many social democrats are leaving behind an adherence to a 'progressive neoliberalism' and seek to embrace a new political economy as well as building a new civil society formation around a stronger civic local government. This is the main thrust of, for example, *Labour Together* led by some Labour MPs and importantly local civic leaders. Momentum, on the other hand, sees itself as a social movement that could provide a vital campaigning base for the Labour Party and the wider Left as part of a broader progressive alliance⁴⁹, but has yet to commit itself to such an approach and is showing signs of internal splits. These thus remain incipient shifts and movements that are yet to imprint themselves on a new progressive hegemonic politics of the Left

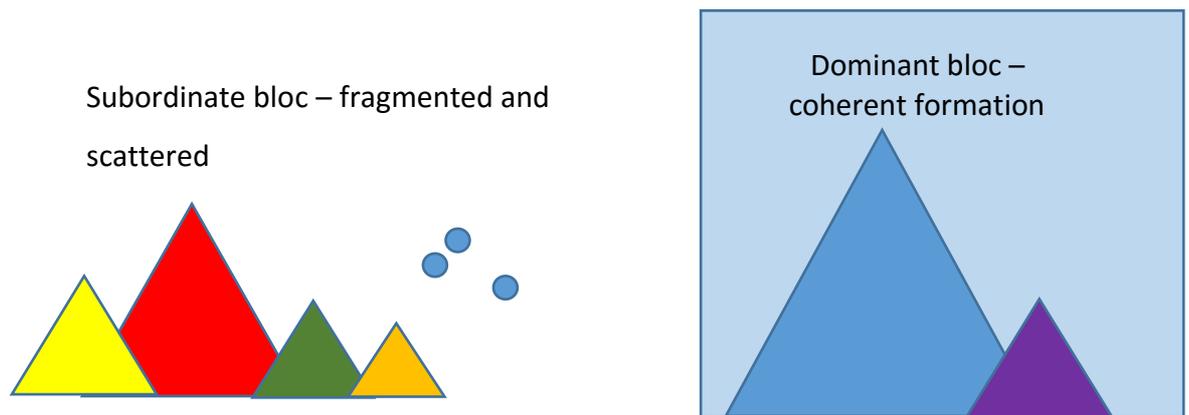
Unfortunately, current Labour primitivism is being reinforced by a deeply held sectarian attitude by its leadership and large parts of its membership to other political forces. Both traditional social democrats and the New Left have, for differing reasons, antipathies to other progressive political parties, a situation that is exacerbated by the absence of an electoral system of proportional representation that could encourage a culture of collaboration. There are further splits on the Left that is having to reorient itself in new RAP era. The English Left is cut off from progressive national movements in Scotland and Wales, as the Labour Party is compelled to compete for votes in the small countries of the UK under a 'first-past-the-post' electoral system. The Liberal Democrats, that are now moving to the left and carving out a new political niche for themselves, have not been forgiven for their role in the Conservative-led Coalition Government.

A fragmented Left Bloc

As Figure 2 illustrates, the respective conditions of the dominant Right and subordinate Left blocs. In an era of RAP, the dominant Right Bloc in the UK context has found a new and

coherent form in its enlarged condition that focuses its power on England. The subordinate political forces, on the other hand, do not even function as bloc. They are a scattered and fragmented set of forces that do not yet share a common vision of the future and cannot agree a mode of collaboration even in the knowledge that there is little prospect of a single Left force being able to win electorally. In this political primitivism and fragmentation lies an era of perpetual defeat and further disintegration.

Figure 2. Dominant and subordinate political blocs compared



The final section of the think piece discusses the necessary strategies and language to build a popular and coherent Left Bloc in the context of evolution of neoliberalism into political regimes that may be more economically interventionist, but culturally regressive and ultimately on the side of capital and economic elites despite their claims to be otherwise.

Part 5: Can the Left develop a Progressive Populism?

Mayism's double shuffle challenge for the Left

The 'Regressive Alliance' is being held together by a post-Brexit populism that rails against so-called political elites and foreigners. At the same time, it offers a vision of a future UK (actually England) as an independent buccaneering 'Dubai of western Europe'; a pure free-market capitalism liberated from the corporate constraints of the EU. Playing a very subordinate role in this discourse is May's promises of interventionism to increase skill levels and to help those families who are 'just managing'. It is a future that even if you think about it for just a minute is deeply illusory and contradictory. But the key is the calculation that most people will not think about it (until it begins to hurt economically) and will simply 'feel' the sense of independence; a country without immigrants to take their jobs and the recreation of past glories.

This new Tory nationalism can and should be opposed by patient explanation; evidence and rationalism about the real issues we face and the role of neoliberalism and not immigrants. But this cannot succeed by itself when populism exists on the terrains of feelings, emotions and everyday language. It is also not simply a case of fighting fire with fire, but recognizing that people need to move forward from where they are ideologically and not simply from where we would want them to be. This requires a dramatic change in political style and vision of the Left that need to combine a transformatory economic and technological programme representing the direction of modernity with a compelling appeal to the emotions that are both universal and abstract (humanity and the natural world) and immediate (my life, my family and my community).

Is it possible to see such a response in terms of a 'progressive double shuffle' of dominant and subordinate discourses? In the Osborne Supremacy I indeed argued for a progressive 'double shuffle' comprising a blend of economic, political and ideological approaches that are repeated here. However, on reflection it may not be correct to see them as a double shuffle in the sense used by Stuart Hall to analyse New Labour and employed here to understand Mayism. The double shuffle used in these ways suggests an instrumental

approach to politics; almost acts of deception to increase political appeal – saying one thing, but really doing another.

What is discussed here is the relationship between the organic and the conjunctural. The progressive Left deeply believes in the potential of humanity; democracy; openness, pluralism, tolerance, peace, our capacities for innovation in the face of the truly global challenges we face. This ethico-politics involves blends of socialism, liberalism, green politics, diversities and feminism. This political morality is being connected to the role of digital technologies that provide for connectiveness and participation – all of which can be summarized in the term ‘radical modernity’⁵⁰. Gramsci would have referred to these as fundamental ‘organic’ developments. But none of this will happen if we do not win on the conjunctural terrains of politics in which futures are shaped and made. We thus need a ‘combinational’ politics that seeks to project a radical modernity through the languages; cultures and structures of the lived experience. If we do not do this, someone else will and to very different effect. It is for this reason that the upcoming section discusses the potential of a ‘progressive populism’.

What is populism and can there be different versions?

We live in an age of populism as we see reactions to the growing inability of the existing neoliberal order to deliver prosperity for different groups in Western society. The term populism commonly refers to the struggle between a supposed populous and a ruling faction. What we have witnessed we have witnessed in 2016 through Brexit and the Trump victory and insurgent movements in France and the Netherlands is Right Authoritarian Populism (RAP). It is this version of populism that is commonly discussed in the media and presented as ‘populism’ rather than a particular version of populism. As Figure 3 shows RAP is based on a polarization between people and political elites defined by the acceptance by various centrist governments of high levels of immigration; superficial approaches to economic nationalism but an underlying support for neoliberal global markets; and crucially the promotion of xenophobia and racism. RAP displays some classical features of 1930s fascism, but not all.

Left or progressive populism has been far less discussed and remains controversial on the

Left itself. Some argue that it has no place in Left political discourse because it promotes demagoguery ⁵¹. This criticism, however, fails to acknowledge the debate that has taken place in Spanish and Latin American politics about the possibility and even the necessity of a Left Populism when struggling with forms of neoliberalism ⁵². A key question is how to develop a national popular form of politics that does not depend on a superficial charisma of the leader, but a deeper and more democratic politics that has a compelling persona in the modern age.

By progressive populism, therefore, I am not simply referring to a particular language or political style that simply appeals to popular emotions, but a multi-dimensional 'national popular' strategy that builds and coheres the Left Bloc based upon - new political dichotomies; a transformatory economics; an alliance-based national popular vision rooted in internationalism; mass protest movements; pluralist and participatory democratic politics for an open social and sustainable future (see Figure 3 for an illustration of its different dimensions). It is through this multi-dimensional popular project that progressives appeal to the emotions (common sense) and direct them educationally towards a more coherent 'good sense' (see Figure 3, point 3).

Figure 3. Dimensions of RAP and Left Progressive Populism

Dimension	Right Authoritarian Populism	Left Progressive Populism
1. Redrawn political frontiers (e.g. the People v. Economic elites)	Division between the People and the Establishment/Elites – sections of the population against a Liberal political/cultural Establishment.	Division between the People and the Establishment/Elites – the 99% against the economic 1% (together with the political forces that support the 1%).
2. Economic politics and policy – a transformatory approach	Laissez-faire and deregulatory policies and selective forms of state interventionism (e.g. military spending, fossil fuel investment and aspects of infrastructure) that promises ‘white jobs’.	Interventionist and transformative economic strategy (A Green and Digital New Deal) that binds together the middle classes and the most disadvantaged; that offers more control to working people and in tune with technological modernity.
3. Ideology and ‘common sense’ and the concepts of the Open Nation, Identities and Place	The ‘hailing’ of the fragments of ‘common sense’, particularly emotions, to hail the past and a bygone age; to create a sense of resentment against modernity and the vulnerable through narrow forms of nationalism.	Communicating with the progressive elements of common sense (the experiences of exploitation and oppression) to create a more critical and coherent view of the world - ‘good sense’ that seeks to create what might be termed ‘progressive patriotism’ or ‘open nationalism’
4. Political life and social life – mass movements for an open future	Authoritarian and anti-democratic strategies (e.g. limiting or trying to shrink the franchise) and attacking vulnerable groups and reversing social rights.	Developing democratic political participation and linking heterogeneous groups together with a common focus on shared problems, tolerance and openness. Time for an anti-fascist popular alliance?

1. The redrawing of political frontiers by the Left – The People v. Elites and other combinations

Left populism has to be based on the shifting of political frontiers. By this I am referring to way that political and ideological struggles are described and understood. Podemos, for example, as rejected the label of the Right/Left dichotomy because they maintain that the Right are happy with this ‘distribution’ of political description in order to ideologically

marginalize the Left. Instead, it has argued for the movement from Capitalist v. Proletarian to The People v. Economic and Political Elites (the 1% or in Podemos terms, *The Casta*).

Left progressive populism therefore does not talk exclusively about the working class (many on the Left have a nostalgic view of the industrial working class and fail to recognize its diversification under neoliberalism), but prefers to the concept of 'The People' that represents a heterogeneous set of social and ideological interests to be coalesced into a 'collective will'⁵³. The redrawing of political frontiers can also take place at other levels (e.g. an independent nation v. supranational forces). Here, for example, Syriza has mobilized a progressive Greek patriotism against a German dominated EU).

Within the UK context, for example, it is possible that upcoming political struggles could be fought around the notion of the 'national interest' v. national self-harm associated with Hard Brexit vote. The battle with UKIP could be fought around 'real patriotism' v. 'fake patriotism' based on the level of national and popular control over our futures. We therefore have to work not only with one redrawn frontier (People v. Economic elites), but also other political frontiers that help to coalesce a series of popular alliances and that link a progressive concept of nation to openness, tolerance and a basic decency that represents the best of liberalism. So far, however, the Right has proven itself far more skillful at redrawing political frontiers than the Left.

2. A green transformatory programme – capturing modernity

At the root of Progressive Populism will have be a transformative economic programme that captures a sense of modernity and the future and can change people's lives in the present. The Right will not deliver that, but the Left must. This would seek to place greater economic power 'in the hands of The People' and its representatives and, in doing so, create *different types of skilled employment* and accelerate technological change. While Corbyn's Labour have been trying to put together such a programme (John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor has a fairly consistent record on this), they have not managed to persuade the electorate of their economic and political competence. Labour has found it very difficult to construct an economic conversation with 'The People'; a situation that has not been helped

by Corbyn's narrow narrative on workers' rights.

What has to be on offer is a radical Green New Deal (to be contrasted with the Right's fossil fuel and racist new deal) that also involves a clearly oriented 'investment state'; a clear sense of economic competence and leadership; and a restructured and more regulated labour market with the focus on training and skill enhancement. The aim has to be the phasing out of low paid and low-skill jobs by greater investment; incentives for companies to follow a high-skill trajectory and an enhanced role for 'strategic trade unionism' that seeks to transform the way we work as well as protecting workers rights. Perhaps this is also the route to a more balanced policy on immigration; that is being fuelled by a low skill and deregulated labour market. Mariana Mazzucato and colleagues envisage this as a:

'green direction' that creates an industrial and technological ecosystem that provides convergent trajectories for the multiple and disparate industries to innovate, while generating common synergies (suppliers, skills, equipment, service and distribution networks, demand patterns, etc.) that provide advantages for all participants' ⁵⁴.

3. Ideology and the mobilization of common sense – creating The People, a new Open England and a pride of place

Here the Right has a real head start, having developed the manipulation of everyday thinking into a political art form. This was recently said of Donald Trump.

'Indeed, the way he talks reminds them of the voice inside their own heads – a rich and sometimes dark stew of conversational snippets and memory scraps, random phrases and half-thoughts – and, by extension, it somehow seems as if they're hearing the voice inside his head' ⁵⁵.

Progressive populism cannot go down this road. Instead it has to be based on a 'common sense' that contains a rationalist component that Gramsci referred to as 'good sense', that arises from the experiences of everyday injustices and desire for fairness. Our historical task is to educate and to create coherent and far-sighted thinking rather than leaving popular

belief in an inchoate condition. Progressive populism has to combine rationality and the emotive in the form of 'progressive passions'. The Left also needs to recognize and utilize the key terms that straddle the dominant and subordinate historical blocs. These include the language of freedom, the individual, patriotism, choice, democracy, responsibility, fairness, inclusion, society and innovation - that each side seeks to fill with its own meaning.

But this language needs to be played out on the material terrains of society – the economy and the spaces in which people live. Here Left Populism operates on the same material terrains as RAP, but brings to it new solutions and the remaking of identities. The problem is that a social democratic Labour Party did not have the guts for this under the neoliberal sway of Osborne; nor did the Clinton Democrats. But now that the neoliberal edifice has been disrupted by the Far Right, there are opportunities to prosecute a profoundly radical programme that also harnesses the active role of both national and local governments. It is the deepest of ironies that it has taken neo-fascism to provide space for the transformative economic argument.

However, the Right will fail economically and the Left has to be prepared to fill the gap by radically extending the economic and the identity argument of People, Nation and Place. This will involve projecting a new vision of what Clive Lewis refers to as an 'Open English Nationalism'⁵⁶. While he did not elaborate on details, we can begin to sketch its basic dimensions that will feature in an upcoming Compass publication on 'progressive patriotism'. As we have seen in the previous section, will necessarily revolve a national economic strategy that is given powerful local and sub-regional expressions in which all social groups can see that they can gain. It also involves creating more cohesive communities based on a closer relationship between what the London Mayor refers to as 'work, living and playing'⁵⁷. That is why it is so important for Labour and the Left to develop a narrative and a plan that seeks to economically transform post-industrial communities coupled with a pride of place and a strong sense of the local and regional.

The concept of an open nation will also have to embrace the idea of more open, flexible and federated relationships. Out of the Brexit wreckage could come a looser but cordial relationship with other European countries. It is difficult to see a highly integrated EU, that

has seen the rise of German economic hegemony, surviving the current turmoil. The same will apply here in the UK, around a new federal relationship involving Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with a more prominent role for the English regions. An Open England would therefore be defined by its own more democratic and devolved local and regional relations; by a more devolved and federated UK; its relationship to a more open and devolved Europe and a commitment to collaborative global institutions to tackle the great problems; the top of which by far is climate change when seen in generational terms. Varoufarkis talks about an alternative to the 'barricaded nation state' in the form of a progressive internationalism based on a New Deal for all ⁵⁸.

4. Political and social life – mass movements for an open and democratic future

Compared with Trumpism, Mayism looks a more muted nationalism, but there are sections of the UK Right that will want to engage in new culture and race wars to bring about the 'great social reversal'. If the economic programme speaks to people's material lives, a progressive populism will also have to be based on a vibrant social view of the future in which mass protests and new cultural alliances reject racism, misogyny and xenophobia and seek to create a world in which people can live together and to unite to tackle the great problems. This is the image of the Good Society. At the same time, the Left needs to produce practical plans for far greater participation in political life, not only through forms of consultation such as Citizens' Panels, but also deliberative democracy where different groups come together to resolve deep-seated problems. A progressive populism is thus based on the development of mass protest, new alliances and building a radical civil society. Chantalle Mouffe, when discussing 'What should Jeremy Corbyn's brand of leftwing populism look like?' stressed that a Left populism is about developing a radical politics that recognizes the democratic aspects of the those who currently support right populism; to provide progressive answers to these demands and to link these with other democratic demands in society, thus creating a 'popular collective will' in order to mobilise collective efforts towards equality and social justice.

The progressive bloc as a new pluralism and the unity of apparent opposites

The new progressive populism can thus be regarded as the cement of the progressive historical bloc. It means leaving behind the outdated models of social democracy;

neoliberalism in all its guises and now a 21st Century fascism. But the progressive bloc defined by the new frontiers cannot comprise a single political shading. It is about recognizing heterogeneity and aligning the apparently incompatible – the Brexit oriented socially conservative working classes; older traditional middle class voters who believe in ‘security’ and ‘decency’; the new vibrant social, economic and cultural forces that are to be found particularly in our cities; and above all, the ‘young’ who are losing so much but who will be the next generation.

The Left has to find ‘languages’ that can unite a disparate set of political forces into a progressive alliance and an increasingly heterogeneous set of social forces that deep down share fundamental needs. The bases of the new progressive bloc will be based on the fundamental values of - reciprocity and mutualism; deep democracy and a belief in participation, deliberation and collaboration; an abiding belief in equality of all kinds and profound respect for the planet. But it is also about harnessing an angry opposition, but with much more moral purpose than the Right – against poverty, exploitation; dispossession and displacement; oppression in all its forms and against cynicism, which is possibly the most corrosive force.

Progressive populism has also to comprise a flexible language that can be translated across different social and cultural forces (what Pat Dade refers to as Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers ⁵⁹); talking simultaneously of ‘conservation’, of values and ways of living that have been undermined by neoliberalism while offering a different kind of future. Conservative hegemony, hitched to Right Authoritarian Populism, will betray the very people to whom it has made promises. The Left must now develop not only a coherent set of policies, but a politics and a language that has depth and breadth in order to be heard. But the tragedy is this. Apart from a few leading individuals, the Labour leadership has not bothered to analyse the political terrain upon which it is presently failing and from its Leftist position does not even recognize the challenge of the national popular. This will have to change in order to find the words and the political culture to challenge in the post-Brexit world.

Notes

¹ The concepts of the Dominant Historical Bloc, Right Bloc and Regressive Alliance are used in this paper to describe and understand the assemblage of relations that underpin capitalist rule in the UK. The broader Gramscian concept of Historical Bloc is defined in Note 10. Here the concept of Right Bloc and Regressive Alliance are used interchangeably to refer to the collaboration between an ecology of Right forces specifically on the political, ideological and electoral terrains.

² May Bulman, 'Labour plans to relaunch Jeremy Corbyn as left-wing populist in bid to seize on anti-establishment sentiment' *Independent* Friday 16 December 2016.

³ Gramsci made a distinction between 'conjunctural' and 'organic' developments. Conjunctural developments could be seen as the result of the accumulation of system complications that erupt on the 'surface' of politics. It is on this immediate terrain that ideology and politics is fought out between the dominant and subordinate forces. Organic developments, on the other hand, were regarded as far deeper, to do with the totality of economic and political relations, that would have significance in the long run. It was understanding the relationship between the conjunctural and organic developments and crises that Gramsci saw as one of the prime functions of the Modern Prince.

⁴ A song written by Billy Bragg in 1988. Bragg reflecting on his lyrics more recently stated that you can wait for the revolution, but it will only come through activism and democratic participation, <http://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/politics/waiting-for-the-great-leap-forward/29/11/> Accessed 25 January, 2017.

⁵ *The Osborne Supremacy* (October 2015) – this Compass publication focused on the roots and nature of contemporary Conservative political hegemony <http://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/The-Osborne-Supremacy-Compass.pdf>

⁶ Inigo Errejon and Chantal Mouffe in *Podemos: in the name of the people* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2016) discuss the concept of the 'political frontier' as a way of redefining ideological and political boundaries, notably moving from Left/Right distinction to that of the 'Casta'/elites and The People.

⁷ Peter Walker and Rowena Mason 'New Ukip leader Paul Nuttall plans 'to replace Labour' *The Guardian*, 28 November 2016.

⁸ See for example, Francis Fukuyama 'US against the world? Trump's America and the new global order' *Financial Times*, 11 November 2016 <https://www.ft.com/content/6a43cf54-a75d-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1> (Accessed 15 November 2016).

⁹ Neoliberalism 2.0 is a term originally used by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso Books, 2015 to describe the chronic crisis of neoliberalism following the Crash of 2008 that has been compounded by austerity measures leading to deepening of inequalities that are now seeping onto the political terrain in unpredictable ways. See Ken Spours *The Very Modern Prince: the 21st Century Political Party and the Political Formation* (2016) Compass Publications – for a more detailed explanation of Neoliberalism 2.0 and its political implications.

¹⁰ David Blanchflower 'Experts get it wrong again by failing to predict Trump victory' *The Guardian* 9 November, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/nov/09/experts-trump-victory-economic-political-forecasters-recession> (Accessed 15 November, 2016).

¹¹ The Gramscian concept of *Historical Bloc* refers to the degree of historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, and more specifically to an alliance of different class forces politically organised around a set of hegemonic ideas and structures that give strategic direction and coherence to its constituent elements (Prison Notebooks p. 34). This means that in the context of this discussion, the dominant (capitalist) historical bloc contains many more interacting levels than simply the political and electoral terrains.

¹² John Harris reflecting on the EU vote argued that that 'Brexit is about more than the EU: it's about class, inequality, and voters feeling excluded from politics' 'If you've got money, you vote in ... if you haven't got money, you vote out' *The Guardian* 24 June, 2016.

¹³ Zoe Williams 'Think the north and the poor caused Brexit? Think again' *The Guardian* 7 August, 2016.

¹⁴ For a liberal conservative view of the new Tory nationalism see Alex Massie 'Britain for the British: Theresa May leads a new nationalist government' *The Spectator* 6 October, 2016.
<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/10/britain-british-theresa-may-leads-new-nationalist-government/>
(Accessed 15 November, 2016).

¹⁵ Hard right control of Conservatives – the analysis of the Right takeover of the Tories are many and varied and will multiply following the Trump victory. There is an interesting one from Nick Cohen 'Brexit lies are opening up a terrifying new opportunity for the far-right in Britain' *The Spectator* 27 June, 2016.

¹⁶ See for example, Ben Jackson for an analysis of left nationalism 'The left and Scottish nationalism' *Renewal* Vol 22, No 1/2 2014.

¹⁷ See *Osborne Supremacy*, 2015

¹⁸ On the back of the LeaveEU votes, Arron Banks intends to establish a right-wing movement (like Momentum) that eventually could become a political party 'The millionaire founder of a pro-Brexit group is apparently planning to set up a new right-wing party' *Business Insider* 8 September, 2016. It is rumoured that Farage will lead it.

¹⁹ See Ned Simons 'George Osborne To 'Fight' For His Beliefs From Backbenches, Says Grammar Schools Should Not Be Theresa May's Focus' *HuffPost Politics UK* 16 September 2016.

²⁰ Opinion polls as of November 2016 put the Conservatives in the low-mid 40s and this now appears to be settling into a relatively stable pattern (see Figure 1 for the 2015/16 trends).

²¹ Arron Banks had threatened the Conservatives 'UKIP donor warns Conservatives to vote Leadsom as PM or risk being ousted at next election' *Daily Express*, 10 July, 2016.

²² Martin Kettle offered a coherent early analysis of Mayism 'Theresa May's ambitious agenda belies billing as continuity candidate' *The Guardian* 12 July, 2016 in which he identified some pre-Thatcherite themes concerned, for example, with industrial intervention that represent a sharp departure from neoliberalism and might be regarded as a paler version of Trumpism. These are further analysed by Nick Pearce.

²³ Nick Cohen 'Theresa May lied and lied again to become PM' *The Guardian* 30 October, 2016.

²⁴ Matthew Parris 'Bite your tongue and back May's new populism' *The Sunday Times* 8 October, 2016.

²⁵ Nick Pearce and Michael Kenny *The empire strikes back: How the vote for Brexit has re-opened deep wounds about race, identity and the future of the United Kingdom* – draft article to be published in the *New Statesman*.

²⁶ Rowena Mason, 'May appoints former advisers as joint chiefs of staff' *The Guardian* 15 July, 2016.

²⁷ Stuart Hall (2005) 'New Labour's double shuffle', *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Culture* 27 (4), 319–35.

²⁸ The concept of the 'Good State' was outlined in her speech to the 2016 Conservative Party conference, summarised by Peter Dominiczak and Michael Wilkinson in 'Remember the good that government can do, says Theresa May as she vows to intervene to help workers' *The Daily Telegraph* 5 October, 2016.

²⁹ See Allister Heath 'Theresa May's speech shows that free-market ideas are in decline' *Business Telegraph* 6 October, 2016

³⁰ The concept of post-liberalism is extensively researched by John Milbank and Adrian Pabst in *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.

³¹ Jon Craig *Theresa May sets out vision for a 'new centre ground'* Sky News, 5 October, 2016.

³² Owen Jones (The Guardian 1 December, 2016) cites the work of pollster Ian Warren who concludes that two groups in particular defected from Labour to UKIP – blue collar working households that are socially conservative on issues of defence, social security and immigration and deprived disaffected voters often in insecure work. These would never have voted Tory but feel talked down to by Labour.

³³ Owen Jones 'Ukip may be dead but its agenda is alive and well' *The Guardian* 18 Oct 2016.

³⁴ The term 'catastrophic tie' refers to Gramsci's concept of the 'static equilibrium' in which the two fundamental classes – capital and labour – cannot overcome one another and thus provide the context for the intervention of a 'third force' that reconciles the 'tie' in a progressive or regressive direction.

³⁵ Ian Cobain 'Britain's far right in 2016: fractured, unpredictable, dispirited ... and violent' *The Guardian* 24 November, 2016.

³⁶ 'UK car firms 'want to be in EU single market' *BBC News* 28 September 2016

³⁷ John Harris 'Jobs for all? In the US that idea is about to be tested to destruction' *The Guardian*, 27 January 2017

³⁸ Ryan Shorthouse 'Don't bend to this anti-establishment rage. Challenge and confront it' *Conservative Home* 11 November 2016.

³⁹ Theresa May's personal approval leadership ratings in November 2016 are 2 to 3 times that of Jeremy Corbyn's, mainly on the grounds of perceived leadership competence and 'understanding ordinary people'.

⁴⁰ John Crace has created the image of the 'Maybot' - a mechanical and contradictory creature in 'Theresa struggles to take back control – from her own Maybot' *The Guardian* 8 November, 2016.

⁴¹ Peter Walker 'George Soros: Donald Trump will 'fail' and Theresa May's Brexit 'could last three days' *Independent*, 20 January 2016.

⁴² Zoe Williams 'In the flight from liberalism, Tories left decency behind' *The Guardian* 5 December, 2016.

⁴³ Gramsci contrasted an ideological and political 'war of position' likened to the trench warfare of the First World War, with the 'war of manoeuvre' reflected, for example, in the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917.

⁴⁴ David Mitchell 'Breaking up is hard to do, unless you're in British politics' *The Guardian* 17 July, 2016.

⁴⁵ Rob Merrick 'Balls warns 'irrational' Labour may be out of power for good' *The Independent* 11 November, 2016.

⁴⁶ Simon Jenkins 'The identity apostles who led us down the path to populism' *The Guardian* 1 December, 2016.

⁴⁷ The New Left Oppositions is analysed by Susan Watkins in *New Left Review* 98, March 2016.

⁴⁸ See Indra Adnan for details of these new parties *21C POLITICS Is the Party Over? Or is it just kicking off?* Compass publications.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Gilbert writing in Red Pepper argues that Momentum can become as social movement but that it

must become part of a broad and progressive alliance 'How the left can win: no single party can defeat neoliberalism. A broader social movement is needed' *Red Pepper* October, 2016.

50 Jeremy Gilbert in his work on *Radical Modernity and 21st Century Socialism* appears to try to bridge the gap between a socio-technical hegemony and local collaborative actions by arguing for the development of 'potent collectivities' on which 'the principles of network logic, self-organisation and distributed decision-making which would inform 21st-century socialism and could inform policy agendas across a range of different domains'.

51 For a recent discussion of Left Populism see Owen Jones 'What should Jeremy Corbyn's brand of leftwing populism look like?' *The Guardian* 19 December, 2016 and Eliane Glaser *Elites, right wing populism, and the left in Open Democracy* 11 November, 2016.

52 For a discussion on the history of progressive or left populism see, for example, Lasse Thomassen, 'Hegemony, populism and democracy: Laclau and Mouffe today (review article)', *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* 40 (March 2016), 161-76.

53 Inigo Errejón and Chantal Mouffe in *Podemos: in the name of the people* argue that a Left populism has to be based on greater popular participation in political life and the development of collective will out of disparate groupings assisted by 'symbolic polarisations' and 'charismatic leadership' that has wealth redistribution at its heart p.107.

54 Mariana Mazzucato Innovation as *Growth Policy: the challenge for Europe* Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, July 2014.

55 Gwenda Blair 'Inside the mind of Donald Trump' *The Guardian* 21 November, 2016.

56 Clive Lewis, Shadow Business Secretary, has recently called for an open English nationalism in response to both Brexit and the Trump victory in 'EU free movement has not worked for millions of Britons, says Clive Lewis' *The Guardian* 15 November 2016.

57 Greater London Authority *A City for All Londoners*, 2016
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/city_for_all_londoners_nov-2016.pdf
(Accessed 16 November, 2016).

58 Yanis Varoufakis 'We need an alternative to Trump's nationalism. It isn't the status quo' *The Guardian* 22 January, 2017.

59 Pat Dade *British Values and A New Progressive Alliance* seminar presentation at the House of Commons, Cultural Dynamics, 6 December, 2016. For more Cultural Dynamics publications go to <http://www.cultdyn.co.uk/index.html>