

★ Star comment

## Don't push the button for an expensive apocalypse

THERE remains an air of abstraction around talk of Britain's "independent" nuclear deterrent.

This consists of four ageing submarines due to be replaced at a staggering cost of £40 billion while upgrading the missile system will push the total cost to £250bn.

No-one is exactly sure who it is to defend us against. The government identifies the main threats to Britain as variously climate change, terrorism and cyber-attacks – but even faced with these dangers a willingness to press the button and ensure any adversary joins us in a nuclear graveyard is seen as a test of suitability for high office.

Jeremy Corbyn thought the question daft and declined to give an answer which satisfied the testosterone tendency. Rebecca Long Bailey's recent response highlighted the idiocy of the whole issue. Anyone facing a decision to press the button has to take into account that we would be "facing nuclear annihilation right across the whole world" she said.

The whole utility of a deterrent is that it deters. If our so far unidentified nuclear adversary decides to launch a nuclear strike against Britain this very expensive deterrent will at that point be redundant.

The provision, supply, maintenance and command and control of these ridiculous Trident missiles lies with the United States so the very notion of our "independent" nuclear deterrent is itself compromised.

Legend has it that our four heroic submarine commanders would need to surface to see if BBC Radio Four's early morning programme is still on air before deciding to fire off their Tridents and thus invite our mysterious enemy to rain a further shower of missiles on their submersible tombs.

Perhaps our nuclear adversary's most effective counter strike tactic might be to lay in a stock of John Humphrys rants and broadcast them round the clock.



The Labour leadership contest is shaping up as careful war of position around the Corbyn heritage. Jeremy Corbyn still walks among us and remains a rallying point for his personal brand of political principle and socialist politics. This holds enormous attractive power to the hosts of Labour returners and new members who make up the electorate. All the runners and riders in this race – irrespective of their actual politics – calibrate their appeal and fine tune their language to take this reality into consideration.

In making our decisions there are some obvious lessons to absorb. The ambitious sweep of Labour's manifesto – taken with the crippling ambiguity of its Brexit positioning – became a credibility issue during the election campaign and this was relayed back by voters, and amplified by the media, as a problem of leadership.

This rather demonstrated that despite the effective mobilisation of activists to key locations during the election that Labour's year all-round campaigning and mobilising presence in working-class communities is still very weak.

One test of the candidates for both leader and deputy leader is whether they play these factors as reasons to weaken Labour's radicalism and dilute its collectivist policies or whether they seek to renew the challenge to austerity and neoliberal economics and rearm Labour's local representatives as tribunes of the people.

The Tory tactic to steal some of Labour's clothes, pretend an end to austerity and attend to the Britain's lop-sided economy can be read as a concession on domestic policies.

That this is for cynical electoral reasons rather than political principle is no secret. But Dominic Raab's clear signal that Tory Britain is "on the same page" as Donald Trump means foreign and defence policy is an arena where compromise is impossible and where Labour's leadership hopefuls need clear principles.

# There is really no contrast between patriotism and socialism

We on the left need to articulate socialist patriotism – love of our country and its people – in opposition to militarism and imperialism, writes **MATT WIDDOWSON**

REBECCA LONG BAILEY'S call to "revive this progressive patriotism" (Guardian, December 29 2019) appeared to be greeted with horror by "Left Twitter." While Long Bailey's article did not expand further on what she meant by "progressive patriotism" or what policies would be guided by this slogan, it appeared to be the very word "patriotism" that was so shocking.

Social media was awash with a mixture of liberal disdain (mainly from those with EU flags in their Twitter handles – apparently, not all flag-waving is bad) and the typical ultra-leftist complaints about "socialism in one country."

The truth is that patriotism can be compatible with socialism and internationalism – in fact, in the current age of nation states, it is necessary to achieving socialism. To utterly dismiss every form of patriotism is to dismiss the entire history of national liberation which struggled (and, in some cases, still struggles) to overthrow colonial rule by imperialist powers such as Britain.

Outright dismissal of patriotism also stems from a lack of class analysis which fails to discern the difference between the nationalism of the ruling class and the hidden history and aspirations of the working class.

Perhaps some of Long Bailey's social media critics dismiss patriotism due to a commitment instead to "international socialism."

As much as the ideal of global socialism is desirable and an eventual necessity, we still live in an age when the nation state remains the only realistic vehicle for the first steps towards socialism: there is no other existing political community capable of delivering the transformation required to bring about socialism; there is no better means of defending socialism.

And, while some may look to international forums such as the UN to reform or defend certain rights, the fact is that the specific struggle for socialism and democracy only happens within the framework of the state – it remains the "only game in town."

Perhaps there is also fear among the opponents of "progressive patriotism" about ceding ground to reactionary nationalism (particularly the ethno-nationalism of the far right).

This is perhaps under-

**PROGRESSIVE PATRIOTISM?**  
Anti-fascist activists wave St George's flags on the UN anti-racism day, March 16 2019



The truth is that patriotism can be compatible with socialism and internationalism – in fact, in the current age of nation states, it is necessary to achieving socialism

standable as there has been a noticeable and troubling shift towards the hard right around the world. But again, this misses the difference between the "official" nationalism promoted by the ruling class and the potential for a socialist patriotism based on popular sovereignty and international solidarity.

Perhaps it's because we are

both most familiar with the official nationalisms of the ruling class. This is either the nationalism of right – the stories of great Britons, great battles and the "achievements" of Empire; or the softer, liberal – more business friendly – "Cool Britannia" style nationalism cultivated during the New Labour period.

Both of these nationalisms



# addiction and socialism

ism as a genuine  
n to the  
**OWSON**



Nationalist sentiment relies on stories and symbols and, a progressive vision needs to rely on the peoples' counter-narrative to the official story of Britain. This is the radical history of Britain. It is the story of the Levellers, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the Suffragettes, Red Clydeside, the Greenham Common camps and the miners' strikes.

It is an inclusive national history, as the struggles of minority groups intertwine and become an important part of the story of radical Britain – the Bristol Bus Boycott; the Imperial Typewriters Strike; the Battle of Cable Street. It is also an internationalist history which includes a plethora of solidarity movements and a strong tradition of peace activism.

With a left-wing government in power, an alternative patriotism would need to build on this radical past in order to look to the future: what sort of society should we build? How should we strive towards a more peaceful and co-operative world?

Patriotism then becomes a patriotism which is inclusive as it would not be dependent on ethnicity or the country of one's birth, but on commitment to the collective goal. What else was the NHS but a collective national project involving people from around the world who were galvanised by a commitment to its founding principles?

If the left is to succeed then we need to start talking about concepts such as patriotism and nationalism without simply reaffirming inflexible dogma or resorting to hysteria. In a world where the nation-state remains a reality and the only realistic path to socialism, the British left needs to articulate its own socialist patriotism in contrast to the chauvinism, conservatism and militarism which characterises the nationalism of the right.

draw on nostalgia for a so-called Golden Age – whether it be a fantasy version of the 1950s (think Heartbeat) or a simulacrum of '60s Carnaby Street (think Austin Powers). Both of these nationalisms tend to overlook the horrors of Empire – with the right-wing version celebrating Britain's imperial past and the "Cool Britannia" version attempting to sanitise the symbols of Empire – a Spice Girl wearing a butcher's apron miniskirt.



## Don't stop the class war

Christmas and the New Year reminded **REUBEN BARD-ROSENBERG** of old conflicts and loyalties that we would do well to remember as war with Iran looms large

**T**HE New Year heralds new beginnings – mostly for ad hoc gym-bunnies, or for couples who think they are going to fix their relationship by jointly committing to some off-the-wall fad diet.

Yet this New Year is also, by necessity, a moment of renewal for the left. It is a moment when we must work out how to fight the old fight upon different battlegrounds to those which have consumed most of our energy during the period of Corbyn's leadership.

As such, it seems fitting that my political 2020 began on Saturday, with the Stop the War march on Downing Street against the drive towards war with Iran. The banners of local Stop the War groups that were formed in the early 2000s were a reminder of our capacity to make the political weather, regardless of how many gerilymandered CLPs we manage to crack.

Moreover, the split over Iraq in many ways pre-figured the battle between left and right that engulfed the Labour Party during the period of Corbyn leadership.

On the one hand, the war radicalised a generation against Labour's old regime. On the other hand, it was crucial in producing today's vitriolic centre. Before Iraq, Blair's critics were an odd alliance of people who opposed neoliberalism and liberals who found Blair's style of politics to be a bit uncouth. By the time Britain withdrew from Iraq, many of the latter had gone on to become Jonathan Freedland.

The key text for those who opposed the anti-war movement was written by Nick Cohen. Significantly it was entitled "What's Left?" reflect-

ing a desire to reclaim mantle of progressivism for pro-war types.

During both the age of Corbyn and the era of Iraq, the emergence of a big noisy group on the left of British politics provoked an angry identity crisis among those who'd carved out a radical-seeming niche at the progressive end of liberalism. Hence over the last four years it has been pretty much impossible to get through a discussion with a centrist without them objecting to the term "centrist," and telling you that they have in fact voted Labour since the early 1600s.

The battle over Iraq also saw

the crystallisation of some of the political tactics that have been favoured by the Labour right over the past few years: the claims of a Red-Brown alliance (initially centred on the notion of "Islamofascism" and later on the amorphous concept of "populism"); the scatter-gun accusations of antisemitism, and most of all the obsessive digital archeology aimed at working out who had spoken on a platform with whom, and who could therefore be rendered guilty by association.

It should not surprise us that the reaction against Corbyn kicked off with a frenzied and media-indulged attack on the Stop the War Coalition. Nor should it escape our understanding that one of the most important ways we can reassert the place of the left in British politics is to build a big and confident movement against the drive to war with Iran today.

Aside from Saturday's march, my memory of the age of Blair was also jogged on Boxing Day, when I sat down to watch *Love, Actually*. It was an interesting trip back into the world that was. Back then, fantasies of a "classless society" were all the rage – helped by some of the peculiarities of the period.

The long boom had caused a fair few crumbs to fall from the banquet table, at least in London and the south east. Housing finance was getting ever easier to obtain. And media was overwhelmingly consumed through five TV channels that everybody watched, in contrast to the more segregated world of digital consumption that would soon emerge. In this context, it took only a moderate amount

of studio magic to convince us that Hugh Grant was fated to pair up with Tiffany from *Eastenders*.

Iraq does of course loom over this film that came out in late 2003. The movie addresses emerging liberal angst by turning Hugh Grant into a better Blair: indistinguishable from the New Labour prime minister in style and lack of substance, but willing to stand up to the US, albeit in a very English and purely rhetorical fashion.

My only other movie this Christmas was the spectacular Muppets Christmas Carol. It always pleases me that the most militant character in this story is not some stoic bore, but is instead the wonderful Miss Piggy, who loves eating and hates bosses.

I suspect that we have all imagined an alternative ending in which Scrooge is reformed, not by the ghost of Christmas past, but by the rather less ephemeral force of a guillotine, wielded by Kermit's good wife.

As the winter continues to freeze us, the Tories continue to rule us, and questions about whether we condemn Iran continue to bore us, we will need to search hard for the Miss Piggy in us all.



“

In this context, it took only a moderate amount of studio magic to convince us that Hugh Grant was fated to pair up with Tiffany from *Eastenders*