

THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

ISSN 1758-5708

£3

DIVIDED TORIES FAIL

LABOUR FAILS TO CHALLENGE

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British people are being left to pick up the pieces from the Tories mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic, with temporary safety nets like the £20 uplift in Universal Credit and furlough on the way out. The long term effects on health, jobs and communities remain to be seen. Whatever enquiries take place in the future, Johnson and the Tories' culpability is not in doubt, including for the unnecessary deaths of tens of thousands of older people in care homes. Similar policies were pursued in Scotland, under the SNP administration, with similar resulting death tolls. Despite these failings leaders seem to be Teflon coated. In, *Divided Tories Fail to get Brexit (and Other Things) Done* Frieda Park examines the Tory record on Brexit and Covid. Johnson has been able to survive so far because of his popularity in the Tory Party and his huge majority in parliament. Also because the establishment want an orderly transition to a new leader which doesn't expose the Tories failures too much nor their anti-democratic practices, contempt for the electorate and corruption. Divisions are beginning to emerge among the Tories on multiple issues meaning Johnson, far from being invincible, is looking increasingly insecure.

No opposition

It would, however, be a sad state of affairs if it is only a Tory rebellion played out in parliament that sees off Johnson. Yet despite his failures, there is precious little resistance among people and communities and there is a woeful lack of opposition from the official opposition in the shape of Keir Starmer. Labour's poor electoral performances of late have underlined Starmer's lack of credibility with the voters. Scott McDonald spells out Labour's problems in *Starmer's failing leadership*. Though in Wales Labour is doing better it's situation in Scotland is still difficult, foundering on the rock of the constitution. The lessons of

Wales are being ignored as Starmer draws the wrong conclusions from electoral defeats in the so-called Red Wall constituencies. The real causes of alienation in working class communities and the radical changes needed to address them are ignored in favour of superficial responses, like making Labour look "patriotic" by appearing with Union Jacks. This is a poor imitation of the Tories and goes down particularly badly in Scotland. Paul Lefley also picks up on how the current Labour leadership is badly misreading working class voters in his review of *Beyond the Red Wall* which was written by Deborah Mattinson, recently installed as Starmer's Director of Strategy.

In a mirror image of Johnson's problems within the Tory Party, Starmer is facing discontent among his own MPs and certainly not only from the left. Right wingers, worried about their careers, have begun to voice criticisms. Both Starmer and Johnson were put in place for the same reason – to prevent Jeremy Corbyn from becoming prime minister. Neither was the ideal candidate for the job. However, having completed their designated mission it is likely that, after a decent interval, both will be moved on in favour of more competent candidates amenable to the ruling class.

As McDonald points out the narrow focus on parliament alone will not bring real change. Only class struggle can achieve that and that is the main ingredient we are lacking.

South America

Class struggle may be thin on the ground in Britain, but that is not the case in other places. Notably, South America remains at the forefront of anti-imperialist battles. Dan Morgan looks at some of the key countries in, *South America - popular struggle wins victories*. For centuries enormous struggles have taken place across the continent

against Spanish, British and US imperialism and their domestic allies. In the course of that time there have been tremendous victories, like the Cuban revolution, and huge defeats like the overthrow of the Popular Unity government in Chile. But people across the continent have kept resisting and fighting for change. Even a few months ago few would have predicted that a self-declared Marxist would be elected president of Peru. In Bolivia, after a bitter defeat for the left and Evo Morales and a campaign of right wing terrorist violence, nevertheless, Luis Arce from Morales's party, the *Movement Towards Socialism*, won the presidential election. In Chile the left has a majority on the convention writing the new constitution for the country. None of this was achieved by purely electoral politics – these successes arose from the struggles of the working class, social movements and indigenous peoples.

Capitalism's future

Capitalism has major issues to address if it is to head off discontent with the current neoliberal model. In *I'll be watching you*, Simon Korner describes another of its excesses in the increasing surveillance of workers, including people being spied on in their own homes and Noah Tucker looks at why state intervention in the economy is now being pursued, however modestly, by governments including in the USA and Britain. In *State intervention makes a return – can it save capitalism?* he considers the benefits for capital in moving away from the unfettered free market, but also the risks such a move might entail.

One thing is clear, without the intervention of the working class all that can happen is that capital will be re-arranging the deck chairs on its Titanic and reshuffling the captains at the top of its parties.

DIVIDED TORIES



Fail to get Brexit (and other things) done

by Frieda Park

It is over a year and a half since Britain left the European Union, but the problems created by the last minute agreement designed to foil a No Deal Brexit remain, so far, intractable. Brexit isn't done in relation to the Irish border and financial services and there is the potential for more such issues to emerge in the future. This mess is of the Tories own making and complicates their quest to establish Britain's place in the world post-Brexit. In addition the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic remains cavalier – costing more lives, creating uncertainty for small businesses and damaging the economy. These and other issues are heightening divisions within the Tory Party which have been suppressed of late.

Major failures

Post-Brexit, the only way of avoiding a hard border between the UK and the EU would have been to adopt something like Theresa

May's deal keeping Britain aligned with EU rules. Without that alignment, under Johnson's agreement, a hard border and new customs checks and regulations were inevitable. The Good Friday Agreement, reached to end the armed conflict in Ireland, virtually did away with the border between north and south. To have re-introduced that as the EU-UK border may have prevented a Brexit agreement being reached due to opposition from the Irish government and the EU. To avoid this Johnson's answer was to create a border instead between Britain and the whole of Ireland including the north. Did he think this would be problem free? No doubt something will be worked out to ensure the free movement of sausages, but in the process Johnson has caused difficulties for businesses and massive political problems alienating the Tories' allies in the unionist parties in the north, with protesters taking to the streets. He has also annoyed the government of the Irish Republic and the EU which has no interest in reaching easy compromises to get him out of his difficulties.

Johnson's last minute Brexit deal with the EU, among many other shortcomings, left out financial services - the biggest sector of the UK economy. Agreement on this sector was to be reached at a later date. The City of London has made losses of more than a trillion dollars of assets and thousands of jobs to EU financial centres since Brexit. In his Mansion House speech on 1st July 21, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, seemed to admit that prospects for a deal allowing UK financial services equal access to EU markets had receded. This leaves the sector attempting to orientate itself towards different markets, with divided views on how helpful possible deregulation will be in attracting new business.

The other major issue facing the country is the coronavirus pandemic. Johnson's handling of this bears all the same hallmarks as his handling of Brexit. As revealed by Dominic Cummings, Johnson was well aware of the cost in human life of pursuing herd immunity and getting rid of restrictions, yet that

has remained his chosen course of action. The government went ahead with opening up while the virus was still circulating at a very high level. It is difficult to fathom whether Johnson's actions are callous and incompetent or devious and calculated. As the population becomes worn down by contradictory advice and impossible to follow guidance then the more people give up. The government, therefore, gets its way, continuing to dispense with restrictions which would help prevent the spread of the virus. An example of this has been the "ping-demic" where not only those with the virus were having to take time off work, but their contacts numbering hundreds of thousands were pinged by the NHS contact tracing app and asked to self-isolate. Some people are receiving serial requests to self-isolate. This is not only a problem for individuals but also for businesses and services. The government's answer is not to restrict mixing to prevent the risky contacts which are happening, but to downgrade the app so that you are less likely to get pinged. This will increase the level of risk.

Another example of the erosion of credibility and trust in the government which is undermining the effort to fight the virus is the faltering effort to get young people vaccinated. All along they were told that their risk from the virus was low, now they are berated for not getting vaccinated and are being tempted by patronising, as yet undefined, giveaways from fast food companies.

The country is being pushed towards a position where the virus will be allowed to circulate freely in pursuit of herd immunity. But, now more than ever, this seems not only like a high-risk strategy, but also one which is unachievable. Can there be herd immunity with a constantly mutating virus which challenges the protection bestowed by vaccines? We are being groomed to accept a situation where thousands continue to die of Covid. The free

circulation of the virus enables it to continue to mutate, posing a threat not only to this country, but to the rest of the world.

Tory discontent

Johnson can announce as many grand schemes as he wants, which might or might not come to pass, but the reality is that on the key questions of the day the Tories are failing. How long can they carry on like this? Sadly there is little popular opposition and none from Kier Starmer so Johnson is not immediately threatened on that front. However discontent among the Tories is beginning to grow.

Until recently Johnson's position within the Party looked unassailable. His 2019 election victory gave him a big majority in Parliament ensuring the loyalty of MPs which was reinforced by his popularity with Tory Party members and his ruthlessness in dealing with opposition. In the previous parliament he removed the whip from 21 MPs, including some of the most senior figures in the Party. Although dissent was suppressed it didn't go away as is now becoming clear. Divisions are emerging round economic, political and international policy and dissatisfaction with Johnson as a leader.

For its survival post-Brexit the Tories see a strong partnership with the United States as essential and Johnson has caved in to US pressure to fall into line with its aggressive stance towards China. Yet China also offers untapped possibilities which could be a big boost to the City of London as well as other sectors of the economy. That is a circle which will be difficult, if not impossible, to square and means that Britain will likely miss out on economic links which could be very valuable to its post-Brexit development. Acknowledging the difficulties faced by the City of London without an agreement to access EU financial markets, Rishi Sunak in his Mansion House speech men-

tioned above, promoted the idea that London could become a centre for Chinese financial services. (1) In doing so he also made a plea for a better trading relationship with China. While a closer relationship with China was favoured by former Chancellor, George Osborne and the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, Johnson's alignment with the US has put the brakes on that. Sunak is, therefore, at odds with Johnson and a significant body within the Tory Party, like the China Research Group lead by Tom Tugendhat, who are hostile to China.

There are also known to be differences between Sunak and Johnson on domestic economic policy with Sunak following a more traditional neo-liberal line. He sees state intervention in the economy to combat the effects of the pandemic as a temporary expedient and wants a return to a more neo-liberal norm when the crisis is over. Johnson, however, appears to favour more state intervention in the economy.

The need to respond to their new-found electoral base in the North of England is a source of tension within the Tory Party, with voters in its southern heartlands concerned that they might lose out. In addition, up-grading infrastructure and loosening planning laws to allow house building conflict with the interests of the comfortably-off who don't want more housing or railways like HS2 in their back yards. These issues were deemed to be significant factors in the Tories drubbing in the Chesham and Amersham by election on 17/6/21 where the Lib Dems overturned a 16,000 Tory majority to win by over 8000 votes. This is the first time the constituency has not returned a Conservative MP. But the Tories have received considerable funding from the construction and development industry - £17.9million since Johnson became Prime Minister. (2) How will the interests of Tory voters in the south be squared with the Party funders who expect some return for their cash?



PHOTO BY THE WHITE HOUSE

Biden tells it like it is to Johnson

There remain tensions with the pro-EU establishment and sections of the Tory vote which is unhappy with Johnson's aggressive pursuit of Brexit.

One measure of dissatisfaction among Tory MPs was that at the beginning of July, Sir Graham Brady was re-elected as the chair of the 1922 committee which represents backbench Tory MPs and runs leadership elections. This is highly significant as it is a powerful post and Brady won in the face of a determined campaign to unseat him by Johnson and his allies who backed Heather Wheeler.

There have been rebellions of Tory MPs on diverse issues including Covid lockdown measures and senior party figures have been prominent in leading the charge.

In July six former Tory Work and Pensions Secretaries, including Iain Duncan-Smith a former Party leader, wrote to Rishi Sunak urging him not end the £20 up-lift in Universal

Credit. There was particular concern expressed about this by MPs representing recently won seats in the North of England.

32 Tories rebelled against the whip in March over funding to remove unsafe cladding from buildings following the Grenfell tower fire.

Over 30 Tories backed an amendment which aimed to block planned cuts to foreign aid. Theresa May, former leader and Prime Minister, was a vocal critic of the government on this issue.

And then there are Dominic Cummings's revelations about the wilful mis-management of the coronavirus pandemic with Johnson consciously embracing a strategy which led to the manslaughter of tens of thousands of older people. We can only guess at what pressures were brought to bear on Johnson when he sacked Cummings on whom he was highly dependent, from his post as top adviser. From the ruling-class perspective government im-

proved after Cummings departure - a no deal Brexit was averted. However, Cummings has not gone quietly. He knows just how bad things were at the top of government and has evidence to back up his version of events. In his BBC interview with Laura Kuenssberg (20/7/21) he also advocated the abolition of the Tory Party and questioned whether Brexit had been the correct course of action. His exposés have highlighted and intensified Tory rifts.

Defeating Johnson

But despite the divisions, scandals, the mishandling of the pandemic, Brexit and a host of other issues the media pressure on Johnson has been relatively light. (Cast your mind back to the relentless and unfounded media assaults on Jeremy Corbyn.) For all the ammunition that Cummings provided there has been little sustained analysis of the implications of what he has said and certainly no concerted media campaign against Johnson. Why is this?

Cummings gave the answer himself. Although he held Johnson in apparent contempt, Cummings was clear the he was the lesser of two evils with Corbyn being totally unacceptable. And that remains broadly the ruling class position. Opening up debate around Cummings's allegations would lead to damning conclusions about the mis-management of the pandemic, the role of unelected advisors in government and the disdain of both elected and unelected officials for the electorate. To engage with Cummings's narrative would open up uncomfortable questions about the whole system, in whose interests it operates and just exactly how democratic it is. The establishment doesn't want that and so is protecting Johnson for now. At least, that is, until Keir Starmer succeeds in making Labour safe for capital again, and/or a position can be created where Johnson faces a realistic challenge from within the Tory Party.

There have been rebellions of Tory MPs on diverse issues including Covid lockdown measures and senior party figures have been prominent in leading the charge.

The Tories' differences show they have problems. We should not be spectators as they fight it out, otherwise all that will happen is that Johnson will be replaced by a different Tory. International policy, post-Brexit and post-pandemic Britain and domestic policy are all throwing up serious rifts but there are those on the left who reinforce Johnson's propaganda of his own invincibility. Pessimism abounds as though Johnson was unmovable. Yet it is only four years since Jeremy Corbyn nearly won a general election. Things can and do change

quickly. The Tories can be defeated and we need to play our part by exposing their weaknesses, failures in government and phoney levelling up. And by encouraging opposition, supporting workers and communities where they are fighting back.

[1] Sunak Insists UK Must Bolster China Ties as Access to EU Market Declines, The Financial Times, 1/7/21

[2] Inside Boris Johnson's Money Network, The Financial Times 30/7/21

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STARMER'S FAILING LEADERSHIP

by Scott McDonald

The Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer's leadership is in trouble. It has done badly in the recent parliamentary by-elections and in much of the local elections in England; it is squeezed between the SNP and the Tories over the constitutional question in Scotland; and it is alienating much of its base internally and its wider external support. Under Starmer's leadership Labour has been weak in criticising the Tory government's manifest failures over the pandemic; it has been largely absent from the concerns and struggles of working people; and has spent much of its energy in a factional drive to turn the Labour Party in a rightward direction acceptable to capitalism and the mainstream media, or as they might put it, to become electable.

Election woes

In the recent Batley and Spen parliamentary by-election Kim Leadbetter won with a razor-thin majority of 323 votes. That election saw another section of the party's core vote break away, with thousands of Muslims alienated by the party's failure to speak out on Palestine, giving their vote to George Galloway. Other disillusioned working-class people also voted for Galloway resulting in him winning 22% of the overall vote. The Leadbetter campaign focused almost exclusively on local issues such as fly-tipping and safer roads. Her literature throughout the campaign was pink instead of the party's traditional red and her final leaflet didn't include Labour's name, but did feature the word 'local'



PHOTO BY RWENDLAND

six times. Asked on BBC Breakfast whether Sir Keir had been an asset or a problem, she said, "The focus of the campaign was very much listening to local people."

In the earlier May local elections in England, Labour losses in the north of England reflected the alienation of many working-class voters over Labour's position on Brexit. As George Eustace, the Tory MP explained, Labour was punished in Leave-voting areas by its "wrangling" over Brexit in recent years. To impose a Remainer candidate for Labour in the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election reflected the Starmer leadership's unwillingness to accept the result of the EU referendum. Hartlepool was won by Labour both in 2017 and 2019 when Corbyn was leader but has now been lost under Starmer. Labour's Brexit blunders, not least due to the influence of Starmer and his campaign for a second EU referendum,

have led to a situation in which many working class and former Labour voters have voted Tory or do not see any reason to vote at all.

In the hours after the loss of Hartlepool Lord Mandelson, the former MP for the constituency, was explaining that the defeat was due to the long shadow Jeremy Corbyn cast over the party.

However, it is interesting to note that Mandelson has also been critical of Starmer. In a *New Statesman* article, headlined *I'm afraid Keir Starmer has come badly unstuck*, Mandelson argued that Starmer "depended too much on the belief that changing the face at the top would be sufficient." [1] Mandelson went on to argue that it is not enough to simply have got rid of Corbyn but that the policies and manifesto on which he stood also need to be ditched. In the article he says that, "The challenge for Keir

is that he has got to be both Kinnock and Blair rolled into one.” Also in the *New Statesman*, Tony Blair stated categorically that Labour “needs total deconstruction and reconstruction. Nothing less will do.” Starmer seems to be following Blair’s advice. Blair’s stance is “really an argument for the break-up of Labour as a social democratic party connected to the labour movement” according to Simon Fletcher, former adviser to Starmer, Corbyn and Miliband. [2]

Discontent among MPs

Starmer’s inept sacking of Angela Rayner before all the local election results were announced and his botched cabinet re-shuffle annoyed many in the Parliamentary Labour Party. This, and the election results, have worried many Labour MPs about their own future career prospects.

Labour figures led by Stephen Kinnock have launched a new organisation ‘Renaissance’ that aims to help the party re-connect with voters it has lost rather than “retreat to its comfort zone and drift to irrelevance”. Their aim is to make the case that Labour should rebuild support in constituencies lost to the Conservatives in 2019, as “opposed to pursuing a ‘Blue Wall’ strategy that would target Remain-leaning Tory seats in the South of England”. [3] This new organisation reflects a certain discontent among some right-wing Labour MPs with the Starmer leadership approach and their own personally vulnerable positions. Yvette Cooper MP is a member of Renaissance’s Advisory Board and she had a slender majority (1,276) in her Yorkshire constituency at the 2019 General Election. Another Advisory Board member is ex-MP and former chair of the Jewish Labour Movement, Ruth Smeeth, who lost her seat, Stoke-on-Trent North, which had voted 72.1% for Brexit.

In these recent elections in England, Labour’s leadership under

Starmer had no political message for voters except “Labour is under new management” which is hardly appealing to people struggling with life’s woes under a pandemic who are worried about their health and livelihood. Contrary to Labour, the Tories did have a clear message. Like their slogan, “Get Brexit Done”, “Levelling-up” is a clear message. Even if it is fake and that it is more likely to be levelling down, it is still a clear message. And it is projected to give hope – something badly missing from the current Labour leadership. The Tories were helped by the vaccine roll-out and the bounce it gave them and this despite the scandals over PPE and cronyism. Incidentally, the Tory government’s procurement of vaccines well ahead of the EU would not be lost on those who voted Leave in the EU referendum.

Scotland: SNP dilemmas

In Scotland the SNP with the Greens won a pro-independence voting majority in the Scottish Parliament replicating the position prior to the election. Boris Johnson and the Tory government are a gift to the SNP. The SNP pose Scotland against Boris Johnson’s Tories and the Tories set themselves up as the main defenders of the union. This suits both the SNP and the Tories and squeezes the Labour Party. The SNP’s 14 years in government, with their less than impressive record, would have put it on the backfoot if that alone had been the ground on which the election was fought, but the SNP preferred to make the election about Boris Johnson. Not only did it seek to attack the Tories but it sought to put Labour on the defensive by conflating support for the union with support for the Westminster Tory government.

The constitutional question has now dominated politics in Scotland for many years to the exclusion of all matters affecting the lives of working-people and will continue to do so if the SNP and the Tories

Under Starmer’s leadership Labour has been weak in criticising the Tory government’s manifest failures over the pandemic; it has been largely absent from the concerns and struggles of working people; and has spent much of its energy in a factional drive to turn the Labour Party in a rightward direction acceptable to capitalism and the mainstream media, or as they might put it, to become electable.

have their way. Although the Scottish Parliament has a pro-independence majority of MSPs, as it had before the election, the country is actually evenly divided (50:50) and very sharply polarised on the question of Scottish independence. The leadership of the SNP are very conscious of the fact that there is no clear majority for independence at the moment and Sturgeon has said that Indyref2 will not be called until Covid is over. She is proposing to call a second referendum in the first half of the Scottish Parliament, that is by 2023. Of course, the Westminster government may resist another referendum but that could play further into the nationalists' grievance narrative.

Starmer has established a Commission to look at the constitutional arrangements for Britain with Gordon Brown as adviser-in-chief. You may recall that Gordon Brown in his unnecessary 11th hour intervention in the previous independence referendum called for more powers, that is more devolution, to be given to Scotland. It is therefore likely to recommend further devolution in England and yet another version of devo-max for Scotland. Labour's answer to Scottish nationalism was to introduce devolution. However, instead of dampening down support for independence it has encouraged it. Many on the Left of the Labour Party in Scotland are obsessed with the constitutional question: they believe that there ought to be another referendum, and are firmly wedded to a campaign for a third option (namely more devolution) to be on the ballot paper for the next independence referendum.

However, the SNP face big issues which it will have to grapple with in the next two years. These include the questions of what currency to use, the prospect of a hard border with England, Scotland's large debt and the difficulties of re-joining the EU by an independent Scotland.

Batley and Spence controversial Labour leaflet



The SNP will also have the problem of keeping its troops in line. Having seen off some of the more impatient independence supporters into Alex Salmond's new party, ALBA, during the Scottish election, they will be conscious that more members could go that way if they don't keep Indyref2 front and centre of the agenda.

Wales: Labour does well

The Labour Party in Wales is in a different situation from the Labour Party in Scotland with Welsh Labour equalling their best result since devolution winning half the Senedd's 60 seats. In the 2019 General Election Labour lost 6 seats to the Tories in Wales. All of these seats had Leave-voting majorities in the EU referendum. In the 2021 elections Labour won back 4 of these (equivalent) seats for the Senedd.

The Welsh government, led by Mark Drakeford, an early supporter of Jeremy Corbyn and his policies, did well in dealing with the pandemic and Welsh Labour had a clear message going into the election for the Senedd, "Build Back Fairer". When Keir Starmer took up the leadership of the Labour Party, Mark Drakeford advised him to "retain the best ideas from the last two manifestos". Starmer could do

with learning from Welsh Labour and listening to Drakeford. Instead Starmer has only listened to his office place-people and David Evans at Labour Party HQ. This advice, based on focus groups and group-think, pointed to centrism as the only possible electable position to have and for Starmer to drop his leadership election pledges.

This approach also led to Starmer being draped in the Union Jack as it is believed that Labour, if it is to win back the Leave-voting areas, has to be seen to be patriotic. This view is based on reading the Leave vote as straightforwardly right-wing. This is a serious misconception. It also further alienates people in Scotland including many Labour supporters.

Following the Hartlepool defeat and severe losses in the local elections Starmer proceeded to radically change his leadership team. Out went Jenny Chapman as Political Director and in came Luke Sullivan, whose appointment "will be seen in part as a way to boost relations with rank-and-file MPs who have become jittery about Starmer's leadership and complain the leadership has been aloof and uncommunicative." [4] Four of the "gang of five", the close-knit group of senior advisers around Starmer as they were known by backbench MPs departed. These changes will not alter the rightward

direction of Starmer's leadership as the new appointees are all New Labour veterans. However, the changes do show how much discontent there is, even among right-wing Labour MPs, with Starmer's leadership and his office. [5]

Parliamentary cretinism

The concentration of the Labour Party leadership on elections and so-called electability, pretty unsuccessful in these recent elections, and the lack of campaigning on the issues facing working people plays into the hands of the Tories.

The goings-on in Parliament notably in the period leading up to the 2019 General Election and the various antics to reverse the result of the EU referendum reminds one of what Karl Marx termed "parliamentary cretinism" in his book, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* which was written in 1852 and still remains pertinent today. The consequences of this concentration on parliamentary politics to the exclusion of 'real world' issues, or if you like, class struggle, makes it easier for the ruling class to continue to rule and the Tories to win elections.

If the Labour Party leadership were to properly take up and campaign on issues such as fire and re-hire; public sector pay including that of the nurses; the ending of furlough and the increase in unemployment especially among young people; the privatisation of the health service; the plight of many people living in high-rise housing post-Grenfell; zero hours contracts and the other dreadful aspects of the private sector gig economy; Black Lives Matter; the right to organise and demonstrate; and to stand up to injustices internationally...then people would be encouraged to support Labour as an alternative.

The TUC estimates that 1 in 10 workers face the issue of firing and re-hiring on worse conditions as many employers use the pandemic

to attack wages and conditions. Many workers are resisting. The bin workers in Thurrock after a six-week strike managed to stop this. Bus workers also took successful action to defend their wages and conditions. Uber drivers after many court cases and industrial action have won the basic right to the national living wage and holiday pay and now recognition of the GMB union to represent them; and there are many other struggles by workers that have gone largely unreported by the mainstream media.

The failure of Labour's current leadership lies in its inability to speak to the working class as it actually exists, its abandonment of policies that address the real life problems of working people and its refusal to outline a vision for a fundamentally different economy and society.

[1] Peter Mandelson, "I'm afraid Keir Starmer has come badly unstuck" *New Statesman*, 11 May 2021.

[2] Simon Fletcher, "Keir Starmer's Labour desperately needs to stand for something", *New Statesman*, 28 June 2021.

[3] Sienna Rodgers, "Kinnock chairs new group 'Renaissance' to reconnect with former Labour voters", *LabourList*, 14 July 2021.

[4] Jessica Elgot, "Keir Starmer appoints new political director in Labour backroom shake-up", *The Guardian*, 28 June 2021. Jenny Chapman was moved from Political Director in Starmer's office to Brexit spokesperson in the Shadow Cabinet. This was possible as she had been made Baroness Chapman and appointed to the House of Lords in December 2020 following her nomination by Keir Starmer. Chapman was widely blamed for the decision to impose Paul Williams as the Hartlepool by-election candidate despite his Remain credentials in the pro-Brexit constituency.

[5] Sam White, formerly special adviser to Alistair Darling when he was Chancellor, has been appointed Starmer's Chief of Staff, replacing Morgan McSweeney, who has been moved to Labour Party HQ as Elections Director. Matthew Doyle, veteran of the Blair years, has been appointed as temporary Director of Communications replacing Ben Nunn. Chris Ward, Starmer's speech writer and Deputy Chief of Staff, has also left Starmer's office. Deborah Mattinson has been appointed as the new Director of Strategy. She was chief pollster to Gordon Brown when he was Chancellor.

From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

"...the American built wall...now divides large swaths of the USA from Mexico. Completed at the end of 2008 at a cost of over \$3.6 billion....The Secure Fence Act was introduced under George Bush's Republican administration in 2006....The title of the Act is deliberately misleading... At 5.5 meters high and 670 miles long this 'fence' of steel mesh, barbed wire and concrete augmented by radar, CCTV and around 20,000 armed border guards is by any standards, a wall...there is strong support for this barrier from both Democrats and Republicans, with 71% of the Senate approving the motion in 2006. Among this 71% was the current President Barack Obama..."

Issue 13 Autumn 2011

The USA's wall of paranoia and profit

Jim Brodlove

Brexit, borders & division in Ireland

by Ernest Walker

In 1998 the electorate in Northern Ireland voted on whether to accept the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) which they did on a majority of 72%. Whilst the Catholic nationalist community voted heavily in favour their enthusiasm was not shared by the Protestant unionist community where those voting in favour was just over 50%. In a recent article published in the Belfast based *Irish News* one of its regular columnists, Alex Kane, revealed that in the elections held for the Stormont Assembly later that year unionist parties that were opposed to the GFA, led by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), received more votes than those unionist parties who were in favour. He also made the point that within the ranks of the pro-GFA Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) were elements who were actually opposed to the Agreement. In other words political unionism had a problem.

Quite naturally some commentators believed that the referendum result spelt the end for Ian Paisley and the DUP. However, over time, the DUP became the biggest unionist party, so were they the real reflection of the unionist/loyalist attitude to the GFA? The UUP and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) whose respective leaders, David Trimble and John Hume, were two of the main architects of the GFA saw support for their parties decline, leading the DUP and Sinn Féin to become the biggest parties in the assembly.

The small pro-GFA Progressive Unionist Party which had the potential of a left voice within unionist politics declined after the untimely death of its charismatic



Sinn Féin leaders, including Michelle O'Neill, (front second from right) oppose Brexit

PHOTO BY SINN FÉIN

leader, David Ervine, and has since shed its left wing image. Although it played an important part in the formation of the GFA, particularly the inclusion of victim's rights, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which also challenging the sectarianism and sexist politics of traditional parties, lost out too.

In 2007 Ian Paisley became First Minister alongside Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness as his Deputy. Such was their relationship that they earned the nickname "The Chuckle Brothers". However, in 2008 Paisley was removed unceremoniously from the leadership of the party he founded. His successor was Peter Robinson who had been seen as very close to Paisley but his removal was less than amicable. This led to bad feeling from the Paisley family towards those, including Robinson, who were responsible.

EU divisions

Whilst the GFA saw the decline of political violence of the 'Troubles',

sectarianism and division still exist. In the 2016 EU referendum Leave was supported by many in the unionist/loyalist community following the line of the DUP - the UUP supported Remain. On the opposite side many nationalists supported the Irish nationalist pro-EU line. It is worth pointing out that Sinn Féin had opposed Ireland's membership application in 1973 and had voiced opposition over the years especially in the eight EU related referendums that have taken place in the Republic.

In 2005 Gerry Adams wrote on the question of the EU becoming a superpower, "This, of course, is the polar opposite of the democratic and anti-imperial outlook of Irish republicanism, as well as democrats and progressive people all over Europe."^[1] He described it as a "rich man's club led in the main by the former colonial powers". He also made the point that EU integration would see the undermining of workers' rights and labour standards, a sentiment echoed at

the same time by Mary Lou McDonald, now President of Sinn Féin. Earlier this year she commented that a united Ireland would see the realisation of the ideals of Pearse and Connolly ignoring the fact that what is now the European Union was set up to combat the ideals of Pearse and especially Connolly. Sinn Féin, like all republicans, cherish the ideas set out in the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic, but they should revisit it and read the part which proclaimed, “The Irish Republic as a sovereign independent state” declaring “the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and inalienable”.

In January this year Michelle O’Neill, Vice President of Sinn Féin and Deputy First Minister in the Stormont assembly wrote in the *Irish News*, “Independence can be achieved through the mechanism of the Good Friday Agreement. This means looking beyond Brexit and beyond the union to a new Ireland with the whole island back in the EU through a referendum on Irish unity”. Sinn Féin claims to have a policy of “critical engagement” with the EU but as one critic pointed out, “while there seems to be plenty of engagement, there is not much evidence of criticism”. They also call for a reformed and democratised EU, however, they are deluding themselves and the Irish people if they think that can happen. On the other side, of course, we have the problems of the Northern Ireland Protocol which equally divides the two communities. Unionists see it as breaching the GFA claiming that it is a constitutional issue as there is a border down the Irish sea and, unlike the rest to the UK, the North is within the orbit of the EU. As you would expect nationalists have no problem with the protocol as they see it as a stepping stone to a united Ireland. The Alliance Party and the Greens, both of which do not designate themselves as unionist or

nationalist, have no problem with it as they are pro-EU anyway.

A legal challenge by unionists claiming that the protocol breached not only the GFA but the 1800 Act of Union was dismissed by the High Court in Belfast but could be subject to an appeal. It has to be said that their chances of overturning the protocol are slim. Another sticking point is the issue of an Irish Language Act which unionists see as a threat to their perceived “Britishness”. This is where sectarianism starts to kick in as, in other parts of the UK which they so want to be a part of, there are several other Gaelic languages spoken. An Irish Language Act is no more of a threat to their Britishness than Brexit is a threat to the GFA as the pro-EU crowd are constantly telling us. Indeed, in loyalist east Belfast Irish language classes are flourishing. Westminster has threatened to legislate for an Act if Stormont does not. However, they legislated on abortion but those services are still to be implemented.

Unity?

The issue of a border poll could be the subject of an article on its own as there are differences amongst its advocates as to when one should be held and it is not the straightforward issue some would have you believe. I would quote the comments of Irish President, Michael D. Higgins, who said that whilst he desires a united Ireland he also desires an Ireland united. As regards the recent turmoil in the DUP some commentators are predicting its demise, although that may be a case of wishful thinking. Some thought that would happen in 1998 and it did not. I am not sure it could happen now. Meanwhile we have the longest waiting lists in the NHS in the UK. We have more and more people using food banks and the fact that many working class people live in housing estates that are all-Protestant or all-Catholic areas does not

help to break down sectarianism. That is just part of the problem and is the legacy of decades of unionist misrule.

We got through the major commemoration in the unionist calendar on the 12th July, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, relatively unscathed as the number of parades, especially the main one, were curtailed by the pandemic. The issue of the bonfires came up again over the period with unionist/loyalists claiming that the opposition to bonfires was an attack on their culture. After one bonfire collapsed when it was lit, and another built using 17,000 pallets also collapsed, this led to calls that regulations on size, siting and safety be brought in. More so when a 17-year-old youth holding a can of petrol which he intended to use to light the bonfire was engulfed in flames. What to many people would seem a sensible thing to do was met with derision from some quarters of unionism/loyalism but when it comes to Northern Ireland as someone said “that’s life”.

The British Government with its announcement of what is tantamount to an amnesty for those responsible for killings during the “Troubles”, whether British Army or paramilitaries, has managed to unite, albeit from different angles, both sides of the community in their condemnation. Of course, the main aim of the Tories is to get the British soldiers off the hook. This is where working class organisations in Britain can help by condemning the government and demanding it withdraw this action, as difficult as that may be, so that justice can take its true course.

[1] Gerry Adams, *The New Ireland: A vision for the Future*. (2005)

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STATE INTERVENTION MAKES A RETURN

can it save capitalism?

Sheffield Forgemasters

PHOTO BY ST BC

by Noah Tucker

The announced reason for the British government's nationalisation in July and August this year of Sheffield Forgemasters, to be followed by state investments into the firm of £400 million, is to "secure the supply of components for the MOD's critical existing and future UK defence programmes." [1] Nevertheless, the move, which is one of a series of major state interventionist measures by Britain's Tory government, will save the jobs of 600 workers at the plant. Reports that *The Free Market is Dead* or that *Neoliberalism is Dead*, as pronounced by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes in a Time Magazine article in April 2021 [2] and by former Obama White House official Jake Sullivan in a February 2020 article in *Foreign Policy* [3] are without doubt highly exaggerated. However, there is a certain change of direction taking place. Sullivan has subsequently been appointed by Joe Biden as the USA's National Security Advisor.

In Britain the industrial policy initiatives of Boris Johnson's Conservative government have included the state organisation and funding of Covid vaccine manufacture, the proposed reassertion of unified state control of the railway system (made possible by Brexit, as EU legislation mandates a split between control of the track and operation of the trains), the blocking of the sale of silicon chip design company Arm Holdings to the US company Nvidia, and even the part-nationalisation of a space satellite company. As BBC Technology Correspondent Rory Cellan Jones noted: "[T]he vital importance of the semiconductor industry has become clear in recent months, with chips at the centre of a US-China trade war and chip shortages halting production at car plants. There has also been a major shift in the UK's attitude towards industrial policy. After three decades of a laissez-faire approach from both Conservative and Labour governments there's a new willingness to intervene - witness the move to spend taxpayers' money

on a controlling stake in the failing satellite business OneWeb." [4]

Free market unleashed

Such a shift, even though shrouded in justifications of 'national security', would have been inconceivable during the administrations of previous Tory prime ministers Thatcher, Major or Cameron, or under the New Labour government of Tony Blair - who was in his time the most convincing exponent of the creed of economic laissez-faire. Blair's raison d'être for deregulation and privatisation was that unleashing the dynamism of the market would create wealth which the government could then use to expand services such as health and education, services which would supposedly be improved not merely by the extra money invested, but by themselves being marketised and privatised. For a while this did seem to work. But Tony Blair's rhetoric on the question of the state and the economy now appears archaic. Take for example his penultimate

speech as leader to the Labour Party conference, where he gushed about the liberalised market, scolded those who saw a need for the government to protect workers or to manage provision of services, and demanded the breaking down of the 'monolith' of the NHS. This was less than two years before he would hand over the reins of office to his unfortunate successor Gordon Brown, just as the gigantic financial bubble of the deregulated economy was showing signs of bursting. Blair proclaimed in September 2005:

"In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive...The temptation is to use government to try to protect ourselves against the onslaught of globalisation by shutting it out - to think we protect a workforce by regulation, a company by government subsidy, an industry by tariffs. It doesn't work today." He added: "The truth is, command public services today are no more acceptable than a command economy... the NHS reforms, to break down the old monolith, bring in new providers, allow patients choice, must continue." Blair even conjured a universe in which the 'shrinking of the state' transfers power to 'people' rather than big corporations: "Today is not the era of the big state, but a strategic one: empowering, enabling, putting decision making in the hands of people, not government." [5]

Within months of Tony Blair's resignation in late June 2007, it was becoming clear that such rhetoric was as illusory as the supposed value of a sub-prime mortgage collateralised debt obligation.

Corbyn changed the debate

Although the lessons of the crisis of the financial markets and the 'real' economy in the late 2000s were sub-

sequently inverted (temporarily) into an indictment of public spending and a justification for austerity, nevertheless it was that crash, followed by the increasingly evident failures of privatised public services, which fatally damaged the credibility of liberal market dogma. But it took until 2017, with the first of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour general election manifestos, for the public mood to crystallise around a political programme to roll back neoliberalism. The Tory response was to abandon the rhetoric of austerity and the free market, instead promoting the necessity of regulation and promising to uphold workers' rights and protections. As *The Guardian* reported on the Conservative manifesto issued two weeks later:

"Theresa May has promised to ditch right-wing, free-market dogma and return to "true Conservatism", and noted that: "The manifesto drew a line under the legacy of David Cameron and George Osborne with promises for more state involvement in the economy ...Its most striking passage appeared to be a rejection of laissez-faire capitalism: 'We do not believe in untrammelled free markets. We reject the cult of selfish individualism. We abhor social division, injustice, unfairness and inequality.'" [6]

Thus despite being besieged and eventually defeated, the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party opened the door for a significant change of policy direction by the British state. Irrespective of the crass comments lauding greed and capitalism, the crony capitalist contracts, and the struggle within the cabinet between Covid herd immunity and the longer term stability of British capitalism, the Boris Johnson administration has been ideologically freed up to take major non-market economic initiatives where they suit its economic and political interests.

However, the main inducements for that shift away from dogmatic neoliberal globalisation are themselves

global. In the USA, alongside the several trillions of dollars of federal spending proposed by the Biden presidency for economic stimulus and infrastructure, including on roads, railways, the power supply and expansion of broadband access, \$250 billion of government investment has already been agreed, via the US Innovation and Competition Act, for semiconductor production, scientific research, development of artificial intelligence, and space exploration. The aim of the Act is, as remarked in a CNBC report, "to ensure the U.S. remains competitive with China as one of the globe's technological powerhouses" [7]. Most Republican senators also accept that the capitalist market is not going to achieve that aim without massive state involvement and direction, hence the bill was passed with bipartisan support.

Even the EU, while still sticking rigidly to its (anti) state aid regime, which blocks most economic subsidies and state investment, is currently tabling legislation to restrict opportunities for companies based in non-EU countries to invest or acquire contracts within the Single Market, on the basis that such companies could be in receipt of subsidies from their own governments, and thus 'distort the market'. As *Euronews* reported: "The [European] Commission is determined to maintain the bloc's reputation of open space for business but, as non-Western countries grow and increase their purchasing power, it is wary that more and more EU firms will end up falling in the hands of non-EU owners... So-called 'traditional' investors, such as the United States, Switzerland, Norway, Canada, Australia and Japan, still dominate the acquisition market in the European Union, although in recent years, new investors like China and India have deepened their reach... 'While state-owned companies represent only a small proportion of foreign acquisitions, their share in the number of acquisitions and their assets have grown rapidly over

the latest years. Russia, China and the United Arab Emirates stand out in this respect,' the Commission said in a 2019 paper." [8]

Although the new EU legislation has the appearance of being aimed at China, Russia and other 'non traditional' investors, it remains to be seen whether it will be used against US firms which will have benefited from the hundreds of billions of state subsidies which will be disbursed under the Biden presidency.

Panic over China

While the coronavirus pandemic and the need to avoid a catastrophic economic collapse has triggered an intensification of state economic intervention, the recent willingness on the part of Western policymakers to consider measures violating the ideological rules of market liberalism must be seen in the context of two main long term factors.

One is the rise of China. While the People's Republic does not pose the same threat to world capitalism as the USSR and the communist movement did in the mid to late 20th Century, it would be no exaggeration to note that the prospective loss of the USA's (currently still overwhelming) global supremacy, combined with the 'failure' of China to adopt a Western pluralist model of capitalist democracy, or to accept a subordinate role to the US on international issues, or even to move to a fully marketised capitalist economic model has induced a state of strategic panic among Western policymakers. (See 'China's Rise and how the USA got it Wrong' in *The Socialist Correspondent* issue 40 [9])

Indeed, despite the proliferation of billionaires and the big increase in inequality which took place since the onset of market reforms in the 1980s, there has been a reassertion in China of both central economic planning and of the place of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the commanding heights of the

economy. Thus the rise of the China as a global economic player has had a result which was not predicted by Western strategists: the emergence of Chinese SOEs as a significant proportion of the world's largest firms. The Fortune Global 500 (a list of the world's biggest companies) currently includes 117 enterprises based in the People's Republic of China (risen from 47 in 2010). 91 of the top 117 Chinese firms are state-owned, and three of the world's five largest firms are Chinese SOEs. [10] The USA has 121 companies in the Fortune Global 500 (none of them state-owned), down from 141 in 2010. Whatever the alleged drawbacks of state ownership and control, they do not appear to be holding back the advance of these Chinese companies.

The other big factor is the evident long term failure of the liberalised market economy to deliver on its own terms. Although still able to create bubbles and crises, the dynamism and productivity which are supposed to be hallmarks of the capitalist market have been remarkably absent in recent decades. Even before the impact of the mismanaged pandemic, GDP and productivity were in the doldrums of long term stagnation in the developed capitalist economies. In the countries of the Euro area for example, according to a research working paper for the Banque de France, GDP growth averaged 1.09% per year from 2005 to 2019, and productivity per hour worked increased at a mere 0.72% annually, continuing an ongoing decline since the so called economic golden age of the end of World War 2 (WW2) to the mid-1970s.

Even more worrying for adherents of macroeconomics, total factor productivity (regarded as a measure of the efficiency by which inputs, i.e. capital and labour, are utilised) rose by only 0.3% per year from 2005 to 2019, less than half the rate of its increase in the previous period, and a striking fall since



PHOTO BY JEREMY

Volkswagen Kombi

the years 1960 to 1975, when it had averaged 3.28%. The authors of the Banque de France research paper remark that, despite the rise of Information and Communication Technology, digital technologies and the use of robotics: "One paradox has appeared over the last decades: in the developed countries, and whatever their individual development level, we observe at the same time a continuous productivity slowdown... This paradox has not yet received any consensual explanation." [11] But there is an obvious explanation - that the liberalised capitalist economy, contrary to the predictions of the free market gurus, has merely reverted to its usual lacklustre performance in terms of productivity.

How are the rich capitalist countries to deal with this debacle? In his 2020 *Foreign Policy* article, which was co-authored with former US State Department and National Intelligence Council official Jennifer Harris, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan drew an explicit parallel with the Cold War against the USSR: "[T]he emerging great-power competition between the United States and China will ultimately turn on how effectively each country stewards its national economy

and shapes the global economy...As in the past, the United States needs to move beyond the prevailing economic ideology of the past few decades (sometimes imperfectly termed neoliberalism) and rethink how the economy operates...The Cold War yielded a similar story. The U.S. government used a recipe advocated by the British economist John Maynard Keynes to grow its economy in the decades following World War II at a pace that the Soviet economy could not match. This involved a formula of stimulating consumer demand and industrial production through public investment and monetary policies favoring full employment. It happened because a range of voices...made the case that out-competing the Soviets called for discarding the laissez-faire economic philosophies that had dominated in the decades preceding the Great Depression.”

Noting that relying on private sector R&D, which is geared to short-

term profits rather than significant breakthroughs, is a factor in the USA losing ground to China, Sullivan added portentously: “History is again knocking. The growing competition with China and shifts in the international political and economic order should provoke a similar instinct within the contemporary foreign-policy establishment. Today’s national security experts need to move beyond the prevailing neoliberal economic philosophy of the past 40 years.”

Two caveats should be added to these assertions by Jake Sullivan and Jennifer Harris. Firstly, that until the late 1970s the economy of the USSR actually grew at a rate considerably faster than that of the US and Western Europe. However, it was developing from a much lower base, and the trade and technology sanctions imposed on it by the USA, along with the vastly improved performance of Western economies following their abandonment of

laissez-faire, ensured that the Soviet Union was unable to fulfil Khrushchev’s call for it to catch up and surpass the West. Secondly, that in Western Europe and East Asia (ie in capitalist countries which were seen as more likely than the USA to be attracted to communism) the changes in economic policy and structure went far beyond the proposals made by John Maynard Keynes.

Mixed economies

In the early cold war period a state intervention which had a huge and beneficial impact on the development of industry in Western Europe was carried out by the US Government. This was the Marshall Plan Technical Assistance Program, by which mass transfers of industrial technology from the USA were organised and subsidised. Thus rather than protecting their intellectual property rights, the US government arranged for American companies to hand over their knowhow of

Percentage rounded estimates on the extent of state ownership in Western Europe in selected countries, 1978

	Austria	Belgium	France	UK	Italy	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	West Germany
Posts	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Telecoms	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	50	100	100
Electricity	100	25	100	100	75	75	25	0	50	75
Gas	100	0	100	100	100	75	100	75	100	50
Oil production	100	n/a	n/a	25	n/a	n/a	100	n/a	n/a	25
Coal	100	0	100	100	n/a	n/a	50	50	n/a	50
Railways	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Airlines	100	100	75	75	100	75	100	100	50	100
Motor industry	100	0	50	50	25	50	0	0	0	25
Steel	100	50	75	75	75	25	100	50	75	0
Shipbuilding	n/a	0	0	100	75	0	100	75	75	25

Source: James Foreman-Peck and Giovanni Federico, *European Industrial Policy: An Overview*, in: James Foreman Peck and Giovanni Federico (eds.), *Industrial Policy in Europe. A Twentieth Century Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999), p. 442. [12]

Because cut-throat competition was restricted, it was easier for the capitalists to accede to working class struggles and demands for better housing, health, pensions and other benefits.

state-of-the-art technologies and production methods to West European firms. This enabled Western Europe narrow the gap in production technology between it and the USA. A similar programme was put in place for Japan from 1955 onwards. The role of West European states themselves in the development of their countries' economies after WW2 is illustrated by the extent of public ownership. This ranged from Austria, where the entire 'commanding heights' of the productive economy were nationalised, to the German Federal Republic which had a lower proportion of state owned industry. In France and Britain, posts, telecoms, electricity, gas, coal and railways were all state monopolies; by the 1970s most of steel production and air travel were in state ownership, as was around half of the motor industry. In the UK, oil production and shipbuilding were also taken into public hands.

The authors of the WWFforEurope working paper *Industrial Policies in Europe in Historical Perspective* comment that: "In West Germany, officially, the self-regulating free market constituted the common economic order as well as the basis for all industrial policy in the Federal Republic. In fact, industrial policy in Germany was characterized by an ambivalent dual approach just as in most other Western European countries...[D]espite all official statements claiming the opposite, both federal authorities and authorities of the Länder intervened directly in markets and did exert a substantial influence on the development of the industrial sector not at least by means of an active support policy in response to economic crisis or slumps that became apparent since the late 1950s." [12]

Notably, Volkswagen, Germany's flagship car producer, was fully state owned (jointly between the federal government and the state of Lower Saxony) until it was part-privatised in 1960. Even then, a special

law was passed, the Volkswagen Act, to maintain state control of decision making in the company and prevent any large private sector shareholder gaining control. (In 2007, the EU Court of Justice upheld an application by the European Commission to have the Volkswagen Act ruled illegal, on the grounds that the law contravened the principle of the free movement of capital.)

Industrial subsidies were an important feature in all the main West European post-WW2 economies. These should really be understood as a reallocation of revenue from more profitable firms, received via corporation tax (which was levied at much higher rates than now prevail, for example 56% of profits in the case of West Germany) to sectors which were less profitable, but nevertheless considered to be important. These subsidies were provided alongside substantial state spending on industrial research and development. According to the *Industrial Policies in Europe* working paper: "[F]or the years from 1966 to 1970, the financial public support for German industries accounted for an average rate of the federal budget of about 9 per cent, hence still being much lower compared to France or Great Britain. But in 1975, West Germany was spending almost the same proportion on financial industrial support as for example France." The German mining and shipbuilding industries were heavily subsidised, with about 2.44 billion deutschmarks allocated to shipbuilding alone from 1966 to 1975. Significant state aid was also provided to other industries including textiles and clothing, food production, machine engineering, the chemical industry, electrical engineering, the iron and steel industry, and aircraft construction and aeronautics.

In Britain and France, the post-WW2 governments pursued active industrial policies which included promotion of mergers between firms to increase efficiency by means of economies of scale. State sponsored

mergers took place in a range of UK industries including motors, electronics, textiles, shipbuilding and aircraft. At the time, these West European economies were referred to as mixed economies, implying a mixture between elements of a capitalist market economy and a socialist planned economy. Where it operated, that model produced results which have not been seen before or since. West European GDP growth per capita, which had hovered around 1% between 1870 and 1950, increased to an average of over 3.6% in the 1950-73 period, before falling back to around 1.8% from 1973 to 2000 [13]. As noted above, it is now running at below 1%.

There were also other major differences with what came before or since, a key one being that, in this state-led, 'mixed-economy' capitalism, the rises in productivity were translated into big improvements in living conditions and incomes for the majority of people, rather than finding their way only into corporate profits, asset price rises, and ballooning wealth for a tiny minority. Because cut-throat competition was restricted, it was easier for the capitalists to accede to working class struggles and demands for better housing, health, pensions and other benefits. Very low levels of unemployment and high levels of trade union organisation led to increased wages and further expectations of continual improvements in social provision. In Western Europe, Japan and even in the USA, the gap between the rich and the poor narrowed. These advances were made despite the European capitalist powers being shorn of their Third World colonies in this period.

During the Cold War, this was hugely to the political benefit of the capitalist powers in their all-important fight against communism. By the 1960s and '70s, it was becoming much more difficult for communists in the West to argue that the workers had nothing to lose but their chains. The Japanese, French, Italian and Spanish Communist Par-

ties, while still enjoying huge support among the working class, were abandoning their alignment with the USSR, and had replaced their advocacy of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism with programmes of gradual reforms in the direction of socialism. Though still a very real problem in the Third World, the sharp edge of the threat of revolutionary overthrow of the system in the advanced capitalist countries was blunted. Under the burden of rising military expenditure, and held back by the US-imposed Co-Com sanctions which restricted imports of technology, the previously very rapidly growing Soviet economy began to slow down, making the enemy less fearsome.

But that stunning success of this post-WW2 Western 'golden age' carried with it very significant costs and increasing dangers. Much of the increased prosperity of the masses was accompanied by high progressive taxation on the very rich and a relative reduction in business profits – the real *raison d'être* of the capitalist system. Increasing trade union power, and with it the struggles for further rises in wages and social provision, coupled with demands for further nationalisations and more state planning, were hard to oppose within the framework of the social-democratic 'mixed economy'. Internationally, Third World countries were combining to improve their terms of trade with the West by collectively increasing commodity prices, and within the advanced capitalist economies, the relative positions of the USA and Britain were slipping against continental Western Europe and Japan.

Too little, too late

So the advent of Reagan and Thatcher, and the pro-market counter-revolution which they instigated, had nothing to do with increasing overall growth and prosperity. It had a lot to do with closing off the ideological and practical possibilities for left-reformist encroachments towards

socialism. And it had much to do with placing corporate profits and the enrichment of the wealthy back at the centre of economic and political priorities. And now, four decades later, we re-enter a world where Western strategists worry that the supremacy of US capitalism and its rich country allies will be challenged. For the very reason which led to the abandonment of the post-WW2 mixed economy, the measures proposed in response by even the most perceptive of these strategists, such as Jake Sullivan, and for all the new trillions of stimulus and subsidy in the USA, are merely a faint echo of the major structural changes made by the West in the early Cold War period. Even those measures come with dangers to capitalism, of which the working class movement should take full advantage. But so far they are much too little and, very possibly, they will also be too late.

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- [1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-to-acquire-sheffield-forgemasters-international-limited>
 - [2] <https://time.com/5956255/free-market-is-dead/>
 - [3] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/07/america-needs-a-new-economic-philosophy-foreign-policy-experts-can-help/>
 - [4] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56804007>
 - [5] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/27/labourconference.speeches>
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 - [8] <https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/05/brussels-moves-to-control-takeovers-of-eu-companies-by-foreign-governments>
 - [9] <http://www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk/articles/chinas-rise-and-how-the-usa-got-it-wrong/>
 - [10] <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-14/Explainer-Why-China-has-so-many-state-owned-enterprises-115vt8ntcZ2/index.html>
 - [11] https://publications.banque-france.fr/sites/default/files/medias/documents/wp783_0.pdf
 - [12] https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/125670/1/WWWforEurope_WPS_no015_MS66.pdf
 - [13] https://ifs.org.uk/conferences/bob_gordon.pdf

I'LL BE WATCHING YOU

surveillance of homeworkers

by Simon Korner

If you're a capitalist, how do you harass your employees when they're working from home? One answer: Microsoft's "long-awaited new webcam" (The Verge, 13 April 2021). Just as Amazon uses Time-Off-Task digital surveillance in its warehouses to measure productivity to the second – and punishes anyone falling behind – webcam surveillance is bringing the same pressures to home-working.

Bosses spy in your home

The surveillance system gives the employer access to live footage of each employee's home workstation. This is "optional" – except that it's not. An internal memo from the world's biggest call centre company, Teleperformance, which is rolling out the system, says employees must allow random, mandatory spot checks. That means every worker has to switch on the webcam whenever they log in or out. The system makes sure workers aren't eating on the job or leaving their desks for any reason. Whenever the Artificial Intelligence (AI) system's scan detects "breaches of work rules during a shift", it forwards a still image of the infraction to management. Even the shortest period of time without mouse-clicks or keyboard strokes is regarded as idleness. Workers going to the toilet or getting up to fetch a drink of water must use the app to enter "break mode" to avoid punishment.

Teleperformance will spy on the other people who share an employee's workspace – partner, kids, flatmates – ostensibly to ensure that confidentiality is not breached.

The cameras will also be set up with facial recognition so they can detect if someone else is sitting at the desk. One worker at Teleperformance's centre in Airdrie near Glasgow says: "I don't want my boss looking into my home but I need my job so I can't possibly say no. These are Big Brother tactics and frightening. We have no idea what security there is to protect us if the people monitoring us abuse their power. We don't even know if this technology can be hacked." Craig Anderson, Communications Workers Union Scottish regional secretary, says: "The call centre industry has always been an industry where targets and monitoring have been some of the highest in any sector and I think now companies are pushing a boundary, and it's a moral boundary, that's too far." As permanent home-working becomes more widespread and companies such as Teleperformance close their physical sites to save money – Teleperformance is closing its Airdrie site later this year – domestic snooping is set to become the norm. 80% of Teleperformance's British workers currently work from home (Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser, 12 April 2021).

French-owned Teleperformance has been one of the most successful "pandemic profiteers," with Covid bringing a massive shift of transactions to call centres. It operates across 34 countries and employs 380,000 worldwide. In Britain it employs 10,000 people. Clients include the RAF, the Royal Navy, the health and education departments, NHS Digital, the Student Loans Company, alongside its work for Vodafone, eBay, Aviva, Volkswagen and the Guardian. Many other companies,

particularly the bigger ones, have also begun using home surveillance. Accounting giant PwC uses facial recognition to make sure homeworkers are at their computer screens, though PwC claims this is for security, as financial institutions must comply with strict regulations.

David Heinemeier Hansson, co-founder of Basecamp, which provides a supervision software platform for businesses, says he regularly has to turn down requests from companies for new methods of spying on their employees. "There is a depressing amount of demand," he says. Silkie Carlo, director of Big Brother Watch, believes the trend towards home surveillance is a logical extension of surveillance in the workplace. But it is "more worrying," she says, because "home still remains a private space". Howard Beckett, assistant general secretary of Unite, promises that the union will "fight legally and industrially to prevent any push to normalise home surveillance".

Surveillance – both in work and in the home – is a huge growth area. By 2025, it will be a \$1.87 billion industry, according to San Francisco's Grand Review Research. Time and motion is entering the digital age. The next step will be microchips implanted under the skin. One Swedish co-working space called Epicenter has been holding "chipping parties", where people can have RFID-enabled (radio frequency ID) rice-sized microchips implanted in their hands. They then use the implants to access electronically controlled doors, for example, or else for social contacts. Embedded chips are only a step along the road from ID cards

and biometrics, says Professor Jeffrey Stanton, of the University of Syracuse, who researches work-related stress. He says that if such schemes are optional, many people will go for them for convenience. But what does optional mean? If your job depends on having an implant, you have no real choice.

Such surveillance is perfectly legal, according to employment lawyer Max Winthrop, so long as the firm is transparent about what it's doing, and it's in the worker's contract. Acas says employers must tell staff if they're being tracked, because "workers are entitled to privacy at work". But knowing about it doesn't change the fact you are being spied on. The most it does is give unionised workplaces a chance to bargain over the extent of the surveillance.

Increasing exploitation

Surveillance is about speeding up work and extending the working day – two methods by which capitalists can increase surplus value. The Daily Mail (3 Feb 2021) points out that people working

from home put in 10 hours extra each week compared to when they are in the office, according to NordVPN Teams, a company that provides digital network services to businesses. That amounts to an increase in worktime of 25%. Many home-workers regularly work till 8pm. Surveillance will put them under further pressure.

Struggles around the length of the working day were one of workers' first demands as capitalism developed. When opposition grew to the point of pressing the capitalist state to enact laws limiting the working day, the capitalists turned to increasing the intensity of labour, usually by speeding up the machinery so the worker produced more value in the same hours worked. Digital surveillance is a modern method of squeezing maximum labour out of workers – no matter how deleterious the effects on health and sanity; and capitalists have little incentive to maintain their workers' well-being, particularly in periods of high unemployment when they can easily find replacement labour.

Just as during earlier industrialisation, nothing will stop the relentless onslaught for profits except resistance from organised labour, class struggle. That means trade unions developing new forms of organisation in an age when the workforce is increasingly atomised and under close electronic watch. It also means mass campaigning on the political front for legal protection from the digital overseers. Michael Ford QC, quoted in the 2018 TUC report on surveillance I'll be watching you, said: "Surveillance is almost as old as work itself, but new techniques represent a growing threat of a different kind to workers and unions." Workers must find new ways to defend themselves against new threats. But defensive strategies can never be enough. The fundamental problem is wage-slavery, and to end that socialism is required.

Surveillance is about speeding up work and extending the working day – two methods by which capitalists can increase surplus value.

Microsoft Lifecam



PHOTO BY ASIM 18

CORONAVIRUS

OVER 4 MILLION DEAD

by Milly Cunningham

On 30 July 2021 at 10.40 GMT, the Coronavirus Worldometer recorded that there had been 197,481,251 cases of Covid 19 world-wide, 4,217,762 deaths and 178,614,428 people had recovered.

In early July, World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that variants like Delta are 'currently winning the race against vaccines', pinning the blame on a lack of equitable vaccine production and distribution. During his biweekly conference in Geneva, he added that passing the four millionth recorded death worldwide from Covid-19 was a 'tragic milestone' which 'likely underestimates the overall toll'. He warned that far too many countries are seeing 'sharp spikes in cases and hospitalisation' while rich nations with high inoculation rates were dropping public health measures 'as though the pandemic is already over'. He condemned 'vaccine nationalism' where a handful of

nations have taken the lion's share as 'morally indefensible' and an ineffective public health strategy. The Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, Dr Mike Ryan, told journalists, 'Making assumptions that transmission is not going to increase because of vaccines is a false assumption. Transmission will increase when you open up because we don't have vaccines [for all], and we are still not sure to what extent vaccination protects against the ability to be infected or have onward transmission.' WHO Covid technical lead, epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove, said the Delta variant had now been detected in 104 countries, the Alpha variant in 173,

the Beta in 122, and the Gamma variant in 74. [1]

The Our World in Data project calculates that as of 29 June, just over 23% of the world's population had had their first vaccine shot. But in low income countries only 0.9% of the population had received at least one dose of the vaccine. Ghebreyesus has described it as 'vaccine apartheid'. [2]

The United Kingdom

As can be seen in the figures in the table accompanying this article the UK has very high levels of infection and deaths due to coronavirus. As of 24 July, 55.9% of the UK population was fully vaccinated. In July a

CORONAVIRUS DATA FROM WORLDMETER 29 JULY 2021

COUNTRY	POPULATION	DEATHS PER MILLION	CASES PER MILLION	DEATHS THAT DAY	NEW CASES THAT DAY
UNITED KINGDOM	68,269,157	1,897	84,981	85	31,117
USA	333,087,850	1,887	106,831	398	92,485
JAPAN	126,059,864	120	7,076	8	9,305
CHINA	1,439,323,776	3	64	0	49
CUBA	11,319,180	232	32,422	68	8,607
VIETNAM	98,278,872	9	1,307	233	7,594
HAITI*	11,551,663	48	1,741	7	39

*These figures are likely to be significantly under-reported due to the political and social turmoil in Haiti

group of 122 scientists and doctors signed a letter to the Lancet urging the UK government not to reopen in England from 19 July, but to delay until everyone, including adolescents, had been offered vaccination and until mitigation measures such as adequate ventilation and spacing were in place in schools. [3] Experts said that opening up would allow the Delta variant and any new strains to spread rapidly round the globe due to the country's role as an international travel hub. At a virtual event public health adviser to New Zealand's government Professor Michael Baker said, 'You're not following even basic public health principles here.' New Zealand had recorded fewer than 3,000 cases and only 26 deaths. [4]

Now that the variants have been renamed according to letters of the Greek alphabet, it is easy to forget that the Alpha variant, renamed by the World Health Organisation on 31 May 2021, was originally called the UK variant in many countries – in the UK named the Kent variant. It was detected in November 2020 from a sample taken in September 2020 in the UK. It began to spread quickly by mid-December, around the same time as infections surged. As well as resulting in thousands of deaths in the UK in the early part of 2021, it was the gift to the world resulting from the negligence of the British government in its failure to take the necessary actions to contain Covid-19.

The USA

Like the UK, the USA has experienced high levels of infections and deaths (see table). Telesur on 27 July reported: 'Covid-19 cases are on the rise in nearly 90% of US jurisdictions, with outbreaks in parts of the country that have low vaccination coverage, said the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in its latest weekly report.' About 48.8% of the US population was fully vaccinated and 56.4% of the population had received at least one shot as

of July 22. Vaccination resistance is blamed for these relatively low figures in one of the few countries with enough vaccines at its disposal to protect every resident. [5]

Japan

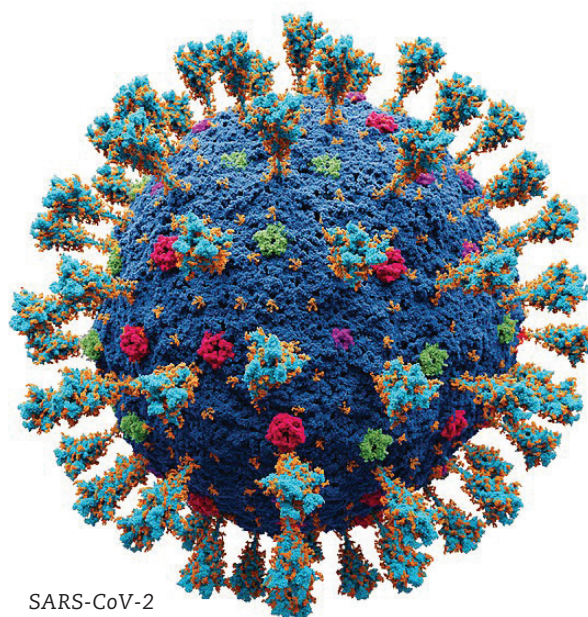
Japan was at the forefront of the world's attention as the 2020 Olympics finally took place in Tokyo. The head of the Japan Doctors Union, Dr Naoto Ueyana, warned in advance that the Games would bring to-

gether in Tokyo 'all of the different mutant strains of the virus which exist in different places', risking the appearance of a new 'Olympic' strain. [6] Up till now Japan has experienced relatively lower levels of deaths and infections (see table). In Tokyo a state of emergency was declared from 12 July to 22 August, covering the period of the Games. The main focus was a request for bars, restaurants and karaoke parlours serving alcohol to close, and for people to watch the Games at home – spectators are barred in any case. Only 15% of Japanese people are fully vaccinated. [7]

China

China's heroic and successful effort to contain Covid 19 in Wuhan in the early months of 2020 is now well

known. As a result infection rates and deaths have been tiny compared to other countries (see table). On 17 July *China Daily* reported that China would provide another \$3 billion in international aid over the next three years to support the Covid 19 response and economic and social recovery in other developing countries, as announced by President Xi Jinping in a speech delivered via video link at the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Informal Economic Leaders' Retreat. China



SARS-CoV-2

also declared that it supported waiving intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines; it has provided over 500 million doses of vaccine to other developing nations. [8]

Cuba

Cuba too has done a good job of controlling the virus, though of late rates have gone up (see table). It has developed five candidate vaccines. The Cuban government plans to vaccinate three-quarters of the population by September. By early July, 2.23 million vaccines had been administered. The US blockade has affected Cuba's ability to get the means to produce and administer the vaccines at the rate they want. Syringe manufacturers are connected in some way to the US pharmaceutical industry. (2) In response, six

PHOTO BY ALEXEY SOLODOVNIKOV

million syringes are being shipped from the US to Cuba, a gift from the US people, bought with fundraising efforts. The first shipment arrived on July 17 at Mariel port in Havana, the Cuban capital. [9]

Vietnam

Vietnam has been outstandingly successful in combating the virus (see table), but they are being stretched by the latest wave. WHO also reported in July that 'due to global supply constraints, the vaccination rates are still low at about 4% of the population vaccinated to date and the number of infections rising sharply in the last few weeks.' It also reported the country's target of vaccinating more than 70% of the population by the end of the first quarter of 2022. [10]

...far too many countries are seeing 'sharp spikes in cases and hospitalisation' while rich nations with high inoculation rates were dropping public health measures 'as though the pandemic is already over'.

In the meantime Vietnam, as it has from the start, is combatting the virus with stringent public health measures. Regular reports have appeared in *Vietnam News*. On 8 July we could read that Ho Chi Minh City would go into lockdown for 15 days from midnight that day, following Government Directive 16. Measures included: only leaving home to buy necessities, and keeping 2 metres distance if you have to; for factory workers, ensuring safe distance, wearing a face mask, and washing and sanitising hands. All non-essential services and businesses were closed, public transport stopped, food delivery services suspended with the authorities saying they would arrange food supply. On 19 July it was reported that two new field hospitals were being built

in the city, expected to open in late July and August, catering for up to 6,000 patients. The 22 July report described how Ho Chi Minh City Resuscitation Hospital, full capacity 1000 intensive care beds, was working round the clock 'to ensure that those who are seriously ill make a full recovery and keep the fatalities figures as low as possible'. 340 doctors, 1050 nurses, and 500 support staff included skilled doctors sent from the three big hospitals in the city. The hospital was dealing with all severe and critical cases in the south.

On 13 July Vietnam News reported that, as Covid-19 cases reached record highs in Ho Chi Minh City, the authorities in Hanoi were taking no chances, and insisting that everyone who travelled to the capital from the southern hub would

be tracked, tested and if necessary quarantined. Barbershops and dine-in restaurants were closed but deliveries were still available. On 14 July we learned that from midnight on 13 July, people going into Hanoi from other areas would need to present necessary documents and undergo virus prevention procedures at 22 checkpoints set up round the edge of the city. On 24 July Hanoi entered a 15-day social distancing period, and all delivery services were halted by the city's transport department. On 26 July the Army's Chemical Brigade sprayed disinfectant around the capital city making sure to get 'into every nook and cranny in some of the smaller streets around the Old Quarter' with staff already having experience of spraying many times.

Good luck and best wishes Vietnam in your heroic efforts!

Haiti

Finally, in this small selection, Haiti. Although it appears to have relatively small numbers of infections and deaths, this could well be a case of deaths being under reported due to the political and social turmoil in the country. The WHO reports that on 14 July, Haiti received 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines donated by the US government through the COVAX facility. Dr Marie Greta Roy Clement, Haiti's Minister of Public Health and Population, said, "This first allocation of vaccines puts an end to a long period of waiting not only for the Haitian population but also for the people of the region who were very concerned that Haiti was the only country in the Americas that had not yet introduced the Covid-19 vaccine." WHO reports that only about 14% of the total population in the Caribbean and Latin America have completed their vaccination schedule, and some countries have not yet been able to vaccinate more than 1% of their population. (10)

Vaccine apartheid indeed.

[1] Covid variants 'winning the race against vaccines' warns WHO chief, *United Nations News*, 7/7/21.

[2] *Tricontinental*, Vijay Prashad, 1/7/21.

[3] Covid-19: Ending all restrictions in England on 19 July 'dangerous and premature' say experts, *British Medical Journal*, 9/7/21.

[4] A threat to the whole world, *Morning Star*, 16/7/21.

[5] Delta Variant and Misinformation Fuel Covid-19 Surge in the US, *Telesur*, 27/7/21.

[6] Covid's 'Olympic' Strain Feared During Summer Tokyo Games, *Telesur*, 27/5/21.

[7] Japan declares state of emergency in Tokyo through Olympics due to Covid-19 surge, *ESPN*, 8/7/21.

[8] Xi unveils \$3 billion global aid package, Xu Wei, *China Daily*, 17/7/21.

[9] Cuba Thanks US Citizens for Sending Six Million Syringes, *Telesur*, 22/7/21.

[10] World Health Organisation – *Weekly Operational Update on Covid-19*, 20/7/21.

SOUTH AMERICA

POPULAR STRUGGLE

WINS VICTORIES



by Dan Morgan, Chile

South America is big, but with only 440 million people – 5.5% of the world total – it is sparsely populated. With an average of 25 people per square kilometre it's like the Scottish Highlands. There is a lot of land to covet, much of it productive agriculturally – plus the Amazon rain forest. Most of the countries are at a medium level of development with GDP per capita measured by purchasing power ranging from \$26,000 US dollars (Chile) to \$12,000 (Ecuador) but Bolivia is still poor at about \$7,500. Despite the wealth generated, inequality is very high.

Imperialist colonisation

North America was colonised by Protestant farmers, leading naturally to capitalist development – apart from the little local difficulty of the US civil war. From 1500, South America was colonised by Catholic Spain and Portugal (apart from Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana). With a feudal mindset, they became *Latifundistas*, landowners of huge estates with little interest in technological progress. After the first genocides of the conquest and the diseases brought from Europe they wanted to exploit the indigenous peoples, keeping them in conditions of misery. When these were insufficient for the more productive plantations of coffee, sugar or cotton, slaves were brought from Africa. Brazil, for example, abolished slavery only in 1888, and racism is deeply rooted. The resulting racial division of the working class has greatly weakened its power. After winning independence from Spain (Portugal in the case of Brazil) the

ruling elites soon became dependent on Britain for finance and all types of meagre development. Lenin gives Argentina as an example of semi-colonial dependence on Britain, in his book *Imperialism, the highest stage of Capitalism*. After World War I British imperialism was progressively replaced by US imperialism.

The Cuban Revolution had a big effect. Scared of its good example, the USA promoted reformist measures with lavish aid. When these went too far for its comfort, it promoted military rule instead. Notable coups d'état followed: Brazil (1964), Argentina (1966 and '76), Bolivia (1971), Uruguay (1973), and Chile (1973). Once revolutionary movements had been crushed, and with the weakening of socialism worldwide, civilian rule returned but with neoliberalism in force. Neoliberal policies meant increased exploitation, greater inequality, privatised or destroyed industries, reduced social benefits and more poverty. Inevitably resistance grew. The first electoral victory was by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. His army background, and popular support has meant that the Bolivarian revolution he started has resisted all types of opposition, despite brutal sanctions imposed by the USA.

This was followed by other governments seeking economic independence from imperialism, and developing South American integration through UNASUR. By 2010 we had Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina in this movement – the 'Pink Wave'. Another notable political advance was the creation of ALBA-TCP (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples

of Our America – Peoples' Trade Treaty). This now includes Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, six English speaking Caribbean island states, and Surinam (formerly Dutch Guiana). There is also CELAC (The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), without North America, as an alternative to the Organisation of American States which too often has been used as a tool of US domination.

All of the Pink Tide governments apart from Venezuela have suffered defeats by various means, taking advantage of the fall in raw material prices and consequent economic problems. A particular tactic is the use of "lawfare" – warfare by judicial means. The judiciary is one of the institutions of state power, and in capitalist countries will protect capitalism, and is usually pro-imperialist. Legal attacks on anti-imperialist politicians have been most notable in Brazil – where Lula da Silva was in prison, prevented from standing against Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Now all charges against him have been dropped. Rafael Correa, former President of Ecuador, was similarly prevented from standing in the last elections and his former Vice-President, Jorge Glas, is in prison on probably trumped-up charges of corruption (and if not totally trumped-up, obviously selectively applied).

But now, as neoliberal policies so obviously fail to solve people's

problems, there is a new wave of anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal movements.

Chile

Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government's strategy of moving to socialism was brutally cut short in 1973 by the US backed military coup. When the danger had passed, neoliberal rule with a democratic face was restored in 1990. With a stable, protected democracy foreign investment in new copper mines flowed in. Now 70% of production is in private hands, with only 30% owned by Codelco, the national company, although this provides more to the public purse than do the private mines. What was not privatised under the dictatorship was privatised after. Most productive industry was killed by the dictatorship. Now most sectors are dominated by an oligopoly of 2 or 3 companies: supermarkets, pharmacies, electricity, gas, forestry, chicken production etc. And they all collude to fix prices. At times they are caught out and derisory fines are imposed. So people are exploited as workers, and again as consumers. The state has been downsized – taxes are now just 21%

of GDP, compared with the OECD average of 34%.

The health sector has a poorly funded public service with very long waiting lists for operations, and an expensive private sector which 18% of the population pays for. Pensions are individual and contributory – no employers or state contributions, so pensions are abysmal. Higher education is expensive, even for state universities. Loans leave students with massive debts. School education is highly socially segregated as it has a subsidised private sector which parents also contribute to. This means that in most areas only the poorest go to municipal schools. Apart from these abuses, a multi-million dollar robbery by police and army generals from the 'reserved expenses' was recently revealed. This, on top of the fact that those institutions have their own excellent pension schemes – enjoyed even by those convicted of murder and torture. The few military prisoners have their own comfortable 'five star' prison.

A key factor in the outburst of anger seen now is the political system. All the parties that have been in government since 1990 have been

financed by big business – even Allende's Socialist Party, to its shame, was financed by Pinochet's former son-in-law, who was virtually given the company which owned all the nitrate mines, and most of the lithium. So the centre-left parties who managed the neoliberal system, along with the right-wing pro-fascist parties, are of course held in contempt. Discontent grew from 1990 onwards. Mass marches against the pension system, the education system, by the women's movement, changed nothing. Not until President Michelle Bachelet's second government (2014 -18) were there any real changes. She was elected with a programme of reforms, communists were included in the coalition for the first time, but rapidly the major reforms were forgotten under pressure from the right wing of the Christian Democrats. Disillusion set in. The feeling of alienation from the political system was general - anarchist and anarchistic opinions are strong, especially in the youth.

So the right wing Piñera was elected President again in 2018. In October 2019 he said Chile was "an oasis of peace" in a troubled continent. Only a week later, all hell broke loose.



Presidents Hugo Chavez, Néstor Kirchner and Lula da Silva in 2006

PHOTO BY RICARDO STUCKERT

...the example of Cuba shows that only real control by working class organisations of the armed forces, judiciary, mass media and other state bodies, as well as parliaments, can ensure real independence from imperialism and permanent social advance.

A 30 peso (4%) tube fare increase led to school students jumping turnstiles, and then huge marches. Tube stations were burned, some by anarchists, some reportedly by police. Supermarkets were looted and burned. The police started to fire tear gas grenades and rubber-coated steel bullets at the faces of demonstrators. Dozens of people lost the sight of one eye, and two were totally blinded. Mass marches every Friday became routine. They soon grew to over a million and a half in the capital Santiago, 20% of the population. By November the ruling class was in a sort of panic, and on the 15th all the old parties, plus Gabriel Boric of the newish Broad Front (Frente Amplio) agreed that there should be a referendum about writing a new constitution. The TV was also showing demonstrators, and many left wing politicians – this lasted only a short time. Even small towns had marches. In Villarrica, 50 thousand population,

4 thousand marched in this most right wing area: health workers, teachers and other education workers, parking ticket workers, builders from the site of the new hospital, the women's movement which is strong here, and everyone who wants to see a new political system. The 'front line' in Santiago held off the police from the marches with shields, stones and sometimes Molotov cocktails and medical brigades were organised. There are still hundreds of people in preventive detention awaiting trial, and demonstrations now call for their release.

These mass protests led to a movement and last October we voted by 78% for a new constitution, to be written by a wholly elected convention. Turnout was 50%, normal for our as yet non-participatory democracy. After more public pressure on Congress, gender parity was added to the proposal, plus reserved seats for ethnic minorities, and space for independents to stand. Two national, and several regional lists for independents were the result, in a wholly new development for Chile. The Constitutional Convention was elected in May. The previously strong right wing was reduced to 24% of the seats. The rules stipulate that anything agreed must have a two-thirds majority, so the right wing does not even have a blocking third. The left wing – Communists, Broad Front, Ecologists and others – won 18%, the very anti-neoliberal People's List 17%, the centre-left 16% and other independents 14%. The 10 ethnic minorities have 11%, 17 seats. Of these 2 are Aymara from the Andes, 8 from small ethnic groups, and 7 are Mapuche, the really large ethnic minority.

The convention elected as president a Mapuche woman, Elisa Loncón, who grew up in poverty, getting an education with great difficulty. This was a notable indication of the desire for a real change in political culture. The members are mainly young, professional or technical workers. Several lawyers or law

students of course, plus teachers and health workers. Only one identified as a manual worker, which speaks of the weakness of the trade unions, which are divided and suppressed in the private sector. The convention began to meet with no computers or communication equipment – the government wants it to fail, and may well campaign to reject the constitution it proposes.

The May mega-election also made big changes in municipalities: the right wing lost many important ones in Santiago and other cities to Broad Front and Communists. Only one Regional Governor is a government supporter, although most are centre-left rather than left wing. Eyes are now on the elections for President and Congress in November. For the left, Gabriel Boric of the Broad Front beat Daniel Jadue, the communist in a primary. Anti-communism is still strong, although Jadue attracted support across a wide section of politics. Boric is more inclined to negotiate with the establishment, and so many on the left are a bit doubtful about him, but the agreement to support the winner of the primary has to be kept. Boric certainly got some centre-left and even right wing votes – one of the problems of open primaries.

As the convention indicated its support for the recognition of and rights of the Mapuche minority, the low-level war by Mapuche organisations intent on recovering territory, especially from the monopolist forestry companies has stepped up. Forestry machinery and lorries are burnt almost daily. A genocidal war 140 years ago in the region that was their homeland, left them with half a million hectares of land out of a total of 10 million. Then more was taken by further violence and fraud. The Allende government restored over 150,000 hectares of this robbery but those were again stolen in the dictatorship. It is these lands that are principally being fought for now. So the region is being militarised, with murder and repression.

We are a long way from very radical change – the judiciary and armed forces are key elements of the present system. The social forces for change are huge but politically wet behind the ears. A serious learning process will be necessary, especially for the anarchistic, anti-party independents. The trade union movement, although weak in the private sector apart from copper mining, will need to be deeply involved. As organisation and political education develop new possibilities will open up. The desire for change exists – unity above all is needed to make it a reality.

Peru

Peru had a revolutionary government from 1968 to 1975 – a military one of General Velasco Alvarado. After a coup against him most progress was reversed but his agrarian reform ended the centuries-old latifundio system. The Andean indigenous peoples keep their community spirit and the Maoist Shining Path guerilla movement gained a lot of support there in the 1980s, but provoked fear in the rest of the country. Its suppression by Alberto Fujimori in the '90s, who was elected but then imposed a dictatorship, explains much of his support. He is now in prison for corruption (most subsequent presidents have also been charged with corruption) and has handed on the baton to his daughter Keiko, also now charged with corruption. So the election in June was between this extreme right winger, Keiko Fujimori, and Pedro Castillo, cast as an extreme left winger. Castillo is a rural primary teacher, son of poor farmers, and a *Rondero* leader. This movement consists of community vigilance committees, who also have informal judicial functions. As President, Castillo wants to extend this system from rural areas to the whole country, and provide them with logistical and other support, to fight crime. He is from the far north of the country, and is notable for leading a teachers' strike in 2017.

Free Peru (*Peru Libre*) is Castillo's fairly new party. It was also formed in a rural region, and describes itself as Marxist-Leninist-Mariateguist: the last name is that of Jose Carlos Mariategui, a Peruvian Marxist. He identified the latifundio system as being responsible for Peru's lack of development, and also said the strong community spirit in the Andes stemmed from the Inca empire and that despite the taxes levied, the basis of it was agrarian communism. So the campaign of terror unleashed against Castillo and his party was terrific. Thanks to votes for him of 85% or more in several Andean regions, he won by just 44,000 votes. Without a majority in Congress, he will have a hard time to transform society as he wants.

His inauguration speech presented a moderate but very progressive programme. A single, universal health system is promised, including quality regional hospitals which do not exist at the moment. Many new social benefits, recognition and use of indigenous languages, promoting science and ending deforestation in the Amazon basin. The luxurious presidential palace will be turned into a cultural history museum, and the Ministry of Culture will be re-named Ministry of Cultures. He does not have the strength to take over transnationals operating in the country but will try to tax them properly, monitor and control them. A major plank of his programme was to change the constitution, to end the neoliberal blocks in it. Clever tactics will be needed to get approval for a Constituent Assembly to undertake this, and he will need to arouse pressure from the masses.

Colombia

Colombia has a long history of violence, virtually since 1948, so the peace negotiations with the FARC guerrillas, under President Santos were historic. This process has been systematically sabotaged by his successor Ivan Duque. The other guerrilla organisation, the



PHOTO BY CASA ROSADA

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo

ELN, wants a peace process but this has been denied them. Duque is a protégé of former president Alvaro Uribe who has a long history of cooperation with drug traffickers and is still active in the shadows. In the last part of the dirty war against the FARC it is now admitted that there were at least 6,400 'false positives' in 10 years – unarmed, usually poor civilians killed by the army to inflate the numbers of guerrilla fighters killed.

Since Duque's election in 2018 the murders of social activists have continued – trade unionists, environmentalists, indigenous leaders and journalists. Even with all these issues, mass protests against neoliberal policies have not erupted – until recently. In October 2019 protests forced the withdrawal of pension reforms. A national strike began in May, against very regressive tax reforms. Really massive protests in the major cities were repressed using the same methods as in Chile. At least 37 unarmed protesters have been killed and many injured. Sexual violence has been used by the police, and 87 people are reported to have disap-

peared. The website *Declassified UK* has revealed that “...as the police killed dozens of protesters in May, a UK military team was in the country advising them in a secret programme. It’s highly unusual for the British military to train another country’s police force.” [1]

Resistance is developing, to oppose neoliberalism and force real political change.

Bolivia

The best news is the return of MAS (Movement towards Socialism) to government. Evo Morales stood for a fourth term in 2019, a mistake in my view because he lost the referendum called to allow him to do that. Any candidate endorsed by him would have won, but the bad feeling he caused made the result a close one. The Organisation of American States (OAS) observers alleged fraud, without any evidence, and that gave the opportunity for the military leaders to force Evo to resign.

As could be expected, the reactionary policies of the resulting government were disastrous, but Jeanine Añez, the de facto president, was reluctant to call elections, using the pandemic as an excuse. Finally, up to 130 roads were blocked to force the elections, and in October 2020 the MAS candidate Luis Arce was elected with 55%. MAS got similar votes for Deputies and Senators. The new government is, if anything, better politically than Evo’s, and has charged 10 military leaders of the coup – 8 are in prison or house arrest, and 2 fled the country. Añez is also in prison. Hopefully, that will discourage future coup attempts.

Industrialisation, to overcome the extractivist, dependent economy, is again on the agenda. Bolivia has probably the biggest world reserves of lithium, and small lithium batteries are now being produced there. The future of car battery production is uncertain – before the coup there

was a joint venture with a German company. There is a urea fertiliser factory, based on the huge natural gas resources, and a steel industry is planned for the first time.

Ecuador

I mentioned the ‘lawfare’ used against Rafael Correa and Jorge Glas above. Correa was succeeded by a member of the same party, Lenin Moreno, who turned out to be a total traitor, reversing what he could of the anti-imperialist, developmental policies of Correa. There was a popular uprising in 2019 against this treacherous government, sparked by a deal with the IMF. The indigenous movement was very strong, and the government eventually negotiated with them publicly, on television. This uprising, by the way, was just before the social explosion in Chile, and helped to inspire it.

There were general elections in 2021 – and the mass media reported that a right wing candidate won with 52% vote. That’s only a half truth, in fact 18% gave a blank or spoilt vote. So Lasso, the winner, got just 43% of the total vote, and Arauz, the Correa supporter, got 39%. Yaku Perez, a lawyer who is leader of the biggest indigenous party, called for the spoiling of the ballot papers. He says he wants no mining, and only limited oil extraction, but he also called for a vote for the pro-imperialist, neoliberal Lasso at the last election, as did his running mate this time. His call to abstain clearly favoured Lasso. So his real intentions are dubious.

Argentina

The confusing political movement that is Peronism produced a real surprise in Nestor Kirchner, one of the architects of the anti-imperialist movement for Latin American integration from 2001. His wife Cristina Fernandez continued his work but economic problems led to the election of the neoliberal Macri in 2015.

Total economic disaster ensued, and Cristina’s ally Alberto Fernandez was elected in 2019, with Cristina as Vice-President. He continues to promote regional integration. Macri left Fernandez with enormous debts, so economically he is hard-pressed. Argentina was the most industrially developed in South America but neoliberal policies in the 1990s destroyed much of this.

Brazil

Now that all legal charges against him have been dropped, it seems likely that Lula da Silva will be elected president again. He says he has learnt some lessons from his previous period, when he made no effort to reform the country’s corrupt political system. The growing movement against neofascist Jair Bolsonaro will help movement in that direction, and more radical economic policies. Brazil was never neoliberal. It still has a lot of industry, which has some protection and an industrial development fund. It has a high tax take for the region of 33% of GDP.

Permanent change

Pink tides advance and recede, and we hope they progress with each movement. But the example of Cuba shows that only real control by working class organisations of the armed forces, judiciary, mass media and other state bodies, as well as parliaments, can ensure real independence from imperialism and permanent social advance.

[1] <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-07-22-revealed-uk-military-unit-in-colombia-assisted-police-force-that-killed-63-protesters/>

Anti-imperialism, oil and NATO's **DESTRUCTION OF LIBYA**

by Pat Turnbull

It is ten years on from NATO's 2011 seven-month long bombardment of Libya, and this once peaceful and prosperous country is still in turmoil. Britain was one of the NATO powers that destroyed Libya.

The British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's advice is against all travel to Libya. This advice has been in place consistently since 2014 and is still current at time of writing. It reads: 'All travel to, from and within Libya is at the traveller's risk. Local security situations are fragile and can quickly deteriorate into intense fighting and clashes without warning... Consular support is not available from the British government from within Libya, as consular operations remain suspended... Military clashes and inter-militia fighting pose significant risks... There remains a high threat throughout the country of terrorist attacks and kidnap against foreigners, including from Daesh-affiliated extremists (formerly referred to as ISIL) and Al Qaida, as well as armed militias...'

This is despite the fact that the Tobruk and Tripoli-based governments, the result of the division of the country that Muammar Gaddafi had held together for forty years, signed a permanent ceasefire on 24 October 2020.

Bombing of Libya

Sarah Flounders, describes the disaster that struck the Libyan people in 2011: 'Under the cover of a cynical UN Security Council vote to impose a so-called "humanitarian" no-fly zone in Libya, Wash-



Libya bombing

ington's goal was to systematically crush every form of resistance and reverse the policy of nationalized oil and gas wealth. US bombers had total control of the skies and everything that moved on land. With the Pentagon in the lead and the main supplier of equipment, 11 countries were dropping bombs on Libya. From the first day of NATO bombing attacks on March 19, 2011 to the capture of Muammar Gaddafi seven months later on October 20, everything built in Libya over a period of 40 years – including the water supply, electric grid, national health care system and tens of thousands of modern apartment buildings and well developed infrastructure were systematically destroyed in every city in Libya. The country with the highest standard of living in Africa now lies in ruin.' [1]

The no-fly zone was imposed through Resolution 1973 of the United Nations Security Council on 17 March 2011. Ten members voted

for it, with five abstentions – Russia, China, India, Brazil and Germany. The resolution called for a ceasefire, and authorised military action, ostensibly to protect civilian lives. At the end of the final Battle of Sirte, Gaddafi's home town, he was not only captured by NATO-backed forces, but tortured and killed, and all on camera, broadcast to the world. The response of Hillary Clinton, President Barack Obama's Secretary of State, to this US-sponsored murder of a head of state was: 'We came, we saw, he died.'

The destruction of Libya had long been prepared. In 2007, at the Commonwealth Club in California, General Wesley Clark related how he had learned of a US plan to attack and destroy the governments of seven states in five years. In 1991 Paul Wolfowitz, then number three in the Pentagon, had told him that "we" had five or ten years to "clean up" the old pro-Soviet regimes before a new superpower came

along to challenge “us”. The seven countries were Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran. [2] Even earlier, in 1981, the CIA helped set up the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, with offices in Washington, and its military wing, the Libyan National Army, based in Egypt near Libya’s border. This organisation was to be directly involved in instigating insurrection in February 2011. The 14 April, 1986 US bombing of Tripoli, targeting Gaddafi’s home and killing his little adopted daughter, was the prelude to the 2011 campaign – indeed, another assassination attempt by a US warplane, on April 30 2011, cost the lives of his son, Saif al Arab Gaddafi, a friend and three of Muammar Gaddafi’s grandchildren.

The so-called Arab Spring gave the imperialist alliance its opportunity. On February 25, 2011 a long-time close friend of Gaddafi, Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham, who was the Libyan United Nations Ambassador, defected to the National Transitional Council, which had been set up in a familiar process where a stooge proxy is created to justify intervention. Henceforth the legitimate Libyan government would not even be represented in the UN. On February 26 the UN Security Council, under US pressure, voted to impose sanctions on Libya.

On February 28, 2011, BBC journalists interviewed Gaddafi in Tripoli. He said, “We never thought Al Qaida would come to Libya.” He reported that the target of Al Qaida and “misguided youth” was to kill police and military in eastern Libya, in al Baida and Benghazi. He indicated that they were stealing weapons from police stations and military barracks to do this. His statements were brushed aside. He asked for a UN investigation and was supported in this by the African Union, with Jacob Zuma, South African president, requesting on Libya’s behalf that UN investigators visit Libya and determine the facts. This request was quickly rejected.

However, when in April the UN did investigate, it focused on the Libyan government instead. Government forces, not Al Qaida, were accused, against all logic, of attacking businesses and oilfields.

In June 2011 a group of Libyan journalists made it back from Benghazi to Tripoli and reported what they saw in the east. They said over 2000 Al Qaida irregulars from Afghanistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were among the forces there. [3] They were committing atrocities, especially against black Libyans and black workers from other African countries, creating a huge refugee crisis on the borders with Tunisia and Egypt. Even so, the ‘rebellion’ was not moving fast enough for NATO and more intensive NATO bombing of Tripoli began on August 19th, clearing the way for the insurgents to enter the capital on 22nd August. Tripoli Central Hospital was overwhelmed with dead and injured people with virtually no staff to handle the catastrophe. Moussa Ibrahim, Gaddafi’s spokesman, in his last press conference from the Rixos Hotel, told the world’s media that in just 12 hours 1,300 had died and 5,000 had been injured in Tripoli alone. His appeal was ignored, as had been the massive demonstrations of the Libyan people in support of Gaddafi, like the one on July 1, 2011, where a crowd of more than one million, 95% of Tripoli’s population, had gathered in Green Square to protest against the NATO bombings. More than two million had demonstrated on that day in Tripoli and other cities of western Libya.

Thousands if not tens of thousands of Libyans were killed or injured by the NATO bombings. Some 8,000 Libyans were made prisoners of the National Transitional Council regime, without casualties to the US or its NATO allies. The air war led to the seizure of all of Libya’s hundreds of billions of dollars in frozen assets and control of future oil profits.

Benefits of oil wealth

When Libya was granted its independence by the United Nations on December 24, 1951, it was described as one of the poorest and most backward nations of the world. The population at the time was only about 1.5 million, over 90% were illiterate, there were no universities, and only a few high schools which had been established seven years before independence. In 1955, oil was discovered. It was high quality, nearly sulphur free. On September 1, 1969, Muammar Gaddafi and a group of young officers seized power from King Idris in a bloodless coup. Subsequently on 11 June 1970, the US Wheelus Air Base, the largest anywhere in the world outside the USA, was closed. Then on 12 November 1970 the National Oil Company was founded. In 1977 Gaddafi transformed the Libyan Republic into the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya – a ‘state of the masses’.

Libya’s oil wealth would be used for the benefit of its people. Under Gaddafi’s 1999 Decision No 111, all Libyans received free health-care, education, electricity, water, training, rehabilitation, housing assistance, disability and old age benefits, interest-free state loans, as well as generous subsidies to study abroad, buy a new car, help when they married, practically free petrol, and more. Other impressive social benefits included free land, equipment, livestock and seeds for agriculture to foster self-sufficient food production. In addition, all basic food items were subsidised and sold through a network of ‘people’s shops’. Literacy under Gaddafi rose from 20% to 80%. [4] The Central Bank of Libya was state-owned and printed its own money, the Libyan dinar, to be used productively and interest free to promote economic growth. Every Libyan family received a monthly payment of 500 dinars, their share of the oil revenue. At the time of the NATO assault, the International

Monetary Fund certified that Libya was debt free. Libyans were sending more money to family members living abroad than was being sent to Libya.

95% of Libya is desert and, before the NATO attacks, 70% of Libyans depended on water piped from the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer System under the southern desert. This Great Man-Made River was begun in August 1984, when Gaddafi laid the foundation stone for the pipe production plant at Brega. A BBC report of March 2006 quoted chief engineer Ali Ibrahim: "At first we had to rely on foreign-owned companies to do the work... now more than 70% of the manufacturing is done by Libyans."



Muammar al-Gaddafi, 12th AU Summit

By 2011 Libya had become a world leader in hydrological engineering and was keen to export its expertise to other African and Middle-Eastern countries. The official website of the Great Man-Made River Authority reported that before the NATO assault approximately 500,000 pre-stressed concrete cylinder pipes had been manufactured and transported. Pipe transportation was a continuous process, day and night. Over 3,700km of roads had been constructed for the heavy

truck-trailers to transport the pipes. Claiming they were military targets, NATO admitted that its jets attacked a water supply pipeline and the Brega pipe factory on 22 July 2011, killing six of the facility's security guards, and putting the water supplies of the Libyan people at huge risk. On 28 December 2016 Kieran Cooke of Middle East Eye reported that the political and economic chaos in Libya did not allow the collection of reliable and accurate data on the current situation of the Great Man-Made River.

Anti-imperialism

The IMF estimated that the Libyan state bank held nearly 144 tons of gold. Gaddafi wanted Libya's wealth to help Africa develop independently of western imperialism. He proposed to create an African currency based on a gold dinar, incorporating South African gold as well. He was working on this with other African nations, including Cote d'Ivoire under President Laurent Gbagbo. This currency would have been a rival to the dollar and the euro – and to the French neo-colonial CFA franc. Gbagbo was also ousted, in April 2011, largely by French troops.

Gaddafi had other ambitious plans. He wanted to create a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation to protect Africa and Latin America from North America and Western Europe, and opted out of AFRICOM, the US's military organisation to control Africa. He was central to the creation and financing of the African Union, and instrumental in setting up Africa's first satellite network, the Regional African Satellite Communication Organisation (RASCOM) to reduce African dependence on external powers. Gaddafi allocated two-thirds of the \$42bn needed to launch a public African Central Bank headquartered in Nigeria, an African Monetary Fund based in Cameroon, and an African Investment Bank based in Libya. The purpose was to provide low cost or interest free loans to African coun-

tries for health, education and other social purposes, as well as vital infrastructure development.

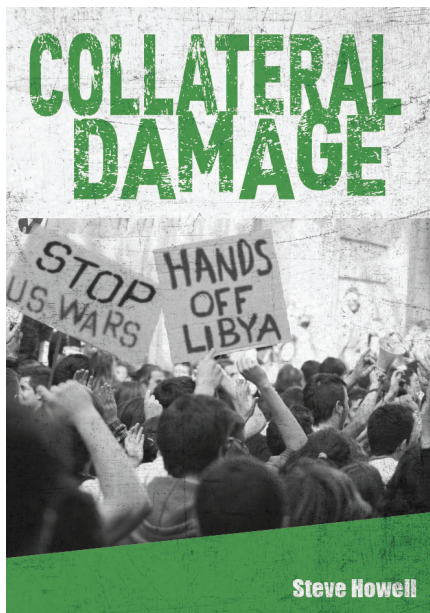
Knowing Libya was a target of the west, Gaddafi tried from 2003 to come in from the cold. When she was US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice praised Libya's decision to "renounce terrorism and abandon its weapons of mass destruction programmes". US sanctions on Libya were lifted in 2004, and in 2006 the US restored full diplomatic relations and removed the country from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. As late as January 2011, the UN Human Rights Council praised Gaddafi, saying his government protected 'not only political rights, but also economic, educational, social and cultural rights'. It also commended his treatment of religious minorities and the 'human rights training' of Libya's security forces. In trying to avoid the wrath of the imperialist powers, the anti-imperialist Gaddafi may have made concessions which lost him allies he needed when they finally came for him and his country. But ten years on from the events of 2011, this article remembers the great achievements of Libya and Gaddafi as well as their destruction by NATO.

[1] *The US/NATO War in Libya; A Continuation of Past Crimes*, Sarah Flounders, in *The Illegal War on Libya*, ed Cynthia McKinney, Charity Press Inc, 2012.

[2] Editor's Note, Cynthia McKinney, *The Illegal War on Libya*, Charity Press Inc, 2012.

[3] *Dispatches from Tripoli, Libya During the NATO Bombing Campaign of 2011*, Wayne Madsen, in *The Illegal War on Libya*, Charity Press Inc, 2012.

[4] *Why Libya was Attacked*, Stephen Lendman, in *The Illegal War on Libya*, Charity Press Inc, 2012



COLLATERAL DAMAGE

by Steve Howell
Quaero Publishing, 2021

Review by Pat Turnbull

Steve Howell's novel *Collateral Damage* is set in 1987, a year after the United States bombed Libya on April 14 1986. The attack, involving at least 44 F-111 bombers, was launched from bases in Britain. In the novel Ayesha, a central character, remembers standing in Aldeburgh on the Suffolk coast with her fiancé Tom, watching the planes fly overhead on their deadly mission. The purpose of the attack was to assassinate Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. It failed, but destroyed his home and killed his little adopted daughter. In the novel Ayesha later visits this destroyed home, just as Tom had done a few days before his death. The search for the truth of how Tom died is the central plot of the novel.

In 1986, only the US, Britain and Israel supported the attack on Libya, in contrast to 2011, when a United Nations Security Council resolution gave the green light for

the destruction of Libya in a seven-month NATO bombing campaign involving 11 countries.

Search for the truth

Tom is a member of a delegation from the UK which has gone to Libya to a conference marking the first anniversary of the bombing. On the visit he is found dead on a beach next to the hotel where the group is staying. The opening chapter is Tom's funeral, then the book goes back eight days to what has led to this point. Jed attends the funeral. He has been drawn into the story by his ex-girlfriend, Hannah, a close friend of Ayesha. Ayesha does not believe Tom's death was an accident, as they have been told, and Hannah wants Jed, who is a lawyer, to help her investigate what happened. The quest will take Jed and Ayesha to Libya, and to discoveries about the British state which, while little surprise to Ayesha, open Jed - and Hannah's - eyes to a scary scenario.

It's Jed's first funeral and his first personal encounter with death. Ayesha at the age of 34 can count 27 people she has personally known who have died. Jed sees Ayesha as 'someone who defies prediction and appears to act on impulse' though her actions 'usually have, he's discovered, an inner logic'. This is our introduction to Ayesha, a vivid presence in the book, shaped by experiences all too common for people from the Middle East like herself, but unknown to young British people like Jed. Ayesha is someone who scans the room when she enters a café, and sits with her back to the wall. Her mother is Palestinian, and her father Lebanese - otherwise she would be stateless. She has come to Britain to study, sponsored by her aunt, leaving Beirut after the Israeli invasion in 1982. Her friend Hannah says, 'When she first came here from Beirut she was in a really bad way.' This is something we

learn more about during the book. Anyone knowing something about recent Middle East history will feel a shiver of foreboding when they hear that she taught girls in the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp.

We also learn more about Jed's father who, his mother tells him, 'got himself into serious trouble for doing what he thought was the right thing'. She tells Jed this because she is worried he is getting himself into something with similar results. This opens the story up to another angle on the US's baleful role in the world, post Second World War.

We often see events from Ayesha's point of view. At the airport on the journey to Libya, Jed says, "Your French was impressive." Ayesha's answer: "That's colonialism for you." When she finds Jed has a US as well as a UK passport she says, "So, you have two of the most sought-after passports in the world." When Jed says, "It feels like we're on the run," we are told that 'Ayesha nearly says she's felt like that for five years.' When they are travelling through Tripoli, Ayesha is reminded how long it is since she has been in an Arab city.

Edward Chamberlain, who is accompanying Tom's father, retired Major Carver, to Libya to see Tom's body and make arrangements for its return, is the representative of the British state. When Ayesha says of the non-aligned movement "Libya does have some friends", Chamberlain replies, "And a lot of them not at all desirable." His view of Tom's participation in the delegation: "Tom was misguided in coming here in the first place, and his family are suffering the tragic consequences." His advice to Ayesha and Jed: "If you choose to stay in Tripoli, you do so at your own risk." No wonder, as one of the Libyans tells Ayesha and Jed, the Libyan Foreign Ministry is "worried about how the British could make trouble for us internationally." Ali,

their Libyan diplomat companion, and Chamberlain are ‘serving different masters with a big imbalance of power.’

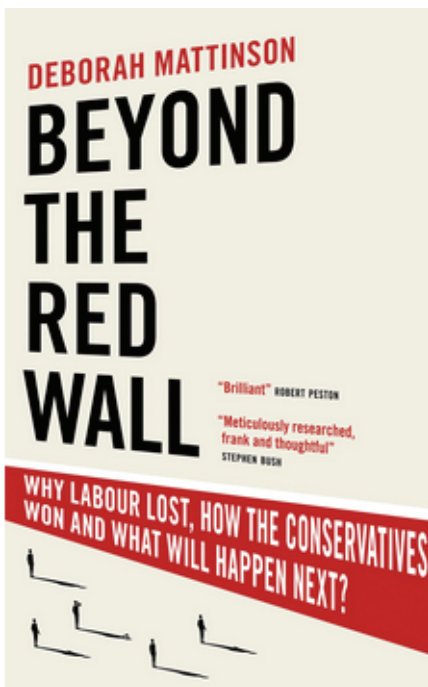
Later in the book we get to know O’Brien, the head of the law firm where Jed works, who came to London from Derry to study in the 1950s and worked in a Law Centre ‘helping Irish families fight Rachenite landlords and cowboy contractors’. Now he deals with immigration and nationality issues. It’s lucky for Jed that this shrewd and likeable lawyer has an idea how to deal with the British state and its representatives.

Real events

This is an exciting and enjoyable novel, with engaging central characters, which deals with matters rarely tackled in UK fiction, and usually not from the standpoint of people like Ayesha. It is also a whodunnit which gradually reveals the truth in true whodunnit fashion. I won’t say more because I hope everybody will read it and enjoy it as much as I did!

There is, however, an extra link to real events which Steve Howell reveals in a blog of 13 April 2021 entitled, *How an unexplained death influenced Collateral Damage*. The book’s cover description of the au-

thor tells the reader: ‘...as an activist in the peace movement, he attended a conference in Tripoli in 1987 to mark the first anniversary of the US air strikes on the city, an experience that influenced *Collateral Damage*.’ In his blog Steve Howell says: ‘A Canadian journalist, 31-year-old Christoph Lehmann-Halens had been found dead on the ground next to the hotel. He was a peace activist who also worked for the Southam News Agency in Ottawa....To this day Lehmann-Halens’ death is a riddle.’ Steve Howell adds this, about his book: ‘I hope, in an indirect way, it contributes to the memory of Christoph Lehmann-Halens, and the cause of peace for which he worked.’



BEYOND THE RED WALL

Why Labour Lost, How the Conservatives Won and What Will Happen Next?

by Deborah Mattinson
Biteback publishing 2020

Review by Paul Lefley

Deborah Mattinson’s *Beyond the Red Wall* studies three areas lost to the Tories in the 2019 general election; Darlington, Hyndburn and Stoke-on-Trent. That the author was recently appointed Keir Starmer’s Director of Strategy and that her book covers matters vital to the Labour Party and the Left in general makes this an important read.

Labour losses

Beyond the Red Wall has two key strands. One is the privations of these areas compared to the rest of the country and the dire need for “levelling up”. Hailing from Darlington herself, Mattinson quotes studies showing, “that those areas have been affected by cuts twice as much as the more affluent south, with deeper cuts across the board, especially in areas like housing, planning, highways and transport,

culture and youth services.” The sheer volume of data in the book confirms that the list is long and stark. Many elements are shared with the rest of the country, albeit not to the same degree, others are regionally specific, and solutions need to reflect that. Only one conclusion is possible: it is not further comment that’s needed here but action.

The other strand the book addresses is the decades long and finally catastrophic decline in support for the Labour Party that led to a situation where, “Of the sixty seats that Labour lost, more than two-thirds were in the Red Wall.” It is emphatic that it was Labour’s disregard for the population there that was the cause. In this respect it’s clear to be seen from Mattinson’s research that Labour’s change of Brexit policy in 2019 was for them the consummation of that disregard.

The method of choice for this former adviser to Tony Blair is focus groups. The problems with focus grouping are well known. It uses statistically small samples which may not be representative of the wider population, and more active participants and/or the moderator can heavily skew the results. Famously Pepsi learned these lessons the hard way when positive focus group responses to their Clear Crystal Pepsi failed to predict the sales bomb the product ended up being. Focus groups also persistently failed to gauge Trump's popularity last November.

Yet Mattinson is both skilled and experienced. Britain Thinks, the consultancy she co-founded, has been in business for over a decade and long before that she was in the field. She takes serious steps to prevent her sampling being unrepresentative, ensuring that the social grades, age range and race of her participants are typical. She corroborates her findings using polls, a variety of bodies, like The Institute for Fiscal Studies, and psephologists. She also used "Citizens Juries" and "Covid Diaries", although it has to be said these were very small samples, 18 and 50 people, respectively.

Right-wing bias

In the course of this she doesn't hide her regard for Tony Blair nor her disdain for Jeremy Corbyn. Nor does she prettify her disapproval of a mass membership and its role in policy formation. She is clear also that the policies of the Left cannot attract the electorate. She doesn't disguise her high hopes for Keir Starmer either, casting around, as she does, for the scant and diminishing evidence for this. Commenting he is "calm and measured", she goes as far as to quote one of her subjects as comparing him to Clark Kent.

The need for levelling up Mattinson exposes may be indisputable but her treatment of some of the

major issues specifically relating to the Labour Party is scarcely so.

The disconnect communities experience with their local councils is a huge issue for Labour. Former Darlington MP Jenny Chapman told locals protesting at a library closure, "as MP her scope for challenging the council's decision was limited". Labour's constituent parts have to fit together better than that. Arguably the book infers this. Yet Mattinson, with a mind-set focused on parliament and general elections, misses a major factor in this. She doesn't seem to have spotted that many CLPs have long complained that when they represent their communities to a Labour council, the response is often poor.

Red Wallers denounce the class composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party and on this it is manifest the party has a real problem. Between 1945 and 2017 its proportion of working class MPs declined from 42% to 1.5%.

Uncompromisingly stated Red Wall voters want their MPs to be working class. Aware of this though she must be, Mattinson is a leading player in a team that shows no intention whatsoever of changing the composition of the PLP.

Red Wallers also denounce the southern geography of Labour. Other than acknowledging this Mattinson has little to say. Given her support for a North London barrister as leader, more than that may be beyond her.

When the book deals with unpalatable and vexing aspects of the communities studied, it is at its weakest. There's no suggestion of engagement, and issues that should be confronted are accommodated. So, for instance, to the sentiment, encountered in Red Wall areas, that welfare recipients are "scroungers" the solution proffered is a contribution-based welfare system. The treatment is much the same with

the anti-immigrant racism Mattinson uncovers.

Leaving aside the question marks about the extent and character of this racism, her response is accommodation. A points-based immigration system is favoured. Opposing this, amongst others, the TUC says "it will make it easier for bad bosses to undercut and exploit everyone who works." It carries on "instead of hostility, discrimination and worker insecurity, we need to make sure that everyone at work has the same pay and rights". On these two policies she is at one with Labour's recently appointed Director of Policy, Claire Ainsley.

In the end the shortcomings of *Beyond the Red Wall*, lie neither in the methodology, nor in much of the empirical data which is there to be heeded. They lie in the predisposition of the author. In terms of the deployment of her method, for all her skill and experience, Mattinson is deeply tendentious. She selects her polls carefully. She claims, for instance, support for nationalisation in 2017 was only 46% per cent. Yet in this period YouGov found support for re-nationalisation ranged between 53% and 65%. Leading up to Labour's leadership election in 2019, it also found support for public ownership increased under Corbyn's leadership. Only Mattinson can say if she was blind to these findings or chose to ignore them.

The psephologist she favours, Paula Surridge is even more rabidly anti-Corbyn than her. Her comments on Corbyn are not remotely balanced. She attributes his 2017 showing to May's incompetence and voters giving him "the benefit of the doubt," – whatever that is. On the beating Corbyn's Labour took in 2019 she comments, "it seemed the media's argument had gradually filtered through." She says this at the same time quoting, without irony, the Daily Mail and Sun headlines that Corbyn was a Jihadi and Terrorist.

Filtering through? The nation was submerged, reason was drowned in a daily tsunami vilifying the man and the policies associated with him. Again, was she blind to it or did she simply ignore Peter Osborne and David Hearst's well-known expose, *The Killing of Jeremy Corbyn*? It is unanswerable.

When Mattinson disparages Left leaning policies it is the inadequacies of her own leanings that show up most. Even before the pandemic the Tories announced an increase in public spending of £18 billion. Since then, they have also proposed amongst other things, a corporation tax rate well in excess of Labour's proposal. It seems to have passed her by that policies currently to the left of Labour's haven't done Johnson and Co any harm at all.

Class unity and mobilisation

As with racism and anti-welfare sentiment, rather than a vision of struggling against division Mattinson's approach to levelling up would compound it, putting brakes on any potential advances. London has

deeply poverty-stricken areas, yet of the 73 local authority areas qualifying for the government's Community Renewal Fund, none are in the capital. Andy Burnham, hardly redder than red, recently warned against "pitching towns against cities and the rest of the country against London". "The country", he went on, "needs levelling up to be a unifying agenda." And the material basis for that exists.

Mattinson seems incapable of seeing the scope for unified action. Take Universal Credit (UC). She clearly shows the disparity of payments between north and south but again somehow misses the point. A call for levelling up on its own simply doesn't cut it. An absolutely equitable levelling up still leaves UC completely inadequate, north and south, town and city. There is no need to pit recipients against each other. Quite the opposite.

The need for levelling up is not contested. If Labour intend only a selective self-interested version as the Tories do, they'll shift no one in their favour. Labour has to declare that more than levelling up is

required and possible. Red Wallers, after all, have expressed hopes of something far better emerging from the pandemic.

Mattinson has no concept of engagement, let alone mobilisation. She is fixated on branding a package far too modest to attract anywhere near the number of voters required to overturn a majority of 160+ seats over Labour. A Labour Party ensconced in Town and City Halls and the Palace of Westminster and that ignores fundamental demands made specifically of it, is hardly going to win back a population she insists won't accept a fudge.

It is indefensible that she rejects transformative policies whose popularity has been revealed for decades by the very methodologies she champions. So much that follows from the data in *Beyond the Red Wall* should be heeded. Perhaps above all, its loudest call is that the population there be listened to. But let it be the 4.7 million people who live in the Red Wall who are listened to and not those with a quite separate agenda who purport to speak on their behalf.

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