

For hope to survive something pretty disruptive may hav...

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Frankie Boyle is proving himself to be much more than an occasionally foul mouthed comedian in his comment column for the Guardian. [As he has said in his latest column:](#)

After the general election, I doubted that anyone would have any hope left at all, any desire to put aside their differences to organise novel methods of resistance. One thing Corbyn's election showed is that there are a lot of people out there with hope. I very much doubt that it can survive the draughty meeting halls, cherished hatreds and bureaucracy of the Labour party.

I have some sympathy with that. There is hope. But there is risk that it may be thwarted by its own optimism. As [Aditya Chakraborty has put it](#), also in the Guardian today:

The great mistake made by the mainstream left and right, even by NGOs such as Oxfam, is in imagining that the super-rich, now enjoying such massive riches, are somehow playing by the same rules as the rest of us. That they are "wealth creators" providing jobs and investment for the rest of us, or that they might give up their tax havens. If that ever were the case, it isn't now.

And there are reasons for that doubt. As the Guardian, again, [notes in another Davos linked report:](#)

The richest stand to gain more from the introduction of new technology than those in poorer sections of society, according to a report which warns that policymakers may be required to intervene to tackle the widening inequality.

The so-called fourth industrial revolution, following on from the introduction of steam power, electricity and electronics, will have less of an impact on developed economies, such as Switzerland, Singapore and the UK. Emerging markets — notably in parts of Latin America and India — will suffer when artificial intelligence and robots become widely used, reducing the competitive advantage of their cheap labour.

As that same report also makes clear, the middle classes will be hit badly. Have no doubt that the political impacts of that are significant, but have also been anticipated. It

is not by chance that David Cameron is working so hard to lead an assault on democracy right now, whether by gagging unions and NGOs, limiting the franchise, undermining the Lords, reducing the number of parliamentary seats and instituting aggressive boundary changes. And he is not alone: I have long argued [that the Big 4 accountants are the greatest co-ordinated threat to democracy](#) as they underpin the architecture of tax havens.

What does all this mean? First, that hope survives in a hostile environment, although I believe that despite Frankie Boyle's pessimism it will continue to do so for what nourishes it is unrelated to the forces that oppose it.

Second, that things can, and may, get worse.

And third, that if they do it is unlikely that the continuum that UBS base their projections upon will exist. The history of political economy is one of unforeseen disruptive events (such as 2008) that result in significant changes in direction in social, economic and political history. UBS (and most politicians) ignore that.

The reality is that these disruptive events take time to absorb into the collective narrative before sense is made of them and a new collective norm is established, before another disruptive event occurs. The risk is that on this occasion (and maybe in others to come) the resistance to change by the combined forces of collective wealth has been so strong that the absorption of necessary change has been strongly resisted by those in power. We have not, for example, really seen the beginning of many of the required and planned post-2008 banking reforms as yet despite which fact the next period of disruption may already be upon us.

That is significant: if true what it suggests is that the feedback loop that ensures that the necessary processes of change that are needed to absorb the consequences of disruption may themselves be malfunctioning. If that happens then the disruption may not result in relatively smooth change but will instead create a wave of politically disruptive noise in the system whose consequences are hard to predict and which may presage a more significant disruption or paradigm shift.

This is not necessarily the case but I certainly see it as possible and that possibility is in itself both cause for hope and deep concern: no one knows how these things will work out and history has not always been kind. But what we have to work for is the possibility that disruptive change can not only be benign but beneficial. That is the definition of hope. I think it exists.