

# THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

ISSN 1758-5708

£3

# LABOUR WINS

## what next for politics in Britain?

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Issue No 52 / Autumn 2024

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**Discussion, debate and author's opinions** - To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of *The Socialist Correspondent*.

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At last the Conservatives have gone and Britain has a Labour government with a massive majority in terms of seats. Yet that huge majority masks an underlying fragility in the Labour vote. As Frieda Park shows in, *A Labour government – what next?* its victory was achieved through the collapse of the Tories and of the SNP in Scotland and the rise of Reform UK. Labour only slightly increased its vote share and indeed more people voted Labour in the two general elections when Jeremy Corbyn was leader. Voter turnout was down. This demonstrates that the electorate was not really convinced by Starmer's offering despite Labour's shift to the right gaining the support of the establishment.

While Labour has made some good moves since coming to power, like settling the public sector pay disputes and better policies on Gaza, much more needs to be done to enthuse the electorate and rebuild public services. If people don't see tangible change, they will have no reason to vote Labour in the future, and promising that things will get worse - cutting winter fuel payments and cuts to services - is not the way to achieve this. Worst of all the government is committed to pursuing the war agenda of NATO.

A vital role will be played by the trade unions, community campaigners and the peace movement to pressure Labour to adopt better policies. We can already see this happening. That is the difference between having a Labour and a Tory government. People have expectations of a Labour government. The task is making the government listen to its voters.

## Nuclear weapons

It should not surprise us that Labour is wholly committed to NATO, arming Ukraine and being confrontational with China. Those

aspects of UK foreign policy have long had bi-partisan support from Labour as well as the Tories. In *Britain's nuclear bomb*, Clare Bailey examines the history of how Britain got nuclear weapons, initially proposed by Winston Churchill and then pursued by the Labour foreign secretary Ernest Bevin.

The story is also one of post-war rivalry between Britain and the United States, but ultimately with Britain forced to play second fiddle to the US. Now Britain's so-called independent nuclear bomb is anything but, relying entirely on the United States technically, politically and militarily.

As our world becomes more dangerous and the prospect of nuclear war comes closer, it raises urgent questions about the wisdom of spending huge sums of money on these weapons of mass destruction when the government is talking about cuts.

## Flashpoints

Despite the dangers to Europe and the world, the West continues to press on with its disastrous war in Ukraine. Even with the evident failures on Ukraine's part to make progress in the war, including its incursion into Kursk and despite the suffering on all sides, the West is determined to double down on war. It has peremptorily dismissed peace plans and calls for negotiations. On the contrary, there are increasing moves to allow Ukraine to use weapons supplied by the West to hit targets within Russia, as John Moore points out in *Ukraine – West continues to escalate war*. This has the potential to widen the war, making the countries who supply these weapons increasingly party to the conflict. He also describes the worrying build-up of NATO bases in Europe as the United States tries to move the responsibility for the war to European countries.

There are immediate concerns over the war in Ukraine and the expansion of Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians, which it is attempting to turn into a regional war; but we also need to alert people to the build-up by the West to war with China. One aspect of this is the rearmament and increasingly aggressive military posture of Japan, dealt with by Simon Korner in *Militarism rises again in Japan*. Imperialists in Japan have long sought to shed the constraints placed on it as a defeated nation after the Second World War and now they have been given the green light to do this by the United States, which wants Japan to be part of the military encirclement of China and of Russia in the East. However, as the only country which has experienced the use of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there is also a strong peace movement in Japan which rejects these moves.

## Peace and anti-imperialism

All these articles and others in this edition point to the pressing need for people throughout the world to reject the West's drive to war and to argue for spending on welfare not warfare. In some countries there are strong voices against war, but that still feels relatively muted in Britain with support in some trade unions for increased arms spending and sending more weapons to Ukraine. Seeing the West's support for Israel's genocide in Gaza has helped lay bare the nature of the West's interests and should lead to more questioning of why it wants to keep the war in Ukraine going. Above all we need to argue that the Labour government can make the choice to ditch spending on war in favour of spending to improve the lives of people in Britain.

# A LABOUR GOVERNMENT what next ?

by Frieda Park

It is a welcome relief to see the back of the Tories. The Labour government opens up opportunities but there will be massive challenges for the movement in trying to turn these into a real progress for working people in Britain.

## Shaky foundations

Though it achieved a huge number of seats Labour did so on the back of voter abstention, a struggling SNP and a divided right. Overall the turnout was 67.3% down 1.6% on the last election, but with much bigger drops in some places like Scotland and Wales.

The FT columnist Robert Shrimpsley called the 2024 election result “Labour’s loveless landslide”. He also commented that Keir Starmer started with “a shallower reservoir of goodwill than any modern predecessor”. Starmer had the lowest number of votes of any first time Prime Minister since the war, achieving only 33.7% of the vote, and the second lowest turnout in more than a century. This was “against a government that the electorate were desperate to remove.” (*Financial Times* 28/8/24)

A sign of how little faith people placed in Labour could be seen in polling at the end of August which showed that 51% of UK adults were dissatisfied with the government, up by 20 points in a month. Labour has had no honeymoon: it is clear that people want something other from Starmer than doom-laden messages about cuts.



PHOTO BY SIMON DAWSON

Keir Starmer meets Olaf Scholz in Berlin

More people voted Labour under Jeremy Corbyn than under Starmer in both the elections when Corbyn was leader. Labour got 10.3 million votes in the last election in 2019, which fell to 9.7 million in 2024. Labour’s vote share was up only slightly from 2019, but down on 2017. So Labour’s remarkable victory in terms of seats won (411) should be understood not so much in terms of Starmer’s success, as by the collapse of the Tories and the SNP and by the role played by the establishment and its media in transmitting the message that it was time for the Tories to go and that Labour should be the voters’ choice to make this happen.

The political figures in charge of Kier Starmer had for a long time implemented a strategy of saying and promising as little as possible

to the electorate and of making the Labour Party as agreeable as possible to big business and the establishment. In making a decisive break with the promise of progressive policies under Corbyn and purging the left, Labour gained the endorsement of business figures. However, from the statistics, we can see that the electorate was less impressed by Starmer’s shift to the right than was capital - his policies seem to have convinced few.

This was evident across the so-called Red Wall, where Labour regained almost all the seats they lost to the Tories in 2019, but increased vote share from 38% to only 41% with the Tories declining from 47% to 24% and Reform gaining 22%, so the two combined were about the same as the Tories had previously got. The vote for the



right, therefore, remained as strong but was split, and this allowed Labour in.

The upswing in trade union action has not led to more evident support for Labour, nor have the protests over Gaza with the negative policies of the leadership, undermining rather than boosting support for Labour.

## The Tories shift right

In terms of seats won (121) this was the worst result in the Tory Party's long history as the pre-eminent Party of British capitalism. The significance of this cannot be underestimated. The key element in the Tories' defeat was their catastrophic failure to effectively represent the interests of the majority of the ruling class which crystallised over Brexit and became worse as the Party shifted towards the far right, depending on tactics of racism, and divide and rule through culture wars. The result is that the Conservatives are no longer the broad-based establishment party capable of uniting different strata of society round ruling class objectives that they once were. This is a historic shift. It remains to be seen whether it can be reversed but it feels increasingly unlikely.

More moderate Tories have been driven from the Party, either through Johnson's purge or because they have just given up. Ironically the more the right of the Conservative Party promotes racist and divisive politics the more they fuel other groups and parties of the right which in turn are seen as a threat to the Tories who then react by moving further to the right. The result of the General Election, with the successes of Labour and the Lib Dems, clearly showed the limitations of this approach, but can the Tories escape from this vicious circle of their own creation? If not, then might they cease to be of value to the ruling class?

The rise of the far right is a product of neo-liberalism which has not delivered and indeed refuses to deliver for working people. The far right usefully channels dissatisfaction with people's miserable lives to negate any potential challenge from the left, attacking targets other than capital. Without the threat of a socialist alternative, neo-liberalism feels that it does not need to accommodate demands from its people for a better life. It is wedded to the maximum exploitation of the working class globally and opposed to anything that mitigates that. It scarcely tolerates mildly social democratic reforms and even without the prospect of socialist revolution the far right is promoted. But although pro-capital, the far right and its successes can still be challenging to the establishment with outcomes it does not want and there is the perennial risk of it becoming too successful like Trump in America, or Johnson here. A question for the neo-liberal strategists is how to contain popular dissatisfaction while maintaining control of the political process so that it doesn't go to the left or too far right.

## Scotland and Wales

A further boost to Labour came from the collapse of the SNP vote. It lost 39 seats, taking its total down to 9. It lost the entire central belt of Scotland where most of the population lives. The SNP's credibility has been severely undermined by the financial corruption crisis affecting its previous leadership; political errors that it made, partly the result of its coalition with the Greens, in particular the debacle round the Gender Recognition Act; and an undercurrent that the nationalists are not delivering for the people of Scotland in areas such as education and health. Continuing to blame Westminster, saying that problems would all be solved if only Scotland was independent, has begun to wear thin. The pro-Starmer establish-

The key element in the Tories defeat was their catastrophic failure to effectively represent the interests of the majority of the ruling class which crystallised over Brexit and became worse as the Party shifted towards the far right, depending on tactics of racism, and divide and rule through culture wars.

ment propaganda also had an effect, clearly sign-posting that voting Labour was the way to get rid of the Tories. Humza Yusaf who replaced Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister was a weak leader, eventually botching the effort to oust the Greens from the government leading to his own resignation.

The fall from grace of the SNP has been sudden and dramatic – they once seemed unassailable with capable, credible leaders, but there had been underlying problems for some time. Principally these were divisions over tactics to achieve independence and increasing friction between the former leader Alex Salmond and his one-time protege and successor, Nicola Sturgeon. Salmond's acquittal on sexual assault charges was a blow to Sturgeon who expected his political challenge to be negated if he was found guilty. Having said that, Salmond's Alba party has so far made no electoral impact on the fortunes of the SNP.

But this does not necessarily mark a return to politics as usual in Scotland with overwhelming Labour representation. Support for independence remains at around 50% and a generation has grown up with their politics framed by the constitution. In addition, as in other parts of the UK, voter turnout was down – in Scotland by 8.4%. The difference in vote share between Labour and the SNP was 5.3%. This points to another weakness underlying the huge majority achieved by Labour – the potential fragility of its success in Scotland.

In Wales the Tories lost all their seats to Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Lib Dems with a 10% drop in turnout and overall a swing away from Labour of 3.9%.

## The other parties

The third biggest share of the vote went to Reform UK 14.3%, though they won only 5 seats, due to the



Trade unions and campaigners fighting cuts

concentration of their support in Brexit voting constituencies. They showed strongly in many seats that they failed to win. Not only Reform, other parties had notable successes. The Lib Dems got 72 seats, their best result since 1923, and the Greens won 4. Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected as an independent with massive support and 4 other independents won seats standing on the issue of Gaza. They have now formed a parliamentary group.

It is hard to estimate the lasting impact of some of these developments. It would be dangerous to dismiss them, but equally dangerous to think that they all represent permanent trends. Some may be more long-lasting than others.

Even the bigger minority parties still have a way to go in becoming strong enough across the UK to challenge Labour and the much diminished Conservative Party. Yet we have moved into a time of increasingly unstable politics, disengagement and more fluid allegiances. Can the Lib Dems and Reform make further gains? Can the SNP revive? For the smaller parties a question will remain as to whether or not they can hold

onto their seats, never mind build on them – especially the independents. The establishment will, of course, try to shape these developments to suit its interests.

## Reform UK

Reform UK currently represents a major threat both in terms of its politics and electorally. The five seats won by the party were all won from the Tories in the South East of England, apart from Ashfield in Nottinghamshire which Lee Anderson retained. But there is also a challenge to Labour. Farage has said post the election that he is not interested in an alliance or merger with the Tories. Instead he says, "We're going to focus on going after the Labour vote". He will also be campaigning for the introduction of PR.

Reform made strong showings and not only in the so-called Red Wall constituencies; it had wider success, coming second in 98 constituencies. Aside from the constituencies it won, the next highest vote shares it got were: Barnsley South 33.2%, Makerfield 31.8%, Hull East 30.6%, Rotherham 30.3% and Castle Point 30.1%, coming second in all of them.

PHOTO BY MIDNIGHTBLUEOWL

Labour held the first four of these and the Conservatives the fifth.

There has been a long term decline in support for Labour in many constituencies where it was previously dominant. This is at least partly an effect of deindustrialisation and the decline of working class organisation and socialist ideas. Dissatisfaction was galvanised around the Brexit referendum, and the failure of Corbyn and McDonnell to straightforwardly respect the Leave vote led to the collapse of the Red Wall and the shift to parties of the right. It is concerning that this pattern has persisted into the 2024 election even if the vote was split between the Tories and Reform.

The shift to the right of the Tories and the rise of Reform have legitimised and promoted racist ideas so that they not only now have a hold – they were always there – but have been given political expression. Perhaps also Reform is more acceptable than the Tories to former Labour voters. The challenge of the right in many working class and other constituencies is real, but fortunately at present divided. How can that be changed?

## Expectations of Labour

An important part of the answer to this question is how Labour performs in government. “You’ve got one chance”, was a phrase uttered by reluctant Labour voters during the election campaign but does the Labour leadership understand that they are effectively on probation? The danger of taking Labour voters for granted has been evident on more than one occasion – in Scotland, over Brexit and in this election on Gaza.

Barring the new deal for working people, Labour promised not a lot so they didn’t have to do much to exceed expectations. Settling the public sector pay disputes was a smart move, damping down trade union militancy and bringing a

sense of responsible government. There is an improved position on Gaza albeit it still does not go anything like far enough, with a partial suspension of arms sales, refunding UNRWA, ending opposition to an arrest warrant for Netanyahu and calling for a ceasefire. There have been other progressive moves compared with the Tories, who have virtually disappeared from view consumed by yet another leadership contest.

However we have also seen the punitive suspension of Labour MPs over the 2 child benefit cap. And there has been the cut to winter fuel payments and other cuts, such as to railway projects. Rachel Reeves continues to threaten public services with her fiscal rules and Tory blackholes and now Starmer says things will get worse before they get better. Starmer has also had a high profile meeting with Olaf Scholz to engineer a closer relationship to Germany and the EU. Worst of all the government is enthusiastically joining in with the West’s murderous drive to war.

Much as the ruling class might like these policies, if Labour is to succeed austerity, cuts and war will not be good enough. It cannot rely on the continued failure of the Tories and the SNP, it must make people’s lives better so that they will have a positive reason to vote for the Party. Living standards need to improve and all aspects of public services – health, education, local government funding to rebuild communities and social housing. But so far there is no sense of commitment to this. A failure to deliver will result in a move back to the right and to nationalism.

The movement needs to demand more. As the public sector pay offers demonstrate, fiscal rules – which are political rather than scientific – are there to be broken. Yet the progress made by the unions in improving members’ living standards may well have the immedi-

ate effect of damping down class struggle and protest.

The West’s backing for Israel’s genocide in Gaza has helped an understanding of the US role as the main threat to world peace. However, in the peace movement ultra-left and liberal voices are still strong, arguing ‘a plague on everyone’s house’ and effectively letting the US off the hook, particularly in relation to Ukraine. The lack of a strong peace movement has enabled the militarist wing of the Trade Union movement to make progress in arguing for increased arms expenditure.

Maintaining pressure on the Labour government to deliver better, through the unions and class struggle, will be essential for the working class and in Labour’s own interests if this electoral result is not to be a one off. Likewise, it will be necessary through political activity and the peace movement to try to erode Labour’s support for the West’s drive to war and to get justice for the Palestinians. For that we need to develop a better understanding of imperialism and to make a central argument for spending on welfare not warfare.

These are real discussions because Labour can be pressurised by the trade unions, the left and even those not particularly left wing who see electoral disaster next time round if Labour doesn’t deliver. We need to do what we can to build an effective and more mature left which is non-sectarian and spends less time on divisive culture wars and diversionary schemes. We need rather to aim to build unity round vital concerns, like housing and local amenities and services – and to build a left that is for peace and against war. In doing this we will also present the most effective challenge to the right and its divide and rule tactics.



# BRITAIN'S NUCLEAR BOMB

PHOTO BY TAM MCDONALD



*Vanguard submarine armed with Trident nuclear weapons returns to base at Faslane on the river Clyde*

by Clare Bailey

"We've got to have this thing over here, whatever it costs. We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it." Ernest Bevin 1946 (British Foreign Secretary 1945-51).

## Getting the bomb

Churchill, with his eye on the future forms British imperial power might take, was the architect of British nuclear weapons policy. He had written with enthusiasm in the early 1930s about research into 'a gigantic source of energy...waiting for a detonator', authorised the development of an atomic bomb in 1941 and, against earlier instincts, arranged the incorporation of Brit-

ish research into the Manhattan Project in 1943.

When as Prime Minister he introduced the 1955 *Defence Command White Paper*, which committed the UK to a thermo-nuclear or hydrogen bomb defence policy, Churchill was intending to settle the shape of British military policy for years to come. His otherwise rhetorical speech was candid in one respect - it conceded that the truth about the hydrogen bomb and its destructive power could well lead to public panic and insisted on the need to withhold information from the British people, "I have been most anxious that responsible discussions on this matter should not take place on the BBC or upon the television..."

In the debate that followed Churchill's speech, John Strachey, MP (previously Attlee's Secretary of State for War and party to the decision to pursue the production of a British atom bomb), pointed out that significant 'commitments' were being made though not referred to by Churchill, notably a commitment to a first strike policy. The White Paper he said: "...lays down the doctrine that if there is any aggression in Europe, and however we are attacked, whether by nuclear weapons or not, we should certainly reply with nuclear weapons. We are committed, it seems, to doing so. That is a very grave decision indeed." Later in his speech, Strachey adds, "Surely, the time to begin negotiations is now.... Whatever their motive may be, the Russians make offer after offer to negotiate, and, so far, what has the West done with those offers? It has written them off and has ridden them off on the grounds that they are all propaganda."

With the passing of this Bill in 1955, the essential components of current UK policy with regards to the retention, deployment and use of nuclear weapons were put in place. The UK would refuse to participate in good faith negotiations for disarmament proposed by the USSR; it would continue to develop thermo-nuclear nuclear warheads; these warheads were committed to NATO, and there was an explicit commitment to their potential offensive use in a conventional war.

## UK/US rivalry

Clement Davies, leader of the Liberal Party, joined that debate in 1955 to ask about British relations with the US, "We now know that the United States has a large quantity of hydrogen bombs. We are now, apparently, to start upon their manufacture. Do we transmit to one another the knowledge which we have? Do we tell one another our secrets?... or does each nation follow its own policy without reference to anybody



else? This seems to me an extraordinary situation.”

The ‘extraordinary situation’ he refers to had begun over a decade earlier and could also be described as business as usual – the pursuit of competing imperial interests under the guise of a wartime alliance. Churchill had set up a British nuclear programme known as Tube Alloys in 1941, outsourcing most of the work to ICI, a decision that alienated the US who saw no reason to collaborate on a project that was going to benefit a foreign corporation. When the US some months later proposed a joint effort, the British government failed to respond and it was only when the US pressed on with the Manhattan Project at speed after Pearl Harbour in December 1941 that the UK discovered its interests would be best served by joining in and that it was now frozen out. When UK scientists were permitted to join the Manhattan Project in 1943, it was as junior partners.

Two years later, after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leaks from the Project to the Soviet Union were traced to British participants and were a convenient pretext for passing the post-war 1946 US McMahon Act, which prevented any further cooperation with its ally on nuclear matters – on pain of death.

Efforts by the US in the late 1940s to restrict the development of the UK programme by offering the use of US made bombs were rejected, and the Attlee cabinet took the secret decision to produce a UK atom bomb independently in 1947. This was in the face of US opposition. It was the year India shook off colonial rule and became an independent state. Loss of empire in one form was made up for in another; post-war Britain may have been broke but not so broke it could contemplate passing up this opportunity to retain its place as a world power.

## The Mutual Defence Agreement

Britain went ahead with its own nuclear weapons programme. Thus far, thus ‘sovereign’, to use Grant Shapps’ recent description of the UK ‘deterrent’. But discussions between Eisenhower and Churchill in the early 1950s soon led to the signing of the precursor to the Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA), compromising the autonomy of the British programme.

When the Suez debacle in 1956 definitively exposed the limits of British power post-World War 2, and when in 1957 Britain became the third power, after the US and the Soviet Union, to produce and test a hydrogen bomb, the Macmillan government proposed to the US the pooling of nuclear resources. This cooperation took the form of the Mutual Defence Agreement which, after much hard-fought technical horse-trading, was signed in July 1958. And so the ‘special relationship’ began – approved by Congress but not by Parliament, which has to date never fully discussed let alone challenged the terms of the Agreement. Although it was originally to be renewed every 10 years by parliament, it has been

reported that Starmer has removed this requirement.

While the US benefited initially from aspects of British nuclear research, the MDA effectively rendered the British nuclear programme dependent on US technology and US arms manufacturers. It allowed the UK to conduct tests in the Nevada desert. It also committed it to continued expenditure on nuclear R&D.

The MDA continues to operate very actively via constant exchanges. In 2002, for example, the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston received visits from many state and private partners in the US military-industrial complex, including Lockheed Martin Missiles & Space, Los Alamos National Laboratory, ITT Industries, Honeywell and Bechtel. AWE visited US establishments 2,000 times between 2007 and 2009. Cooperation is also organised in Joint Working Groups, whose number and focus vary – there are currently 15 of them. This information about the workings of the MDA is never published and is only extracted with difficulty from ministers by parliamentary select committees.



Treaty Series No. 41 (1958)

### Agreement

between the Government of the  
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
and the Government of the United States of America

for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic  
Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes

Washington, July 3, 1958

[The Agreement entered into force on August 4, 1958]

This sharing of knowledge and materials has facilitated the development of the UK weapons programme for over 60 years and, despite denials, it has consistently breached the terms of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) whose purpose was to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology and to promote the goal of nuclear disarmament. In 2004 the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), one of the less aggressive establishment think-tanks working on what used to be called 'peaceful co-existence', obtained a legal opinion that the renewal of the MDA treaty would violate Article VI of the NPT. This view was rejected by the US and the UK on the weasel grounds that the MDA does not involve the transfer of deployment-ready bombs or warheads. The 2004 BASIC report [1] on the workings and implications of the MDA is worth reading as is the more recent Nuclear Information Service report. [2]

A 2020 report by the national security think tank, Center for Strategic & International Studies [3] fears the US warhead modernisation programme could indeed be seen as escalatory and refers repeatedly to the implications for the UK. In their view the 'tight coupling' of the US/UK nuclear relationship requires very careful PR.

## UK nuclear force today

The active nuclear force is composed of 4 SSBN (Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear) submarines. One of these is always at sea, its whereabouts unknown; two in port, deployable at short notice, and the fourth in overhaul/repairs. This is termed Continuous at Sea Deterrence – CASD. Each submarine carries 16 Trident IID-5 missiles, each of which has a range of 12000km and can be armed with up to 12 warheads. The current Vanguard submarines are due to be replaced by new Dreadnought submarines over the coming decade currently costed at £31 billion. A pro-

gramme to replace the Mk4 nuclear warhead they carry is also underway at AWE Aldermaston, in close consultation with the US. The Trident delivery system currently in use was designed to operate into the 2040s and the decision to replace/renew was taken in 2016. In effect there was little choice if the UK was to continue to operate a nuclear force given the US was modernising its own warheads and Trident system.

In the 2021 Integrated Review of Defence and Foreign Policy the government, citing new 'technological and doctrinal threats', announced the reversal of what had been several decades of decreasing the number of UK warheads – that is, gradual disarmament. The previous cap on the nuclear stockpile of 225 was increased up to a possible 260, permitting a 40% increase over the earlier goal of a reduction to 180. This huge escalation has gone largely unremarked.

An overview of the nuclear force can be found in a Commons briefing paper of May 2023, *Nuclear weapons at a glance: United Kingdom*, although the UK has never declassified the precise size of its nuclear stockpile and the 2021 Integrated Review makes it clear that a policy of 'deliberate ambiguity' about the operational stockpile, deployed warheads and missiles, was being extended.

The UK's nuclear submarines are built by BAE Systems in Barrow and maintained by Babcock International in Devonport and Faslane. The propulsion systems, and their in-service support, are provided by Rolls-Royce Submarines Ltd in Derby. The warheads are designed and made in Aldermaston. A nationalised Sheffield Forgemasters is now also part of the UK nuclear supply chain. The Trident missile delivery system is built in America, primarily by Lockheed Martin with Northrup Grumman, Boeing and others contributing elements to its production. This means regular vis-

its to the US by the UK submarines for maintenance.

The components of the UK's nuclear weapons establishment are carefully distributed across the country as can be seen on the 2024 *Defence Nuclear Command Paper* map – figure 1. They employ around 42,000 people, a workforce that will double under new plans. Interestingly the map does not mark Sellafield or other sites involved in the production and storage of fissile materials for use in the warheads. Some of these materials come from the US, but by no means all.

FIGURE 1 (right)

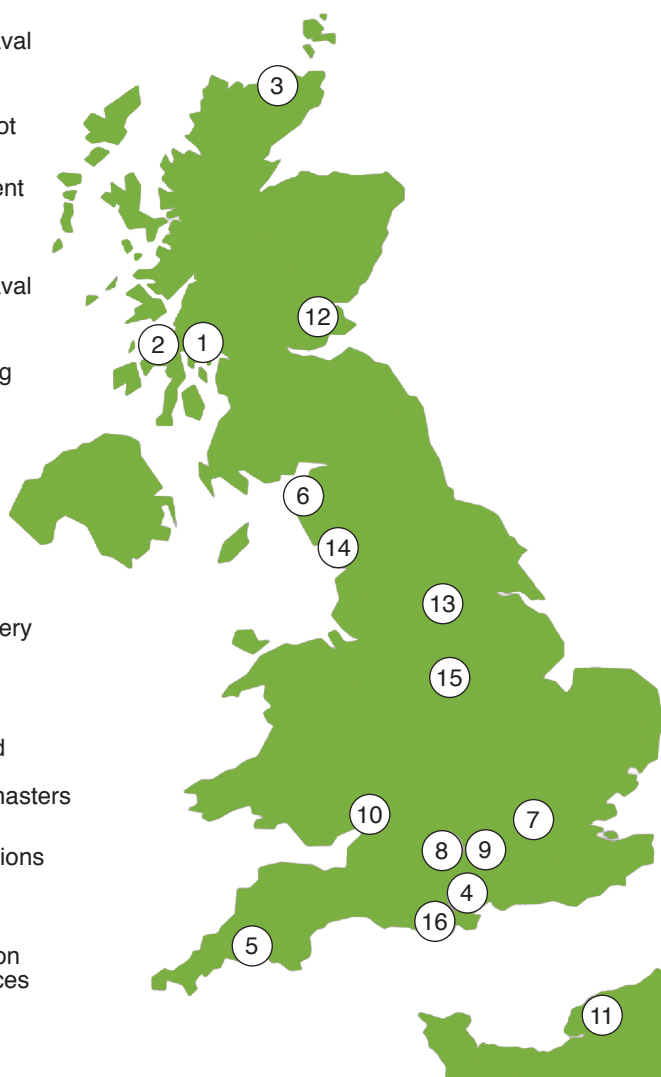
## Aldermaston

The Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, target of the peace marches of the 1950s and 60s, merits attention.

The precursor to AWE was the High Explosive Research project at RAF Aldermaston, a World War 2 airfield used by the US Air Force. The AWE was established there in 1952 and was managed by a number of different government departments until 1993 when the Blair government gave Hunting-BRAE, a private consortium, the contract to manage the whole Establishment. Within 5 years the company had been prosecuted twice for serious breaches of safety and in 1999 it lost the contract to another consortium whose key elements were in place until recently – US arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin and Serco. Jacobs Engineering, another US company bought a stake in 2008, meaning that US companies controlled 75% of the management of, and profits deriving from, the 'sovereign' British bomb plant. Between 2000 and 2015 dividend payments to shareholders amounted to over £800m, £82m in 2019 alone.

The privately-run AWE's safety record was dangerously poor. In the years 2000-2011 there were 158 fires

- ① His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde
- ② Royal Naval Armaments Depot
- ③ Vulcan Nuclear Test Establishment
- ④ Navy Command Headquarters
- ⑤ His Majesty's Naval Base Devonport
- ⑥ Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
- ⑦ Ministry of Defence Head Office
- ⑧ AWE Aldermaston
- ⑨ AWE Burghfield
- ⑩ Submarine Delivery Agency
- ⑪ EPURE Agency
- ⑫ Rosyth Dockyard
- ⑬ Sheffield Forgemasters
- ⑭ BAE Systems Submarine Solutions
- ⑮ Rolls-Royce Submarine Ltd
- ⑯ Defence Radiation Protection Services



recorded, with a local newspaper reporting that during the same period the fire brigade was called out to AWE four times a week on average. In 2013 AWE was placed under 'special regulatory attention' by the Office for Nuclear Regulation, not only in response to safety concerns but also because there were huge delays and overspends in the delivery of a new warhead – 6 years overdue with a budget running at double the original. In 2018 AWE was ordered to pay £1m to an employee who had suffered electrical burns. Eventually AWE was nationalised by the Tory government in July 2021 – without fanfare, and without disclosure of the compensation that was undoubtedly paid to Lockheed and its partners.

AWE is now managed for the UK government as an arms-length company with a workforce of 7,000 – the arms-length status guaranteeing continued access by private companies. A case in point: AWE's CEO is Nick Elliott, Director of Helsing Ltd., a company that bills itself as 'Europe's leading software and AI defence company'. Helsing announced a £100m investment in the UK at an event in February 2024 featuring Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister, alongside Minister for the Cabinet Office, Jeremy Quin. Both Quin and Elliott referred to the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to be seized to test new software developments in the battlefield.

## Selling the bomb

The purposes, dangers and costs of the UK's bi-partisan nuclear force have never been accepted in the UK. Protests began in 1952 and never stopped. Successful peace campaigning – the great CND marches of the 1980s, the Greenham Common peace camp that saw off US Cruise missiles – meant governments have had to work hard to conceal the actual workings of the force. The British bomb has always been cloaked in myth.

In March 2024 the Sunak government published a *Defence Nuclear Enterprise Command Paper* laying out the UK's planned escalation in its offensive capabilities. It was dressed up as a 'national endeavour' by Grant Shapps, who described it as an inspiration to the workforce and a commitment to 'the communities that support the nuclear deterrent'. This 'national endeavour' entails huge investments in nuclear-related skills – 5,000 new apprenticeships over the next 4 years, a quadrupling of PhDs in the nuclear sector; a £763 million investment partnership with industry focused on BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, EDF and Babcock, as well as a £3bn investment into the infrastructure in Barrow and Derby. This is in addition to the allocation of £31bn for the building of the Dreadnought subs. The plan is 'to expand the nuclear workforce' by something like 40,000 (currently estimated to be 42,000). The plan for Barrow is to be a 'new partnership between national and local government, BAE Systems and the local community...to make the area an even more attractive place to live, work and build a nuclear career'.

When training and skilled jobs have disappeared almost everywhere else, they can be conjured up for the nuclear industry.

The 2024 Paper also outlines the degree to which UK universities have been penetrated by the arms



The US Department of Defense recently added the UK to a list of NATO nuclear weapons storage locations in Europe, while work has begun on a ‘surety dormitory’ at RAF Lakenheath, suggesting an imminent increase in US personnel.

industry. AWE has ‘a programme of engagement’ with 37 universities, and a ‘strategic partnership’ with five of them.

When it became clear that Shapps was not going to be Defence Minister for very much longer, the PM in waiting, Kier Starmer, was brought forward to express his readiness to ‘press the button’. This ritual conducted by the press on behalf of the British state seals his or her endorsement as a candidate for Prime Minister and at the same time enacts for the public the claim to ‘operational independence’ made by British governments since the MDA was signed.

The claim has often been disputed, for example in a Politico article *How Washington owns the UK’s nukes* (30/04/15), quoting Peter Burt, research manager at the Nuclear Information Service, “The fact that, in theory, the British Prime Minister could give the order to fire Trident missiles without getting prior approval from the White House has allowed the UK to maintain the façade of being a global military power.... In practice, though, it is difficult to conceive of any situ-

ation in which a prime minister would fire Trident without prior US approval... the only way that Britain is ever likely to use Trident is to give legitimacy to a US nuclear attack by participating in it...”

Much about the precise workings of the UK nuclear programme remains either classified or obscure, so it is perhaps significant we’re allowed to know that one of the first duties of a new PM is to write by hand the Letters of Last Resort – instructions for the commanders of the four UK nuclear submarines, to be opened and read at sea in the event of the annihilation of the British government in a nuclear war. The Letters also have a function in the present, reinforcing the notion of an independent deterrent.

In April 2024, Starmer visited the BAE Systems shipyard in Barrow and wrote in the Daily Mail that his commitment to the UK deterrent was ‘unshakeable’ and ‘absolute’. For good measure he added that he sees the independent nuclear programme as one of the towering achievements of the 1945 Labour government and as the bedrock of Labour’s plan to ‘keep Britain safe’ – the greatest myth of all.

## Getting ready for nuclear war

Army top brass, angling for a bigger cut of the defence budget, have at times expressed the view that Trident is an expensive nonsense, but Britain’s nuclear ‘deterrent’ is far from being a white elephant. Its Trident missiles are part of an aggressive NATO first-strike strategy and Britain’s rearmament drive is contributing to the NATO-wide arms race.

As the US is modernising its own nuclear forces, its nuclear missiles are set to return to the UK. The US Department of Defense recently added the UK to a list of NATO nuclear weapons storage locations in Europe, while work has begun

on a ‘surety dormitory’ at RAF Lakenheath, suggesting an imminent increase in US personnel. ‘Surety’ is a term used to indicate conditions for the maintenance of US nuclear weapons overseas. Similar bases are being established all over Europe and South East Asia as the US prepares for nuclear war with Russia, China and North Korea.

In the six months following the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022 a rash of articles appeared across all media calculating the odds on the use of battlefield nuclear weapons, and it is now commonplace to read military analysts, commentators and politicians airing the potential, even likely, use of tactical nuclear bombs in current conflicts. NATO’s drive to war outlined in an Atlantic Council paper, *To deter Russia, NATO must adapt its nuclear sharing program* (30/7/24), makes their case for moving tactical weapons further east in Europe. Speculation about nuclear weapons being used in the Middle East has reached fever pitch.

In effect, the use of battlefield nukes has not only been made thinkable, the expectation that it will happen sooner rather than later has been created. This in turn makes the use of strategic weapons like the UK’s Trident missile system much more likely.

[1] [https://www.nuclearinfo.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/11/BASIC\\_Special\\_Report\\_Chamberlain\\_et\\_al\\_US-UK\\_Nuclear-weapons\\_collaboration\\_under\\_Mutual\\_Defence\\_Agreement\\_2004\\_Volume\\_1\\_of\\_1.pdf](https://www.nuclearinfo.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/11/BASIC_Special_Report_Chamberlain_et_al_US-UK_Nuclear-weapons_collaboration_under_Mutual_Defence_Agreement_2004_Volume_1_of_1.pdf)

[2] <https://www.nuclearinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/MDA-Briefing-digital.pdf>

[3] <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-nuclear-warhead-modernization-and-new-nuclear-weapons>



# UKRAINE

## West continues to escalate war

by John Moore

Ukraine's attack on Russia in early August – confirmed as a western operation by Ukrainian official Mikhaïlo Podolyak and many other sources – is designed to prolong the war by showing that Ukraine can “achieve results”, as Zelensky put it. It crosses a red line, the first major western attack on Russian territory since the Nazis, and shows clearly the West's belligerent intent. President Putin called the move a “large scale provocation” and said it removed any “taboos” in terms of Russia's response.

### Dangerous move

Months of training in Britain went into preparing the attacking force. British weapons used openly inside Russia “on a scale matched by no other country”, according to the *Times*, as well as ‘mercenary’ troops on the ground from several NATO countries, signal a major escalation and attempt to lock any future US administration into pursuing the war. [1]

The advance into Kursk hit principally civilian targets. Videos show civilian cars and ambulances carrying wounded being shot at by Ukrainian troops, drones destroying apartments and churches, and chemical weapons being used.

Most western military analysts agree that this is a desperate symbolic throw of the dice which is questionable militarily and hugely wasteful of lives. Across the 700-mile frontline in Ukraine, Russia is pushing back Ukrainian forces relentlessly. It has maintained superiority in air defence through-



PHOTO BY ANDY DUNAWAY

F16 fighter aircraft

out the war, according to the US journal *Business Insider*, and also a 10-to-1 advantage in artillery shells with the world's biggest production of munitions. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian advance into Russia is a highly dangerous move in terms of escalation, and one that potentially threatens the Kursk nuclear power station, which has already come under fire. The head of Russia's nuclear agency has warned the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the dangers, and the IAEA called for “maximum restraint”.

Since the failure of its counter-offensive last year and its ongoing retreat, with losses estimated at five times those of Russia, the attack is a continuation on a much bigger scale of Ukraine's focus on striking civilians and infrastructure inside Russia. In June, a cluster-bomb attack aimed at a nearby military target hit a beach in Sevastopol, Crimea, while on the same

day in Dagestan, radical Islamists launched another attack, echoing the ISIS Crocus concert hall killings in Moscow earlier in the year. Oil refineries, shipping, bridges and shopping malls have all been targeted regularly and increasingly.

Russia's response to this opening up of a second front appears composed, moving reserves forward to contain the invasion, without deviating from making important strategic gains in the Donbass.

### Reasons for escalation

Ukraine's Kursk advance comes at a time when western support for NATO's war has been flagging in the face of Russia's resilience to western sanctions and its slow but steady advance (deliberately slow in most areas, in order to reduce casualties). It shows the clear intention of the dominant ruling circles to keep Russia tied down

in a long costly European war as they prepare for their bigger conflict against China. The war also cements US domination over the EU its rival as well as ally, which has been one of the chief consequences of its provocation of Russia from the start.

There are other reasons for prolonging the war – the huge profits to be made, not only from arms sales. BlackRock, the world's biggest asset fund manager, is leveraging Ukraine's enormous debts to profit from the postwar reconstruction, estimated at up to \$750 billion. Meanwhile, almost a third of Ukraine's rich agricultural land is already concentrated in foreign corporate hands. Lithium and other rare earth deposits in the Donbas and central Ukraine are another rich resource. Germany in particular, searching for lithium for electric car production and green energy technology, is pressing for the war to continue in order to ensure and restore control over these territories. Ukraine's biggest titanium producer is also up for privatization as part of the latest massive sell-off of state assets.

## Calls for talks

Despite the two-year-long campaign of vilification of Russia and the championing of Ukraine in the West, a major opinion poll conducted in the US and Europe published this summer by the New York-based *Institute for Global Affairs* revealed that there is "broad transatlantic support for urging a negotiated settlement to end the war in Ukraine." 94% of American respondents said they wanted a negotiated end to the bloodshed, even if it meant Ukraine ceding territory and 88% of Europeans said the same.

In terms of diplomatic efforts for peace, China and Brazil have called jointly for an international peace conference that includes both Russia and Ukraine, following on from

China's 12-point peace plan put forward in February. Both initiatives were dismissed by the western powers.

Hungary's Viktor Orban, as the current rotating EU president, has met Putin, Zelensky and Xi in a push for peace, for which he's been demonised as an "appeaser" by EU hawks such as Ursula von der Leyen, who called for Hungary's EU voting rights to be suspended as punishment. Hungary was also "stripped of the right" to host an EU foreign and defence ministers meeting in late August. But Orban is not alone among European politicians urging talks. The leader of the conservative opposition CDU in Germany, Friedrich Merz, has also called for negotiations, while simultaneously urging Germany to supply Ukraine with warplanes, as have the CDU prime ministers of Saxony and Thuringia. The far right AfD which did well in the latest regional elections, has also called for peace talks, as has the leftwing anti-war party, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW). Many Germans fear being dragged into a war. Meanwhile, the Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, having narrowly survived an assassination attempt, has re-emphasised his party's opposition to Ukraine joining NATO, because it would lead to World War 3, and Italy has reiterated its refusal to allow Ukraine to use its weapons to strike Russian territory.

Liberal voices have also called for peace. A letter in the *Financial Times* (10/7/24) from distinguished former ambassadors to Russia and the USSR as well as establishment academics such as Lord Skidelsky, Richard Sakwa and Anatol Lieven, suggested talks were needed given the inevitability of a territorial division of Ukraine. The letter went viral.

Within Ukraine, there has been a steep falling off in support for the war - 44% of the population now

favour a diplomatic solution. This feeling is strongest among those living close to the frontlines. [2] Zelensky's approval rating has fallen, and a large section of Ukrainian people reject mobilisation. For instance, 11,000 Ukrainian men have crossed illegally into northern Romania to escape the regime's military pressgangs and others are escaping elsewhere or paying a \$10-20,000 bribe. Truckers blocked a main highway near Odessa in May against a new mobilisation law, and a month later military vehicles belonging to military enlistment offices were set alight in protest against the draft.

This anti-war sentiment goes back over thirty years. Between 1991 and 2014, every opinion poll showed that the majority of Ukrainians consistently opposed joining NATO. Despite the brute force of the Maidan coup in 2014, which pushed Ukrainians into line, 75% of them voted for a peace ticket in 2019 promised them by Zelensky. A poll by the Kiev International Institute for Sociology conducted just before Russia's intervention showed that only 16% of Ukrainians were willing to take up arms to defend their country.

## NATO encroachment

The US knew all along that no Russian government of whatever stripe would accept Ukraine joining NATO, according to a series of newly declassified documents. [3] In 2008, William Burns, then US ambassador to Moscow, now head of the CIA, advised Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice that, "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)." This was also the shared opinion of 50 prominent foreign policy experts in an open letter to President Clinton in 1997, who wrote: "We believe that the current U.S. led effort to expand NATO ... is a policy error of historic proportions" which would "unsettle European stability".

To try to secure a peaceful solution, Russia signed the Minsk agreement in 2014, which agreed autonomous powers for the Donbas within Ukraine, a deal unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council. But Angela Merkel, one of the key guarantors of the agreement, later admitted in *Die Zeit* that it had simply been a holding operation to buy time for the West to re-arm Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Donbas was bombarded by Ukrainian forces for seven years, killing 14,000 Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and in 2021 Ukraine announced its intention to tear up the Budapest Memorandum and acquire nuclear weapons. When the shelling of Donbas increased exponentially in early 2022, Russia was forced into launching its ‘Special Military Operation’, a pre-emptive strike to prevent unrelenting NATO-backed aggression.

In response to Russia’s successful defensive military operation, NATO has been escalating the war, proving right all Russia’s security fears, with the aim of raising the cost to Russia as far as possible and destabilising the government, though the reality is overwhelming support for the war among the Russian population.

Russia will now face US Tomahawk and SM-6 hypersonic long-range missiles based in Germany, capable of hitting many of Russia’s major cities. These missiles were banned under the 1988 INF treaty, which the US abrogated in 2019 in preparation for the current war. Placing long-range missiles in Germany – a decision made without Bundestag consultation – makes Germany a potential target. Russia said the missiles represent a “security threat” to its territory.

Another threat to Russia is the F-16s now permitted to take off from Poland, along with F-16s from Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands recently supplied to Ukraine. Russia has warned that any airfields from which planes take off for bombing missions against



*Ursula von der Leyen, EU hawk*

Russia will become legitimate targets, no matter what country they are in. One F-16 has already been destroyed. A further threat is the British Storm Shadow missiles, which Sir Keir Starmer says should be used to strike military targets deep inside Russia. President Biden had already secretly told Ukraine to do the same, but Starmer’s “bombastic” warmongering, as *The Guardian*’s Simon Jenkins (15/7/24) called it, prompted criticism from British military sources for being too naked. In addition, France is deploying military ‘trainers’ to Ukraine, alongside the NATO special forces already there, and Kaja Kallas, the Atlanticist prime minister of Estonia and now in effect the EU’s foreign minister, has called openly for the dismemberment of Russia.

Meanwhile, Poland, which has become NATO’s main stronghold, with the biggest land army in Europe and a new US ballistic missile site and command base on its soil, has declared that it will intervene directly in the war if Ukraine were in danger of losing. It has recently signed a treaty with Ukraine that includes rounding up Ukrainian exiles in Poland into a

‘volunteer’ Ukraine Legion operating from Polish territory.

NATO’s new control centre inside Ukraine itself, and its new military HQ in Wiesbaden, Germany with 700 staff, are all part of a strategic shift towards direct NATO engagement with Russia, in which Europe takes a more central role. This US switch to place Europe on the frontline of the war is to be underpinned by the establishment of a European Defence Union over the next five years, and a new missile project – the European Long-Range Strike Approach – to be produced jointly by Germany, France, Italy and Poland.

Europe’s obedience to US orders means it could find itself running the war alone and preparations are already underway. In Scandinavia and the Baltics, and in other EU countries, conscription is being introduced. NATO is creating an army of 300,000 troops which can be ready within 30 days, in addition to its troops already deployed on Russia’s borders in the Baltic countries. It is also building Europe’s largest NATO military base in Romania, bigger than Ramstein in Germany, and much further east,

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHE LICOPE



only 250 miles from Russia's Crimea and 186 miles from the strategically important port of Odessa.

In a further aggressive move, NATO has accused China of being a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war in Ukraine. Outgoing NATO chief Stoltenberg said China had incited the "largest military conflict in Europe since World War Two", a charge China rejected angrily. It produced evidence that in fact over 60% of Russia's imported military components and dual-use items come from the US and other Western countries, not China. The true face of China was seen at a meeting in late July between the Ukrainian and Chinese foreign ministers, at which Ukraine announced that it was "ready for constructive negotiations with Russia to achieve peace" – showing China working for a diplomatic solution.

## Peace not arms

Despite Putin's warning that if western escalation continues the war could reach a "point of no return", the western war party keeps up its provocations. Ignoring the real danger of world war breaking out, influential voices on the British left have persisted

throughout the war in calling for more arms to Ukraine. For example, in July 2024 the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign issued a bulletin titled 'Time to help Ukraine win' calling on the government to give Ukraine "all the weapons needed to enable Ukrainians to free the entire country and end the occupation", and to seize all Russian state assets in the West - worth \$300 billion. Signatories to this call include trade unionists and MPs who should be at the forefront of a campaign for peace. This 'solidarity' campaign overlooks the murder of at least 48 trade unionists burned alive in a neo-Nazi attack in Odessa after the Maidan coup – an attack which sparked the Donbas rebellion against the Russophobic coup regime. The call for more arms shores up support for the Keir Starmer's pledge of £3.6 billion a year to Ukraine "for as long as it takes".

The same political weakness was seen at last year's TUC conference when the GMB and ASLEF proposed and seconded a motion calling for "practical aid" and "whatever means available" to guarantee "the territorial integrity of Ukraine". It was supported by the NUM, PCS and other unions. Our response should be to expose

NATO's aggressive war aims more widely and effectively. All channels we have access to must be used to clarify what the mainstream media is at pains to conceal – that Russia has throughout acted in order to defend itself against NATO expansion and does not threaten Europe. It is the western elite that is intent on intensifying the war as evidenced by the crossing of the red line into Russian territory.

Keir Starmer's £64.6 billion defence spending this year makes a mockery of the £22 billion 'black hole' in Britain's finances which the government insists on plugging through the "difficult choice" of austerity measures.

[1] <https://www.kitklarenberg.com/p/britains-kursk-invasion-backfires>

[2] <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/06/ukraine-public-opinion-russia-war?lang=en>,

[3] <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/us-russia-nato/#~:text=Declassified%20docs%3A%20US%20knew%20Russia,snookered'%20by%20NATO%20%7C%20Responsible%20Statecraft>

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# Israeli aggression increases

by Helen Christopher

The far-right Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu is facing increasing problems as it continues to pursue its genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Not only has it doubled down on this murderous war, it has escalated violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. It is trying to widen the conflict to a regional war by forcing Iran and Hezbollah to respond to its attacks and assassinations. Netanyahu has demonstrated that he is not interested in a ceasefire. If in any doubt about Netanyahu's position on a ceasefire then read his words from his press conference on 2nd September, held during the protests in Israel against his failure to get hostages released. He said that the war would only end "when Hamas no longer rules Gaza". He went on, "when [Hamas] understands we're not ending the war, they'll give in." Not the words of someone who has any intention of entering into negotiations in good faith to achieve a ceasefire

In pursuing all-out war Israel is continuing to lose international support and is engendering growing opposition at home. Notwithstanding the increased pressures however, the Israeli government is committed to the genocide of the Palestinian people and is trying to achieve this as quickly as it can lest it is forced to call a halt at some point.

## Ceasefire and hostage deal blocked

Recent negotiations have been around a United States proposed ceasefire deal. First mooted back in



Graffiti in refugee camp in Nablus

May and agreed by the UN Security Council in June, it was accepted by Hamas with a framework agreed in July. Israel had originally accepted the deal as a basis for negotiations as well, but has gone back on this agreement by adding requirements which it knows will be unacceptable to Hamas. In particular it has stated

that it wants to keep its troops occupying the Netzarim corridor, preventing free movement between north and south Gaza, and the Philadelphia corridor, Gaza's border with Egypt. This is the only border Gaza has which is not with Israel. Such a continued armed occupation would be incompatible with a ceasefire

PHOTO BY ALMONROTH

and was not part of the original deal, which included the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. Israel also introduced a new requirement that in any hostage/prisoner swap, Palestinian prisoners would only be released into exile and not be allowed to return to the West Bank or Gaza. In further negotiations the US has accommodated Israeli demands, but this revised deal has been rejected by Hamas.

As the negotiations drag on so the death toll in Gaza continues to mount, including the deaths of hostages. This latter fact has inflamed public opinion in Israel, where there was already growing dissatisfaction with Netanyahu's lack of commitment to getting the hostages released. At the beginning of September there were massive protests against the government. The trade union centre, the Histadrut, called a general strike, which was outlawed by the courts. Though the protests were huge, Netanyahu still commands a lot of support in Israel, which is deeply divided.

In addition, Israel has launched military attacks against Iran and Hezbollah, which are serious and impossible for them to ignore. Israel has a long history of disregarding its neighbours' sovereignty and occupying their territory. During this war against the Palestinians there have been further military attacks and assassinations. On 25th August Israel rained rockets down on Lebanon in what it described as a pre-emptive strike aimed at Hezbollah targets— in other words an unprovoked attack on a neighbouring state. Hezbollah responded with rockets and drones aimed at Israeli military targets. Israel has been supported militarily in this by the US which has maintained the presence of two naval carrier strike groups in the area, designed to give cover to Israeli aggression and deter Hezbollah or Iran from responding. The potential for drawing the United States directly into the conflict is evident and has in part conditioned

Iran and Hezbollah's response as they have no interest in a wider regional war.

Hezbollah also described its action as retaliation for the assassination of one of its senior commanders, Fuad Shukr, in an Israeli airstrike on Beirut in July. The following day Israel also assassinated Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's political leader, in Teheran. These criminal acts are designed to draw Iran and Hezbollah into military conflict with Israel and to attempt to pull Israel's allies into the war. With Israel trying to engineer a breakdown in ceasefire negotiations, it may only be a matter of time before that happens. Iran has made its response to Israeli aggression conditional on achieving a ceasefire, so any collapse could lead to it taking action.

## West Bank

While Israel continues to lay waste to Gaza it has also escalated its genocidal campaign in the West Bank through the extension of settlements, state sponsored settler violence and incursion by the Israeli Defence Force.

The Israeli settler movement aims to drive Palestinians from their homes and homelands in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in defiance of international law. In July the UN's top court ordered Israel to stop any further settlement and evacuate settlers from Palestinian land. In the last 50 years Israel has expanded its occupation of Palestinian territories through these settlements. There are now half a million settlers in the West Bank and 200,000 in East Jerusalem. Since Israel's war in Gaza began, there has been a sharp rise in settler violence. The director of Shin Bet, the Israeli internal security agency, recently asked for more resources to combat what he described as the danger of "Jewish terror". Yet it is the Israeli government that is supporting and arming the settlers. In June the government announced

plans for new settlements and legalised planning for "outposts" on the West Bank in what has been described as the largest theft of land from Palestinians since the Oslo Accords of 1993.

In a PR gesture to try to placate a horrified world, the US government and others have sanctioned a handful of the settlers. But Israeli government ministers have taken action to help individuals avoid these sanctions. Although banks initially froze the settlers accounts, the Israeli finance minister intervened and within a couple of months they were again granted access to their cash. Whilst foreign banks have been punished by the US for doing business with Cuba, the Israeli banks involved have suffered no consequences.

Over 600 Palestinians have been killed on the West Bank since October 7th. At the end of August, the Israeli Defence Force invaded the West Bank occupying Jenin and other refugee camps. Thirty-six Palestinians were killed, including children, and hospitals were attacked.

## Isolate Israel

While the overwhelming majority of world opinion and decisions by the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice have condemned Israel and its leaders, the US and the west do little to curb them. There have been some welcome measures by the new Labour government in the UK, but they do not go far enough. The UK, the US and other western countries which still support Israel need to pull the plug on arms supplies and political protection. That will be the decisive way to stop Israel and save the Palestinians.



# Militarism rises again in Japan

by Simon Korner

In September 2022, the Japanese government announced its intention to restore Japan to military greatness, beginning its largest re-armament programme since the end of World War 2.

## Imperial ambitions

The revival of Japanese martial ambitions is a sobering prospect, in particular for those countries that fell victim to its colonial brutality last century. China lost 20 million people, mostly civilians, killed by Japan during its long war of occupation starting in Manchuria in 1932. Korea's population endured slave labour, mass rape and forced deportations for more than three decades from 1912 under Japanese colonial rule. The fact that Japan has never acknowledged its war-crimes makes the danger more stark. At the provocative annual ceremony this year to honour Japan's World War 2 war dead at the Yasukuni shrine, Japan once again refused to mention or apologise for Japanese wartime atrocities.

The immediate purpose of Japanese re-armament is to prepare for war against China, with Japan joining a US-led axis including Australia, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines – and NATO. The process is already underway: tightening economic sanctions against China; physical encirclement with military bases; and an economically draining arms race. As one of the US's subordinated allies, Japan is set to play a key role promoting US strategy in East Asia.



Hiroshima destroyed by nuclear bomb

For its part, Japan's ruling circles have long sought to regain the country's former status as a belligerent country. For the past 80 years, they have chafed under the constraints of its constitution which states that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Japan has never fully held to this renunciation, circumventing it via the fiction that its military was part of the police service, and by insisting that its growing armed forces were strictly defensive in nature. Every move towards so-called normalisation by the Japanese establishment has been gradual so as not to alarm its population, which remains largely opposed to militarisation after having experienced its disastrous consequences during World War 2, in which over 3 million Japanese people were killed.

However, over the past decade, this surreptitious re-armament with mil-

itary spending pegged at 1% of GDP, has been replaced by more overt steps towards militarisation, testing how far they can push the public. First, in 2014, Japan reinterpreted its constitution to allow it to fight overseas and to do so alongside allies – a far cry from strict self-defence of the homeland inscribed in that constitution. This cleared the way for supporting a future US-led war to break Taiwan away from China.

In 2022, Japan made the more radical constitutional revision of reconfiguring its military into an attacking force. This change required a two-thirds super-majority in parliament, which was made easier by the assassination of the hawkish prime minister Shinzo Abe two days before a national election, allowing the long-time ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party, to win the necessary majority. Under its new National Security Strategy Japan's military spending will double by 2027, making it the world's third biggest arms spender, after the US

and China, up from ninth. Importantly, the new strategy allows it to strike foreign bases pre-emptively.

Thus, Japan's postwar ambiguity as a "semi-disarmed economic giant, an Asian Germany of sorts", as historian Rana Mitter has described it, is over. Like Germany, it has entered an arms race to become a major player in close alignment with NATO, spending at least 2% of its GDP on arms. [1] The US ambassador in Tokyo, Rahm Emanuel, welcomed the 2022 change as "a momentous milestone", while *Foreign Affairs* journal called it "a profound transformation", both recognising that it marks a qualitative change.

## Integration with US and NATO

As part of its re-armament drive, Japan is rapidly integrating its military into US command structures. This is the biggest enhancement of the US-Japanese alliance since 1960. Operational control now comes under direct US leadership in Japan, whereas up to now the 54,000 US military personnel based in Japan had to defer to "command and control authority" from a distant base in Hawaii. In effect, the two militaries will operate seamlessly as one body. The pretext is that "quicker joint decision-making and careful coordination of the countries' defense capabilities" is needed to confront China over Taiwan and North Korea. [2] One top US Marine Corps general in Japan called this "setting the theatre" for the coming conflict, which could be as soon as next year, according to Mike Minihan, General in charge of US Air Mobility Command, who said: "I hope I am wrong. My gut tells me we will fight in 2025".

Central to Japan's integration with the US military – which places Japan at the epicentre of US control over the Pacific, eclipsing South Korea – is also a far closer relationship with NATO, which is spread-

ing its tentacles into east Asia. Japan attended the NATO summit in Madrid for the first time in 2022, and in 2023 joined the unprecedentedly large two-week Air Defender exercise with NATO countries in Europe as part of an ongoing joint military training programme. Japan has also opened a NATO liaison office in Tokyo, a move condemned by China, Russia and also France, which does not want US encroachment on its colonial empire of Pacific islands or damage to its major trading relationship with China. Japan is now the biggest non-member financial supporter of NATO missions. It has spent over \$30 million on missions in Ukraine, and a further pledge of \$7.1 billion in non-military aid.

## Russia and China

Japan was initially slow to apply anti-Russia sanctions in 2022 because of its important trade with Russia in fuel, cars and machinery. But a year later at the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan came out in condemnation of the 'Special Military Operation' and imposed sanctions. In return, President Biden declared that the US was "fully, thoroughly, completely committed" to the defence of Japan using all means, including nuclear weapons. Japan's turnaround extended to its joining another big military exercise, Orient Shield, with the USA near Russia's border in 2023, provoking a strong diplomatic protest by Russia.

Japan's view of China has followed a similar trajectory to its relations with Russia, moving from cordial to belligerent. In 2013, when Xi Jinping became China's president, Japan officially called China a strategic partner – China is Japan's largest trading partner in both imports and exports. Ten years later, by contrast, Japan labelled China "the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan" and acceded to US demands to shut off the sup-

ply of advanced computer chips and the machinery needed for their manufacture to China. China warned that Japan's policy change risks "conflict and confrontation." Likewise, Russia said NATO's advance into Asia will lead to "an escalation in bloc conflicts."

The tightening structure of Japan's anti-Chinese alliances includes the Quad, with Australia, India and the USA, and future membership of AUKUS (Australia, Britain and the USA), a bullying alliance that has put Australia under direct US military control and will do the same for Japan. Both countries to be used to strangle China's trade through the choke-points of the Taiwan Straits and South China Sea, which are China's main trade gateways.

Meanwhile, as part of its relentless encirclement of China, the US has pushed for a new pact between Japan and the Philippines which allows each country's troops to be stationed on the other's territory. This Reciprocal Access Agreement in effect gives Japan back access to the Philippines, which it occupied in World War 2. The agreement is a way of ensuring that the Philippines remain US-compliant.

## Military build-up

In practical military terms, Japan has bought 500 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US (which has 4,000), and around 150 US advanced fifth-generation aircraft to replace its aging F-2 fighters.

Its burgeoning military industrial complex, with Mitsubishi Heavy Industry at its core, is producing the US's Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, carried by F-35 stealth fighters, and is also building Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missiles for export back to the USA, which has stockpile shortages because of Ukraine. Exporting weapons has until now been prohibited in Japan. Japan has also converted two large warships into



aircraft carriers, the first in Japan's navy since 1945, ready to carry F-35s. In addition, Britain's BAE and Japan's Mitsubishi are producing the new Tempest next-generation stealth plane over the next ten years, as part of the Global Combat Air Programme with Italy. All these massive investments in arms production are reviving Mitsubishi's World War 2 role as a global weapons manufacturer.

Japan is also deploying over 1,000 long-range Cruise missiles able to reach North Korea and China, and is developing hypersonic weapons for use potentially to seize back Russia's Southern Kuriles islands which it lost formally in the peace treaties that settled World War 2. In addition, under a recent agreement between Japan and the UK, British troops can be stationed in Japan for joint exercises, such as the one in 2022 which simulated the retaking of an island under enemy control. More ominous still is the proposal to deploy tactical nuclear weapons on Japanese territory. While the US has up to now provided a long-distance nuclear umbrella, it will now place tactical nuclear weapons in its bases in Japan itself. Any strike launched from these bases would risk retaliation, dragging Japan into nuclear conflict again.

Meanwhile, the heavily militarised Japanese island of Okinawa which already hosts 31 US bases will receive a further 2,000 US marines by 2025. Other Japanese islands such as Ishigaki in the far south-west, even closer to Taiwan than Okinawa, will house new missile bases, ready to target China.

Just as Germany was forced by the US in 2022 to cut off relations with Russia, its main supplier of cheap energy, Japan has been co-opted fully into the US war axis at its own expense, forced to spend on arms, essentially to promote US aims. This echoes US policy toward the defeated capitalist class in Germany

and Japan after World War 2, which used the rehabilitated industrial leaders, who had backed the fascist regimes, against rising workers' movements in western Europe and ensured that Japanese attempts in the 1950s to normalise relations with the USSR and China led nowhere. Like Germany, Japan, the only country to have had nuclear weapons used against it, remains effectively an occupied power with 85 US military bases on its territory.



Shinzo Abe

## Conflicts

However, in the longer term, unless a world war intervenes, neither Germany and Japan will remain permanently satisfied with subordinate status. A revived Japanese empire will threaten not only North Korea, but South Korea as well, and eventually even its master the USA. South Korea's president Yoon Suk-yeol raised the alarm, calling Japan's re-armament "a grave matter", while a [South] Korea Times editorial demanded that Japan "not forget the lessons of the Pacific War". The prospect is already driving an arms race among the countries of south-east Asia, in part for fear of renewed Japanese domination.

To clear the way for its rising power, Japan is tearing up not only

the its pacifist constitution but the main World War 2 peace treaty it signed as the terms of its surrender – the Potsdam Proclamation of 1945 – which stated that all foreign territories and islands occupied by Japan, including Taiwan, would be restored to their former owners, in particular, China and Russia. Under the Proclamation, Japan's current claims to the Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea, only 100 miles north of Taiwan, and to Russia's Kurile islands, have no basis in international law and are clearly acts of expansionist aggression.

## Opposition in Japan

On the positive side, Japan's strong historical attachment to peace still presents a problem for Japanese warmongers. 75% of Japanese people want their country to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, permanently banning them. [3] Nagasaki's Mayor Shiro Suzuki's refusal to invite Israel to the memorial to the victims of the atom bomb on August 9th, citing the likelihood of largescale protests against the Zionist regime's genocide, showed the potential strength of anti-imperialist sentiment in Japan – much to the fury of the USA and Israel. But it's on the issue of tax rises for arms spending that the government is weakest. A 2023 opinion poll showed 80% opposed to financing defence spending through tax increases. [4] The recent resignation of prime minister Kishida is partly related to this issue and shows the potential focus for peace campaigning in future.

[1] <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/japans-plans-for-an-antichina-alliance/>

[2] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10175050/>

[3] <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2020.1834961#abstract>

[4] <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/06/24/making-defence-spending-sustainable-for-japan/>

# SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTION 2024

## Can the African National Congress renew and recover?

by Alex Davidson

In the 2024 South African election the African National Congress (ANC) received 40.2% of the votes, dropping below 50% for the first time since the first democratic election in 1994. (see TABLE 1) [1]

TABLE 1 (below)

**South African Election 2024**  
**African National Congress**  
**Percentage share of vote**  
**Elections 1994-2024**

YEAR	% age share of vote
1994	62.5
1999	66.4
2004	70
2009	66
2014	62
2019	57.5
2024	40.2

ANC in its analysis of the election result stated, “While the ANC has won the most votes in this election, the results show a significant decline in the ANC support from previous elections. While there are several factors that have contributed to the decline in support, the results send a clear message to the ANC. We wish to assure the people of South Africa that we have heard them. We have heard their concerns, their frustrations and their dissatisfaction.” [2]

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in a statement to the ANC National Executive wrote, “We are at a crossroads as the liberation movement, where the electorate, and in particular the working and middle classes, have handed a painful verdict on our performance...Society is correctly angered by the decade of state capture and corruption, loadshedding, deteriorating municipal and public services, a stagnant economy and rising unemployment, poverty and inequality...” [3]

### Voter turnout

Voter turnout was down compared to previous elections. In 1994 voter turnout was 87% compared to 59% in the 2024 election (see TABLE 2). Some 11.5 million of those registered did not vote bringing the turnout down to 59%. A further 13 million did not register to vote.

TABLE 2 (below)

**South African Election 2024**  
**Voter Turnout, 1994-2024**

YEAR	% age
1994	87
1999	89
2004	77
2009	77
2014	73
2019	66
2024	59

### Parliament

Although ANC lost its majority it remains the largest party in the South African Parliament with 159 out of 400 MPs. The second largest party is the Democratic Alliance, whose base remains largely among white voters. It saw its share of the vote increase marginally from 20.77% in 2019 to 21.81% in the 2024 election. The Democratic Alliance now has 87 MPs an increase of 3. The third largest party in Parliament is the recently formed Umkhonto Wesizwe party, led by Jacob Zuma, with 58 MPs followed by the Economic Freedom Fighters with 44 MPs down by 5. The Inkatha Freedom Party is next with 17 MPs. There are a total of 18 parties in Parliament. (see TABLE 3)

TABLE 3 (top right)

**South African election 2024**  
**Parties, percentage share of the**  
**vote, number of seats in National**  
**Assembly**

### ANC loss of votes

ANC lost votes through many of its past supporters not voting. It also lost votes to the Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) party, led by Jacob Zuma, particularly in KwaZulu Natal (KZN), where MK won 45% of the votes. Prior to this election ANC had lost voters to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). This haemorrhaging of votes from ANC combined with the huge numbers of people not voting meant that ANC lost its majority for the first time since the election which ended apartheid thirty years ago.

	PARTY	% age support	SEATS (400)
1	African National Congress (ANC)	40.18	159
2	Democratic Alliance (DA)	21.81	87
3	Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK)	14.58	58
4	Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	9.52	39
5	Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	3.65	17
6	Patriotic Alliance (PA)	2.06	9
7	Freedom Front Plus (FF+)	1.36	6
8	Action South Africa (Action SA)	1.2	6
9	United Democratic Movement (UDM)	0.49	3
10	African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP)	0.6	3
11	Rise Mwanzi	0.42	2
12	National Coloured Congress (NCC)	0.23	2
13	Build One South Africa (BOSA)	0.41	2
14	African Transformation Movement (ATM)	0.4	2
15	Al-Jama	0.24	2
16	Pan African Congress (PAC)	0.23	1
17	Good	0.18	1
18	United Africans Transformation (UAT)	0.22	1

TABLE 3

It should be noted that ANC retained its majority control in 5 of the 9 Provinces (Limpopo, Eastern Cape, North West, Free State and Mpumalanga) and has been elected to lead the government in another 2 provinces (Northern Cape and Gauteng). Of the remaining two provinces, the Inkatha Party leads a coalition including ANC in KZN. The Western Cape is controlled by the Democratic Alliance and ANC has never held a majority in the province.

TABLE 4 (right)

**South African Election 2024**  
**African National Congress (ANC)**  
 %age share of vote by Province

Province	% age share of vote
Limpopo	74.23
Eastern Cape	62.47
North West	58.53
Free State	52.88
Mpumalanga	51.89
Northern Cape	49.3
Gauteng	36.47
Western Cape	21.34
KwaZulu Natal (KZN)	17.62
Out of country	3.92



## Umkhonto Wesizwe party

Umkhonto Wesizwe (Zulu for ‘Spear of the Nation’), abbreviated as MK, was originally the ANC’s armed wing. The new Umkhonto Wesizwe party was founded in December 2023 six months prior to the election. ANC challenged the use of the name and symbol by the new party but lost in the courts.

Jacob Zuma was prohibited from standing as a candidate in the election due to his having been convicted for Contempt of Court and sentenced to 15 months in prison. However, his name and image remained on the ballot paper as leader of the MK party. The MK party vote has a largely ethno-nationalist/tribal base with their votes being mainly in the province of KwaZulu Natal, the adjoining province of Mpumalanga and in Gauteng with high numbers of people with a Zulu heritage. (see Table 5) Beside its predominantly ethnic voter base the MK party has brought together many of those who gained positions of power and privilege, especially during the years of Zuma’s presidency and those who were involved in State Capture.

The MK party has had a volatile start to its existence with its founder, Jabulani Khumalo being expelled, The MK party has had a volatile start to its existence with its founder Jabulani Khumalo being expelled and then, following the recent election, 20 of its MPs being dismissed and replaced. Following the election Jacob Zuma was expelled by ANC in July 2024.

TABLE 5 (right)

**South African Election 2024**  
**Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK) Party**  
**%age share of vote by Province**

## Economic Freedom Fighters

The Economic Freedom Fighters was founded in 2013 by Julius

Malema and Floyd Shivambu following their expulsion from ANC. The party’s support reflects grievances over the issues of unemployment, poverty and inequality. In the 2024 election it won 9.52% of the vote which was down from the previous election, losing votes to the MK party. Its vote share in KZN fell from 10% in 2019 to 2.3% in 2024. Following the election Floyd Shivambu, Deputy President and Lieutenant Commander-in Chief, left EFF and joined the MK party. He has since been appointed by Zuma as the MK party’s National Organiser.

## Roots of the problem

ANC’s loss of support is due to a variety of factors. While many advances have been made since 1994 including access to clean water, electrification, sanitation, housing, education and social policy, the gap between rich and poor has grown wider, and unemployment has remained very high at around 40%. The deep-rooted causes of unemployment, poverty and inequality lie in the fact that South Africa is a capitalist state, and that apartheid remains embedded in the social-economic fabric of the country.

With the formal end of apartheid in 1994 and with ANC gaining political

Province	% age share of vote
KZN	45.35
Mpumalanga	16.97
Gauteng	9.79
North West	2.06
Free State	1.93
Eastern Cape	1.44
Limpopo	0.85
Northern Cape	0.79
Western Cape	0.57

power the conditions were created for opportunism and careerism to grow within the organisation. Three years after the end of apartheid, Nelson Mandela in his Political Report to the 1997 ANC National Conference stated,

“Later in this report, we will discuss the intrusion of this self-same media within our ranks, during the last three years, to encourage our own self-destruction, with the active involvement of some who are present here as bona-fide delegates to the conference of a movement to which they owe no loyalty...In reality, during the last three years, we have found it difficult to deal with such careerists in a decisive manner. We, ourselves, have therefore allowed the space to emerge for these opportunists to pursue their counter-revolutionary goals, to the detriment of our movement and struggle. During this period, we have also been faced with various instances of corruption involving our own members, including those who occupy positions of authority by virtue of the victory of the democratic revolution...Clearly we have to take all necessary measures to purge ourselves of such members and organise ourselves in such away that will make it difficult for corrupt elements to gain entry into our movement.”

However, these problems of opportunism, careerism and corruption continued to grow alongside developing discontent with the ANC government and its policies. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) became increasingly critical of their alliance partner, ANC, and Mbeki’s government and its policies of accommodating business.

## Mbeki removes Zuma

Corruption charges against Jacob Zuma over a major arms deal emerged during the trial of Schabir Sheik, charged in 2001, and who was

found guilty of corruption and fraud related to the arms deal. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison in June 2005. President Thabo Mbeki then relieved Zuma from his post as Deputy President of the Republic.

In December 2005 Zuma was charged with rape but was acquitted in May 2006 in a very high profile trial which stirred much emotion throughout the country. Corruption charges were still being pursued against Zuma but then in October 2008 a Judge found that Zuma had not been properly consulted on the charges according to the law and in his judgement referred to political interference by the Government. Following this judgement the ANC National Executive re-called Thabo Mbeki as President of the Republic. Mbeki resigned as President and Kgalema Motlanthe was elected President.

## Zuma replaces Mbeki

Jacob Zuma was seen by many as a victim. He also accrued support from those discontent with the Mbeki leadership. At its Polokwane conference in 2007, Zuma was elected as ANC President defeating the incumbent, Mbeki. All of the officers elected were from the “Zuma” slate. All of these developments deepened divisions and factionalism within ANC.

The impact of the social crises on the ANC was reported by Jonny Steinberg in his account of his several years of research in Bethlehem, eastern Free State, “I was staggered to witness the extent to which it had become a single-source economy. In the township of Bohlokong the majority of those I met who had a formal job or stable business either worked for government or were contracted to deliver a public service. I was even more staggered to discover how many of these jobs were available only to those with personal connections to leading ANC figures. The patronage networks went right down to



COSATU protest against state capture 2017

the bottom of the municipal wage scale; I met cleaners who got their jobs through membership of their local ANC branch. The result is that branch meetings are like vipers’ nests. Factionalism is vicious and interminable because everyone needs their patron to get ahead.”

## State Capture

Zuma’s nine years as State President saw the development of opportunism, careerism and corruption taken to new levels with what became known as State Capture. President Zuma was forced to establish a commission following a report by the Public Protector into allegations of corruption and fraud. The Judicial Commission which became known as the Zondo Commission after its chairman, Raymond Zondo, was set the task of investigating the allegations of state capture, corruption and fraud. Jacob Zuma was replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa as President of ANC and the country in 2018. According to the Zondo Commission, State Capture evolved as a project, “...by which a relatively small group of actors, together with their network of collaborators inside and outside of the state, conspired systematically (criminally and in defiance of the constitution) to redirect resources from the state for their own gain”. The Zondo Commission’s report added that, “This was facilitated

by a deliberate effort to exploit and weaken key state institutions and public entities, but also including law enforcement institutions and the intelligence services. To a large extent this occurred through strategic appointments and dismissals at public entities and a re-organisation of procurement processes.”

“The Commission found that many companies, including prominent international firms, were willing to enter into kickback arrangements to secure lucrative contracts. Auditors, bankers, lawyers, and consultants were also implicated.” [6]

The Zondo Commission’s recommendations included proposing that law enforcement agencies should investigate individuals implicated with a view to bringing criminal charges against them. This is now in process.

## Disillusion with ANC

Discontent and disillusion with the ANC and its government resulted in the loss of its majority in Parliament in the 2024 election.

Following the election COSATU issued a statement which describes the situation, “Voters are exhausted by the manner in which we conduct ourselves as cadres, where we have become synonymous with corruption, immorality and arrogance.

PHOTO BY DISCOT

Workers have lost faith as they have been battered by retrenchments, below inflation salary increases, a rising cost of living, the non-payment of pension and medical aid benefits, attacks on collective bargaining and painful budget cuts to frontline services. We have felt the consequences of neglecting workers. Similarly, in the course of our factional wars, we have seemingly abandoned the need to constantly nurture the spirit of non-racialism and build the movement across all communities...Despite our painful setback, we are pleased that against very difficult electoral odds, we managed to elect governments led by the ANC nationally and in seven provinces.” [7]

## Government of National Unity

Whilst ANC remains by far the largest party it no longer has a majority of seats in Parliament. (see Table 3) and so ANC proposed a Government of National Unity (GNU) and invited all parties in Parliament to join. Nine other parties joined ANC in the GNU. Umkhonto Wesizwe party and the Economic Freedom Fighters did not join and are in opposition.

The GNU is based on a Statement of Intent which the parties have signed up to. The Statement of Intent includes the following commitment, “At this historic juncture, we must act to ensure stability and peace, tackling the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, entrench our Constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and to build a South Africa for all its people. The people of South Africa expect us to work together as political parties to achieve these objectives, and to usher in a new era of peace, justice and prosperity for all.” [8]

ANC’s National Executive Committee held a Lekgotla (conference) on 6 August 2024 and in his closing remarks, Cyril Ramaphosa, said,

“We have recognised that we need to undertake this work within a Government of National Unity comprised of parties, some of which we have sharp political and ideological differences with. We need to provide leadership to the work of the GNU not through the imposition of our will, but through the strength of our positions and the clarity of our purpose. We need to make use of the fact that the principles and minimum programme contained in the Statement of Intent that the 10 parties of the GNU committed themselves to provides a basis for far-reaching social and economic transformation. This Lekgotla has confirmed that the ANC must proceed...with greater energy with the renewal of our movement. Cde Blade Nzimande [9] reminded us that we cannot renew the ANC without renewing the Alliance. We agree. We must now make it a priority to build the Alliance as a cohesive and effective agent of change within a common programme of action. Having taken the view that the GNU is the best tactical option, the ANC is fully aware about the risks and potential threats of this moment. We have noted the statement of the South African Communist Party on the occasion of its 103rd anniversary that the Party ‘takes a critical but non-oppositionist stance’ towards the GNU. We welcome this. We agree with the statement by the SACP that: ‘We must ensure that our participation [in the GNU] does not undermine our core principles and goals but serves as a platform to defend and advance working-class interests.’” [10]

## GNU

ANC aims to continue to pursue a policy of non-alignment in foreign policy with the GNU. It remains committed to the work of BRICS+ and solidarity with Palestine, Venezuela and Cuba. Ronald Lamola, who as Justice Minister in the previous government, led the case at the International Court of Justice against Israel for its genocidal

policy, has been appointed Foreign Minister in the GNU.

In terms of its domestic policy, time will tell if the ANC is able to renew itself, lead the GNU in a progressive direction and improve the lot of the masses of the people. It will be a difficult and uphill task.

[1] <https://results.elections.org.za/home/> All tables in this article are drawn from South African Independent Election Commission’s website.

[2] <https://www.anc1912.org.za/statement-by-anc-secretary-general-on-outcome-of-2024-elections/>

[3] COSATU statement to ANC NEC Lekgotla, 6 August 2024.

[4] Nelson Mandela, Political Report to 50th ANC Conference, 1997.

[5] Steinberg, Jonny, “South Africa could grant itself the way to something big”, *Business Day*, 6 May 2021.

[6] <https://www.statecapture.org.za/> The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption, and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State.

[7] COSATU Message of Support: ANC NEC Lekgotla, 5 August 2024

[8] <https://www.anc1912.org.za/statement-of-intent-of-the-2024-government-of-national-unity-2/>

[9] Blade Nzimande MP is chair of the SACP and a cabinet minister in the GNU.

[10] <https://www.anc1912.org.za/closing-remarks-by-anc-president-cyril-ramaphosa-to-the-anc-nec-lekgotla/>, 6 August 2024



# Regime change in **BANGLADESH**



*Sheikh Hasina, former Prime minister of Bangladesh*

PHOTO BY DELWARHOSSAIN

by Pat Turnbull

On 5 August Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and left the country for Hindon Air Base near New Delhi, India.

## **Assassination attempts**

Heeding the lessons of history, Sheikh Hasina and her supporters may have feared for her life. She is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's first president and co-founder of the party which she leads, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). Rahman was assassinated on August 15 1975. Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh

Rehana, being out of the country at the time, were the only members of her family to survive the attack by army personnel who invaded their home as part of a coup d'etat.

On 21 August 2004, terrorists attacked a rally in front of the Awami League's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka. Sheikh Hasina and top leaders of the Awami League escaped, but Ivy Rahman, Women Affairs Secretary, was killed along with 24 activists. More than 400 people were injured, many of them permanently crippled. There is no doubt that Hasina was the target.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence, now a museum, and his statue in front of it, have been vandalised. Offices of the Bangladesh Awami League, co-founded by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1949, and for the past 15 years the ruling party, have been ransacked.

## **Regime change**

On August 6 2024, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus was appointed head of an interim government. Vijay Prashad wrote, 'Yunus as the founder of the micro credit movement and promoter of "social business" used to be seen as primarily a phenomenon

in the neoliberal NGO world...The students see him as a figurehead although his neoliberal politics of austerity might be at odds with their key demand, which is employment.' (*Consortium News* 16/8/24)

On 9/8/24 the *Daily Observer* reported that leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the chief opposition to the Awami League – had met with United Nations resident coordinator in Bangladesh, Gwyn Lewis. BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said after the meeting: "No one has any doubts concerning a neutral election. We have achieved independence for the second time with strong support from the people and the international community, especially the UN. Development partners of Bangladesh, who displayed concerns regarding their country's future, had their doubts dispelled today."

The violent protests in Bangladesh and the crackdown by the armed forces have been reported in the UK as student protests against a quota system for government jobs which included 30% for relations of veterans who fought for the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in the war of 1971. The Supreme Court acceded to the students' demands and scaled back the veterans' quota to 5%, but the protests continued, even after Hasina had left the country. As reported in the *Dhaka Tribune* 9/8/24, 'Following Sheikh Hasina's resignation as the prime minister on Monday, violence and clashes have erupted across Bangladesh, with at least 232 people reported dead...over the past three days...Previously, during the quota and anti-discrimination student movements from July 16 to August 4, a total of 328 deaths were reported.' Leaders of the Awami League and their families were some of the immediate victims after Hasina's departure, including young men hacked to death, and others burned alive in house fires. Hindus also became victims of sectarian attacks.

Soon the process of nailing Awami League leaders through the judicial process began. 'Former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, along with six others, has been booked for the murder of a grocery store owner, Dhaka Tribune reported.' The store owner was reported to have died in a police shooting incident on July 19. Among the other accused are the Awami League general secretary, former home minister, and former inspector general of police. (*Times of India*, 13/8/24)

'Quota Movement and the "Blueprint" for Regime Change in Bangladesh' was the title of an article on the website of the Bangladesh Awami League 28/7/24 which began: 'The blueprint for a regime change was cooking in the background for the past five months. The Quota Movement provided the perfect cover. The plan was to create terror and chaos across the country through vandalism and arson attacks, and invade central government establishments. To implement this plan, 300,000 cadres of BNP and Jamaat-E-Islami and professional goons were brought to Dhaka from all over Bangladesh.'

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party was founded on 1 September 1978 by General Ziaur Rahman, who became leader of Bangladesh as a result of the coup in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed. Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamist fundamentalist movement founded in 1941, the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh, and was banned there on 1 August 2024.

The article continues, 'Sources from several agencies have confirmed that the plan was to infiltrate the Quota Movement, and using the cover of the general students, create a situation through violence and chaos that the government is forced to resign.' Targets were the airport, parliament, and BTV, the national broadcaster, as well as the Dhaka-Chattogram

highway, which links the capital and Bangladesh's main port.

The reference to 'the past five months' is likely to refer to the time since the January elections, which were pointedly boycotted by Sheikh Hasina's political opponents, laying the grounds for claims of lack of democracy.

Former Indian diplomat and expert in international security Melkungan-gara Bhadrakumar offered a similar analysis, 'The striking similarity of what happened with other colour revolutions must be noted. Wherever Americans demand "democratization", there is invariably a regime change agenda. This is axiomatic. And when it comes to Bangladesh, it is a lynchpin of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Bangladesh is becoming a crucial player in the geopolitics of the region following the failure of the recent colour revolution in Thailand, the stalemate in Myanmar, India's refusal to be a pro-western ally and, of course, China's consolidation in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. All this is happening against the backdrop of the historical moment in the volatile world order, which is in transition. I tend to see the regime change in Pakistan in 2022, and now in Bangladesh, in this light.' The retired diplomat saw events in Bangladesh as 'a setback for both India and Russia – and China, for that matter – for whom Hasina was a time-tested friend. Hasina pursued a robustly independent multi-vector foreign policy. Americans will not allow such freedom or strategic autonomy.' TASS 7/8/24

## Bangladesh raises US ire

There had been earlier signs that Bangladesh had raised the ire of powerful international operators. In an article of 16/12/21 on the Atlantic Council website entitled, 'US sanctions on Bangladesh's RAB: What happened? What's next?', Dr Ali Riaz, 'a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's South



Asia Center and a distinguished professor at Illinois State University' wrote: 'On December 10, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Bangladesh's elite paramilitary force, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), as well as seven of its current and former officers due to serious human rights violations. These actions came at the last day of the virtual Democracy Summit organized by the White House, to which Bangladesh was not invited...Dhaka summoned the US Ambassador to Bangladesh and expressed its discontent...a punitive measure against it of this scale is unprecedented.'

The article explains that the RAB is an elite unit of the Bangladesh police founded in 2004 under the BNP government led by Khaleda Zia and that, 'Reports by Human Rights Watch in December 2006 and 2009 documented allegations.' The obvious question is why impose sanctions now and not then? The article cites as one reason, '...there are increasing US interests in the region due to the growing geopolitical and geostrategic importance of South Asia, including Bangladesh...the US...would like to see Bangladesh as a close partner in the region... Washington is expecting Bangladesh to join the Indo-Pacific Strategy.' But in the face of 'Bangladesh's growing relationship with China, especially after joining the Belt and Road Initiative' and the 'increasing ideological leanings of the Bangladesh Awami League towards the Chinese model of governance and economic development, the Biden administration decided to act'. The article ends: 'Many are wondering whether these sanctions are one-off actions on the part of the US as well as if they will be widened in the future, particularly if the Bangladeshi government decides to ignore them...'

## China and BRICS

The keynote speech by Ambassador Yao Wen at *The Belt and Road Initiative in Bangladesh Report* launch, expanded the picture of what has



The Padma Bridge

PHOTO BY AZIM KHAN RONNIE

displeased the USA: 'Bangladesh is the first country in south Asia to join the Belt and Road Initiative... In 2016, President Xi Jinping of China paid a historic visit to Bangladesh and elevated the relationship between the two countries to strategic partner of cooperation. Three years later, Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a landmark visit to China...Last month, President Xi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met face-to-face for the first time over the last four years in South Africa...

...China has built 12 roads, 21 bridges and 27 power and energy projects in Bangladesh, and Chinese companies have created more than 550 thousand jobs in Bangladesh. Recently, the Dasherbandi Sewage Treatment Plant Project and the first section of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway have been completed, which contribute to promoting Bangladesh's economic and social development and uplifting people's livelihood...

...In the fourth quarter of this year, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel, and the first section of the Padma Bridge Railway Link project will be opened to traffic. The Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone will start construction. The South Alam Coal Fired Plant and Cox's Bazar Wind Power Plant will be operated commercially...

...China has been Bangladesh's largest trading partner for 12 consecu-

tive years. Since Bangladesh joined the Belt and Road Initiative in 2016, bilateral trade has grown from 15.3 billion US dollars to 27.8 billion dollars in 2022, which is the highest in the history.'

The ambassador also highlighted that, 'Over the years, China has provided more than 5000 opportunities for Bangladeshi young people to go to China for training and participate in degree education.' He concluded, 'The Belt and Road Initiative serves as a platform for China to construct the community with a shared future for mankind. The BRI has no gene of seeking hegemony, no tradition of interfering in other countries' internal affairs, and no elements of expansion and plunder.' (website of the Embassy of China in Bangladesh 22/9/23)

In September 2021, Bangladesh also became the first country outside the original BRICS founding members to join the New Development Bank (NDB). The article *Bangladesh and New Development Bank (NDB): Accession and after, money and more*, by Gregory T. Chin and Rifat D. Kamel (*Global Policy* 4/5/24), gives more details. Bangladesh's accession had strong support from India, China and Russia. The then NDB President Marcos Troyjo welcomed Bangladesh as "one of the world's fastest-growing economies". The article mentions the government's Bangladesh Vision 2041, which has the 'strategic policy goals of becoming an upper middle-income



country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2041, eliminating poverty and elevating industrial capacities along the way.' The NDB saw advantages for the Bank as well, as Bangladesh: '...a stable economy in the South Asia region, extends the global reach of the Bank, helps to diversify the bases of financiers and borrowers for the Bank [and] improves the risk profile of the Bank from the perspective of the global credit rating agencies.' The article stresses that 'Bangladesh remains one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world; it is extremely difficult and expensive to build modern transportation and communication networks across the country - and yet, it is essential to make substantial investments in climate-resilient infrastructure development.' In his speech quoted earlier, the Chinese ambassador mentioned the Padma Bridge Project. The article gives more information on that: 'This Mega Project was delayed when the World Bank cancelled a US \$1.2 billion loan in 2012 due to allegations of corruption which the Government has denied.' Other factors are likely to diminish Bangladesh's access to lending from the World Bank in future, which makes possible loans from the NDB more important. 'NDB sent a high-level

delegation to Bangladesh in January 2024 [which] made progress on the financing of several infrastructure projects for 2024...' These include the Dhaka Water Supply Project expected for June 2024, and the loan to state-owned Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company to upgrade old gas pipelines.

### Independence and sovereignty

Back to the Padma Bridge. The article *Padma Bridge – A Symbol of Pride and Dignity of Bangladesh – An Engineering Masterpiece* (BAL 25/6/22) mentions that in 2017 a Canadian court found no proof of corruption. It also emphasises the importance of the bridge which 'has connected a third of Bangladesh's land, entangled with rivers, to the capital'. The bridge will transform 'the economic footing of around 50 million people of the south-west part of the country' (an underdeveloped region) and 'will also ensure a rise in the national income by at least 1.5 per cent'. It has international significance too; it is on the route of Belt and Road Initiative projects on the trans-Asian network. The BAL said that Bangladesh would finance the project itself and emphasised that many developing and under-developed countries are 'still too

reliant on western handouts which prevents them from pursuing independent policies', and believed that Padma Bridge can be an inspiration to them, an 'endless source of confidence in one's own capability and resources'.

One final piece of evidence that this is a classic US regime change agenda comes from Sheikh Hasina herself. News website Azerbaijan24 reported that 'In a message on Sunday [11/8/24] cited by the *Economic Times*, Hasina signalled that she could have retained power if she had agreed to host a US military base in Bangladesh: "I resigned, so that I did not have to see the procession of dead bodies of students... I could have remained in power if I had surrendered the sovereignty of Saint Martin Island and allowed America to hold sway over the Bay of Bengal." Hasina was referring to Bangladesh's coral reef island in the northeastern part of the Bay of Bengal...A number of Bangladeshi officials claimed over the past months that the United States had proposed leasing the island on several occasions, but was refused. Hasina said that... US officials met with her before the previous election and sought her support in building an air base on Saint Martin.' (Azerbaijan24 11/8/24)

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# CHILE

## A bright future for capital

by Dan Morgan

Chile is a very rich country but the people see little of the wealth. It has enormous natural resources, including huge reserves of copper and lithium, both essential for the transition to clean energy. The future is bright – but for whom?

### Copper industry

In the case of copper, largely for transnational capital. Chile produces about 25% of the world total but the state company CODELCO accounts for only a third of that now.

CODELCO is the lasting legacy of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government. All the big mines were nationalised, along with an amendment to the constitution saying that all natural resources belonged to the State. Despite right-wing attempts to sabotage the decision, it was eventually passed unanimously in 1971. Such is the political support that even Pinochet's neoliberal dictatorship did not attempt to change that. Instead, the stratagem was used of leasing mines to private capital, mainly transnational.

When a safe neoliberal democracy replaced the neoliberal dictatorship, transnationals felt confident enough to open mines in newer deposits. So now CODELCO is left with often old mines with declining returns, while many richer deposits are operated by firms with capital from the UK, Canada, US, Japan, Switzerland and so on.

The private companies say their effective tax rate is now 45%, including an additional royalty tax which was passed after being

watered down by the right wing in Congress. Sounds high by the standards of modern capitalism, but mining is so profitable it is quite acceptable. The companies' only concern is to get material out of the mines and export it. Refining, adding some value, is not the main concern of the transnationals so they export a lot of copper concentrate.

In 2020, 55% of copper exports were as concentrate, and this is expected to rise to 68% by 2030. Refining capacity has fallen in Chile and is not planned to increase. This is an economic and environmental crime – needlessly shipped across the Pacific to China and Japan, about 75% of the concentrate is rock and tax is only paid on the copper content, not on the gold and silver content which is also found in the ore.

Yes, they would argue that refining costs in Chile are several times more than in China. But this is because China has invested in new refineries – it has seven times more capacity now than in 2010. Chile's enormous potential for solar energy in the Atacama desert, where most copper production takes place, makes it ideal for energy-intensive industries like copper refining.

This is just another example of the lack of industrial policy, of a vision for national development. Successive governments have let transnationals do what suits them, and have not demanded investment in industry, let alone developed nationalised industries.

The biggest copper mine in the world is Escondida. It's high in the Atacama Desert in the north of Chile, near the border with Argen-



tina. It started up in 1990 and is owned by BHP, Rio Tinto and a Japanese company, JECO. BHP is the biggest mining company in the world, based in Australia but with British and US capital. The permanent workers recently went on strike during negotiations for the next three-year contract. It's a good moment because the price of copper is at a high at four dollars a pound.

Each day of the strike cost the company 150 million dollars, so it lasted just 3 days. Among other benefits won were full private healthcare and no limit on redundancy payments, which under the law the company only has to pay for up to 11 years of service. The 2,400 workers got a bonus equivalent to £43,000 each. That's 1% of what the firm distributes to shareholders, who will get around £10.3 billion this year. However, the ninety ton dumper truck drivers are already being replaced by autonomous driving.

So there is a sort of labour aristocracy, albeit that they have to work at high altitudes.

Last year, the average net income in Chile was about £12,000 though this figure is highly skewed by a few high salaries. The median wage was £8,600 for men and £7,200 for women. [1] Also, about 30% of workers are in the informal economy, usually with lower incomes.

## Lithium

With lithium, the situation is better now. The government recently negotiated a deal with SQM, which had a contract to exploit the biggest salt lake until 2030. SQM, the producer of all Chilean nitrates and most lithium, was a state company until it was sold off to Pinochet's son-in-law for a pittance. Now the state will get half the profit until 2030, and then 85%. Depending on the outcome of negotiations with European firms, there will possibly be some adding of value – the production of cathodes for batteries. A solid deal with a Chinese firm was excluded from this new contract and the Chinese firm is appealing the decision.

There is a lot of criticism on 'extractivism' both in Chile and in the West, but the only real opportunity for Chile is 'extractivism to end extractivism' to quote former President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa. Dialectical thinking. Industrialisation to add value and make that happen depends on having governments not under the political sway of imperialism. The same applies to the ecological impact of mining. The mitigation of those effects depends on the will of the State to regulate the mining companies or take control itself. Whatever the case, copper mining will be essential for the foreseeable future.

## Supermarkets

One of my first lectures on economics explained the idea of 'price elasticity of demand'. If the price of a basic food, say milk, falls by 50%, are you likely to drink twice as much? No. So the elasticity is low. If the price of electric cars fell by 50%, sales would probably increase by several hundred percent – high elasticity. So supermarkets maximise their profits by keeping food prices high. Demand is inelastic, people have to eat whatever the price. In theory though, competition will keep prices at a 'normal' level.



Escondida copper mine Chile

PHOTO BY MUNICIPALIDAD DE ANTOFAGASTA

Chile is known not as the land of the free, but as 'the land of the three'. We have three owners of the main supermarket chains. Three chains of pharmacies, petrol stations, distributors of bottled gas (used by almost everyone), telephone services, producers of chicken, and just two of toilet paper. These are not technically monopolies, but oligopolies; it is easy for them to fix prices to keep them high. It is especially easy in Chile where the rich all live in the same small area of Santiago, just 3 of the 32 boroughs, and can contact each other with ease.

Some economists, even including some self-styled Marxists, discount the ability of oligopoly to fix prices but in Chile collusion to keep prices high has been discovered in several cases, including chicken, toilet paper, gas and pharmaceuticals. This produces a momentary scandal and even attempts to pay some compensation. In the case of supermarkets however, this has not been done.

I saw clearly that it operates in Santiago. About 22 years ago a supermarket opened two blocks from where we lived. The owner obviously had a different business model. The prices were always about 20 percent lower for almost every-

thing. A litre of milk, for example, was 400 pesos, when everywhere else it was 500 pesos, or 500 instead of 600.

Of course, he started to sell huge quantities. From 2 check-outs he grew to 18 in the first year – only by word-of-mouth advertising. In the next 8 or so years he grew to own 12 supermarkets in the west and south of Santiago. Then he sold them all and presumably retired a wealthy man. The prices were immediately increased to match all the others. As a small business, he obviously could not negotiate lower prices from the producers or wholesalers, yet he was able to sell milk more cheaply. So it was clear that the big chains, in keeping their prices high, were getting monopoly profits. Of the 10 richest families in Chile, two own supermarket chains. They have made enough to invest in Argentina, Peru and Colombia. The biggest chain was bought by US company Walmart in 2009. The rest of the super-rich get their money from mining, forestry, banking and other finance.

## Corruption

The lid is being taken off another major case of corruption. The first big case was revealed in 2014. A disgruntled manager spilled the beans



on illegal financing of politics on a massive scale. All main political parties other than the communists had been financed in a way that avoided paying tax for years. This included Allende's Socialist Party, to its undying shame, and all those that had happily run the capitalist economy since 1990. The right wing parties had received most money of course.

This case ended with a few light sentences. Notoriously, the owners of the Penta financial group, who had been behind massive fraud, only had to pay a derisory fine and attend "ethics classes".

Now there is another major trial on the horizon – we hope – after a leak of audio tapes made earlier this year. Luis Hermosilla, a very well-connected lawyer, is heard admit-

A former prosecutor, commenting on these cases, says it adds pieces of the jigsaw puzzle left from the 2014 cases and explains why some prosecutors took strange decisions not to investigate the crimes properly. Public opinion, we hope, will demand that this present case be properly investigated.

## Right wing moves

Meanwhile we have our own case of lawfare, under a judge with clear political connections. Daniel Jadue, probably the most popular politician in the country, was in prison for three months and has now been released to house arrest. Jadue was the communist mayor of a poor borough of Santiago, who introduced a People's Pharmacy to break the oligopoly, a People's Optician, a bookshop where there had been none, a

the Ukraine regime slant. Now he is leading the outcry against Maduro's re-election in Venezuela. All political parties in Chile support Boric, except the communists who issued a declaration supporting the sovereignty of States and opposing actions that would tend to increase polarisation there. It was carefully worded, as there is a lot of pressure to exclude the communists from the governing coalition.

The right wing in Congress here in Chile continues to block significant progressive reforms. With the government able to make little progress, the outlook for the municipal elections in October is not very hopeful.

[1] The exchange rate varies a lot, but I have used the average for this year 1 pound = 1,200 pesos throughout



Self checkout at Walmart Chile

PHOTO BY OSTRANATION

ting that the bribery of Internal Tax Service staff, which they were planning, was a crime. Tax avoidance on a large scale has been revealed. The most interesting aspect is that Hermosilla is a close friend of a former Interior Minister, in turn a close friend of former President Piñera. WhatsApp messages from his phone, going back years, show the links between politicians and lawyers in deciding the promotions of prosecutors and judges, including for the Supreme Court.

free People's University, and municipal housing at low rents – a first for Chile. Jadue is charged with financial crimes relating to the management of the People's Pharmacy in a case initiated by a supply company.

Gabriel Boric, our President, has forgotten all the anti-imperialist phrases he used in his youth and follows the US line on major foreign policy issues. He went to the farcical 'summit' on Ukraine, and was selected as one of the spokespeople to give

## From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

West pulls Ukraine into its orbit of war

"The western move to radically extend its influence over Ukraine – central to the US strategy of encircling Russia and halting the return of a rival power - has created a dangerous fault-line that risks escalation in the future..."

The West's humiliation of post-Soviet Russia lies at the heart of the current conflict. Instead of halting NATO expansion at the end of the Cold War, as promised to Gorbachev, NATO absorbed twelve former Soviet nations."

Issue 21 Winter 2014

Simon Korner



## SPRING

by Sergei Antonov

(Foreign Languages

Publishing house,

Moscow 1954)

Reviewed by Marianne Hitchen

It is often worth remembering how the first socialist country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was built despite great hardship and two world wars. How was it possible for this poor, underdeveloped country to transform itself into a major power, and its people to win themselves material security and freedom from serfdom, inequality and ignorance?

In Sergei Antonov's collection of stories called *Spring*, you begin to discern the answer: monumental collective effort, participation in organising and decision making, enthusiasm, pride, determination, excitement, belief in what they were doing and why they were doing it, and very, very hard work. Written between 1947 and 1952, Antonov brings these years to enthralling and immediate life, through five tales of people responding and adapting themselves to their conditions, while describing their particular efforts to rebuild a country devastated by war.

It isn't easy finding out about Sergei Antonov these days, partly because his name is the Russian equivalent of John Smith (and the internet is full of cellists and Yale professors of the same name), but also because the period in which he lived and wrote about is being falsified and quietly written out of history. In the furthest pages of Google you eventually find brief biographies on the Good Reads website, and in the Free Dictionary, which cites *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, 3rd edition (1970-1979).

Born in 1915 in Petrograd into the family of a railway engineer, Sergei Antonov travelled widely in southern Russia, the Urals, the Volga region and Central Asia as a child. After school he worked as a handyman on construction sites, and on graduating from the Leningrad Highway Institute in 1938, became a civil engineer then a teacher in a technical school. He fought on the Soviet-Finnish and Russian fronts of the Second World War (the Great Patriotic War as it was known in the USSR), where he commanded engineering and sapper units. After initially publishing poetry in 1943-1946, his first story *Spring* appeared in 1947. Novellas and film scripts followed, for which he received the State Prize of the USSR, the Order of the Red Banner and the Stalin Prize (1951).

Antonov's stories focus on individuals and the part each of them plays in building a new society, and are characterised by beautiful descriptions of nature:

"It was almost five o'clock in the morning. Dawn was breaking; the sky over the birch grove was delicately flushed, but the sun had not yet come up. The birds were still asleep. Someone was lighting a fire in the last house of the village which straggled along the edge of the ravine, and thin fibres of smoke rose placidly into the sky." (*Morning* 1949)

His stories centre around people of all walks of life and personalities, who are always thinking, working (often through the night), learning, dealing with difficulty, getting on each other's nerves, and making discoveries about themselves and other people. In this excerpt from *Rain* (1951), a dissatisfied office manager struggles to adapt to the new world:

"The train was moving before she knew it. And although it was she who was leaving and Nepavoda who was staying, it seemed to her that she was standing still and Nepavoda and the little station and the highway along which she had come into town and the glistening trees and the fragrant rain-drenched earth and the soft low sky - that all these things had begun to move and were slowly wheeling away from her. Suddenly she remembered Pasha, and clever ungainly Timofeyev, and the inquisitive brigade-leader Olga, and the bearded man wearing the discarded army coat, and Engineer Gnatov, and the disapproving driver; and she was bitterly sorry that all these people, who had just begun to respect her, were receding faster and faster into the distance, and perhaps she would never see a single one of them again"

This description of wheat could only have been written by someone who helped to grow it, and understood its value:

"On every hand, stretching away to the very edge of the forest, was the ripe wheat, stirring faintly. The heavy ears waved in the breeze, sending a soft rustle, a thin ring, a faint whistle over the plain. A silvery path of moonlight shimmered on the stalks, and suddenly I felt calm and happy". (*Spring* 1947)

After reading this book, it is impossible not to grieve and wonder at how this passion and commitment came to be squandered. These stories are a vivid reminder of what is lost.

from Lamentations

I shop at this store  
milk and the white bread  
they call the wedding  
Along with the change  
there was sometimes a handful  
of pistachios or invitation  
to try their olives  
freshly delivered and stuffed  
with almonds  
no almonds will be  
stuffed in these olives again  
the long white loaves  
are stale  
the milk is sour  
there is no bread  
called wedding  
there was the bride  
who had no father  
to lead off her dance

Esther Dischereit  
translated by Iain Galbraith



Esther Dischereit is a German poet, essayist and playwright. She lives in Berlin.

'Lamentations' is part of *Flowers for Otello: On the Crimes That Came out of Jena*, a text for performance, centred on a series of racially motivated murders committed in Germany by the so-called National Socialist Underground (NSU) between 1998 and 2011. Of the ten victims, nine were immigrants or foreigners. This terrorist organization was known to the investigative and intelligence authorities but was not pursued. Instead, the victims and their families were themselves accused of involvement in violent crime and other criminal acts.

'Lamentations' commemorates the dead.



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