

Peer group pressure

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Whilst engaging in the topical parlour game 'Who in the Labour Party is trying to shaft Jeremy Corbyn?', my mind naturally turned to the master of dark arts, Lord (Peter) Mandelson. I took a look at his entry in the House of Lords Register of Members' Interests, where I learnt of his consulting business, Global Counsel, and his membership of the Advisory Board of another business which many will not have heard of, the cyber security firm BlueVoyant. More on these later. As I surveyed the Register, I came across an interesting feature which Mandelson's connection with a cyber security outfit suggested: Labour peers seem to have a far greater predilection for working with cyber security firms than do Conservative peers.¹ Judging by the political affiliations of Vice Chairs of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Cyber Security,² which MPs can join, this is a complete reversal of interest. There is only one Labour MP listed there, whilst there are four Tories (not including peers). In the context of the overall size of the House of Lords membership, the total numbers aren't great, but even so finding ten Labour peers with current or very recent remunerated cyber security interests and only one Tory suggests the area has a particular appeal. My review of the Register has probably missed a few others, possibly on both sides, since not all entries relating to company directorships etc. have a description of what the company's specific activity.

Perhaps I should make two observations before continuing to take a detailed look at the individuals and businesses involved. Firstly, there is no way of knowing whether these peers were headhunted or whether they actively sought out this type of employment. (It is also true to say that

¹ All references to the Lords' Register relate to <<https://tinyurl.com/y6y3zozj>> or <<https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests/?letter=A>>, accessed 13 July. N.B. The Register is updated on a daily basis.

² Are p. 445 of the document at <<https://tinyurl.com/yxvlorrn>> or <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmllparty/190619/register-190619.pdf>>. The CyberSecurity APPG also has its own website at <<http://www.appgcybersecurity.org>>.

many of the ten Labour peers are former ministers with time on their hands. Perhaps there aren't yet enough Tory peers of fairly recent vintage who are in the same boat?) Secondly, on a general point about the ennobled contingent of likely Corbyn haters, they will be heavily reinforced by the peers appointed by Blair and Brown – who know that Corbyn doesn't like the peerage. He's only appointed a handful himself (including Shami Chakrabarti – and look where that leads us in the great 'Labour is anti-semitic' debate) so he has a natural core of privileged opponents with an axe to grind. Most of them are ex-MPs who will have been frustrated with their former colleague's wayward ways. It is worth noting at this point that another peer, Baroness Kennedy of Cradley, lists being chief of staff to Tom Watson MP, the anti-Corbyn deputy leader of the party, as a remunerated position. Her husband is Baron (Roy) Kennedy, a former director of Finance and Compliance for the party and latterly a whip in the Lords.

There appear to be two types of Labour peer with links to cyber security. The first comprises those who have sought to set up their own consulting business, or who do so with others; and for this to happen they are likely to be 'household names' - e.g. ex-front bench ministers or similar high profile people. Then there are those who appear to have been recruited into existing businesses but whose turnover is too small for them to be legally required to deposit accounts with Companies House and it is likely that some of these people, in contrast to the first category, will be minnows with bigger ambitions

Here, alphabetically, is the list:

Blunkett, David The former Home Secretary has a family business called HADAW Productions and Investments Limited involved in 'publishing, broadcast and print media; advisory services for overseas trade, and cyber and internet security advice'. Four members of the Blunkett clan are listed as directors and company secretary. Oddly, one of these lists his occupation as 'Environmental Health Officer' and another as 'Motor Vehicle Engineer.' Another, more fittingly, is described as an 'Information Analyst.' HADAW is therefore, I imagine, a cyber security minnow if indeed it has anything to do with the subject at all. Trying a web search for HADAW, to find more information than in the Companies House documents, proves fruitless. There seems to be a totally unconnected business selling cameras and an Arabian racing horse that has now been put out to stud. HADAW I guess does nothing more than receive Blunkett's earnings from other sources. A more serious involvement with cyber security was his role as a non-executive director

(until 20 February 2019) of Cyber 1 AB, a company registered under Swedish law. Its website³ lists amongst its current directors Lord (Anthony) St. John Bletso, one of only two crossbench peers I found with such an interest. His Lords' register entry displays a wide range of corporate interests, from uranium mining to sports betting. Sitting together on Cyber 1's board for nearly two years might have been an interesting experience for Blunkett. Bletso is the 22nd Baron to hold the title. I imagine their conversation at times would have touched upon the terrible threat posed by Corbyn.

Brennan, Daniel Brennan is a QC and a senior associate member of Matrix Chambers, perhaps best known for another (erstwhile) member, Cherie Blair. Brennan's connection with the world of cyber security comes in the form of being an Advisory Board member of the U.S. firm Assured Enterprises, Inc., in which he has shares. As is so often the case with the sales pitch of cyber security companies, their website plays on their government connections: 'Assured has supported the highest security levels of the US Government and now brings its expertise to commercial enterprises.'⁴ This, I think, gives us a clue why these businesses are so attractive to Labour peers who have lost influence: they project closeness to power, and particularly the thought that knowledge is power. (By way of contrast, many Tory peers are already so well established in the City/ elite circles they are happy where they are.) The 'Lord on the Board' syndrome helps make the case. Assured Enterprises, Inc. informs potential customers that Lord Brennan 'brings integrity, insight and creative thought to the cybersecurity and data protection challenges facing major financial institutions, NATO, military and law enforcement agencies and many others.'⁵

Browne, Des The former Secretary of State for Defence under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown is a paid consultant with the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI). NTI is not a cyber security organisation as such – it says it is a non-partisan, non-profit group supporting multilateral nuclear disarmament – but its inclusion here is justified by its identification of the cyber security threat posed by nuclear catastrophe:

'The cyber threat has expanded dramatically in recent years, with a series of damaging, high-profile attacks that have made headlines around the world. Nuclear facilities and critical command and control

³ <<https://cyber1.com/corporate-governance/>>

⁴ <<https://www.assured.enterprises/company/about-aei/>>

⁵ See note 4.

systems are not immune to cyber attack — such an attack could facilitate the theft of weapons-usable nuclear materials or a catastrophic act of sabotage. In addition, there is even the possibility that nuclear weapons command and control could be compromised.⁶

Who could argue with that? The NTI does specialist work on cyber security and, through e.g. U.S. Admiral (retd.) Mike Mullen, shares personnel with BlueVoyant.

Harris, Toby Harris was a member of the London Assembly and a former chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority. He lists his directorship of Cyber Security Challenge UK, a non-profit organisation supported by various government departments and the private sector with the aim of generating cyber security skills particularly amongst young people.⁷ It runs competitions and education programmes and is no doubt a leading UK marketplace for recruiting new cyber security talent. In that sense it seems like a typical on-the-cheap British variety of inculcating such talent. Contrast this with e.g. Israel's Unit 8200 which also mainly recruits young people (of conscription age) but is seen as an alternative to military service – even if it is the Israeli Defence Force's largest unit.

Mandelson, Peter Mandelson's role as an Advisory Board member of Bluevoyant places him in the heart of a highly networked cyber security community, as one can discern from the biographies of its senior personnel: CEO Jim Rosenthal was the chief operating officer of Morgan Stanley and co-chair of Sheltered Harbor (a financial sector initiative to protect banks from an 'apocalyptic cyber attack').⁸ BlueVoyant's Executive Chair is Thomas Glocer, a former CEO of Reuters and a director of Morgan Stanley,⁹ a director of K2 Intelligence and the Atlantic Council, amongst other things. Chief Operating Officer of Bluevoyant is Jim Penrose who worked in the National Security Agency (NSA) for 17 years, and with a business called Darktrace (on whose Advisory Board sits crossbench Lord Evans of Weardale, KCB, former head of MI5).¹⁰ Mr Penrose's biography on the BlueVoyant website contains several items that are so secret they have had to be redacted (those being details that relate to his private

⁶ <<https://www.nti.org/about/cyber/>>

⁷ <<https://www.cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk/>>

⁸ <<https://tinyurl.com/y4y6hkctc>> or <<https://www.pymnts.com/news/banking/2017/banks-prepare-for-apocalyptic-cyber-attack/>>

⁹ Since we're mentioning Morgan Stanley, let's not forget that former Labour Chancellor Alistair Darling is also a director.

¹⁰ <<https://www.darktrace.com/en/advisory-board/>>

sector career). Other senior personnel of BlueVoyant include Ron Feler, former Deputy Commander of Israel's Unit 8200; David Etue, former Vice President of Rapid 7 Inc; Milan Patel, formerly of K2 Intelligence, the FBI's Cyber Division, the White House National Security Council Joint Requirements Team and the FBI SWAT Team; Austin Berglas, formerly in the FBI and K2 Intelligence; Chris White, of Booz Allen, and Vincent D'Agostino, former Managing Director of K2 Intelligence and 11 years in the FBI. Reading through all these biographies I noticed that Jules Kroll, founder of K2 Intelligence, was also listed as being on Bluevoyant's board. I therefore wondered if there was anyone left at K2 but, yes, there is because Kroll is still there as well. There's also Nadav Zafrir of Team 8.¹¹

These biographies of the personnel of just one cyber security company make something abundantly clear: whilst cyber security is not exactly the same thing as intelligence, it is intertwined so closely as to be almost indistinguishable. It is also clear that many who work in cyber security served their apprenticeships in government agencies, which is nothing new.¹² Many private detectives, after all, started out as plods.

All these biographies paint a picture of an establishment which seems to run quite smoothly just beneath the surface of public recognition. This because – unlike Bilderberg or similar effusions of establishment networking (including Davos) – they don't appear to bear the imprint of political control or in extremis, 'conspiracy.' Having said that, they are very obviously deeply committed to maintaining the fabric of the current social order. However I have not yet completed my list of Labour peers in this this line of work.

Mendelsohn, Jonathan. Mendelsohn's register of interests entry shows he is a director of Cyber Protection Ltd. I didn't find a website for this company, but it does have a Companies House entry which lists just two directors Mendelsohn and Sir David Garrard.¹³ Mendelsohn, whose background has largely been in lobbying, has struck out in several directions but let's not forget that he played a leading part in the original 'Lobbygate'.¹⁴ Sir David also played an important part in a New Labour

¹¹ See < <https://www.team8.vc/member/nadav-zafrir/>>

¹² Bluevoyant biographies sourced from <<https://www.bluevoyant.com/company-leadership/>>.

¹³ <<https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/09907875/officers>>

¹⁴ The story was originally broken by Greg Palast and it is extensively covered in his *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002)

scandal, his one being 'Cash for Honours'.¹⁵ The loan he had made to the Labour Party remained after the scandal died down but he apparently asked for it to be repaid specifically in reaction to Jeremy Corbyn's successful victory in the 2015 leadership campaign.¹⁶

Cyber Protection Ltd was incorporated in December, 2015 and is shown as 'dormant' which is probably just as well. Mendelsohn and Garrard exemplify everything that was wrong about New Labour.

Reid, John Tony Blair's Jack of all Trades cabinet minister registers his position as chair of the advisory board of Shearwater Group plc: 'digital resilience/cyber security.' He also has his own company called John Reid Advisory Ltd: 'risk management; homeland security strategy as well as being chair of the 'Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security (formerly Institute for Security and Resilience Studies), University College, London (not-for-profit limited company engaging in academic research)'. The only other member of Shearwater's Advisory Board is Marcus Willett CB OBE whose biography reads:

'Marcus joined the Company as a Member of its Advisory Panel in April 2019. Marcus was formerly the Deputy Head of GCHQ, having served 33 years with the organisation. He was also GCHQ's first Cyber Director and has established and led major UK Cyber Programmes. Marcus also held posts across the wider UK intelligence and security community, and is currently the Senior Advisor for Cyber at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a world-leading authority on global security, political risk and military conflict.'¹⁷

The revolving doors in the world of cyber security are enough to make one's head spin, but I suspect we're barely scratching the surface.

Symons, Elizabeth The former General Secretary of the senior civil servants' trade union, the First Division Association. She lists being a former member, 'Advisory Board of PGI Protection Group International (executive protection, surveillance and risk consulting) (interest ceased 7 August 2018)'. PGI's website has a section on Cyber security. As ever, its people come largely from government intelligence and defence

¹⁵ See, e.g. <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/mar/16/uk.labour>>.

¹⁶ See <<https://tinyurl.com/y6phel6w>> or <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/top-labour-backer-calls-in-pound2m-loan-as-donors-revolt-bkgkltb7pjk>>.

¹⁷ <<https://shearwatergroup.com/advisory-panel/>>

backgrounds.¹⁸ Symons is another one who has had past 'issues', not least in the case of David Mills (the late Tessa Jowell's ex-husband) and his 'attempts to clinch a \$200 million aircraft deal' with Iran, which 'was in danger of falling foul of US sanctions'.¹⁹

Taylor, Ann Former Chief Whip Taylor's register entry tells us that she is a 'Member of the Board, Thales SA France (information systems for defence and security, aerospace and transportation).' Thales, a business probably best known for its defence systems and technology manufacturing, is nevertheless a major player in the cyber security market and is part owned by the French state.

West, Alan The former First Sea Lord appears to be the most qualified of this bunch to actually have something serious to say about cyber security. His biographical entry at the website of *London Speaker Bureau* states:

'As Security Minister, West produced the UK's first ever National Security Strategy and Cyber Security Strategy as well as formulating a series of other strategies such as the counter-terrorism policy; science and technology for countering international terrorism and guidance for local government in enhancing the security of crowded places. He also put in place the basic construct for Olympic security for the London 2012 Olympics.'²⁰

As you might expect, West lists a cyber security job, as a non-executive director of MCM Solutions, whose website tells us that they are 'mission ready' and informs us:

'Modern Intelligence Agencies need to be ready to process information from numerous digital devices (computers, USB's, memory cards, tablets, external hard drives etc.) at a moment's notice. The Detego® unified platform is a true end-to-end investigation suite for the acquisition, analysis and reporting of any digital assets.'²¹

It is not clear whether the Detego technology is designed purely for government agencies or for the private sector too, if indeed in this speciality there is a difference to be found.

¹⁸ <<https://www.pgitl.com/our-people>>

¹⁹ See, e.g., <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/may/04/uk.labour>>.

²⁰ See <<https://londonspeakerbureau.com/speaker-profile/alan-west/>>.

²¹ <<https://www.mcmsolutions.co.uk/intelligenceagency>>

Lastly, a quick mention of an additional, but no longer Labour name: Lord (Brian) Mackenzie of Framwellgate who lists an interest as 'President (formerly Non-executive Chairman), Secure Intelligence Ltd (consultancy on cyber penetration prevention and safeguarding company data)'. Mackenzie was a Labour peer from 1998 until 2013, when he was suspended from the House of Lords for six months following a 'cash for access' episode.²² Secure Intelligence Ltd tells us 'We liaise directly with key decision makers, supported by a signed legal waiver. We operate discreetly with minimal awareness of our presence, with our trained operatives working clandestinely to leave little to no trace. In essence, we do not exist before, during or after the event.'²³ As two words simply say on their home page: Counter Espionage. Their corporate logo looks remarkably similar to Parliament's portcullis, which may be considered unfortunate these days.

Mackenzie would have been just another Labour peer lurking around the cyber security community, embedding in what is for the rest of them a clear clique with a deeply pro-establishment bent. Those who were in Parliament at the time supported the Iraq war, which doesn't bode well for their intelligence analysis. Now Brexit has sharpened some of their antipathy to the serial rebel Corbyn. Probably speaking for all of them, Peter Mandelson said: 'Why do you want to just walk away and pass the title deeds of this great party over to someone Like Jeremy Corbyn? I don't want to, I resent it, and I work every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of his tenure in office.'²⁴ David Blunkett concluded an article in the *Daily Mail* (where else?) with 'A renewed form of moderate New Labour needs to return.'²⁵ Lord West, quoted in the *Sun* said, 'But more and more I'm beginning to say, I don't think he's got the mental capacity to grasp some of these big issues.'²⁶

Nearly all of these Labour peers have openly signalled their opposition to Corbyn one way or the other, e.g. either by voting against

²² <<https://tinyurl.com/y4crvl5l>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2524648/Lord-Mackenzie-Framwellgate-Lord-Laird-suspended-House-Lords.html>>

²³ <<https://www.secureintelligence.co.uk/how-we-work>>

²⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/yy9ztqu8>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/21/peter-mandelson-i-try-to-undermine-jeremy-corbyn-every-day>>

²⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/yyhg5vsn>> or <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5695797/Now-no-doubt-Corbyn-got-prayer-says-LORD-BLUNKETT.html>>

²⁶ <<https://tinyurl.com/y3zog5up>> or <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1389672/labour-peer-lord-west-launches-astonishing-personal-attack-on-jeremy-corbyn-saying-the-leader-lacks-mental-capacity-to-deal-with-big-issues/>>

the party's Brexit position, or opposing the reinstatement of Chris Williamson MP who was suspended twice over alleged anti-semitic remarks. The big question might be: will this well-connected cyber-security/intelligence nexus within the Labour Party succeed in their ambition to get rid of Corbyn? And who will help them?

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