Noah Carl and the promotion of eugenics at Cambridge University

Thomas Scripps 26 February 2018

The following report was delivered by International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) steering committee member Thomas Scripps at a meeting in Cambridge on February 23, 2019. The report discusses the political and historical issues raised by the promotion of eugenicist Noah Carl to a leading research fellowship at the University of Cambridge.

The immediate impulse for calling this meeting was Cambridge University's awarding of the Toby Jackman Newton Trust Research Fellowship to the eugenicist Noah Carl. However, the significance of this event goes far beyond the elevation of this one individual.

Carl's appointment is a political decision. It contributes to the growth of a right-wing intellectual climate in academia and complements a drive internationally by the ruling elites to rehabilitate and promote the fascistic right and its intellectual nostrums.

Carl began his academic studies at Oxford University's Nuffield College, where he undertook his BA in Sociology, followed by an MA, a PhD and a period of work as a postdoctoral researcher. During this time, he authored 34 academic papers, a significant number of which links "genetic intelligence" to "race" and "criminality" and which assert a determining influence for IQ on "life outcomes."

His articles include, "Net opposition to immigrants of different nationalities correlates strongly with their arrest rates" and "Are immigration policy preferences based on accurate stereotypes?" which claim to demonstrate that anti-migrant views are "reasonably accurate" as regards criminality.

"Ethnicity and electoral fraud in Britain" claims to demonstrate the prevalence of "cousin marriage" in blanketly described Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and then links this to a culture of nepotism and in-group favouritism, used to explain unsubstantiated accusations of electoral fraud.

"A global analysis of Islamist violence" and "An analysis of Islamist terrorism across Western countries," assert that having a large "percentage of Muslims in the population" is the cause of an increased threat of terrorism.

"IQ and socio-economic development across local authorities of the UK" claims to correlate average regional IQ with economic prosperity, heavily implying that the former (measured intelligence) is the cause of the latter (prosperity).

Journalist Ben van der Merwe, from the student publication *Cherwell*, has played an important role in uncovering this story. He sums up Carl's modus operandi very well in an article for the *New Statesman*. Rejecting the slander repeated in the right-wing media that opposition to Carl is a case of "student snowflakes" trying to shut down legitimate academic study, he writes:

"Like many in the academic far-right, Noah Carl lives a double-life. Research for mainstream, established journals serves to legitimate the pseudoscience that he produces in his spare time. This extracurricular work ... is where Carl really takes on the tough questions." [1]

While his papers are given a sociological gloss, Carl's true Social Darwinist colours are revealed by his participation in a close-knit network of naked white supremacists and eugenics advocates, including Emil Kirkegaard, Heiner Rindermann, Richard Lynn and Gerhard Meisenberg—some of his most common co-authors and publishers.

Kirkegaard describes himself as a eugenicist and racist and has posited the existence of racial tiers based on alleged inherent average intelligence. He has written that coupling between these claimed races is a factor in the development of mental and physical illness in a population. One of Kirkegaard's papers, arguing that crimes committed by immigrants in Germany correlated with low IQs and the prevalence of the Islamic faith in their home country, was positively reviewed by Carl, who wrote, "Overall, the paper is written clearly, and the analysis is well-conducted ... I am satisfied with the re-drafted version, and I therefore approve the paper for publication." On his blog, Kirkegaard has sickeningly suggested that an answer for paedophilia would be for children to be drugged, writing, "If they don't notice it is difficult to see how they cud [sic] be harmed, even if it is rape."

Kirkegaard runs the online journal *OpenPsych*, which he founded to help eugenicists circumvent the peer review system and give their work a veneer of legitimacy. Its editors and referees are almost all associated with the far-right and often have no qualifications in the fields they oversee. Over half of the articles on the site are authored or co-authored by Kirkegaard. Carl has several papers published through *OpenPsych*, is a member of its review team and joined Kirkegaard in writing an open letter in defence of the journal, along with Heiner Rindermann.

Rindermann has written a book called *Cognitive Capitalism: Human Capital and the Wellbeing of Nations*, which argues that global inequality is the result of genetic, racial differences in intelligence. In an article titled "Secondary School Level Engineers" he wrote, "the standard of education of most immigrants from Western Asia and Africa is low, and their capabilities are limited. The consequences of [migration] will be bitter."

Lynn argues for the existence of inherent and substantial IQ gaps between races. He claims that men are biologically smarter than women and that black people are more likely than white people to be psychotic. He is the assistant editor of the racist *Mankind Quarterly* journal, which has published several works by Kirkegaard and one bizarre piece by Carl, titled "The Relationship between Solar Radiation and IQ in the United Kingdom".

Meisenberg is a close associate of Richard Lynn and editor-in-chief of *Mankind Quarterly*.

All these individuals, Carl included, have presented at the London Conference on Intelligence. The annual eugenics conference—uncovered by a *London Student* investigation—was secretly organised at University College London by honorary UCL professor James Thompson. It was attended by another British academic, King's College London Professor Adam Perkins.

Thompson, echoing Lynn, asserts that global inequalities are the product

of variations in IQ. He claims that certain ethnic minorities are capable only of making a poor contribution to the UK, due to their asserted IQ deficiencies. He argues that those of a right-wing political disposition are genetically intellectually superior to those on the left, and that the same is true of men over women. He has suggested screening African Americans on the basis that they are more likely to be psychotic than other population groups.

Perkins has written a book, *The Welfare Trait: How State Benefits Affect Personality*, which argues that social support could encourage "employment resistance" and that welfare dependency could be bred out if benefits payments were reduced until there was a birth rate decline in out-of-work households. He lists US behavioural geneticist David Lykken as an influence. In 1998, Lykken suggested that people should be forced to apply for a license to have children: disqualifying factors would include being unmarried, unemployed, or having a debilitating illness or other disability.

Far-right pseudoscience

This is a cabal dedicated to the promotion of race science in the service of far-right and outright fascist politics. There is zero scientific credibility to this work.

Firstly, there is no serious basis for talking about distinct and defined races. In any case, the overall genetic variance which exists across all human beings is remarkably small compared to other mammals, thanks to the species' relatively recent origin. The suggestion that highly complex mental characteristics might develop differently between different groups in the same manner as characteristics such as skin-colour is fraudulent. In contrast to the single-gene mutations which affect many well-known distinguishing traits, whatever genetic element there is to an individual's intelligence and behaviour is determined by potentially thousands of genes. Moreover, the role that genes play in an individual's development, let alone that of society, is dwarfed in comparison with a host of social factors most always related to class background and the resulting opportunities or lack of them.

Much of Carl's research, and that of his fellow pseudoscientists, relies on a systematic distortion and misuse of data and flagrant violations of the peer review system. Where these papers are subjected to serious, outside scrutiny, they are condemned in the harshest possible terms.

Perkins' book was criticised for "statistical errors and incorrect conclusions" and for "misrepresenting studies to suit his thesis." One of his papers, "Personality and occupational markers of 'solid citizenship' are associated with having fewer children" was reviewed as having made "shockingly bad" errors including, "the misreporting of results" the "use of obviously inappropriate statistical techniques" and of "the most astonishingly flimsy, indirect and, it turns out, flatly erroneous evidence." [2]

Carl's appointment to Cambridge was opposed by an open letter signed by hundreds of academics, which described his work as "ethically suspect and methodologically flawed." [3] One review, from a statistics research group, of his "Net opposition to immigrants of different nationalities correlates strongly with their arrest rates" article, stated that "this particular research offers no insight on the matter" and that "research this bad should never be published in any form." [4] His article on Islamic violence relied heavily for source material on a known Islamophobic website, TheReligionOfPeace.com.

As for Thompson, 10-year editor of *Nature* Adam Rutherford reviewed his publications at the time of the London Conference on Intelligence revelations and described them as a "pseudo-scientific front for bog-

standard, old-school racism." [5]

Among numerous exposures of Richard Lynn's work, psychologist Leon Kamin has written "Lynn's distortions and misrepresentations of the data constitute a truly venomous racism, combined with the scandalous disregard for scientific objectivity." [6]

Carl and the rest are not simply carrying out bad science with shoddy methods and inaccurate conclusions. Their work has an ideological motive—to emphasise the importance of genetics and the existence of innate inequality. They have adopted a methodology suited to their politically reactionary, unscientific objectives—sifting through or orchestrating studies to find data which can be presented as proof of the fictions of the far-right: criminal migrants, stupid Africans and the lazy poor. It is not "uncomfortable objective truths" or honest mistakes leading these individuals to their conclusions, as some of their defenders claim, but the politics of the far right, to which they hope to lend intellectual legitimacy.

Carl's work, and Oxford background, are regularly referenced on farright sites like the *Daily Caller, Free West Media* and *InfoWars*.

Perkins, Thompson and Kirkegaard have all loudly supported Trump's travel ban against several Muslim-majority countries, with Perkins stating that it "makes sense in human capital terms." Challenged on Twitter over his use of data from Africa to support his argument, he responded, "Somalians don't perform well either side of the Atlantic." He has appeared on the far-right The Reality Calls Show podcast and once carried out a study which calculated that an "extra" 98,040 people were "created by the welfare state" over 15 years due to a rise in welfare spending—representing an "ever-greater burden on the more functional citizens." He estimated the "cost" of these individuals to the state at £12,000 per head in welfare payments and the expected crime they would commit.

Thompson's Twitter "follows" include white supremacists and altrightists Richard Spencer, *American Renaissance* and Brett Stevens. Thompson has a following on the alt-right web site *The Unz Review*.

Kirkegaard is regularly publicised on the Neo-Nazi forum *Stormfront* and has posted a photo of himself receiving a Nazi salute with the caption "there will be an heir to the Fuhrer". He describes Muslim immigration into Sweden as "the self-destruction of their country" and supports the farright Sweden Democrats party.

Rindermann is publicised on *The Unz Review*, the white nationalist VDARE and *The New Observer* and is a member of the ultra-conservative Property and Freedom Society.

Lynn heads the white supremacist Pioneer Fund, monitored as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, which funds the Ulster Institute of Social Research of which he is president. This organisation produces the racist journal *Mankind Quarterly*. Lynn has argued in favour of the "phasing out" of "incompetent cultures" and argues for predominantly white states to secede from the USA, establish strict border controls and limit welfare to "preserve civilization".

Fascism and eugenics

Contrary to the claims made by Carl's defenders, such eugenicist ideas are inseparable from their fascist past. *Mankind Quarterly* was established in Edinburgh in 1961, with money from the Pioneer Fund, under an editorial board including Robert Gayre, Henry Garrett, Roger Pearson, Reginald Gates, Corrado Gini and Otmar von Verschuer.

Corrado Gini, of Gini coefficient fame, was a close colleague of Benito Mussolini and key architect of his regime. In 1927, he published a book titled *The Scientific Basis of Fascism* and in 1929 he founded the Italian

Committee for the Study of Population Problems. He believed in an "organicist" theory of nations—which held that younger, fitter nations should overcome older, decaying ones—and supported Mussolini and Hitler in World War II.

Otmar von Verschuer was a German eugenicist interested in "racial hygiene" and an advocate of compulsory sterilisation. He was director of the Institute for Genetic Biology and Racial Hygiene from 1935 to 1942 and director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics from 1942 to 1948. Here he tutored Nazi war criminal Joseph Mengele who went on to conduct deadly human experiments as the camp physician at Auschwitz. Verschuer used blood and bone samples from Jewish and Roma people murdered in the camps in his own research. After the war, he attempted to re-establish his research institution but had his requests denied by the responsible commission on the basis that "Verschuer should be considered not as a collaborator, but one of the most dangerous Nazi activists of the Third Reich." He nevertheless went on to become a genetics researcher and a lifetime member of the American Eugenics Society.

British academic Roger Pearson believed in survival of the fittest competition between the races. He founded the Neo-Nazi Northern League in the 1950s, to "save the Nordic Race" from "forces which would mongrelize our race and civilization." Robert Gayre defined himself as a Strasserist after the Nazi official, and was a Northern League member, as was Henry Garrett, who believed the inferiority of blacks required racial segregation. Reginald Gates also believed marriage of blacks and whites should be prevented as they were separate species.

There is a political logic to eugenicist ideas. Whatever genuine scientific interest was involved in their early discussion, motivated by new discoveries in biology, they quickly became a vehicle for definite, reactionary social interests. This is a historical subject which we intend to research and write on more extensively.

First formed as a school of thought in the late 1800s, eugenics found a wider hearing from the turn of the century as world capitalism entered an extended period of collapse. In the course of these tumultuous decades, inter-imperialist tensions were pushed to breaking point in the First World War and run-up to the Second and the question of social revolution was posed in country after country.

Eugenics became popular as a means of asserting that the imperialist despoiling of the planet was justified by the superiority of the white race and that immense social problems like poverty, unemployment and crime were not the product of the social system but of "defective" human material. The mentally ill were often the first to be targeted. In some circles, definitions of "unfit" populations came to include the "residuum," i.e., the most disadvantaged, chronically unemployed, poverty-stricken and sick in society. So-called "national degeneration" was a widely held fear among the world's ruling elites, inflamed by the looming threat of war.

The essential core of this ideology—adopted in different forms by a spectrum extending from right-wing social democrats to the far-right—was a fervent opposition to the politics of Marxism, at this time gaining a mass hearing in the world's working class.

Marx's revolutionary exposure of class oppression as the fundamental cause of social evils could not be tolerated. Against the socialist movement for an egalitarian society through social revolution was asserted the genetic superiority of certain races over others and of the rich over the poor.

When these arguments were again presented to a wide audience in 1994, with the publication of *The Bell Curve* by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, David North, international editorial board chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site*, summarised their significance as follows: "[T]he racist arguments are introduced in support of a broader, utterly reactionary defence of social inequality..." Murray and Herrnstein were

suggesting "that social inequality is the natural and legitimate expression and product of genetically-determined mental capacities." [7]

Vicious anti-socialism and eugenicist Social Darwinism found its ultimate expression in fascist counterrevolution.

In Nazi Germany, over 400,000 people were sentenced to be sterilised in over 200 eugenics courts set up in the Third Reich. An estimated 350,000 institutionalised mentally ill patients or children suffering from birth defects were murdered. [8] The horrible end point was reached in the Holocaust—the mass extermination of 6 million Jews and an additional 11 million Slavs, Romani people, disabled people, homosexuals and other groups. [9]

Even outside of the Nazi regime, the numbers of lives maimed by eugenics-inspired policies runs into the hundreds of thousands. In the United States, 65,000 people branded "mental defectives" were forcibly sterilised in the 20th century. [10] In Sweden, 63,000 people suffered the same fate in the name of "ethnic hygiene," 40,000 in Norway and 6,000 in Denmark. [11] In Peru, at least 260,000 women, mainly from indigenous populations, were sterilised between 1995 and 2000, as part of a "public health plan". [12]

The re-emergence of eugenics

Carl's continued presence at Oxford and promotion at Cambridge is astounding. Intellectual association with *OpenPsych*, *Mankind Quarterly* and the likes of Kirkegaard ought to have been career suicide. Yet the only form of censure he appears to have received during his career is a polite request from Oxford University to remove his university email address from a paper he had published on *OpenPsych*. Oxford did not tell him to stop his collaboration with fascist pseudoscientists, but simply to avoid directly implicating the University in that work!

Now Carl has gained a promotion—and his case is far from unique. Rindermann holds a university chair. Lynn was only dropped as an emeritus professor at Ulster University after protests by students. Thompson was an honorary professor at University College London and allowed to quietly move into retirement after protests at his secretly hosting the London Conference on Intelligence on campus. Perkins remains a professor at King's College London, in the face of student protests.

Both Rindermann and Lynn sit on the editorial board of the *Personality and Individual Differences* journal, ranked in the top 15 of over 60 journals in the category "Psychology, Social" according to its impact—as measured by the Journal Citation Reports in 2015.

This can only be explained by the protection and promotion of their ideas by sections of the ruling elite, which speaks to a profound shift to the right in bourgeois politics.

When Carl came under criticism at the end of 2018, he received a full-throated defence in the *Spectator* by columnist Toby Young. Young denounced "the scandalous shaming of Noah Carl" by "a mob of grievance studies professors." He followed this up with another piece, "Will Noah Carl get a fair hearing?" which called for Chris Skidmore, the current universities minister, "to stand up for intellectual freedom and free speech."

Young has previously advocated what he called "Progressive Eugenics" in the Australian conservative magazine the *Quadrant*, writing that poorer people should be helped to choose embryos with genes for greater intelligence. This, he said, "could help to address the problem of flatlining intergenerational social mobility and serve as a counterweight to the tendency for the meritocratic elite to become a hereditary elite."

In January 2018, Young was selected by the Conservative government

to lead the newly established Office for Students and fiercely defended in the face of substantial opposition. He was only let go after it emerged that he had been present at the latest London Conference on Intelligence.

There are other examples.

The assertion of a dominating influence of genetically determined IQ was fundamental to the creation of the grammar school system, which streamed children into a two-tier education system after a test at the age of 11. It reared its head again under then Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove in 2014 when his adviser, Dominic Cummings, authored a report which claimed that children's academic performance was mainly related to their genetics and IQ.

In 2012, former Conservative Vice-Chair for Youth Ben Bradley tweeted in defence of Tory cuts to welfare: "Sorry but how many children you have is a choice; if you can't afford them, stop having them! Vasectomies are free ... Families who have never worked a day in their lives having four or five kids and the rest of us having one or two means it's not long before we're drowning in a vast sea of unemployed wasters that we pay to keep!"

Carl's articles, meanwhile, offer an effective academic endorsement for the Home Office's "hostile environment" against immigrants and its anti-Muslim Prevent scheme.

The sharpest expression of the political influence of these ideas is given in Germany. Rindermann's Chair is held at the Technical University of Chemnitz, the town subjected to a riot of 7,000 Nazis last August. His writings were a major inspiration for a book by Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician Thilo Sarrazin, published in 2010, called *Germany Abolishes Itself*, which sold over 1.5 million copies and argued for a viciously anti-migrant policy.

What is striking is how the appearance of eugenicist ideas at Cambridge University echoes developments now taking place at German universities. At Berlin's Humboldt University, historian Jörg Baberowski—backed by the press and a compliant academia—has worked consistently since 2014 to relativise and whitewash the crimes of Hitler's regime. In response to a powerful campaign by the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party (SGP) in Germany to oppose Baberowski's historical falsifications, he has been defended by university authorities, just as Carl is being protected at Cambridge. Humboldt University disingenuously declares Baberowski's right to academic freedom. The press accuses the IYSSE and our supporters of "mobbing—Trotskyist style." The political forces driving this agenda are clear. In country after country, the ruling class is elevating farright figures and organisations, many of them with a fascist heritage, to positions of power. From the Alternative for Germany to the National Front in France, PiS in Poland, Vox in Spain, Bolsonaro in Brazil and Trump in the United States. Britain is very much a part of this phenomenon, with the Tory party striding ever further to the right and a spree of fascist protests recently organised around Tommy Robinson.

The fight against fascism

The World Socialist Web Site wrote in its New Year's Statement for 2019, "Under conditions of deepening capitalist crisis, unprecedented levels of social inequality and preparations for world war, the ruling elites are resurrecting all the political filth responsible for the worst crimes of the 20th century ... Fascism is not yet, as it was in the 1930s, a mass movement. But to ignore the growing danger would be politically irresponsible. With the support of sections of the ruling class and the state, right-wing movements have been able to exploit demagogically the frustration and anger felt by the broad mass of the population." [13]

For this reactionary process to develop, however, an ideological

offensive is required. An advance guard is therefore being formed in sections of academia to force far-right nostrums back into public discourse

Protests at Ulster University, King's College London and now at Cambridge have demonstrated that students are not prepared to sit by and watch this take place. The IYSSE and the SEP support these actions wholeheartedly. At the same time, we warn that the fight against Carl and his associates, and the fascist revival they represent, cannot be won at the level of student protest. The return of eugenics and social Darwinism is the product of immense shifts in social forces and powerful ruling-class interests, which demand an ever-more right-wing intellectual climate.

You need only look at the offensive currently underway on UK university campuses, in the context of which Carl's appointment has taken place. A lie has been constructed in the media in recent years which claims that universities are captive to a dogmatic, authoritarian leftist conformism. Melanie Phillips, writing in the *Times*, has wailed before that "Universities have caved in to [the] dogma and thuggery" of "left-wing bullies and craven authorities." In June this year she wrote a *Times* opinion piece headlined, "Left-wing hate mobs can't stand free speech" after students at Stanford University demanded that a speaking invitation to Charles Murray, author of *The Bell Curve*, be rescinded. The *Daily Mail's* Stephen Glover has accused universities of producing a "left-wing fifth column."

Carl himself is at the centre of this campaign. In February 2017, he presented a report to the Adam Smith Institute titled "Lackademia: Why do Academics Lean Left?" This work became the basis for a whole series of articles in the *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *City AM* and the *Express* and interviews on BBC Radio Scotland and Radio 5 denouncing alleged left-wing groupthink and bias in academia.

The government has latched on to these claims with the creation of the Office for Students (OfS), nominally set up to protect and extend free speech. Toby Young's original appointment to lead the organisation said everything about the character of the "free speech" which would be defended.

Former universities minister, Sam Gyimah, has explained that the OfS intends to "clarify the rules and regulations around speakers and events to prevent bureaucrats or wreckers on campus from exploiting gaps for their own ends." OfS Chairman Sir Michael Barber expressed the need for "challenging or unpopular" speech—and he has powers to shame or fine institutions which the OfS deems has interfered with these principles.

The green light has been given for universities and student societies to invite any reactionary they like onto campus, with the government standing ready to denounce students who protest and expose their ideas.

Trump's fascistic adviser Steve Bannon has been able to deliver a half-hour speech unchallenged at the Oxford Union—after the originally scheduled Alternative for Germany deputy, Alice Weidel, dropped out. Marion Marechal Le Pen of the French National Rally will soon be afforded the same opportunity. Far-right student activist organisation Turning Point USA, publishers of a McCarthyite "professor watchlist" targeting left-wing academics, has established sections across several UK campuses.

Students and academics who wish to oppose such serious threats can only do so by making their ally the most powerful social force on the planet, the international working class.

Across the world, workers are coming forward in struggles against the corrosive inequality, warmongering politics and dictatorial methods of government which underpin the growth of the far-right and its ideologies. In the final analysis, it is only through this global movement's transformation into a conscious struggle for socialism that fascist revival can be overcome. That transformation will require a reclamation by the working class of its immense revolutionary experience, encapsulated in the history of the Trotskyist movement.

It is to this task that the IYSSE urges all those alarmed by what they have seen happen here at Cambridge to dedicate themselves.

Notes

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- [6] Southern Poverty Law Centre, 'Richard Lynn',
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- [11] Stephen Bates, 'Sweden pays for grim past', *Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/06/stephenbates
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- [13] James Cogan, Joseph Kishore and David North, 'The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction in 2019', *Worlds Socialist Web Site*, https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/01/03/pers-j03.html



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