

# THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

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## Opposition to US global domination is growing

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The war in Ukraine is changing the world both in ways that might have been predictable, but also in unexpected ways.

## US dominance leads to division and defiance

The war was born out of the United States desire to remain the world's only superpower and it has continued to signal its aggressive intent, particularly in relation to China. The US wanted to contain and push back Russia, but it also wanted to force the European Union, especially Germany, to cut off trade with Russia, particularly in relation to oil and gas and thus make it dependent on America instead.

The fallout from this has increased tensions in the EU and stoked traditional rivalries between Germany and France who vie for leadership of the bloc. Simon Korner describes how this is unfolding in, *German-French competition intensifies*. Two main areas of dispute are round energy and each countries' military power. Germany is seeking to manipulate EU policy aimed at combatting the self-inflicted energy crisis to protect its own interests at the expense of other EU countries. Likewise, it is asserting itself as a military power, hugely increasing arms spending and threatening France's military leadership in the EU. Such tensions are not likely to decline, but only to get worse.

In other parts of the world the United States' attempts to bully countries into line over Ukraine have not had the same success as in Europe. In *US seeks to use Ukraine to own and control Africa*, Alex Davidson points out that countries representing nearly half of the world's population have failed to support the US position on Ukraine at the United Nations. In return the United States is seeking to sanction African states who do business with Russia through its "Countering

Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act". The US also has a widespread military presence on the continent with 29 military bases under the United States Africa Command - AFRICOM. While African countries have shown signs of defiance over Ukraine, America has no intention of giving up the fight for control of its rich natural resources.

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries are also among those taking issue with the US trying to impose its will on the world. Their alliance is one of a growing number of bi and multi-lateral agreements between countries of the global south which seek to develop trade and cooperation on a more equitable basis and now also circumventing the restrictions which the United States is imposing through sanctions. Though it remains at present massively dominant, the United States unipolar world is increasingly being challenged. What a *multipolar world* might look like is explored by Frieda Park. Its benefit would be to break US power and open up the possibility of progressive change. Such a world, and the fight to achieve it, will not be without complications and challenges. It is, therefore, vital to support those opposing US imperialism, to defend the sovereignty of nations and to oppose US sanctions and its drive to war.

## Britain and Ukraine

Whilst the fall out from the war in Ukraine has increased opposition to US policies in many parts of the world, the biggest, long-standing imperial powers have fallen into line behind its war aims. The UK has gone further than others in stoking up the war as Gregor Tassie sets out in *Britain's war in the Ukraine*. After the United States it supplies the most resources to Ukraine, including vast amounts of military equipment. The UK's active involvement not only extends to

arms supplies, there are British troops deployed in the country and British intelligence is being provided to Ukraine. There are reports that Britain has been involved in major incidents such as the blowing up of the Nord Stream pipelines.

Though profitable for Britain's military-industrial complex, British people could well use the cash being poured into Ukraine to meet their demands for reasonable wages and to improve the critical state of public services.

## Trade unions fight on

Trade union members are not only heroically battling on with their campaigns of strike action, they are now being joined by more groups of workers.

In *The cost of profit crisis*, Sacha Gear makes it plain that the wage demands of unions are entirely affordable and contrasts the declining living standards of workers with the growth in profits and in the wealth of billionaires. He makes the point that this, therefore, is a political choice in favour of capital and against the working class, not an economic necessity. This is underlined by Helen Christopher in *Tories under pressure*. Though they managed to wriggle out of the crisis caused by Liz Truss' disastrous premiership, the Tories still face multiple problems. The party remains riven by divisions. Simply allowing public services to fall apart and taking a confrontational stance towards strikers doesn't seem to be going down well. Many more people support the strikes than oppose them, with striking nurses achieving over 60% approval ratings.

Christopher says, "There is an opportunity for the working class and the trade unions to take advantage of the Tories difficulties, to build greater unity of strike actions and campaigns and make gains."

# A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

by Frieda Park

The war in Ukraine has brought into focus a number of questions which have been present for some time in the geo-political situation.

These include: The significance of the US unipolar world and the lengths it will go to maintain its hegemony. The nature of the forces opposing that hegemony and what does the demand for a multipolar world mean? What is the role of anti-imperialists in the current situation?

The US world order is the biggest threat to peace and the greatest constraint on progressive forces on a global scale as evidenced by the numerous illegal wars it has fought, and its' military interventions and coups against leftist governments. However in the current situation, without a socialist world, opposition is largely from other capitalist powers. What are the implications of this?

## Asserting independence

Quite big capitalist nations are asserting an independence from the diktats of the US, including even formal allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Nations which are targets for US domination like Iran and Russia are in opposition as well as other emerging powers like India and South Africa. Catalysed by being pushed to take sides over the war in Ukraine much of the global south, perhaps from experiencing the consequences of US hege-



PHOTO BY COLETIVO RESISTÊNCIA

Lula (on right of photo) victorious in Brazilian election

mony, have refused to back the US agenda. This trend has not abated as the conflict has continued, but rather seems to be intensifying. It is a clear indicator of how seriously US power is in decline. This is good. Any challenge to US power undermines its ability to oppress other nations and prosecute wars. It will open potential space for progressive change which would otherwise be crushed.

We can see in South America how progressive movements have been able to take advantage of the US preoccupation with fighting to maintain its power on too many fronts. Leftist, social democratic governments have returned to power with great victories in Colombia, a long term ally/pawn of the US in the region, where the first ever leftist President was elected, and in

Brazil with the defeat of Bolsonaro. This demonstrates the progressive potential of challenges, even from capitalist countries that undermine US hegemony.

Unlike previous realignments between imperialist powers there is no immediate contender to take over from the US as hegemon. That is why it is unhelpful to categorise the conflict between the US and Russia as an inter-imperialist war as it is not a war for global imperial advantage. Previous major imperialist powers seem to be out of contention to take over from the US. Germany has embraced its own destruction in the service of America over the Ukraine war. France, though less happy, has so far concluded, meaning the EU has adopted the same stance - although that has already resulted in divisions within

and between member states and may result in future reversals for the current German government policy. As evidenced by its current political turmoil Britain also is in imperial decline as is Japan.

## Multipolar world

Those countries increasingly alienated by the US have begun to advocate for a “multipolar” world, rather than the unipolar one. It has taken the US proxy war against Russia to bring the possibility of a multipolar world to the fore, but what will it take to achieve it? Of course it would mean a decisive diminution of US power. That still seems some way off given its global predominance in terms of its economy, financial control and vast military might, way outstripping any competitors. There is no faction within the US establishment which is for accepting a decline in US power, nor giving up its status as the world’s sole superpower. Rising powers, particularly China, are being met with bullying, sanctions, provocations and threats of war. Yet will that position be sustainable as more and more countries see fewer benefits to toeing the US line and fall out of the US orbit? Bullying is having less effect and the US seems uninterested in wooing other countries – perhaps it is below its imperial dignity. China on the other hand does very well at wooing other countries and winning their support.

In this fragmenting world what the US has achieved is keeping the other old, declining imperial powers on its side – Britain, Germany, France and Japan. (Arguably Germany might have had another go at asserting itself, and has been working to construct the EU as its imperial base, but seems to have abandoned that possibility in giving all out support to the US.) That constellation of established imperialist countries is an incredibly powerful bloc although it is not without its tensions and unhappi-

ness with US policy. For as long as it holds though, this is another major strength for the US.

On this basis the road to a multipolar world seems set to be one of continued conflict and war as the US tries to defend its position.

Whilst breaking the power of the US which has dominated the globe since the end of World War 2 would remove the biggest threat to peace and progress, what would a multipolar world have to offer?

## BRICS

The example of BRICS is interesting. It is emerging as a focus for counter-balancing US power. It was always its intent to bring together some larger economies independent of current imperialist blocs. Originally Brazil, Russia, India, and China met together in 2006 and the group was joined by South Africa in 2010. Since the war in Ukraine started Argentina, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt have all signalled an interest in joining.

BRICS aims to foster economic collaboration and has established the New Development Bank, financed by member states to support each other and other nations. It allows BRICS member states: “to promote their interests abroad... and can highlight the strengthening positions of countries whose opinion is frequently ignored by their developed American and European colleagues.”

It has discussed an alternative international payment system to SWIFT, which hasn’t been concluded, but two BRICS members, Russia and China already have such systems.

The political dimension of BRICS has been in sharp focus since the war in Ukraine started, with only Brazil, under Bolsonaro, voting to condemn Russia at the United Nations. Yet he also made statements declaring Brazil’s neutrality in the conflict – it is heavily dependent on Russian fer-



The flags of the BRICS countries, left to right China, Russia, Brazil, India, South Africa

PHOTO BY PALACIO DO PLANALTO

tiliser for its big soya bean industry. He opposed sanctions on Russia and suggested that Zelensky should accept defeat and surrender.

The new President, Lula da Silva, has said that Zelensky was equally to blame for the war as Putin and that he would promote peace talks.

Especially if it were to expand, BRICS could be an alternative alliance of big capitalist economies creating a separate power base to the unipolarity of the US. The disparate nature of the countries involved would bring its own difficulties, however, and may limit what could be achieved.

In addition to BRICS a plethora of bilateral and multilateral agreements are being made by countries who wish to collaborate and decrease their dependence on the United States

If the US is pushed back other capitalist powers will compete to exploit its weakness and occupy the space created. That is to say we will return to a contest of rising and declining imperial powers with the likelihood that one or more will be newly emerged and not one of the historic powers identified by Lenin back in 1917 when he was writing about the imperialist world system. [1] But the disruption to the world order also has potential to create space for

progressive governments in neo-colonial or semi-colonial countries. The other hope is that from the war, chaos, and poverty being inflicted on the peoples of the world there will be a stronger revival than at present of anti-colonial and socialist movements.

### Anti-imperialism

At the present time what can we do as anti-imperialists to help break US power and achieve a multipolar world?

1. Unequivocally oppose US imperialism and support any country challenging US aggression. There is no, as yet, competing imperialism which would justify an abstentionist position in any conflict. This stands regardless of the internal politics of the countries involved, which may be reactionary - but that is a separate question from their geopolitical position.

2. Support the independence and sovereignty of other nations and their right to determine their own solutions to their political problems. This means opposing regime change to install more pro-US governments. Iran is an obvious current target for that. We know the pattern - that people suffer injustices, sometimes severe repression, but their justifiable grievances are subverted by the west to effect "colour revolutions" which leave people often no better off, while opposition to Western agendas has been removed. Constant intervention allegedly to support human rights or avert aggression through instruments like the National Endowment for Democracy, military interventions etc are rife and we should always be aware of that especially when we see our media promoting opposition in countries such as Iran. If they really were concerned about human rights where is the coverage of Palestine?

3. Oppose sanctions as a method of imperialist coercion.

4. Oppose the escalation of military spending among NATO countries and the drive to war, particularly with China.

5. Welcome and support alliances and agreements at the inter-state level, between countries of the global south. We should also emphasise positive internationalism - supporting workers and progressive movements throughout the world which challenge the imperial order. If the multipolar world is to be anything other than a capitalist world order then progressive forces, including our own movement, must be stronger than they are now.

[1] Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, V I Lenin 1917

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# US SEEKS TO USE UKRAINE TO OWN AND CONTROL AFRICA



Tiny Djibouti highlighted in green controls access to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean

GRAPHIC BY NINROUTER

will engage with African partners to expose and highlight the risks of negative PRC (Peoples Republic of China) and Russian activities in Africa”. [2] At the NATO summit in June 2022 Africa and the Middle East were named as NATO’s ‘southern neighbourhood’. This was reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 in which the United States claimed Latin America as its ‘backyard’.

Developing countries in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia have been disproportionately hurt by rising fuel prices and a global food shortage driven by Western sanctions. Many countries in the Developing World, suffering from the effects of sanctions and also conscious of Western interventions which have led to millions of deaths in Iraq, Libya, Somalia and other countries as well as the huge migration of peoples, are sceptical about the US and the West’s motives. Many countries are trying to take a non-aligned path hence the abstentions or not voting in these votes at United Nations, despite the cajoling of the United States and its western allies.

## African natural resources

The African continent holds a huge proportion of the world’s natural resources, both renewables and non-renewables. It is home to some 30% of the world’s mineral reserves, 8% of the world’s natural gas and 12% of the world’s oil reserves. The continent has 40% of the world’s gold and up to 90% of its chromium and platinum. The largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum and uranium in the world are in Africa. These minerals are critical in the manufacture of electronic goods and armaments.

Relatively recent oil finds along the coast of West Africa in Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote D’Ivoire have further enhanced the continent’s strategic importance.

by Alex Davidson

The United States House of Representatives in April 2022 passed the “Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act”. It now lies with the US Senate where it has been passed to the Foreign Affairs Committee for a detailed implementation plan. The Countering Malign Russian Activities Act would sanction African states if they do business with Russia (and could possibly extend to China in the future).

The African Union reacted angrily to the Act referring to it as a bullying and paternalistic piece of legislation. It is seen by many African countries as punishment for them abstaining at the United Nations on votes relating to the conflict in Ukraine and to pressurise them to fall into line behind the US, NATO and the West’s condemnation of Russia.

In August 2022, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield travelled to Ghana, Uganda, and Cape Verde. “We’re not asking Afri-

cans to make any choices between the United States and Russia”, she said ahead of her visit, but, she added, “for me, that choice would be simple”. [1] US Secretary of State Blinken visited Africa one week later to reinforce the message.

In votes at the United Nations General Assembly while around 140 member countries voted to condemn Russia, five have voted against and around 35 countries have abstained with 9 not voting. Those voting against, abstaining or not voting for the US resolutions since the conflict began representing nearly half of the global population and, “suggests that, even at this crucial stage in the war, Russia’s allies are not as sparse as the West might like to think” (*Washington Post*, 11/10/2022).

In August 2022 the White House published “US Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa” in which, under the heading, “Refine and Re-invest in US Defense Tools”, it stated that, “In line with the 2022 National Defense Strategy, the Department of Defense

These more recent oil discoveries are in addition to the established fields of Nigeria, Gabon and Angola. New finds of oil along the lake system of the Rift Valley and large gas deposits off the coast of Mozambique and Tanzania have attracted some of the largest oil and gas majors. These finds are of particular interest to India and China because the resources can be shipped directly across the Indian Ocean.

## AFRICOM

These strategically important natural resources of Africa are the focus of the build-up of United States military power on the continent. On 6 February 2007, long before the

current Ukraine conflict, then US President George W. Bush directed the creation of US Africa Command (AFRICOM). The decision was the culmination of several years of deliberation within the Department of Defense acknowledging the growing strategic importance of Africa. The stated aims of US Africa Command, with partners, are “to counter transnational threats and malign actors, strengthen security forces and respond to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity.” (my emphasis) [3]

AFRICOM now has some 29 bases spread over the African continent.

These bases are classified as “Enduring” and “Non-Enduring” by AFRICOM.

The tiny country of Djibouti, formerly known as French Somaliland, gained its independence from France in 1977. The country, with just over one million of a population, is located in a critically strategic location near some of the world’s busiest shipping lanes. It controls access to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean and serves as a key refuelling and transshipment centre. It hosts many foreign military bases, leasing of which makes up a large proportion of the small country’s income.

By far the largest base is that of the United States, which leases Camp Lemonnier, which was originally established as a garrison for the French Foreign Legion. It accommodates some 4000 US soldiers and contractors and includes military personnel from the UK. France operates the military airfield at Chebelley, which, since 2013, AFRICOM has used as a separate base from Camp Lemonnier for its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Predator and Reaper drones operate from Chebelley.

In 2006, the then Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, General T. Michael Moseley, said, “We’ve moved from using UAVs primarily in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance roles before Operation Iraqi Freedom, to a true hunter-killer role with the Reaper... Today, the Air Force can launch a UAV from a remote field on the other side of the globe, then pilot that aircraft from a base in the United States. These systems and the Airmen who operate them offer unprecedented flexibility to combatant commanders worldwide.” [4]

France also has a military base which hosts some German and Spanish military personnel. Other bases in Djibouti are operated by Italy, Japan and China.

| ENDURING FOOTPRINT 2019      | NON-ENDURING FOOTPRINT 2019 |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Chebelley, Djibouti          | Bizerte, Tunisia            |
| Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti     | Arlit, Niger                |
| Entebbe, Uganda              | Dirkou, Niger               |
| Mombassa, Kenya              | Diffa, Niger                |
| Manda Bay, Kenya             | Ouallam, Niger              |
| Liberville, Gabon            | Bamako, Mali                |
| St. Helena, Ascension Island | Garoua, Cameroon            |
| Accra, Ghana                 | Maroua, Cameroon            |
| Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso    | Misrata, Libya              |
| Dakar, Senegal               | Tripoli, Libya              |
| Agadez, Niger                | Baledogle, Somalia          |
| Niamey, Niger                | Bosasso, Somalia            |
| N’Djamena, Chad              | Galcayo, Somalia            |
|                              | Kismayo, Somalia            |
|                              | Mogadishu, Somalia          |
|                              | Wajir, Kenya                |



## AFRICOM exercises

AFRICOM undertakes several military exercises involving African countries including Justified Accord 23, or JA 23, which this year is scheduled to take place from February 13th-24th. Other exercises include Cutlass Express, Flintlock, Obangame, Phoenix Express and African Lion. [5]

“African Lion 2022”, the largest military exercise on the African continent, was launched by the United States and Morocco, the host country, in June 2022. These annual manoeuvres took place mainly in Morocco but also in Tunisia, Senegal and Ghana. They mobilised more than 7,500 soldiers from ten nations, including Brazil, Chad, France and the United Kingdom. Military observers from NATO and fifteen “partner countries” took part, including, for the first time, Israel. In Morocco, these land, airborne, sea and CBRN (nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical) decontamination manoeuvres took place near Rabat, Morocco, and in several southern regions, including Mahbès, on the Algerian border. As in 2021, airborne troop jumps and artillery fire took place in the desert, on the edge of Western Sahara, not far from Tindouf, the base in Algeria of the Polisario Front, the long-established independence movement for the Western Sahara.

The question of Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony has for decades pitted Morocco against the Polisario, supported by Algeria. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), led by the Polisario Front, has been recognised by many independent African countries but not by Morocco nor the West. A referendum on independence was agreed decades ago but has never been implemented due to the intransigence of the West.

As part of an agreement brokered by former US President Donald Trump, the United States recog-

## ...the colonisation of Africa, dating from the nineteenth century, and its aftermath of neo-colonialism, still casts a shadow and mars the development of the whole of Africa.

nized Morocco’s sovereignty over this vast desert territory in December 2020, in return for a resumption of diplomatic ties between Morocco and Israel. Algeria severed diplomatic relations with Morocco in August 2021, accusing Morocco of “hostile acts” and denouncing its military and security cooperation with the “Zionist entity” (Israel).

Much of Africa gained its independence from colonialism in the aftermath of World War 2. Angola and Mozambique gained their independence in 1975 with the overthrow of Portuguese colonialism. This was followed by the liberation of Zimbabwe and Namibia and then South Africa in 1994 with the ending of apartheid. However, the colonisation of Africa, dating from the nineteenth century, and its aftermath of neo-colonialism, still casts a shadow and mars the development of the whole of Africa.

### Entente cordiale

In 1880 only the coastal areas of Africa had been colonised but, in what became known as the “Scramble for Africa”, within twenty years the whole of Africa was colonised. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 attempted to formalise the Scramble for Africa by regulating European colonisation. The Entente Cordiale of 1904 between Britain and France, with its secret agreements, brought an end to this period with the complete division among the imperial powers of the whole continent.

France and Britain signed the Entente Cordiale under which the two powers said “they had no intention of altering the political status of Morocco”. However, the Treaty carried with it secret clauses envisaging that “force of circumstances” might oblige them to “modify” their policy – and, in that event, France (and Spain) might in effect divide up the territory between them. In return, France renounced all previous objections to British control of Egypt. In other words, France and Britain had privately entered into a contract for the destruction of the independence and integrity of Morocco, an independent African state of some 219,000 square miles and some 8 million people with great natural wealth. It was carved up by France (and Spain) in exchange for untrammelled British control of Egypt. [6]

Thus, the Entente Cordiale brought to an end lengthy years of rivalry and military hostility between Britain and France. The imperialists had been busily snatching what they could get in Africa since the Scramble for Africa began in 1880. The snarling at one another over the booty had been brought to an end with the complete division among the imperial powers of the whole continent. Incidentally, Edward VII, King Charles’ great, great grandfather, is credited with playing a major role in paving the way for this infamous agreement with his closeness to the French and in particular his state visit to Paris in July 1903.

Are we now witnessing a different kind of Scramble for Africa in the 21st century but with the possible end result the continuing subservience of Africa to imperialism?

## Different scramble for Africa

This new and different Scramble for Africa is overwhelmingly dominated by the United States, which is intent on securing its hegemony over Africa. Britain and France are also heavily involved but as junior partners. It is fuelled by growing competition with China.

As in the late nineteenth century the prize is access to Africa's resources, especially oil, gas and minerals. It involves a drive to impose unequal terms of trade on Africa and it is backed by military might to secure control over Africa's resources. As well as fossil fuels Africa has rich deposits of 'strategic' minerals that are essential to a modern manufacturing economy for the production of electronic goods and armaments manufacturing. The United States with its military might, organised through AFRICOM, along with its 'soft power' including the use of 'aid' and the bribery of governments, institutions and individuals, is determined to own and control Africa and its vast resources.

[1] Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a US Department of State Africa Regional Media Hub Briefing-United States Mission to the United Nations (usmission.gov)

[2] US-Strategy-Toward-Sub-Saharan-Africa-FINAL.pdf (whitehouse.gov)

[3] [www.africom.mil/about-the-command](http://www.africom.mil/about-the-command)

[4] [www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123027012](http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123027012)

[5] [www.africom.mil/what-we-do](http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do)

[6] Morel, E.D., Morocco in Diplomacy, London, 1916

## OZYMANDIAS by P B Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said – “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”



Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) wrote his meditation on despotic power in 1817; it was published in *The Examiner* in January 1818 and is thought to have been inspired by reports of a statue of Ramesses II, which Shelley never saw. It was brought to London from Egypt in 1821, having been 'acquired' by the British Museum.

# THE ISRAELI ELECTION: AN OWN GOAL?

PHOTO BY JACK SANDERS



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

by Brian Durrans

Israeli elections are usually a distraction from Palestinian self-determination. However, to the alarm of Israel's mainstream and liberal apologists, the hard-right government emerging from the November 2022 election puts Palestine centre-stage. One veteran critic predicts that by their own bigotry the openly racist, Jewish-supremacist minority parties, which for the moment can make or break the government, will "usher in the end of Israeli apartheid." [1] This may be over-optimistic, but there is certainly a new opportunity for building solidarity with Palestine. A summary of the Palestinian strategy for self-determination might therefore be helpful before looking more closely at the evolving situation and prospects for a political breakthrough.

## BDS and self-determination

The clearest expression of this strategy is set out in the 2005 "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Call" for global support for Freedom from occupation, Equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Justice for Palestinian refugees by honouring their Right of Return. These demands unify Palestinians wherever

located: in Israel proper, the occupied territories (West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem) and the refugee camps and wider diaspora. They are also open to support by anyone anywhere and by any means necessary. Since Israel's settler-colonial apartheid system exists to deny the demands of the BDS Call, achieving them means dismantling the system itself. Only then will Palestinians be free to exercise political self-determination. [2]

Until then, argument is likely to continue on whether Palestinians should eventually exercise that right in a separate state, or accommodate it to the equivalent right to self-determination of the beneficiaries of their former oppression in a shared state. That, however, is for Palestinians themselves to decide, and their decision will probably be shaped by their experience of how, and with whose help, the system was opposed in the meantime. Uniting on what needs doing now – and here the Palestinian-led BDS movement is the essential guide – is therefore the most effective way for advocates of one state or two (or any or none) to press their case.

## Far right in power

Let me return to the November election which put former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu back in power. Out of 120 seats in the Knesset (parliament), his Likud party has 32 seats and the pre-election PM Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party 24. This leaves the two biggest parties seven seats short of an absolute majority and therefore dependent on at least half of the 14 seats now held by three smaller far-right parties that

contested the election under the label of one of them, the Religious Zionism (RZ) party, whose leaders include openly racist supporters of anti-Palestinian terrorism. The other two parties in that electoral pact are Otzma Yehudit and Noam. Pushed out to the margins are parties appealing mainly to Israel's Palestinian minority (20% of the population) with 10 seats between them. Israel's once ruling Labor party, which in its day built illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land faster than any other government, is now reduced to a mere 4 seats. But what does all this mean for Palestinians?

The Jewish-supremacist parties and their support base do double service for Israeli apartheid - while also putting it at risk.

## Resistance

First, outside the government and the Knesset, the three RZ parties are active among settlers and zealots who terrorise Palestinians. They do this with scant (if any) restraint by the police or military, or with their covert encouragement. This provokes resistance which the settlers assist the police and army in suppressing. Such attacks have increased since the election but were also underway for months before in several parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Resistance to these provocations has been especially strong in places directly affected, such as Hebron and Nablus in the occupied West Bank but also in the Sheikh Jarrah community of occupied East Jerusalem where Palestinians are cam-

paigining against evictions which are illegal under international law. All these responses build on the unprecedented non- or cross-factional militancy of May 2021, when widespread strikes, demonstrations and armed clashes across the Occupied Territories were taken up within the 1948-borders of Israel itself. Another sign that the lessons of May 2021 are being learned is the recent emergence of the well-disciplined, unified (non- or cross-factional) armed Palestinian militia, “The Lion’s Den”. The Palestinian BDS leadership recognise that although armed resistance alone cannot match the military capacity of the Israeli state, attacking armed occupiers is not only legitimate under international law but can also be effective in particular situations and empower other forms of struggle.

## Making the bad look less bad

The second, and equally important, service of the outlier Jewish supremacists to the apartheid system is to make those running it and especially their liberal apologists look better than they deserve. Leading figures from the RZ electoral pact parties were swiftly installed in important ministries. The Otzma Yehudit leader, Itamer Ben-Gvir, for example, has expanded his role as National Security Minister by adding powers over the police; while the new Finance Minister, RZ leader Bezalel Smotrich, looks likely to take over civil administration of the Occupied West Bank from the Defence Ministry, a development some describe as de facto annexation. [3]

In a recent interview with a reporter from UK TV Channel 4, Zvika Fogel, former head of the Southern Command of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and recently-elected Otzma Yehudit MK, “expressed his desire to scrap the concept of proportionality [...], saying that ‘if it is one Israeli mother crying, or a thousand Palestinian mothers crying, then a thou-

sand Palestinian mothers will cry.’” [4] What, then, is Israel’s “concept of proportionality” that scrapping it is so controversial? To judge from the last 14 years of conflict-related deaths in Israel and the Occupied Territories, including Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan, it can only be that the death of one Israeli is “proportional” to the deaths of at least twenty Palestinians. [5] Figures for 2022 were incomplete at the time of writing, but the “proportionality” figure may need upward amendment given the predicted record death toll for West Bank Palestinians in 2022. [6]

## Things of concern

An article in *Ha’aretz* reported the reaction of some pro-Israeli US Jews to news following the Israeli election. There were three main concerns. Top of the list was that Israel’s so-called Law of Return, which since 1950 has given Jews - defined as having at least one Jewish grandparent, and their spouses, wherever they are living - the right to relocate to Israel and acquire Israeli citizenship, may be

amended “so that the grandchildren of Jews would no longer qualify”. And that converts (and the descendants of converts) to denominations of Judaism disapproved of by Israel’s new zealots (but popular in the US) might be denied these same entitlements they have previously enjoyed. Of some, but little less, concern to those interviewed were moves to erode the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, of LGBTQ people and of women. And finally, plans to annexe the West Bank that would negate the “two-state solution”. [7] In the *Ha’aretz* piece registering the alarm of some pro-Israeli U.S. Jews

towards the rightward shift in Israeli politics there is not a single word about the 74-year-old denial of the right of return for Palestinian refugees or their descendants; nor the current second-class status of Palestinian citizens of Israel. The revelation by whistleblowers in 2014 (published in the *Guardian*) that Israeli military intelligence division’s Unit 8200 blackmailed LGBTQ Palestinian civilians in the Occupied West Bank, or the well-documented systematic discrimination against Palestinian women citizens of Israel. [8] The article was also silent on how illegal Jewish-only settlements and roads, and restrictions on, and fragmentation of, Palestinian homelands so that they resemble an island archipelago, make a “two-state solution” hard if not yet completely impossible to imagine. If those interviewed really thought formal annexation of the West Bank was likely - and, if it was, how the great accumulation of evidence for apartheid across the whole of Israel/Palestine (“From the River to the Sea”) could then no longer be denied - they might have put it at the top of their list instead of at the bottom. If the new

## A government of this character can offer Palestinians everywhere little more than further repression and intransigence.

Israeli government keeps on track, it seems that Israel’s fan-club, especially in the US, may be in for a rude awakening.

## The road is clear

Leveraging its balance of parliamentary seats in the ruling bloc, RZ may help make the existing apartheid system even more oppressive to Palestinians yet even harder to justify to world opinion. All this leaves Israeli apartheid vulnerable as an obstacle to ruling the country by “normal” means, albeit normal for an abnormal system.



*Umm Kamel al-Kurd who was evicted from her home in the solidarity tent in Sheikh Jarrah*

A government of this character can offer Palestinians everywhere little more than further repression and intransigence. There is no second Oslo, no repeat illusion, on the horizon. Nor can Israel offer its supporters or its critics across the world anything more than distraction from the simple and increasingly acknowledged reality that it operates a system of apartheid. The repression and the distraction will probably be ferocious. But for Palestinians and the solidarity movement – including sympathetic nation-states, governments and at least parts of international institutions - the November election has helped clarify the road ahead.

## The International dimension

Just as the wider problems of the Middle East, including those of Israel/Palestine, originate in past imperial manoeuvres, so imperialism and geopolitics still impinge on how Israeli apartheid can be overthrown, how quickly, and to whose benefit. Reckless adventurism in foreign relations is sometimes an option for Israel but doesn't always turn out well (e.g. Suez in 1956, Lebanon in 2006). Whoever is in the Israeli government, the US is never far away, so foreign policy is likely to be driven by shared objectives. If the crime of apartheid can be considered an "internal" policy, when it runs into trouble, it can quickly impact foreign policy as well. Suppose the pro-Israel lobby in the US loses the sympathy of younger and middle-

aged voters likely to be disillusioned by a right-wing Israeli government scoring low against their own progressive social and cultural values. In those circumstances, current lies about BDS being the tool of jihadists or anti-semites may no longer work.

For the time being, "normalisation" of Israel's relations with some neighbouring states – and limited attacks on its enemies, above all, Iran and Syria – are likely to continue under its new government. This is a complex and fluid situation but if Israel talks, as it always does, of facing "existential threats", most of the world takes the view that this can't protect its system of apartheid which, under international law, counts as a crime against humanity. Israel is the only middle eastern state with nuclear weapons but refuses to negotiate for regional disarmament, and on 28th October 2022, the United Nations General Assembly voted 152/5 that Israel should give them up. [9]

Israel and the US view Iran and Syria as targets for political, economic and strategic reasons, but as both "targets" are aligning more closely with Russia and China, the US, despite its often bellicose comments, may yet restrain Israel from the folly of a full-scale attack, unless (since grave misjudgements are also possible in the current political climate) it regards such an attack to be in its best interests. Lebanon, in the meantime, has agreed a mutually beneficial maritime demarcation with Israel to facilitate an illegal Israeli-controlled submarine natural gas pipeline originating in Palestinian occupied territory at the expense of future Palestinian options.

## Solidarity

There is little the solidarity movement can do about such aspects of Israel's foreign policy beyond campaigning against UK-based Israeli arms manufacturers and dealers, those complicit with them, and the UK-Israel two-way arms trade. At

home and abroad Israeli apartheid – and the Palestinian people – face uncertain times, though there is also room for hope, perhaps more so than for decades, because of the outcome of the November election. BDS, however, provides the tools necessary to help bury Israeli apartheid as was successfully done with its South African version in the early 1990s.

In that struggle, the United Nations played an important role, and it remains an important factor in monitoring and condemning Israel's many breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws. But it was then, and is even more so now, both a battleground for influence as well as an instrument for making the changes most of its members ask of it.

[1] [www.haaretz.com/opinion/2022-12-11/ty-article-opinion/.highlight/yearning-for-a-jolt-and-the-end-of-apartheid/00000184-fd67-d4c7-a786-fdf7a4ee0000](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2022-12-11/ty-article-opinion/.highlight/yearning-for-a-jolt-and-the-end-of-apartheid/00000184-fd67-d4c7-a786-fdf7a4ee0000)

[2] Omar Barghouti, BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights (2011). BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, the main tools for states, organisations and citizens anywhere to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

[3] [www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/13/israel-knesset-elects-netanyahu-ally-temporary-speaker-unusual-move](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/13/israel-knesset-elects-netanyahu-ally-temporary-speaker-unusual-move)

[4] [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-12-11/ty-article/.highlight/israel-should-stop-being-too-merciful-to-palestinians-far-right-mk-tells-british-media/00000185-0032-d275-a3d7-b33a77be0000](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-12-11/ty-article/.highlight/israel-should-stop-being-too-merciful-to-palestinians-far-right-mk-tells-british-media/00000185-0032-d275-a3d7-b33a77be0000)

[5] [www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties)

[6] [www.voanews.com/a/un-2022-likely-deadliest-for-palestinians-in-west-bank-/6811454.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/un-2022-likely-deadliest-for-palestinians-in-west-bank-/6811454.html)

[7] [www.haaretz.com/us-news/2022-11-30/ty-article/.premium/israels-far-right-coalition-presents-unprecedented-challenge-to-u-s-jews/00000184-c7e1-d823-a9f4-d7e1c7e50000](http://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2022-11-30/ty-article/.premium/israels-far-right-coalition-presents-unprecedented-challenge-to-u-s-jews/00000184-c7e1-d823-a9f4-d7e1c7e50000)

[8] [www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1053601/1930\\_1335793868\\_womencitizens-of-israel-for-the-session-israel-cedaw48.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1053601/1930_1335793868_womencitizens-of-israel-for-the-session-israel-cedaw48.pdf)

[9] [multipolarista.com/2022/10/31/un-vote-israel-nuclear-weapons/](http://multipolarista.com/2022/10/31/un-vote-israel-nuclear-weapons/). The five voting against: Israel, USA, Canada, Micronesia and Palau.

# GERMAN-FRENCH COMPETITION INTENSIFIES

by Simon Korner

The war in Ukraine has intensified rivalries between the major imperialist powers. Most notably, the US has forced its European 'allies' into self-sabotaging anti-Russian sanctions – at a stroke weakening Europe and strengthening itself. Germany has cut off the cheap Russian energy on which it relied for 40% of its supplies, and has begun importing much more expensive US liquified natural gas instead. This is impacting badly on German industry, and some companies are already moving operations to the USA for cheaper energy (*Anadolu Agency*, 14/12/22). And then there was the destruction of Nord Stream 2, the 30% German-owned pipeline, which Russia believes, citing plausible evidence, was a US-orchestrated attack carried out by British special forces (*Reuters*, 29/10/22).

Meanwhile, US nuclear weapons stationed in Germany, along with 40,000 US troops, reinforce US hegemony over its main European rival. As former Indian diplomat M. K. Bhadrakumar puts it, “Chancellor Scholz is terrified of President Biden’s wrath.”

US dominance over Europe has also expressed itself in the recently introduced Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a law that subsidises fuel prices for US industry, leaving European countries to pay higher prices for US fuel brought about by their sanctions against Russia. In response to the IRA, French newspaper *Les Echos* has labelled the US a “systemic rival”. For now, Germany and France are united in their protest against what amounts to a trade war against Europe.

## France fears rise of German militarism

Notwithstanding their temporary unity against the IRA, the result of the marked increase in US bullying has been to raise tensions between France and Germany, the two major powers in the EU. They have turned on one another to the point where a long-planned joint Council of Ministers summit had to be postponed till January this year due to bitter arguments.

For France, the rise of German militarism is a cause for alarm. Since the 1963 Élysée Treaty, France’s clear military superiority as the sole nuclear power on continental Europe was accepted by Germany, and in turn French military power underwrote Germany’s economic hegemony over the rest of the EU.

France has long insisted on maintaining military pre-eminence in Europe. Its controversial Pacific nuclear tests in the 1990s, for instance, were justified by the then foreign minister on the grounds that, “France had to protect itself after being invaded three times in the past century” (*The Times*, 4/8/95) – he was referring to invasions by Germany in 1870 (rather over a century before), 1914, and 1940. As an independent nuclear power France is also able to resist US interference to a degree, while ultimately it nurses ambitions to realise De Gaulle’s vision of French pre-Waterloo global supremacy (*Foundation Robert Schuman*, 1/2/21).

Now French fears of Germany’s strength and intentions have increased exponentially – for good reason. Germany is less and less

willing to take French interests into account. Chancellor Scholz has seized the opportunity of the Ukraine war to argue explicitly for German militarism, “Germans are intent on becoming the guarantor of European security...” he said. “The crucial role for Germany at this moment is to step up as one of the main providers of security in Europe by investing in our military, strengthening the European defence industry, beefing up our military presence on NATO’s eastern flank... This decision marks the starkest change in German security policy since the establishment of the Bundeswehr in 1955...” (*Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2023).

## Germany joins war party

What Scholz calls a “Zeitenwende” or tectonic shift means that the German establishment consensus, as expressed by Willy Brandt, that “war must never again go out from German soil” has been revised (*Foreign Affairs*, 5/12/22). Germany under the SPD and Greens has joined the war party by delivering heavy weapons to Ukraine, something that was taboo as recently as early 2022 (*Deutsche Welle*, 19/1/22).

Even more serious taboos are being challenged. A senior *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* editor has called explicitly for Germany to acquire nuclear weapons of its own (*Carnegie Endowment*, 5/3/20). This would “be a precondition of German leadership in Europe independent from France and closer in line with the worldview of Eastern European countries such as Poland”, according to Wolfgang Streek (*New Left Review*, 7/11/22).



PHOTO BY US STATE DEPARTMENT

*US Secretary of State Blinken and German Foreign minister Baerbock have a quiet word*

Concrete moves are already being made for this. Annalena Baerbock, the hawkish Green foreign minister, has insisted on buying thirty-five US F-35 bombers – in fact she made it a condition of the Greens entering the coalition government with the SPD. These planes can carry US nuclear bombs, and were chosen for that purpose (*Daily Express*, 15/12/22).

As well as acquiring the US nuclear-capable F-35s, Germany is developing a European fighter plane with France and Spain. Known as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), the project high-

lights the tensions between France and Germany. Disputes over which aerospace company – France’s Dassault or Germany’s Airbus – predominates have delayed the project. While Dassault’s CEO, Eric Trappier, says his company must remain the “uncontested leader” (*Defense News*, 22/11/22), Germany’s Airbus is worried about being relegated to a role as a supplier rather than full partner. France, for its part, is worried about giving away high level technology to Germany. Similar quarrels delayed the 1980s joint Typhoon project and led to France going its own way with its Rafale fighter.

## Military leadership

In addition, Germany’s plan for a European air defence system called the European Sky Shield Initiative involving 15 countries has infuriated France, which is meanwhile developing a rival air defence system with Italy. “There is the impression that Germany is forging ahead alone,” says Gaspard Schnitzler of the French thinktank Iris (*20 Minuten, News von Jetzt*, 20/10/22).

France believes Germany is breaking up the old Franco-German axis and thus undermining France’s long-held vision of European (in effect French) “strategic autonomy” – that is, French room for manoeuvre outside US command and commensurate French military pre-eminence within Europe. As one report puts it, France is concerned that “insufficient coordination between member states and off-the-shelf purchases might benefit the US industry rather than Europe’s, ultimately creating new dependencies” (*ISPI*, 7/4/22).

The European Sky Shield, consisting of US Patriot weapons among others, will cover most of the Baltic and eastern European states, giving Germany too big “a foothold in Eastern European countries” for France’s liking, according to Gaspard Schnitzler, because it poses a challenge to French military superiority. “With its new €100 billion fund announced in February to re-arm the German military, Berlin has enough to triple its acquisition budget every year,” says one researcher at another French think-tank IFRI (*Le Monde*, 15/10/22).

Germany is thus promoting itself as leading the European arm of NATO, rather than as a partner with France in the EU’s semi-autonomous defence force. Whereas the French government once lobbied for Germany to raise its arms spending – so long as France and the EU controlled the result – it is now watching in dismay as Germany escapes

the post-war embrace that bound it to France for decades. As Macron put it, “I think it’s not good for Germany or for Europe that it isolates itself” (*The Limited Times*, 20/10/22).

## Energy dispute

Another Franco-German dispute is over energy. With soaring prices across Europe, France, Italy and around two-thirds of EU member states have argued for a price cap on gas, seeking to use the EU as a cartel to keep prices low. Germany opposed this, arguing that a cap would divert gas that the EU needs to other countries willing to pay more. But a more important reason for German opposition was revealed when it suddenly announced €200bn (£170bn) in state aid to German businesses and consumers to offset the high fuel costs – having given France no prior warning of its move. This massive subsidy allows Germany to obtain the gas it needs despite high prices, something less wealthy EU countries, including France, find harder to do. German subsidies benefit its own industry at the expense of the industries of France and peripheral EU countries – similar to what the US is doing to Europe with its Inflation Reduction Act.

Though an EU price cap was finally agreed in late December 2022, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary refused to sign the deal, and German let-out clauses render it largely unworkable and unlikely to last.

Germany is also trying to hobble France’s competitive energy industry, in particular the state-subsidised *Électricité de France* (EDF). Former EDF boss, Henri Proglio, complained recently, “The German obsession for 30 years has been the disintegration of EDF...they’ve succeeded” (*Documentaire et Verité*, @DocuVerite, 13/12/ 22). Proglio added: “How do you expect this country (Germany) to accept that France has a competitive tool as powerful as EDF on its doorstep?”

The Germany-first approach has caused an outcry across Europe. One adviser to Italy’s prime minister said Germany’s energy policy “undermines the reasons for the Union”. Luxembourg’s energy minister, called it an “insane race... to outcompete other governments in such a difficult moment in Europe.”

France, in turn, is refusing Germany’s request for a new energy pipeline (the MidCat project) to run from Spain across France to Germany. While France cites environmental reasons for refusing the project, it clearly gains by hindering German access to fuel, an area in which France has a relative advantage because of its nuclear power programme.

Beyond the energy sector, the use of economic muscle has long been used by Germany as a weapon to subordinate the other EU countries, including France. Germany, for instance, argues for maintaining the EU’s Stability and Growth Pact, which sets tight limits on national debt. France, by contrast, wants to scrap it to allow it to subsidise its arms and nuclear industries – key sectors of its economy. Germany wants spending limits because its debts are lower than France’s, and seeks to gain advantage by adhering to the Pact. France seeks to gain by breaking it.

## China

There are also major tensions between France and Germany over China – both countries vying for trade, despite US disapproval. Scholz has agreed the sale of 24.9% of Hamburg port to Chinese company Cosco. His recent visit to Beijing with a large business delegation provoked anger among the eastern European countries and the EU foreign ministry, which argue for anti-China confrontation in line with US policy. France is once again worried about Germany going it alone, after Germany rebuffed the idea of a joint Franco-

German visit. Following Scholz’s trip, Macron announced his own visit early next year (*Politico*, 16/11/22).

## Germany consolidates power

Germany favours enlargement of the EU to include “the Western Balkan states, Ukraine, Moldova and, in the long term, to Georgia”, as Scholz announced recently (*The Guardian*, 14/12/22). The accession of several smaller countries – most under German economic influence – will massively enlarge Germany’s sphere of control within the EU, at the expense of France. Within an EU of at least 30 states, Germany will have an inbuilt majority. And if it achieves its aim of establishing a new system of majority voting rather than the current unanimous voting, it will have gained unprecedented political control over the EU.

However weakened in relation to the USA, German imperialism has been pulled firmly into the Atlanticist fold, at least for now, though the military monster the US is creating could come back to haunt it in years to come.

Within the EU, the effect has been to intensify the historic rivalry between Germany and France. Germany’s doubled military budget will increase the pressure it is already exerting on France to cede its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to the EU. Such a move would in effect mean Germany, as the EU’s hegemonic power, attaining Security Council membership and global power status. As France will not sit by and watch Germany eclipse it, the contradictions between the two look likely to sharpen, leading to the possibility of yet another armed conflict between them.



# BRITAIN'S WAR IN THE UKRAINE

by Gregor Tassie

From the start of the conflict, Britain was first among European NATO states to give lethal assistance to the Ukraine, and this has continued. In December 2022, Britain led the formation of a Joint Expeditionary Force of the Nordic Northern Neighbours Group of ten countries. [1] Rishi Sunak affirmed an increase of military and financial support to £2.3 billion and committed to the same, if not more, in 2023. [2] This compares to the EU funding of €3.1 billion. Britain is paying the Ukrainian army, structuring funds to the Ukraine through loans, facilitating borrowing from the World Bank, and grants.

The UK is the second biggest military contributor to the Ukraine. [3] Among arms being given are Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons (NLAWs), Javelin hand-held rockets, Starstreak satellite equipment, Stormer, Samson, Scimitar, Wolfhound, Husky and Mastiff armoured vehicles, 84,000 helmets, Brimstone 2 missiles, and M270 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), M109 howitzers and Black Hornet Nano Unmanned Ariel Vehicles (UAVs). [4] Britain's leading companies involved are BAE, Babcock, and Rolls Royce, employing 70,000 worldwide. The military-industrial complex is budgeting to 2026 suggesting this conflict may last for another three years. History informs us that Britain has a long engagement in the region.

## History of British involvement

Following the 1917 October revolution, Churchill persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to abandon isola-

tionism and join the intervention of thirteen countries to bring down the Bolsheviks. [5] Britain sent troops to northern Russia and the Ukraine, collaborating with remnants of the Tsarist army. The conflict caused huge damage with ten million Soviet citizens killed.

Dissatisfied by the failed intervention, Britain continued to undermine the Soviet government by assassination attempts on Lenin and Bolshevik leaders. [6] However the influence of the British working class was instrumental in obliging the UK government to recognise the USSR in 1924. Trade and the League of Nations were important avenues for cooperation, yet there emerged further attempts to subvert the Soviet Union. Following Hitler's ascent to power, MI6 enjoyed a 'cordial relationship' exchanging information on communism with the Gestapo till October 1937. [7] It was at this time MI6 started backing the Ukrainian nationalist movement. [8] In 1946, after the Nazis defeat, MI6 continued to sponsor the underground movement of Bandera and his Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists-B (OUN-B) operating in the USSR. [9] The OUN-B led by Bandera, who collaborated with the Nazis, murdered up to 100,000 Poles in 1943, an event condemned as genocide by the Polish parliament, and the European Parliament. The anniversary of Bandera's birth was recently widely celebrated by the Zelensky regime, including in a tweet from the Ukrainian Parliament.

The Labour government issued work permits to 35,000 Ukrainian former POWs who had fought against the Red Army. They became the core of the anti-communist Association of Ukrai-

nians (AUGB), which established branches active in expounding Ukrainian nationalism. [10]

Prior to 2020, about 32,000 Ukrainian-born British citizens, plus another 30,000 were registered with the AUGB and the Ukrainian Institute London (supported by the UK Foreign Office). The latter was formed in 1979 by a Ukrainian priest Josef Slipky who had served time in a Soviet jail for collaborating with the Nazis. The organisation has a well-funded network in Britain. Their website offers details on how to contact MPs, councillors, media, etc. to build support for the Ukraine. The Ukrainian Institute and AUGB are members of the anti-communist World Ukrainian Congress and the European Congress of Ukrainians. [11]

## Post-Soviet involvement

Commitment to the Ukraine by Britain dates from 1993 when President Kravchuk visited London, following Thatcher's visit to Kiev in 1986. Military cooperation started in 1994 when the Duke of Gloucester led a Ministry of Defence delegation to the Ukraine for joint military exercises in the Black Sea near Ochakov. [12]

Following the illegal overthrow in 2014 of the elected Ukrainian president, Britain's Ministry of Defence initiated Operation Orbital starting in 2015 and training 22,000 Ukrainian soldiers near Lvov. Between 30 and 75 British military advisors worked in Ukraine assisting in intelligence and expanding the Ukrainian armed forces and police. Additionally, the UK-led Operation Interflex involved 250 paratroopers from the 16th Air Assault Brigade in joint exercises with Estonia. UK jets

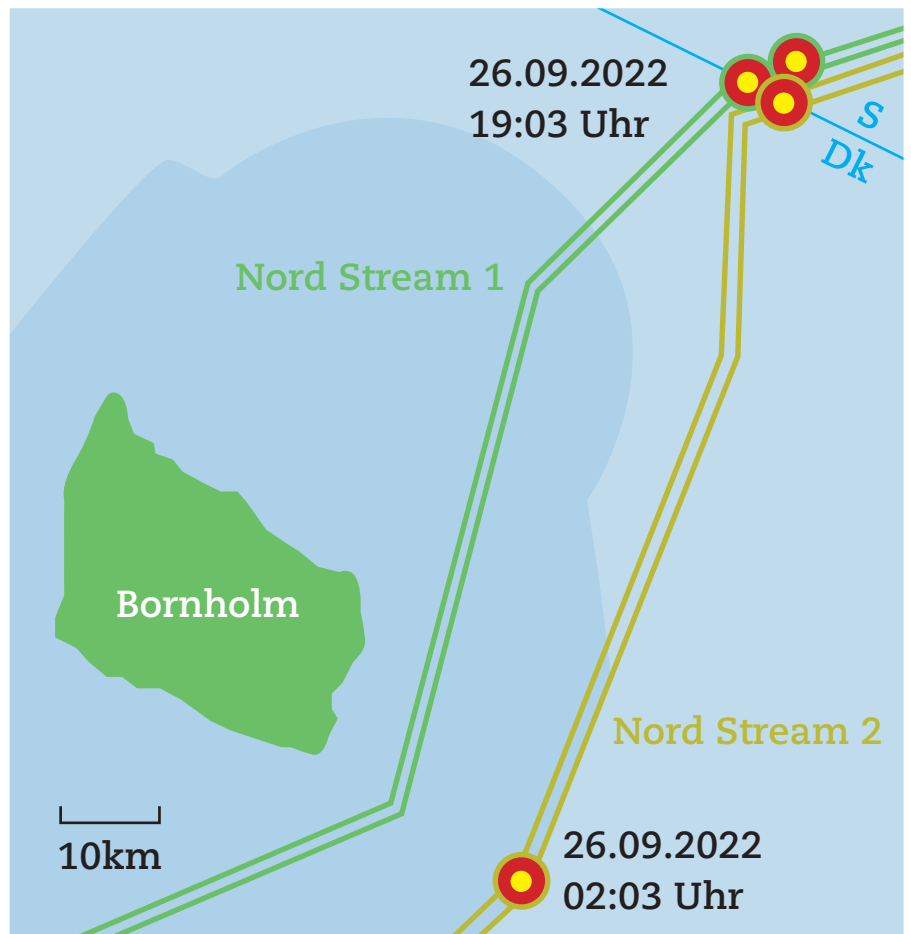
were located in forward bases in Cyprus and Poland.

According to a former Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) officer Vasily Prozorov. "When Zelensky visited London he secretly met with Richard Moore the head of MI6 (on 12th October 2020) and London proposed the training of officers for sabotage who knew English, and Russian and had been trained at Russian military colleges." They established a UK military base at Ochakov on the Black Sea. No less than the US, "British intelligence treat Ukraine as a colony, using its territory for operations." [13] According to *Ukrainian Pravda*, in the talks between Moore and Zelensky, three subjects were discussed; first attacking corruption, taking control of the state apparatus including courts, second the approach to Russia, and third, controlling Zelensky's circle. [14]

On 21st June 2021, an agreement was signed between Britain and the Ukraine on board HMS Defender at Odessa which specified the provision by Britain to Ukraine of missiles, two mine-hunter vessels and eight warships as well as the building of a new naval base in the Sea of Azov. The following day, en route between Odessa and Batumi in Georgia, HMS Defender made an incursion into Russian waters of 3 kilometres when it was intercepted by two patrol boats and an SU24 fighter plane which fired warning shots across the Defender's bows. Accordingly, the boat left Russian waters, however, according to a BBC reporter on board the crew were on "action stations" before they left Odessa. [15] On 27th June, documents were discovered that proved this was a planned event. [16]

### Britain involved in war

As from March 2022, the Ukraine's "intelligence, security and counter-intelligence have been under the guidance of MI6 for organizing sabotage in the Donbass and Russia." [17] British intelligence is protecting



Location of the attacks on Nord Stream 1 & 2 26/9/22

BASED ON GRAPHIC BY LÄMPPEL

the tunnels through which arms are transported into the Ukraine and which are crucial to supplying of lethal weapons from NATO. [18]

The UK has been suspected of being involved in several major operations; attacking the Moskva ship, the Sevastopol naval base, the Crimea bridge and field operations in the Donbass. One of the most significant however is the blowing up of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in September 2022. Last summer a US aircraft carrier Kearsarge visited the Estonian Miinisadam navy base, and took part in the Baltops naval exercises near the Danish island of Bornholm." [19] The exercises involved deep sea divers and helicopters close to the pipeline location. At the time of the three explosions at both pipelines, a military aircraft from a German airfield circled the pipeline three times and then landed at a Polish aerodrome. A few minutes

after the explosions, the then British Prime Minister Truss texted the Secretary of State Blinken on her mobile phone, 'It's done!' [20] Intercepts of radio traffic were analysed by the Russian Ministry of Defence who accused the Royal Navy of planning, and carrying out the attack on 26th September. [21] Britain was also involved in launching a drone attack on the Sevastopol naval base.

Russian intelligence has reported that MI6 were involved in troop assaults on the Zaporozhy nuclear power station last summer and that British commandos were recently involved in the Kherson oblast. [22] Their role appears to be planning and leading small groups in special operations rather than taking part in large scale battles. It has been acknowledged by Lt. General Robert Magowan, that British troops are operating in the Ukraine. [23] The numbers include 350 commandos,

ostensibly to protect the British embassy, however, there has been no denial of combat activities against Russia. It is disturbing that there have also been reports of attempted fake Russian chemical weapons attacks, similar to what happened in Syria. [24] According to intercepts in January 2023, the Royal Navy is planning to launch missiles on Russian targets in the Far East. [25]

## Opportunities for peace

As NATO and the US are increasing military spending in 2023, and Russia is militarising its economy, it is unlikely the war will end soon. Merkel and Holland's confessions that they were lying in signing the Minsk agreements in 2015 damage Russian confidence that Western states are trustworthy in negotiations. Merkel said in an interview that the purpose of Minsk was to buy time for Ukraine to re-arm and, therefore, not to achieve a peaceful resolution of the disputes with Russia. In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe and the US, the war is imposing a huge effect on economic life and living standards. *The Financial Times*, states that the UK in 2023 is going to endure the deepest recession of all the G7 countries. [26] The consequences of dwindling social spending, increasing strikes and public discontent prove that the conflict is unsustainable for Britain and other NATO states.

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# EUROPEAN PROTESTS

## against war, NATO and EU energy policy

by Marianne Hitchen

Large demonstrations in many European cities last year show how the energy crisis, linked to EU sanctions against Russia, is fuelling political instability as soaring power prices stoke inflation to levels unseen in three decades. In most cases the demonstrators hold a range of political views, including nationalist sentiments egged on by the right, which is exploiting the growing refugee crisis. But an awareness of the role of the US and NATO in prolonging, if not provoking, the war is growing across the political spectrum. Many of the protesters have called on their governments to end the war soon and for NATO to negotiate with the Kremlin. Some have linked their economic difficulties directly to the strategic objectives of the European Union and NATO, and have called explicitly for their countries' membership of these bodies to end.

In Britain, any debate around NATO is almost taboo. The characterisation by the British press of the Brexit debate as being between ignorant nationalists versus sophisticated pro-Europeans may also be at play in preventing a clear-headed analysis of NATO's role in Britain as well as in Europe. In the face of a huge energy crisis, European leaders still prioritise politics and ideology over people's lives and the economy, by playing tough with Russia and closely following the US.

The overview below records some of the recent protests, with their mix of both left and right wing opposition to their governments' policies.



PHOTO BY ALEXANDAR VUJADINOVIC

### FINLAND

Progressive and anti-war sectors in Finland continue to protest against the country's bid for NATO membership. Demonstrators last June claimed that Finland's accession to the US-led military alliance will make it part of the nexus against the people of the world, and is not in the interest of the Finnish people. The political establishment in Finland used the pretext of the Ukraine war to run a campaign claiming that joining NATO was essential for the country's security.

### NORWAY

Peace campaigners in Norway have slammed an agreement that gives the US exclusive and unhindered access to its military bases. Norway For Peace and the Communist Party of Norway also protested against the weakening last year of Norway's seven decade long foreign policy, which barred the presence of foreign military bases on Norwegian soil. Norway has become an increasingly important host of, and participant in, NATO-US

military exercises in the Scandinavian region. This was probably a major cause of Russia's "enough is enough" moment.

### GERMANY

Every Monday evening in recent weeks, rallies several hundred strong have taken place in towns and cities across eastern Germany to protest against growing economic hardship and the consequences of NATO aggression against Russia. In Leipzig, eastern Germany's biggest city after Berlin, left and right political groups have often found themselves protesting at the same time on Augustusplatz. "Ordinary Germans are paying because America wants to interfere in Russia" said an unemployed man from Brandenburg succinctly, adding that his bills were going up and his chances of getting a job going down.

In stark contrast to the response by the British peace movement, the German Peace Council clearly identifies NATO as the aggressor in the current conflict.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

Huge demonstrations - in one case around 70,000 strong - took place in Prague last September, calling on the government to do more to control soaring energy prices and demanding the resignation of prime minister Petre Fiala. The protest at Wenceslas Square in the city centre was held a day after the government survived a no-confidence vote amid opposition claims of inaction against inflation and energy costs. "Russia's not our enemy, the government of warmongers is the enemy", one speaker said. The refugee crisis was also a concern in the minds of protesters. Around 500,000 Ukrainians fled to the Czech Republic last year, making up 4% of the Czech population, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

## AUSTRIA

Provoked by soaring energy prices, inflation and other issues, anti-government protesters held rallies in Vienna last September while chanting slogans opposing EU sanctions on Russia. Against the backdrop of an unpopular and divided government dogged by corruption scandals, Austria's populist, right-wing Freedom party has gained much support through naming EU sanctions against Russia as the cause of the mounting economic hardship faced by working class Austrians. Former foreign minister Karen Kneissl has said that the political and economic situation in Austria is rapidly deteriorating.

## FRANCE

In October, thousands of protesters marched through Paris in a demonstration mainly ignored by French media. Organised by The Patriots, a nationalist, Eurosceptic party, the demonstration attracted a lot of support from wider French society. The protesters denounced NATO warmongering and economic disruption linked to the sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia. Led by a large banner proclaiming RESISTANCE, people chanted "Let's get out of NATO" while other placards called for Frexit - France's exit from the EU.

## ITALY

The future of Italy's military support for Ukraine in its war with Russia was cast into doubt after thousands of people took to the streets of Rome and Milan in October, to protest against the shipment of arms to Kiev. Local media reported that protesters held banners, placards and rainbow flags. They demanded negotiation and diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis. The demonstrators included representatives of trade unions, student groups and cultural associations. Growing numbers of Italians argue that following EU and NATO policy on Ukraine risks prolonging the war and diverting resources the government should be spending at home.

## MOLDOVA

One of the poorest countries in Europe, Moldova is paying a high price for its government's hard-line pro-EU, pro-NATO stance on Ukraine, led by prime minister Maia Sandu. Formerly an exclusive user of Russian gas, Moldova's sanctions against Russia have resulted in Gazprom cutting supplies by 30% and demanding the payment of outstanding debts. Gas bills have gone up by 27% and inflation by 33%, while most Moldovans have been plunged into a devastating cost of living crisis. 7000 protesters marched in the capital calling for Maia Sandu's resignation, some even setting up camp outside her house and refusing to leave until she did.

## GREECE

In December, Greek communists demonstrated at the site of a derailed train carrying US army equipment, which had arrived at the port of Alexandroupolis. "Alexandroupolis is a port of the people and not a base for imperialists" declared the protesters, as well as "No involvement, no participation in the war, the bases must be closed down and US troops must go". While the Greek Communist Party holds both Russia and the US

responsible for the war in Ukraine, it still manages to protest effectively against NATO's manoeuvrings.

## PORTUGAL

In Portugal in December hundreds of people attended demonstrations in Lisbon and Porto in support of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine. The Portuguese Council for Peace and Cooperation said, "We are here today because Peace is urgent and it is necessary to raise the struggle for Peace to new heights to stop the warmongering madness that commands the policies of the EU and European governments, completely servile to the interests of the United States."

## SPAIN

The NATO summit was held in Madrid in June 2022 and led to several protests, including a 5000 strong demonstration. A second planned march was banned by the authorities on security grounds. While some banners condemned Russia as well as NATO, others focused their attention on NATO's role, saying "No to NATO, no to War, for Peace.". Some called for NATO bases in Spain to be closed. Concha Hoyos, a retired Madrid resident said, "I am fed up [with] this business of arms and killing people. The solution they propose is more arms and wars and we always pay for it. So no NATO, no [army] bases, let the Americans go and leave us alone without wars and weapons," (Al Jazeera 26/6/22)

## Wake-up call

The fact that the right is making ground with opposition to the war and EU policy should be a wake-up call to the left to fight on these issues and not allow the right the space to seem to defend people's interests.

# TORIES UNDER PRESSURE

by Helen Christopher

Striking workers in Britain have shown a remarkable determination to keep going with their campaigns of industrial action to secure increased pay, and to defend working conditions and services. Leading the way RMT members first voted for strike action back in May.

Other workers have not been deterred by the intransigence of the employers and the government who are intent on inflicting defeat on the likes of the RMT and the CWU. In fact more and more groups have taken action. This includes the Royal College of Nursing which used to pride itself on its anti-strike stance. All of this is a measure of how serious the situation is for workers and their families as they increasingly struggle to afford the basic essentials of life. The stress of working in services which are falling apart and where patients, passengers and others are put at risk takes its toll. In the NHS it is leading to an exodus of staff, compounding the problems. The obvious point has been made by unions that not paying staff is a false economy, but that logic only applies if the government had any concern for the future of the NHS. It does not. It wants to reduce public services further with private

**Despite the media stepping back from attacking Sunak, the crisis within the Tories has not gone away.**

companies getting the crumbs of what is left and people with any cash at all forced to go private.

## Tory troubles

Despite the militancy of the unions, the Tories got through the Truss fiasco and are trying to steady the ship. We have yet another Prime Minister, this time it is Rishi Sunak, the markets choice, who is in number 10. Yet the tory civil war continues with Johnson loyalists blaming Sunak for his downfall and prepared to undermine him at every opportunity. He too, as much as Truss (or Johnson), wants to make the working class pay. Sunak is not challenging market orthodoxy and is carrying through the establishment agenda, including trying to edge closer to the European Union and prosecuting the war in Ukraine. This leaves the Tories free to focus on defeating the Trade Unions, driving down working class living standard and destroying public services.

However, there are clearly concerns that the Tories are still not getting the situation with the strikes under control and that their highly confrontational and uncompromising stance is not bearing fruit. Even Keir Starmer, who wants to please capital above all, felt confident enough to reject Grant Shapps' proposed new anti-union legislation in his New Year speech. Announcing this proposal to enforce minimum levels of service during strikes in different industries, Shapps made the statement that unions should not be able to put lives at risk. In fact it is normal for unions to agree life and limb cover during strikes – it is the Tories who have failed to provide a basic level of service to the British people with hundreds dying, not because

of striking ambulance workers, but because the Tories have run the NHS into the ground. Levels of service are already below a safe minimum, so it is difficult to see how anyone would ever be able to strike if this legislation were passed.

Following a familiar Tory script, Government ministers have made outlandish attacks on strikers, including the once revered medical staff, for whom we all applauded during lockdown. There is nothing new in this. Honest toil is only respected so long as workers remain submissive and don't stand up for their rights. It is not clear, however, that Tory arguments are totally credible with ordinary people. The claim that wage rises would fuel inflation does not wash when clearly inflationary price rises started long before the current wage demands of workers. We are also told that there is no money, yet everyone now knows that money can be found if needed to bail out bankers, for economic support during the pandemic and the energy crisis and for the war in Ukraine. Such basic facts have not been entirely lost on the British people. A Savanta ComRes poll of 16th-18th December 2022 showed far more people supporting the strikes than opposing them, with nurses achieving 63% support. Another poll at the same time conducted by YouGov found a similar level of support for the nurses.

The government has tried to hide behind so-called Independent Pay Review Body recommendations for the public sector, but these recommendations came before soaring inflation hit living standards. The GMB union has said it will withdraw from collaborating with the pay review bodies next year. In fact, the

pay review bodies covering nine groups of staff in the public sector are not independent at all. They comprise a chair appointed by the Prime Minister, with the other 6-8 members appointed, following a selection process, either by the PM or the relevant Secretary of State. "Independent" is, therefore, only a word attached to government appointed bodies to give some illusion of objectivity.

Realising that the ham-fisted attacks on workers are back-firing the Prime Minister has made more conciliatory noises about being prepared to talk – but at time of writing not actually about the current inadequate pay offers.

The moment of turmoil, of palpable crisis, under Truss has passed, but the Tories problems have not gone away. They are faced with managing capitalism's continuing crises

of hands for capitalism, he has the media behind him and is intent on squashing dissent in the party. And he and Wes Streeting have made clear that they will not meet TU demands for decent pay. He will pursue other key policies for British capital, including prosecuting the war in Ukraine and drawing closer to the EU. In respect of the latter, Labour is seen as much better bet for capital than the fractious Tories.

Despite that Labour still remains only a stop-gap for the establishment. It was founded by the, now striking, trade unions and is still seen as home by many socialists, radicals and campaigners – not what the establishment wants in its political party. Labour can get capitalism out of a hole and a spell for it in government provides an illusion of democracy. It also allows time for the Tories to regroup in opposition but it is really the Tories who are the

been; Maintaining an independent world role versus allying with the US and/or the EU; one nation Toryism versus individualist neo-liberalism; the dominance of the city versus industrial policy and regional development.

The defining issue, however, became the EU and Brexit with the two sides of this debate increasingly entrenched and hostile from when Britain first applied to join the then Common Market in 1963 to its actual accession in a decade later. The biggest problem for the establishment is that the dominant Brexiteer wing of the Tory Party does not represent the dominant interests of British capital. Nor does the Tory party ripping itself apart help either. So much is the Party membership distrusted that it wasn't even allowed to vote on Liz Truss' replacement, having picked in the last two elections, leaders the establishment didn't want.

The Tory Party desperately needs reform, but it is a huge task with all manner of right wing diehards now influential in parliament, and a membership that cleaves to their policies.

**The obvious point has been made by unions that not paying staff is a false economy, but that logic only applies if the government had any concern for the future of the NHS. It does not.**

and a lot of damage has been done. Boris Johnson's mirage of "leveling up" combined with some vague appeal to making Britain more dynamic in terms of investment and industrial development has largely evaporated. Tory MPs who won former Labour seats in the north of England and elsewhere are already looking for other jobs in preparation for getting turfed out at the next election. On current trends those who shifted their votes at the last general election do not seem to be the harbingers of a new wave of working class Toryism.

## Fixing the Tories

A period in government for Labour is all but certain – it would be difficult for Starmer to lose. He has established that he is a safe pair

natural party of British capitalism. However, the Tories divisions and problems are deep and enduring – how easy will it be to sort them out?

The Conservative Party, has failed, in recent years to fully represent the interests of British capitalism's dominant strand. Despite the media stepping back from attacking Sunak, the crisis within the Tories has not gone away. There are Tory MPs plotting against him as they see him as the prime mover in Johnson's ousting. The absurd premiership of Liz Truss, demonstrated how deep the problems are and reflects of the crisis of declining British imperialism. The divisions which arose from that post World War 2 decline within British capital and the establishment have, since then, played out with increasing intensity in its political party. Some of the fault lines have

## Opportunities for the unions

In this situation there are challenges and opportunities for the unions. The government remains determined to defeat them for political as well as economic reasons. But the Tories are in crisis and they are not winning the public argument. Those who have been battling on for months now will welcome the reinforcements joining the struggle. The massive waves of action could be made to count more - be more joined up and involve community campaigns, connecting with the concerns of the vast majority over the cost of living. There is an opportunity for the working class and the trade unions to take advantage of the Tories difficulties, to build greater unity of strike actions and campaigns and make gains. This would represent a huge defeat for the Tories.

# THE COST OF PROFIT CRISIS



PHOTO BY UK PRIME MINISTER

Class warriors, Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak's first cabinet meeting

by Sacha Grear

An 11% wage rise for all public sector staff - 5.8 million workers - would cost £13bn according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The government would get around a third of this back in extra tax and National Insurance payments, so we are really looking at a cost of approximately £8.7bn (Richard Burgon MP). To put this in perspective the government bailout of Bulb Energy and its (private) takeover by Octopus Energy, reported in *The Metro* 22/12/22, will cost the taxpayer in the region of £6.5bn (The Office for Budget Responsibility).

The increase in public sector pay would need to be funded year on year. But as Richard Burgon MP wrote, “a small wealth tax on the very wealthiest households with assets over £10 million could [fund this] ... or we could end the injustice where taxes on profits when selling assets are paid at lower rates than the income tax you pay on your wages. Addressing this by equalising Capital Gains Tax rates with income tax rates alone would raise £17 billion a year—more than enough.”

In short, the government, without bemoaning its affordability, is prepared to pour billions into propping up private capital - billions that will materialise as shareholder dividends - but is not prepared to pay public sector workers a decent wage.

## Tory priorities

Even these figures are only scratching the surface of Tory priorities.

In November 2020, the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced: “Based on our assessment of the international situation and our foreign policy goals, I am increasing defence spending by £24.1 billion over the next four years. That is £16.5 billion more than our manifesto commitment”. The increase in the military budget did not draw any shouts of ‘unaffordable’ from either side of the House. Bear in mind that is the increase in military expenditure, not the total. In 2021 Britain’s annual military expenditure was £59.5bn. Ben Wallace MP, Minister for ‘Defence’, has announced government plans to increase this to £100bn per annum by 2030. A further £2.5bn was plucked from the ‘magic money tree’ (with which Theresa May mocked Corbyn’s Labour) in order to fan the flames of the proxy war in Ukraine, no questions asked.

‘Foreign policy goals’ then, principally to expand the interests of British capital investments abroad and if required, go to war with China - we are already circuitously at war with Russia - are being funded by sustained, deep cuts to social expenditure.

As if a demonstration of those policy goals were needed, the HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group was sent to the South China Sea in July 2021. The Strike Group consisted of the HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier - the largest and most powerful surface vessel in the Royal Navy’s history - 8 other attack vessels, 32 aircraft, and 3700 personnel.

A genuine defence policy, with the sole objective of defending Britain from attack rather than promoting British global imperial interests, would cost a small fraction of the current budget, releasing multi-billions of pounds every year for investment in socially useful production and the socio-economic infrastructure. The government’s plan to double the current waste on military spending is obscene.

The government’s attack on public sector workers and Britain’s social infrastructure has nothing to do with ‘economic necessity’. It is a political choice. Its deceitful narrative - that public sector wage increases in line with inflation are “unaffordable” - was further exposed in a recent report by the Royal College of Nursing. The report details how awarding nurses a pay rise of 5% above inflation would be cheaper than recruiting new nurses from abroad or using agency staff to fill vacancies.

The cynical, ruthless treatment of NHS staff is not about cost. The Tory government strategy, drip fed over 12 years, is calculated to suppress wages, decimate the workforce and collapse public services to the point where the remaining skeletal infrastructure is potentially profitable and attractive to private takeovers. It is a giveaway of immense public wealth to corporate capital interests, similar to the ‘Academisation’ of state education when billions of pounds worth of local authority schools and their playing fields were gifted to Academy chains without a penny in compensation.



This is more than right-wing ideology about 'reducing the state'. On the contrary, this is about increasing state intervention, lubricated with public funds, to patch up an economy that has been in enduring and deepening crisis since at least 2008. It reflects the essentially parasitical character of contemporary capitalism, which despite the fourth industrial revolution is losing the capacity to constantly reinvent itself and is, bit by bit, being reduced to asset-stripping the social infrastructure it had managed to build during its expansive heyday.

That infrastructure was deemed necessary by the Victorians and Edwardians to produce and reproduce a viable, modern workforce - through education, healthcare, social services, transport, energy and water supplies. The core of the expenditure - building schools, hospitals, roads, railways, the underground, sewers and waterworks - was afforded between 1870 - 1914 when the rising class of capitalists was exploiting its colonial Empire for many trillions of pounds - £45 trillion from India alone.

Then the post-World War II temporary settlement saw the Labour government of 1945-51 create the modern welfare state and the NHS, enact the 1944 Education Act, and nationalise coal, gas, electricity, the railways, iron and steel industries. Water and waste water services were virtually all publicly owned by the turn of the 20th century. They were privatised in 1989 by the Thatcher government.

## Differing class fortunes

The contemporary attack on wages and working conditions, in conjunction with privatisation, is projected as a cost of living crisis for workers, supposedly caused by the war in Ukraine and the Covid pandemic. But this is falsehood upon falsehood. Prices were outstripping wages long before Covid or

the start of the war in Ukraine. The decline in public sector real wages began nearly two decades ago. The neoliberal attack on public services and workers' conditions dates back to Thatcher. The sanctions imposed on Russia have simply served to exacerbate a crisis that was already systemically embedded.

In reality the decline in wages and working conditions coincides with the rapid growth in profit margins. The rise in poverty and food banks is the flip-side of the exponential growth in the wealth and number of billionaires. These contrary class fortunes are causally and inseparably connected. Britain's billionaires are increasing their wealth by £220 million every single day. Bankers' bonuses are up 28%, and bosses' pay at the largest 100 companies is up 23%. (Richard Burgon MP)

Globally, "every 30 hours, the pandemic spawned a new billionaire", said Somesh Jha of Al Jazeera. He also said, "According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, 131 billionaires more than doubled their net worth during the pandemic. The world's richest person, Louis Vuitton chief Bernard Arnault, was worth \$159bn on December 27, 2022, up by around \$60bn compared with early 2020. Elon Musk, the planet's second-wealthiest man, boasted a \$139bn fortune — it was less than \$50bn before the pandemic. And India's Gautam Adani, third on the index, has seen his wealth increase more than tenfold in this period, from approximately \$10bn at the start of 2020 to \$110bn at the end of 2022."

According to Knight Frank, estate agent, "ultra-high net worth" (UHNW) individuals, defined as having a fortune of more than \$50 million, are now at a record number of 218,200. Credit Suisse add that the number of people in the UHNW bracket has increased by more than 50% in the past two years. (Avanti Populo, New Year's Resolution)

## A deliberate strategy

What we are living through is not an unavoidable cost of living crisis. This is the unfolding of a deliberate strategy to intensify the upward redistribution of wealth, to compensate capital for an enduring, systemic crisis. Experienced as immiseration by the working class, and as tragedy and devastation by the global south, this is in truth a cost of profit crisis.

With the Tax Justice Network estimating that \$21 trillion to \$32 trillion in financial assets are sitting in offshore tax havens, the cost-of-profit crisis is resulting in grotesque stockpiles of wealth that, ultimately, will never be used. It gives perspective to the vomit-worthy allegation by the Minister for Health, Mr. Barclay, that trade unions have made a "conscious decision" to "inflict harm" on patients. This Orwellian double-think sits alongside his predecessor's decision in 2020 to send Covid-positive patients back to Care Homes where they cross-infected residents, resulting in tens of thousands of fatalities.

Theorising about the 'small state' has not prevented the government from interfering directly in the Rail dispute, instructing rail companies not to agree a deal with the RMT, ASLEF and other unions. The government is subsidising the prolongation of the dispute by funding any company losses incurred as a result of strike action. While striking workers are losing income, company profits are being looked after by the state. The role of this Tory government in the conflict between labour and capital is transparent. It is the executive leadership of a ruling class committed to prolonging the systemic status quo, continuing the upward redistribution of wealth and to crushing organised working class resistance.

# The People's Democratic Republic

# 1970 - 1990

by Pat Turnbull

Yemen has for the past few years been in the news mainly because of the war waged on the country by Saudi Arabia, which has resulted in so many deaths and reduced Yemen to one of the poorest countries in the world. Few people talk about the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which existed in South Yemen from 1970 to 1990, and achieved much in that short time.

Helen Nettleship was in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) from July 1974 to September 1976. She says: "Every village had a Nadi, a community centre, where women, including myself, would go every afternoon to learn how to read and write. If you didn't go, the head of the household would be fined. All schooling and all medical treatment were free and a given right. The last time I went to Yemen was 2005 and 2008. Then you had to pay for school books and all medical treatment. As for women, they all have to be veiled, seen and not heard."

## Yemen's history

Yemen is situated on the Arabian Sea, at the south-western tip of the Arabian peninsula. North is Saudi Arabia, east is Oman. Across the Red Sea to the west is Eritrea, across the Gulf of Aden to the south are Djibouti and Somalia, with Ethiopia inland from them.

Yemen was famous in ancient times for the Incense Road, with caravans of dromedaries travelling from the south to the north of Arabia and beyond, carrying incense from Arabia and spices which arrived from India at the harbours in the south. Remains from Yemen's past include

the Marib Dam, built in the first millennium BC, the Taweelah Tanks, huge water reservoirs, and the town of Shibam, which has been in existence for about 1,700 years, and is listed as a World Heritage site for its 500 mud-brick tower blocks.

For the East India Company, Aden, on the southern coast, was a useful stopping off point on the route to India, as it had a natural harbour and ready sources of water. It was captured for the British on 19th January 1839 by Captain Haines, although battles lasted till 1857. From 1869 Aden's importance greatly increased with the opening of the Suez Canal. In 1904 the British and the Ottomans divided Yemen into what would become the PDRY in the south, and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the north. Aden became a large fleet and military base, run from India until 1937. The British had no interest in what lay behind Aden, and made agreements with the feudal emirs and sultans ruling these areas so that nothing would interfere with their operations. After the Second World War Aden was the second transshipment port in the world, and after the British abandoned their military base at Suez, it became the headquarters of Middle East Command from 1958, with a garrison of 15,000 troops.

## Liberation struggle

In 1956 huge demonstrations shook Aden. In 1959 the first Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) cell was set up there. Early members included Abdel Fattah Ismail and Ali Nasir Muhammad, who went on to be leaders of the PDRY up to 1986. By 1962 there was a substantial underground structure. The mission: to get rid of the British and gain inde-

pendence. In 1963 the National Liberation Front (NLF) was set up and October 14th that year was when the NLF dated the start of its campaign for liberation. The people of the Radfan Mountains, about 100 km north of Aden, started the people's armed struggle. Britain had built a military airport and stationed a small military unit there, which was overrun by the freedom fighters. The struggle was merciless; the British aircraft bombed villages, and destroyed or poisoned wells. After several months the fighters had to retreat to the mountains, but the signal had been given for all South Yemenis.

Women were involved in the struggle as well as men. Klaus-Dieter Schruhl, a doctor from the German Democratic Republic, spent two years in the PDRY, from 1972 to 1974, and in 1980 published a book about his experiences. He says: "I have seen plenty of women whose age, many births and hard life on the land were plain to see, strolling along the streets of Aden... with Kalashnikovs on their backs alongside their husbands, sons and daughters."

From August 1964 there was fighting in Aden. The liberation movement virtually eliminated the leadership of Aden Special Branch by assassinating its senior officers. In November 1964 the British government announced that it would evacuate Aden in 1968, keeping its military base and handing over power to the federation of emirs and sultans. However, the revolt escalated and Aden was placed under direct British rule. The NLF held its first National Congress in June 1965 in North Yemen and true to its aim of developing economic and social policies that would win mass support, issued

an inspiring national charter, talking of nationalisation of assets, extensive land reform, free education and health, and a new role for women.

The NLF set up Popular Committees, which took over the running of the sultanates when they had been overthrown. In November 1965 six unions in Aden broke away from the reformist trade union congress and declared for the NLF. The NLF penetrated and converted the recently established Federal Armed Forces, Federal Guards and police. On 20th June 1967 the NLF occupied Crater, the old city of Aden, and defended it for 17 days with the help of the population. British figures show the increasing number of incidents in Aden: 36 in 1964; 286 in 1965; 510 in 1966; and 2,999 in the first ten months of 1967. At the beginning of November 1967, the high command of the South Arabian Federation Army, formed by Britain, officially declared its support for the NLF, and the 20,000 strong army went over to the side of the revolution. On 8th November the NLF stated that it was in full control of the country and two days later it started acting as a provisional government, issuing its Official Gazette to lay down new laws. Finally Britain was forced to announce on 13th November that it would negotiate with the NLF. From 21st to 29th November 1967 talks took place in Geneva, and on 30th November 1967 the last British forces left and the country became the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY).

The Soviet Union sent a delegation to open diplomatic relations in December 1967. In the summer of 1968 three Soviet warships visited Aden and a military delegation arrived, leading to an agreement that brought deliveries of aircraft and weapons in January 1969. China recognised the PRSY on 31st January 1968, and gave long-term loans for economic development and military equipment.



PHOTO BY BRIAN HARRINGTON SPIER

### Progressive achievements

However, all was not to be plain sailing. As the PDRY government would later say: "Independence brought the class struggle into even greater focus. The NLF was split into a 'right' stream satisfied with political independence and not at all inclined to change anything in the country, and a 'radical left' that wanted to push ahead with social and economic transformation, serving the broad toiling masses rather than the privileged few." 1968 saw major battles between these two streams from which the left emerged victorious in a process named the Corrective Move of 22nd June 1969. On 30th November 1970, on the third anniversary of independence, a new constitution was adopted. The PRSY became the PDRY, confirming the long-term commitment to Yemeni unity. It vested all political power in the working people. The Constitution had a key statement: "The National Front Organisation leads, on the basis of scientific socialism, the political activity among the masses and within the mass organisations to develop society... in a manner that achieves national democratic revolution following a non-capitalist approach."

Islam was recognised as the official religion, and the government was charged with protecting the country's Islamic heritage. The renamed National Front (NF) leaders were secular, however, and saw religion as a private matter. Government members emphasised the many examples in Islamic texts which

backed the government's policies, referring also to historic writings found in Tashkent and other parts of the Islamic regions of the Soviet Union.

The 1970 constitution guaranteed a broad set of rights to women. They would have equal access to education and employment. The Family Law passed in 1974 gave women new rights over divorce and restricted polygamy. Women were a central part of campaigns in the early 1970s to eradicate illiteracy. The General Union of Yemeni Women gave women an influence on policy.

Full legislative powers were to be vested in the Supreme People's Council (SPC) which would elect the Presidential Council. The SPC met for the first time in August 1971 to elect Abdel Fattah Ismail as speaker and Ali Nasir Muhammad as prime minister. At its Sixth Congress in March 1975 the NF agreed formally to incorporate the PDU (People's Democratic Union – Communist Party) and the Ba'athist Popular Vanguard Party, al-Talia, into the NF, and in 1978 this became the Yemeni Socialist Party. Women were represented at all levels in the party organisations.

People's Courts were set up all over South Yemen, later replaced by a judicial system based on the 1970 constitution and administered by a minister of justice. Mass organisations were set up for workers, peasants, students, women and the professions.

After the Corrective Move the National Front consolidated its control of the armed forces, known as the Popular Defence Forces. The army was equipped with Soviet tanks and artillery; there was a small navy of Soviet supplied ships; and an air force with 111 Soviet combat aircraft. The armed forces demonstrated their effectiveness in two border wars with the YAR in 1972 and 1979. There was also a People's Militia trained mostly by Cuba but also by China, and Popular Defence Committees modelled on what had been developed in Cuba, plus a 15,000 strong Public Security Force, a kind of police force.

The British had only developed Aden as a service centre for the military base, so many were unemployed when the base was dissolved in 1967. The British offered huge sums to try to keep the base, but the Yemenis turned them down and despite promises the British paid very little other compensation.

## Economic development

The new republic had to tackle the economic situation. It nationalised 36 foreign owned banks and insurance companies, and created five national companies dealing with internal trade, external trade, shipping, petroleum and the docks, and a National Bank. In 1972 privately owned buildings owned by absentee landlords were taken into state hands without compensation. Prices of basic foodstuffs were subsidised through state control of internal trade, and a Price Stabilisation Fund, set up in 1974, fixed the prices of wheat, flour, rice, sugar, milk powder, ghee, cooking oil, and later tea. The oil refinery whose construction had been started by the British in 1952 was nationalised in May 1977.

On 25th March 1968 the first law on agrarian reform was passed. All land owned by the sultans, their followers and larger landowners was



confiscated and redistributed, with limits on how much land, irrigated and unirrigated, could be owned by a person or a family. Cooperatives were set up, some later becoming collective farms. Around half of the country's cultivated area was allocated to 26,000 people. Water, so vital in this hot, arid country, was nationalised and the government took control over the drilling of wells. Cotton was exported and was a major source of foreign exchange. By 1977 agriculture was providing 7% of GDP (gross domestic product), although even with the development of government-supported irrigation methods to raise yields, only 2% of the PDRY was cultivable.

Fishing was the country's major resource. The industry employed 13,000 people working for a few boat owners. Moves to organise cooperatives were effective. A Public Corporation for Fish Wealth and a national fleet were set up. The Soviet Union helped with loans to modernise the fleet and build a fish cannery. By 1977 fishing was providing 10% of GDP.

On a medical visit to a fishing village, the doctor and writer, Klaus-Dieter Schruhl heard how things had changed. There were now 340 members of the collective, organised in groups per boat. The groups delivered the fish to the collective and were paid at fixed prices. The fish was transported to Aden, and the returns were distributed according to the catch, leaving a portion for social and educational purposes and for widows of fishermen. The

women who worked in the collective got the same wage as the men.

Dr Schruhl wanted to know what it was like before. An old man, better dressed than the others and wearing gold rings, spoke up. "I used to be lord of this village. All the boats belonged to me, I hired them out to the fishermen with nets and other equipment. I had a truck which took the fish to Aden and brought back petroleum and other articles to the village. Of course I sold all the goods, for example salt for salting the fish, in my shop. The fishermen had to give up part of their catch direct to me. The fish which they kept, I sold in a kind of auction. There were no fixed prices." In 1970 all the boats but two, which his sons now used, were taken from him. He became a member of the newly formed collective. Formerly he didn't have to work. This small capitalist gave part of his considerable income to the Sheikh of the region. How did he acquire his former possessions? A family member who worked abroad gave him money and he bought himself some boats and especially the truck. As richest man in the village he formerly had four wives. Now he could only afford two.

An essential element in economic development was the Ministry of Planning. In an interim first plan from 1971-72 to 1973-74, 38% of spending was devoted to agriculture, 17% to industry, and 10% to health, education and other social needs. A second, five-year, plan covering 1974-78 moved towards

more capital-intensive projects, developing agricultural and industrial production and improving government services. Grants and loans from the Soviet Union, the World Bank and Kuwait were the main sources of external assistance.

A study by the World Bank indicated that investment was 31% of GDP in 1977, compared with 2% in 1970, and there had been an annual growth of 7% in real terms between 1973 and 1977. The PDRY's social development was commended, with adequate food supplies and the rapid expansion of health and education services to all parts of the country. Around 49% of the PDRY's economy was in the public sector by 1980, representing 16% of agriculture, 72% of fisheries, 73% of industry and 30% of trade.

## Education and health

Education was a big priority for the PDRY. The newly liberated country inherited fewer than 400 primary schools of all types, 61 intermediary schools, 19 secondary and technical schools, three teacher training colleges and no universities. The 1970 constitution guaranteed education for all, and was followed by a 1972 law. By 1977 there were nearly 1,000 primary schools, 326 intermediary schools and 23 secondary schools, and there were 260,000 pupils in the system, compared with 63,000 at independence. Aden University was set up in 1975. There was a campaign in the early 1970s to eradicate illiteracy. Boys and girls were taught together.

The constitution guaranteed free medical care for all but in 1970 there were only 71 doctors in the country. Visiting a doctor before independence used to cost almost a third of the monthly income of many families. People would go to healers, who were of varying levels of honesty and skill. On 15th July 1972 the health service was nationalised. Diagnosis and treatment were free everywhere, and prescrip-

tions cost only a nominal amount. By 1977 there were 222 doctors, of whom 125 were Yemenis, with the new medical school at Aden University producing graduates. In the 1970s the number of hospital beds doubled, and health units, health centres and hospitals were set up throughout the country.

## International policies

As well as having friendly relations with the socialist world, the PDRY joined the Arab League and became active in Arab politics soon after independence. Kuwait quickly recognised the PDRY and supported it economically. The PDRY welcomed the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and spoke out against Iraq in its war with Iran in the 1980s. During the Ramadan (Yom Kippur) war of 1973, the PDRY helped Egypt block the Bab al-Mandab, the strait between Yemen and Africa, but, like most of the Arab world, it cut links to Egypt after President Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977. From 1973 the PDRY recognised the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) which opened an office shortly afterwards. When the PLO armed forces were expelled from Lebanon in 1982, the PDRY provided a camp for some of these forces near Aden. The PDRY was also active in the Non-Aligned Movement.

The PDRY had external enemies throughout its existence, including its mighty neighbour, Saudi Arabia, which did not recognise the PRSY/PDRY, provided the many Yemeni exiles in Saudi Arabia with arms, bases, training and logistical support, and helped set up Radio Free South Yemen. The leaders of the PDRY aspired to Yemeni unity with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in North Yemen. However, the YAR was run as a personal fiefdom by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, whose long period of rule was to last till 2012. Islamist forces also penetrated the YAR and became a thorn in the side of the PDRY. Unity when it came in 1990 was similar to the

case of Germany. The PDRY was taken over by the reactionary YAR. Dissatisfaction with the outcome for the south led to the rebirth of the movement for South Yemeni independence and the outbreak of war in 1994.

## End of the PDRY

Differences of view of what route the PDRY should take, as well as personal ambition, sadly played themselves out in several violent incidents during the years of the Republic's existence. The most serious of these was in 1986 when Ali Nasir Muhammad instigated an attempted coup, starting with the assassination of several members of the political committee, gunned down at the start of a meeting. One of the dead was Abdel Fattah Ismail, the most consistent Marxist in the PDRY leadership. He had been chiefly responsible for the creation of a leading Marxist-Leninist party, insisted on the principle of collective leadership, and encouraged the development of relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Ali Nasir Muhammad, on the other hand, had increasingly tried to concentrate power in his own hands, operated networks of personal patronage, wanted a greater role for the private sector and private investment, and favoured relations with rich Arab countries and the west.

The end of the Soviet Union marked the end too of the PDRY, still a beacon and inspiration to those who want government in the interests of the people.

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*Part 2 of Yemen will appear in the next issue of The Socialist Correspondent and will deal with the current situation in the country.*

# MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

2/3/31 – 30/8/22

Mikhail Gorbachev in 2010

## THE REAL LEGACY

by Gary Lefley

When Mikhail Gorbachev died the British media wrote glowing obituaries of the leader who presided over the demise of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The acclaim, and his terminal role, are not unconnected. That 80% of the newspapers publishing these obituaries are privately owned by 5 billionaires might raise our suspicions. That two far-right former leaders of Britain and the U.S., Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, embraced Gorbachev as “a man we can do business with”, while branding Nelson Mandela a terrorist, is indicative. Mandela and Gorbachev stood on opposite sides of history, and of the imperial divide.

### Birth of the Soviet Union

When Gorbachev was born in 1931 the Soviet state was barely 13 years old. As we might expect of an embryonic socialist society, the first of its kind in 200,000 years of human history, conceived during the carnage of the first global war, trying to make its way in a hostile capital-

ist world: the struggle for survival was traumatic.

In 1917 Soviet Russia was technologically and economically 50 plus years behind the industrialised capitalist countries. World war and civil war had created widespread famine and poverty. Virtually all heavy industry had been destroyed. Agricultural output had fallen by 50%. Three quarters of the population could not read. 7 million people had died of famine, 3 million more of typhus and cholera epidemics. 1.5 million died in World War 1, another 1 million in the civil war. 2 million emigrated en masse - the industrialists, financiers, merchants and 9/10ths of the engineers, doctors and teachers.

The ‘White Russian’ counter revolutionaries, supported and armed by the capitalist world, raised armies to bring down the Soviets. Troops from 14 countries, including Britain, France and Japan, invaded to crush the revolution. And yet the people and their infant Soviet state, led by the Bolsheviks and the Red Army, survived. Survived and grew. As

socialist revolution spread, so 15 republics came together to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

### War against fascism

By the time Gorbachev was 9 years old the Soviet Union, abandoned by its ‘allies’, was facing the Nazi blitzkrieg alone. The US and Britain declined to open the second front for 4 years. Senator Harry Truman, later to become US President, explained in 1941, “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible...” The strategy was clear: encourage Soviet socialism and Germany - an imperial rival to the US - to destroy each other. The US could then march in and pick up the spoils, in terms of markets, capital exports, resources and cheap labour.

In defeating Nazi Germany and the might of the Wehrmacht, the USSR lost 25 million dead. Another 25 million were rendered homeless. 1710 towns and urban centres were destroyed, along with 70,000 villag-

es and 32,000 industrial enterprises. And yet, the USSR survived. Such were the conditions in which the first socialist state was to be built. In 1945 the revolution was just 28 years old, a third of which had been spent defending itself against war, invasion and civil war. What was achieved domestically during this period, and subsequently, was a testimony to the astonishing possibilities of the new socialist society, and of human endeavour.

## Cold War

No sooner had World War 2 finished than the US and Britain began preparing for war, and nuclear war, with the Soviet Union. In 1946 Winston Churchill made his Fulton Cold War “Iron Curtain” speech, declaring Britain’s World War 2 ally to now be its enemy. US General Groves, who was in charge of the atom bomb Manhattan Project from Autumn 1942 onwards, subsequently wrote, “I think it is important to state, I think it is well known, that there was never from about two weeks from the time I took charge of the project, any illusion on my part but that Russia was the enemy and that the project was conducted on that basis.”

When the Soviet people were dying in their millions to liberate the world from fascism, Nazi Germany was gassing millions in its concentration camps, and Britain’s armed forces were in North Africa fighting to keep a hold of its colonies.

The Cold War hostility continued through to Gorbachev’s appointment, with an arms race that was designed to bankrupt the USSR, divert its resources away from building socialism domestically and from providing material backing for national liberation movements in their fight against colonialism and imperialism. Nevertheless, the Soviets continued to provide huge support, including military hardware, for the people of Vietnam in their war against US imperialism. They

provided similar support for African peoples in their liberation struggles against European neo-colonialism.

## Soviet achievements

Despite all these drains on its economic development, the socialist developments of post-war USSR were remarkable.

- **Unemployment:** The right to work was established in Soviet law as a basic human right. Unemployment was abolished by 1930 with all citizens guaranteed employment to match their qualifications.

- **Wages:** Between 1950-1970 average real wages rose by a fraction under 100%. From 1970-1976 wages rose by 20%, student grants by 50% and other allowances by 40%. From 1965 to 1977 real per capita incomes rose by 65%.

- **Taxation:** Taxes represented a tiny percentage of income.

- **Prices:** In the 1970s the USSR Retail Price Index (RPI) fell by 0.2%. For several decades the prices of basic consumer goods and services were frozen. In Britain during the same period the RPI rose by 114.9%; U.S. 46.6%; West Germany 40.8%; France 66.9%.

- **Rent:** By the time Gorbachev came to power the USSR had the lowest and most stable rent levels in the world. Rent included electricity, central heating, and gas. It had not risen since 1928 and constituted on average 4-5% of the family budget.

- **Housing:** during the 1970s over 11 million new flats were built, enabling 20% of the population to move into new accommodation.

- **Social Wage:** By the time Gorbachev became the Soviet leader the USSR social wage was as high or higher per capita than any other country in the world, with the exception of the German Democratic Republic. This included the number

of schools, teachers, institutes of higher education, hospital beds and doctors.

- **Women in politics:** Women were guaranteed in law equal rights, equal opportunities and equal pay. By 1980 there were more women with higher education qualifications than men. Women constituted 51% of the workforce, 31% of the Deputies to the Supreme Soviet, 35% of the 15 union republic supreme Soviets and 48% of the local Soviets.

## Return of capitalism

Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 and Head of State in 1988, committed to the introduction of market principles within the planned economy. By 1991 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was no more. His much vaunted policies of ‘Perestroika’ and ‘Glasnost’ turned out to be smokescreens which facilitated the return of the private ownership of capital. He had championed Perestroika (‘Restructuring’) and Glasnost (‘Opening Up’) as if they were new revolutionary concepts in the development of socialist society. In reality, Perestroika was doublespeak for privatisation; the rise of the billionaire Oligarchs was its realisation. Glasnost, projected as press freedom, was actually its antithesis. While it ‘opened up’ the Soviet press and air-waves to the penetration and ownership of western corporate media, including agencies such as the CIA, by 1991 under Yeltsin the Communist Party and its publications were banned.

Ethnic tensions began to develop that subsequently were to erupt into full-scale wars in Chechnya, Georgia and Moldova after the Soviet Union collapsed. Three decades later, some of these conflicts remain unresolved. Contrary to the West’s narrative, the transition back to capitalism across the USSR was anything but peaceful.

The United States, which had been covertly active in undermining the governments of the 15 republics and the Warsaw Pact states, as well as stirring up social unrest, asserted its unipolar world order, with consequent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yugoslavia, and Libya.

In March 1991, a referendum resulted in an overwhelming majority for preserving the Soviet Union as a federation of equal sovereign republics. The outcome was shelved. The following August Gorbachev signed a decree banning the Communist Party of Russia. On 25th December that year he resigned as President of the USSR which was formally dissolved the following day. Yeltsin continued in his role as the leader of Russia. Seven decades of the first great socialist experiment was over.

Sky History.com provides a succinct summary of Yeltsin's role in office, "With the Soviet Union out of the way, Yeltsin eliminated most price controls, privatized a slew of major state assets, allowed for the ownership of private property and otherwise embraced free market principles. Under his watch, a stock exchange, commodities exchanges and private banks all came into being. But although a select few oligarchs became shockingly wealthy, many Russians lapsed into poverty due to rampant inflation and the rising cost of living. Yeltsin's Russia also struggled with the taint of being an ex-superpower and with corruption, lawlessness, decreased industrial output and falling life expectancies."

These developments were greeted with wholesale approval by NATO and the EU, happy in the thought that the markets, natural resources and labour force of the USSR and Warsaw Pact states would now be ripe for exploitation by western capital. Mikhail Arutyunov, who was standing with Yeltsin on top of a tank in Moscow on 19th August 1991 as the Soviet leadership disintegrated, later summed up what

was happening to Russia under Yeltsin, "The population is separating into the extremely poor and the extremely rich."

### Gorbachev despised

With his Nobel Prize in hand and his heroic reputation abroad, Gorbachev put his popularity to the test by running for Russian president in 1996. He secured 0.5% of the vote.

Most charitably, Gorbachev was inept and naive. In reality, he was a catalyst in the destruction of Soviet socialism; the rise of the billionaire oligarchs; the impoverishment of the people; the privatisation of half of Europe and one third of Asia; the exponential growth in power and reach of NATO, from 16 to 30 members; and the rise of a unipolar world order under the sway of US imperialism.

For that he is despised in his own country. As one observer of the Russian media commented at the time, "The response by Russians to the death of Gorbachev has been overwhelmingly negative with social media attacking his [domestic] role in the 1980s and for destroying the world socialist system. The media have been partly respectful but many point to the current war (Ukraine) as being a result of his betrayal and incompetence. Social media have been uniform in calling him a traitor."

An honest assessment of Gorbachev has to deal with the reality that the gradual political decline of both the Soviet Union and its Communist Party during the latter phase of Brezhnev's leadership was a reflection of the emergent revisionism and careerism within the Party and the state. These developments disempowered the Soviet working class and incapacitated the forces necessary to resist the overt and covert interference of the West, along with the rise of Gorbachev, Yeltsin and a billionaire oligarchy. The counter-revolution culminated

in the breaking up of a highly successful planned economy, in large-scale privatisation, social and democratic regression and the reestablishment of capitalism. A vigilant, thriving, revolutionary vanguard of a politically educated and mobilised working class would not have permitted the likes of Gorbachev and Yeltsin to destroy 70 plus years of socialist progress.

Churchill had once bemoaned: "we should have strangled the Bolshevik infant in its cradle". Like his adoring Tory descendent Thatcher, he too would have been able to do business with Mikhail Gorbachev.

## From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

"An interesting question concerns the possible reasons why neo-liberalism was so enthusiastically adopted by New Labour. New Labour liked to describe itself as 'business friendly'.

As part of its appeal to the middle ground, the tendency of the Labour Party during periods of capitalist crisis is to revert to economic orthodoxy as recommended by business and the City."

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Neo-liberalism and  
New Labour

Tom Burden