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Proposals for articles and letters to the editor should be sent to tscsubs@btinternet.com

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Overthrow of Assad deepens crisis in the Middle East

It is too early to say what the exact causes and outcomes of the overthrow of President Assad of Syria are, and as we go to press things could still change quite dramatically. Yet a few contours can be seen.

This is a victory for the West which Assad long resisted, and whose overthrow leaves Syria open to competing Western and regional powers including Turkey, Israel and the United States not to mention the Kurds and different terrorist groups within the country. It is difficult to see how this can have a stable and peaceful outcome. But the West often prefers instability to a strong opponent – it happily created chaos in Libya. And as with Libya the United States, which has boots on the ground, is interested in Syria's oil.

The overthrow of Assad is also a major blow to Russia and to Iran, the latter already under increasing pressure from Israel's attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel has been actively involved, and is currently bombing Syria and annexing territory. A further consequence is that this shift in the balance of forces in the Middle East weakens the position of the Palestinians.

These are all immediate consequences. In the longer term, however, the aggressive powers may be storing up as yet unforeseen difficulties for themselves. We will have in-depth analysis of events in Syria in the next issue of *The Socialist Correspondent*.

The threat of war

Events in Syria are another demonstration of the parlous state of the world with widespread war and the threat of war which could spark

global conflict including an increasing risk of nuclear weapons being used. Simon Korner in, *The danger of world war – can it be stopped?* sets out the historical precursors to previous world wars and identifies similar trends occurring now. He points to factors such, a major arms race, the formation of rival armed blocs and a series of smaller wars leading to a general conflagration finding disturbing parallels today. He looks in more detail at the three fronts of war – two underway in Ukraine and Gaza and the third that the US is preparing the ground for – a war with China. Yet the global majority reject this drive to war and is collaborating more closely in trade and diplomacy. The US is losing friends among its erstwhile allies and the peoples of western countries are increasingly sceptical of war. But will this be enough to stop imperialism?

In, *The fight for peace and disarmament*, Gary Lefley points to the urgent tasks of the peace movement in Britain. As people continue to suffer poverty, cuts to services and crumbling infrastructure yet the government plans to increase arms spending to 2.5% of GDP or £87.1 billion including massive expenditure on replacing the Trident nuclear weapons system. This has nothing to do with self-defence and everything to do with Britain playing its part in fighting wars and imposing military power across the globe. Not only could this money be better spent elsewhere but Britain's active involvement in wars such as Ukraine make this country a target. He poses the alternative to an imperialist, warmongering UK, arguing that we could take the path of non-alignment and join with others, like BRICS, to have a more secure and prosperous future.

Trump's return

But what will the prospects for the world be with Donald Trump back

in the White House? Steve Howell considers this question in *Trump's election: how it happened and what it could mean for the world*. It is not entirely certain how Trump will approach the war in Ukraine, but there is an increasing shift in the establishment towards the realistic view that Ukraine cannot win on the battlefield and that there should be negotiations. Other things are clearer. Trump will maintain a firm support for Israel's genocide in Gaza and ramp up hostility towards China as a prelude to war.

Howell also considers why Trump won and Kamala Harris lost the Presidential election. Breaking down the statistics of where the Democrats lost ground he identifies how the conscious neglect of core voters led to a drop in support for the Democrats through abstention, with Trump also capitalising on this disaffection. A failure by the Democrats to address the needs of working class Americans as well as alienation on the issue of Gaza were among the factors at work.

Labour's failures

Similar failures afflict the Labour government here. Despite a huge majority Labour will not challenge big business or the establishment with the result that it is disappointing its voters. Two areas where Labour is not delivering are housing and planning which are considered by Pat Turnbull in, *Housing crisis – causes and cures* and by Peter Latham in *Labour's Planning Reforms – a step backwards*. In both these policy areas Labour has not grasped the need for state intervention to fund and strategically plan to meet people's needs in housing and the environments they live in.

Supporting the US war drive and failing to meet the needs of working class people will not be a winning formula for Labour.

THE DANGER OF WORLD WAR can it be stopped?

by Simon Korner

The dangers of direct conflict between the great powers have multiplied greatly over the past year. The US's refusal to accept its declining supremacy, to compromise or negotiate, means that ongoing conflicts in the Ukraine and the Middle East are in danger of reaching a point of no return. This "extreme adventurism", and "belief in their own impunity" as President Putin warned in July could "turn into a tragedy."

Approaching war

Historically, impending international conflict has been signalled by at least three factors: first, a major arms race; second, the formation of rival armed blocs; and third, a series of smaller inciting wars leading to a general conflagration.

Before World War 1 a huge naval arms build-up began between Britain and Germany, followed by the formation of enemy alliances – Britain, France and Tsarist Russia against Austro-Hungary, Germany and Italy. Then there was a series of armed incidents – in Morocco in 1911 between Germany and France over colonial possessions, and in the Balkans where regional war soon sparked the outbreak of World War.

Before World War 2, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and fascist Italy all re-armed massively, as did Britain and France – remember the sup-

posedly impregnable French Maginot line. The 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact of the Axis powers against the Soviet Union cemented the fascist bloc. Soviet diplomatic efforts to form an opposing anti-fascist alliance were repeatedly rebuffed by Britain and France. Subsidiary wars leading up to this World War, included Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931, Italy's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia and Franco's war against the Republican Spanish government beginning in 1936. Each on its own fell short of global conflict, but moved the world towards war.

Warning signs

Similar signs of impending international war are visible today. First, an arms race is taking place among the NATO nations – Germany, France and Japan have doubled their military budgets. US arms spending is approaching \$1trillion a year. Britain's spending has risen to 2.5% of GDP, with Poland's 3.5%, providing it with the biggest land army in Europe. And of course, unprecedented profits are rolling in for arms companies like Germany's Rheinmetall, whose shares are worth 245% more than in 2022, and for Britain's BAE Systems up by 101%.

The western rush to militarisation has pushed China, still a developing country, to divert much-needed domestic investment into defence – last year almost \$300 billion, while Russia has boosted its spending to

just over \$100 billion a year. [1] It was the West's arms race during the Cold war, forcing the USSR to prioritise defence over other crucial investment, that contributed to socialism's demise and the same strategy is in play today against capitalist Russia and Communist-led China.

As regards the second sign of potential war, bloc-formation, the NATO alliance has expanded to include Sweden and Finland, and western power is expanding around the Pacific, including a major increase in cruise missile deployment in the US's Japanese and Philippine bases, and in South Korea. Billions are being spent arming Taiwan along with the training of Taiwanese troops in the USA. The nuclear submarine AUKUS deal between the US, Australia and UK aims at choking off China's maritime trade and seals Australia's fate as a US subaltern.

So far no opposing bloc has formed, but Russia and China have become, "allies in every sense of the word", according to Putin, co-operating strategically across the board. Chinese-Russian relations are the closest they've ever been, with record trade, and the use of their national currencies rather than the dollar. The Russian language is increasingly popular in China, as Mandarin is in Russia. The two countries have also conducted their first joint patrols near the Arctic. Meanwhile, Iran has been driven closer to both,



F16s at Kunsan US Air Base South Korea

PHOTO BY BRITTANY AULD

along with other sanctioned countries that now make up 30% of the world's population. Russia and Iran have committed themselves to comprehensive mutual defence and China has signed a 25-year strategic partnership with Iran worth \$400 billion, in the teeth of unilateral US sanctions. All three countries conducted a joint naval drill earlier this year in the Gulf of Oman, the fifth of its kind. More broadly, the growth of BRICS, which now includes Iran, points to a potential longer-term rebalancing of world power.

In terms of the third indicator of global conflict, regional wars, the US/Israeli/British genocide of Palestinians and the war against the resistance forces allied to Iran – and potentially against Iran itself – has become as dangerous as the Ukraine war in terms of potential for uncontrolled expansion. Meanwhile, western naval gunboat provocations close to China's coast, claiming "freedom of navigation", are relentlessly ramping up tensions in East Asia.

These three fronts are the current faultlines along which the US is fighting to maintain its global hegemony. All three are interlinked and, because of that, all are potential catalysts for world war.

Three war fronts

Looking at the Ukraine front first, the war aims not only to weaken Russia, the US's opponent with the biggest nuclear arsenal, eventually dismembering it, but to create more favourable conditions for the coming war with China by tying down and disabling its principal partner.

Now that NATO has ignored Russia's unambiguous warning against the use of long-range weapons, the regional war using Ukrainian cannon fodder to do NATO's fighting has "acquired elements of a global character," according to Putin in a speech on November 21st, he also pointed to the fact that it is NATO itself, not Ukraine, operating the hi-tech weapons.

Starmer's belligerence puts Britain on the frontline. Macron's grand-

standing does the same for France. If Polish airfields are used to launch bombing raids on Russia they could become a target. The fact that Germany is building its first military base abroad since 1945, near Lithuania's border with Belarus and hosting 4,000 soldiers, brings Germany closer to conflict too. Meanwhile, Moldova bordering south-western Ukraine, is being systematically destabilised to be made ready for war; Georgia likewise.

Similarly, the Middle East front is vulnerable to expansion, because of the constant enlargement of Israel and its attempts to pull the US into attacking Iran. Also Iran is the principle impediment to total US control of the region's energy and it has the bigger strategic aim of choking off vital Chinese energy imports. Direct US (and British) involvement has included, assassinating Iranian general Suleimani in 2020, occupying Syria's oil fields, targeting Gaza, bombing Yemen and Iran, and manning the new THAAD missile defence system in Israel. This could also spark conflict with Russia, whose Syrian

The genocide in Gaza continues



PHOTO BY WAFA

airbase has already had to use its air defences against Israeli attacks nearby. Ukraine's provision of drones and advisers to Al Nusra, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, for use against Russian bases again illustrates the interlinking of the different war fronts, just as the use of Britain's base in Cyprus for transporting war supplies to Israel could draw that country into the war.

On the third front in the Far East, the re-arming of Japan, which has revised its peace-oriented constitution, is highly provocative. War could break out over the Chinese and Russian islands which Japan now claims for itself, in breach of its surrender terms at the end of World War 2. Both Russia and China are also worried about the proliferation of US missiles within range of them on land, in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines and at sea.

Former French prime minister Dominique de Villepin commented, "Rarely has the world been as combustible and dangerous as it is today... In the past, barriers of distance, slow communications and limited exchanges contained conflicts naturally. Today, by contrast, humanity is fully interconnected and interdependent". [2]

US aggression the main danger

On all three fronts, it is the USA, "the most violent country in the world since 1950", according to Professor Jeffrey Sachs, once a US establishment insider, that's pushing the world towards the brink. President Biden boasted that the US can fight multiple wars simultaneously: "Not only does the US 'have the capacity to do this,' he said, 'we have an obligation to. We are the 'essential nation'." President Trump is no better: more bel-

licose against China, he's also even more militantly pro-Zionist. Let Israel "finish the job" is his slogan on Palestine.

FT journalist Gideon Rachman reported from Washington in 2023 "how commonplace talk of war between the US and China has become. Many influential people seem to think that a US-China war is not only possible but probable". (*Financial Times* 24/4/23) Those include the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Charles Q. Brown, who said in July that he was "fully confident" the US would win a war with China over Taiwan, while the head of the US Navy, Admiral Lisa Franchetti, predicted such a war would break out by 2027. [3] There's some basis for Charles Q. Brown's boast. In 2017, the US developed a new guidance system or "super-fuze" for their nuclear warheads, doubling their destructive capacity. The US can

now destroy all of its enemy inter-continental missile silos using only about 20% of its warheads, according to the *National Interest* journal – an advantage that gives them nuclear first-strike capability. [4]

This under-reported development should be understood along with the deployment of US nuclear weapons in Romania and Poland, the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001 and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, as well as the threat made by Zelensky in 2022 of Ukraine joining NATO and years of Ukrainian bombardment of its own Russian-speaking population. These were developments that forced Russia into its attack to pre-empt a NATO move into the Donbas, Crimea, and Russia itself. Even the compliant Boris Yeltsin had warned President Clinton against expanding NATO eastwards. By continuing to escalate the conflict in his final weeks of office, Biden wants to ensure that the US aim of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia continues under Trump.

American warmongering is echoed in Europe. Andrius Kubilius, former prime minister of Lithuania and now the EU's first defence commissioner, said Europe must be ready to fight Russia within 6-8 years. Already NATO is massing troops in eastern Europe and preparing new land corridors to transport them to the frontline against Russia. The recent vote in the EU parliament for long-range weapons use against Russia showed the prevailing recklessness. This was led by Ursula von der Leyen whose mission is to ensure absolute compliance with US policy and continued massive European expenditure on Ukraine by EU countries – €110 billion so far, exceeding by a long way the US's €75 billion.

Meanwhile, the same ironclad commitment to war can be heard in Israel's public statements. One Israeli official was quoted by NBC,

saying: "We decided to kill Nasrallah after concluding that he will not agree to any solution that isn't tied to ending the war in Gaza". This insistence on war, on violence, is an enactment of deliberate US policy.

China and Russia hamper US

Against these forces of destruction, Russia and China are imposing limitations on the West's room for manoeuvre. For months, Russia succeeded in delaying western escalation by restating its red lines against long-range rockets. When the Biden administration ignored these warnings, Russia's formidable response using its Oreshnik ballistic missile to destroy a Ukrainian military factory provided further opportunity for the US to pause and reflect.

Meanwhile, China's Ukraine peace plan, together with Brazil, is supported by more than 110 countries – ignored for now, but potentially exerting important diplomatic pressure in the longer term.

Both China's and Russia's ties with Iran, coupled with Iran's ability to break through the Iron Dome, have so far limited further attacks on Iran by Israel, though the genocide in Gaza and Lebanon has not been prevented.

China's diplomacy last year in bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia closer has borne fruit – to the extent that the Saudis, only days after Iran's retaliatory missile strike against Israel in October, publicly reinforced the friendly relations between the "brotherly states" according to Xinhua news. More significantly, the Saudis, UAE and Qatar have refused Israel access to their airspace to bomb Iran, having experienced damaging Yemeni attacks on their oil production in the past. Normalisation seems to be on hold.

China also helped bring the Palestinian parties together, in particular Hamas and Fatah, in an important meeting in Beijing earlier this year.

In East Asia, China has resisted US attempts to lure it into using force to reclaim its province of Taiwan. It has also helped calm tensions with Vietnam over disputed waters – with Vietnam's president Tô Lâm stressing during his recent state visit to China Vietnam's full support for the one-China policy – and it has defused its Himalaya border dispute with India.

With Russian backing, a peace and decolonisation process has begun in the Sahel in Africa, supported by Algeria. Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali are uniting in the Sahel Alliance to take control of their own mines – gold and in Niger's case, huge uranium mines too – and to tackle the violent Islamist militias which emerged out of the western destruction of Libya and which are controlled by the French Foreign Legion. Niger has closed down the huge US drone base near its capital. Burkina Faso has forced France to shut its military base. Chad has expelled US troops. The fact that the Green Berets will probably move to pro-western Ivory Coast or Benin doesn't detract from the achievement. As Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, maintains, "Russia is defending a multipolar world order." The legacy of Soviet solidarity with Africa persists even today – thousands of Africans study at Russian universities every year.

Overall, the global south is asserting its place on the world stage. South Africa's case against Israeli genocide at the International Court of Justice, founded after World War 2 and known as the World Court, has led for the first time in 42 years to the UN General Assembly voting overwhelmingly for sanctions against Israel. In turn this put further pressure on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to act. Its juris-



Andrius Kubilius, EU Defence Commissioner – preparing for war

diction applies to individuals rather than states and it eventually issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant.

Meanwhile, “the Palestine flag has become the global symbol of freedom and liberation”, according to Husam Zomlot, Palestine’s ambassador to the UK. The Israeli genocide and unbridled aggression have created a new unity between former enemies, Hamas and Hezbollah, both of whose prestige has risen after defying Israel and remaining undefeated. Hezbollah is regarded by most Lebanese as the sole force capable of defending Lebanon against Israel.

Difficulties for the west

The growing disgust at the western-supervised genocide is putting pressure on western governments. Malta has refused access to Israel-bound ships carrying weapons. Ireland has refused to evacuate its peacekeeping force from Lebanon – despite Israeli threats. Italy has condemned Israel for targeting its UN contingent in Lebanon and has announced a full suspension of arms sales to Israel. Several western countries have stated they would abide by the ICC arrest warrants. Public outrage at her position on Gaza contributed to Kamala Harris’s election defeat.

In Europe, pessimism about defeating Russia, which is steadily pushing back Ukrainian forces on the ground, has imposed a degree of realism among sections of the rul-

ing circles. Forced to deindustrialise after the US ordered them to cut off their cheap Russian energy supplies and sabotaged the Nordstream pipeline, some elements are realising that their subordination to the US and its reckless war cuts across their own interests. French commentator Emmanuel Todd put the case clearly, “... if Russia is defeated in Ukraine, European submission to the Americans will last for a century”. It’s a vasalage millions of Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, Slovaks, and many French and Poles too, reject, just as they reject war: a recent poll in Germany revealed that 59% are for peace talks with Russia, rising to 68% in eastern Germany. This is reflected in the plunging popularity of the ruling coalition and the growth of pro-peace parties.

Meanwhile, in the US, the isolationist wing of the establishment wants to settle the war with Russia, and there are worries about the accelerating movement away from the US dollar due to the freezing of Russian reserves, and loss of global market share due to sanctions.

Britain

Britain, for its part, continues to serve US power faithfully, promoting the Ukraine and Middle East bloodbaths with exceptional vigour and preparing to host nuclear missiles at Lakenheath. Britain’s warmongering “serves as a historic British power enhancer” according to analyst Sumantra Maitra of the Responsible Statecraft thinktank, increasing its ability to wield influence over its European rivals in the military sphere and ensuring that the EU never gains autonomy from the US. Britain also sees itself as the defender of the imperialist system in general – as a world power, second only to the USA in the number of overseas bases. [5] [6]

Our country’s rulers are united for war, and that makes our task both difficult and crucial. The TUC Con-

gress this year supported Palestine and called for peace in the Middle East. We need to extend that positive understanding and argue that it’s the same warmongers destroying Gaza, Lebanon and Iran who are destroying Ukraine, attacking Russia and preparing for war on China.

This period is one in which the global rulers can no longer rule in the old way – the West’s stranglehold and unbridled violence have become visible to many. The growing appetite for change – away from war, immiseration, sham democracy, climate catastrophe – means that millions of people are disillusioned with the entire system.

The acute dangers – including the danger of the Right cashing in on mass disaffection – make our job in promoting the socialist alternative vital. Given the opportunities for radical change that major wars have opened up in the past, we can point to what may open up in the future, as we try to ensure that the world survives the destructive trajectory of US decline.

[1] <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity>

[2] <https://mondediplo.com/2024/06/02/france-foreign-policy>

[3] <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/the-us-navy-is-planning-for-possible-war-by-2027-when-china-expects-it-will-be-ready-to-invade-taiwan-us-admiral-says/ar-AA1qODKj>

[4] <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-super-fuze-the-big-upgrade-americas-nuclear-arsenal-22765>

[5] <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/01/27/whats-behind-britains-aggressive-posture-against-russia/>

[6] <https://bfp.co.uk/2023/02/why-is-britain-so-strongly-behind-ukraine/>

THE FIGHT FOR PEACE AND DISARMAMENT



The Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth leads the way in the South China Sea 2021

PHOTO BY MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

by Gary Lefley

The basic case in support of Britain's nuclear weapons has barely changed in the past 72 years: it pleads Defence via Deterrence. The bogey man comes and goes. New ones are invented. For four decades the rationale was supposedly to deter the so-called Soviet threat. The USSR has been and gone. The Warsaw Pact has been and gone. But NATO, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have not. Britain continues to spend multi-billions of pounds on military forces and nuclear weapons in the name of 'defence' and 'deterrence'.

There is a yawning disconnect between the premise and the conclusion for Britain's possession of nuclear weapons. The conclusion is always the same - "We must have a nuclear deterrent". But the premise - exactly who it is we are supposed to be deterring - changes periodically, to fit the latest targets of US and British imperialism. We had to deter Stalin, we had to deter Brezhnev, we 'can do business with Gorbachev', said Reagan - and they did - resulting in the large-scale privatisation of the Soviet economy,

wage cuts, price inflation, mass unemployment and poverty. We didn't have to deter Yeltsin, we didn't have to deter Putin - but no, on second thoughts, now we do have to deter Putin.

Not about self defence

While Britain and the US turn the meaning of self-defence on its head with regard to Israel, a glance at the deployment of global forces reveals the depth of deceit. The US has 750 military bases in over 80 countries. That equates to around 80% of all the world's foreign military bases. Britain, with 145 bases in 41 countries, has the second biggest number. According to the esteemed Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Russia is estimated to have between 12-36 and China, 5-8, depending on how you define a military base. [1] [2] Again according to SIPRI, the United States military budget is greater than the next 9 biggest spenders added together. Of the 193 nation state members of the UN, 175 have a smaller annual GDP than the United States spends every year on 'defence'! That is 9/10ths of the countries of the world.

If we step away from the relentless messaging of the pro-NATO establishment, is it not absurd to suggest that the US and UK's global military footprint has anything to do with deterrence? They have 895 overseas military bases - more than four bases for every country in the world and gargantuan levels of military spending. And NATO military strategies are based on the doctrines of power projection and forward force projection - that is deploying and sustaining armed forces and military power outside NATO territory. In other words, they have military dominance throughout the globe. [3] Even with the most blinkered will in the world, this is not about defence. Indeed, does not the rest of the world perceive it as the opposite: an imperial threat of existential proportions?

A cursory look at US invasions and covert regime-change operations over the past 70 years makes it clear that its military and special forces are not purposed for self-defence - unless you think a myriad of states were planning to invade America, including Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba, Chile, Grenada, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Venezuela,

Libya, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia Yugoslavia, the USSR, and more.

As for Britain, are we so insular, so ignorant of how the world has experienced Britain's savage colonial and continuing neo-colonial occupations, so imbued with the sub-conscious ideology of supremacy, as to believe that the UK's overseas military bases, across six continents, are somehow about defending Britain? When the Royal Navy cruised through the South China Sea in 2021, with the largest attack force assembled by Britain in over 30 years, did anyone seriously think it was there to defend Plymouth? How do we think the people of Beijing and Shanghai received that deployment? And how might the people of Britain respond to a deployment in kind - with an attack fleet sailing through the English Channel and the North Sea in 'self-defence' of China?

Yet Britain repeats a similar exercise - albeit surreptitiously - all year round. Its four Trident nuclear submarines can each deploy up to 192 independently targetable nuclear warheads. Each warhead is eight times as destructive as that which obliterated Hiroshima in 1945. Other than in some Dr Strangelove dystopia, who believes that silently traversing the world's ocean beds with enough nuclear warheads to destroy virtually every major city on the planet is motivated by self-defence?

Preparing for war

These weapons are not about deterrence. They exist for the purpose of imperial projection, and imperial war. Recent statements from leading political and military figures underline this reality. Grant Shapps, the then Defence Minister, said in January this year: "In five years' time we could be looking at multiple theatres including Russia, China, Iran and North Korea... We have moved from a post-war to a pre-war world". [4] Curiously,

those 'theatres' do not include Britain. Or western Europe. Or the USA. As if the targeted countries would not retaliate. General Sir Roly Walker has stated that Britain must be ready within 3 years for a war against the "Axis of Upheaval" - again, Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. [5] US Air Force 4 Star General Mike Minihan is predicting war with China in 2025. [6]

Germany, France and Japan are all in the process of increasing their military spending by between 50% and 100%. The UK currently spends 2.32% of GDP on defence - £64.6 billion. Starmer has said that will rise to 2.5% - £87.1bn - "as soon as resources allow". The Ministry of Defence Equipment Plan for 2021-2031 states: "The [defence] department has an equipment plan which balances cost and budget. Over the 10 years from 2021-22 we plan to spend £238 billion on equipment procurement and support... Spending on nuclear programmes across of the whole Defence Equipment Plan over the next ten years (2023 to 2033) is forecast at £117.8 billion". [7] If this is anywhere near accurate it suggests that in the region of 49.5% of the UK's military equipment budget for the next decade will be spent on replacing Trident nuclear submarines with the new Dreadnought class boats and upgraded nuclear weapons. Even these colossal sums, from the horse's mouth, are still way less than CND's estimate of £205 billion, which includes in-service costs for the duration of the Dreadnought programme.

The threat is allegedly coming from Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. Yet nobody is seriously projecting a scenario under which any of these states actually initiates war against Britain. The US and NATO are surrounding these countries, by land and by sea, with nuclear-armed military bases and submarines. There are no equivalent deployments by any of the four targeted states. The cold-war-to-hot-war allegations against them

are conspicuously devoid of any evidence, or any *raison d'être*.

The real threat to the British Isles is if Britain implicates itself as an aggressor in a war against them. In other words, the real threat to Britain comes from our self-inflicted relationship with the US and our self-inflicted membership of NATO. Any nuclear threat derives from our self-inflicted possession of nuclear weapons.

Alongside US-NATO-UK warmongering there resides a familiar narrative: McCarthyism, Islamophobia, Russophobia, Sinophobia; the demonising of leaders like Gaddafi; and plain lies, such as Iraq's non-existent nuclear bomb.

The US has for over a century been the world's dominant, imperialist power and has proven repeatedly that it will use the terror of war. It remains the only country ever to drop nuclear bombs on people, killing more than 300,000 civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is hardly surprising that Russia and China today choose not to, unilaterally, be rid of their nuclear weapons while the US has them deployed on every continent, in every ocean.

The concept of self-defence is a viable principle for international relations if its application is consistent, universal and upheld in conjunction with multilateral commitments to peaceful coexistence and cooperation. But the perversion of this principle becomes apparent the moment the West applies its validity selectively. Manifestly, the US, UK and NATO do not extend the right of self-defence to their chosen victims. Today the peoples of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and now Iran, are not afforded this right. Netanyahu, in pursuit of annexation and expansion, under the pretence of self-defence, is given the go ahead and the weapons to displace a nation, destroy a civilisation, and exterminate a people. Those who dare to resist

- those who are acting in self-defence - are labelled terrorists.

The British peace movement

Today there is a heavy burden on the British peace movement. The establishment media, and the Labour Party under Blair, did a job in marginalising the objectives of nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO. Yet since 2010, under the leadership of Kate Hudson, CND has made impressive strides forward in developing a world view that has a broader appreciation of global developments and Britain's role within them. CND began to campaign for Britain to leave NATO, and for US and NATO forces to be expelled from the UK.

PHOTO BY CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT



Peace not war

From CND's recent briefing, No To NATO, and from Sophie Bolt's excellent inaugural speech as Hudson's successor it is clear that CND is developing a world view that is incompatible with the interests of imperialism and militarism.

While Britain has nuclear weapons, and remains allied to the US, the threat of mutually assured destruction is as real as it ever was. The development of tactical/battlefield weapons has lowered the threshold for initiating nuclear war. But they have done nothing to prevent - and everything to incite - the escalation

of war to the nuclear-strategic level. And as recent warfare has demonstrated, there are no 'Iron Domes'.

If nuclear disarmament had slipped down the pecking order of priorities for the British Left, then that is being reversed, and not by demoting the profile of campaigning for a free Palestine, or a sustainable planet, or for a ceasefire and a negotiated peace in the Donbas. Rather, nuclear disarmament is now a key component of a positive alternative strategy for Britain as a nuclear weapon-free state, out of NATO. As Sophie Bolt, said recently, "... a peaceful, just, sustainable and nuclear-free world" necessitates "overcoming the major obstacle, which is US global dominance... Our efforts for an independent foreign policy, to secure Britain's progressive role in the world and break with the US military project, are absolutely critical". [8]

The peaceful alternative

We may want to make British membership of the Non-Aligned Movement integral to that independent foreign policy. No to nuclear weapons, US bases and NATO, becomes a less isolationist, more attractive proposition when we add the positive vision of joining up with the 120 member states of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). And at some point, BRICS - already representing nearly half of the global population. The positives of being a non-nuclear weapons state and a member of NAM are not only about enhancing Britain's security.

The multi-billion-pound construction and operational costs of the Dreadnought programme represents a huge potential peace dividend. The past 15 plus years of enduring economic crisis is reflected in Britain's crumbling social and economic infrastructure. An increasingly needy and indebted British public may now be a little more susceptible

to claiming that peace dividend, scrapping four submarines and 770 warheads, and joining the global non-nuclear mainstream.

It's a win-win-win:

- Give up threatening other countries with nuclear annihilation and stop being a target for nuclear retaliation
- Resign from the swaggering nuclear weapons club of 9 countries (conceivably encouraging others to do likewise) and join the 184 nations that defend their independence without stockpiling nuclear weapons
- Release multi-billions of pounds to invest in the people of Britain.

Scrapping Britain's nuclear weapons, leaving NATO and joining NAM increases Britain's security, enhances the country's legitimacy, status and opportunities within the global community and affords a multi-billion-pound peace dividend. With Britain now contributing to missile attacks deep within Russia, we are directly provocative of, and susceptible to, a nuclear conflagration. To sidestep the issue of British nuclear disarmament is perilous. A fundamental re-alignment of foreign and domestic policy is required urgently.

[1] <https://www.aljazeera.com/.../infographic-us-military...>

[2] https://www.sipri.org/.../2024-04/2404_fs-milex_2023.pdf; https://www.declassifieduk.org/revealed-the-uk-militarys...

[3] DP_0033_LOHSE_FROM_POWER_PROJECTION_TO_POWER_PROTECTION.PDF

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/.../defending-britain-from-a-more...>

[5] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c035d05je2jo>

[6] <https://www.ft.com/.../2b50ce67-bf88-4aff-bac9-eb9ac1b3b2ca>

[7] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/620fc427d3bf7f4f0981a158/Defence_Equipment_Plan_2021.pdf

[8] Building a peaceful, nuclear-free tomorrow | Morning Star



Trump is back...

TRUMP'S ELECTION

How it happened and what it could mean for the world

by Steve Howell

After a US presidential election, it is usually easy enough to offer some sensible thoughts on what happened and why. It also tends to be fairly clear what the outcome means for the world because of the longstanding neo-con consensus on foreign policy between Democrats and Republicans. Even the personnel can move seamlessly between administrations once their political patrons have completed the electoral show. As Julius Nyerere famously said the United States is a one-party state "but, with typical American extravagance, they have two of them." [1]

In the case of Donald Trump's victory over Kamala Harris, however, the dust settling has not entirely cleared the fog, if you'll forgive the mixing of metaphors. The reason for this is because his nominees for key 'national security' posts are people who have been at loggerheads with each other on geopolitical issues and particularly on which confrontations and wars the US should prioritise.

But let's come back to that harder question after dealing with the easier ones.

Trump's victory

Firstly, what happened? Trump's victory was undeniably an extraordinary comeback after being trounced by Joe Biden in 2020. Not only did he win the electoral col-

lege by 312 to 226, he also won the popular vote - by a margin of 2.5m - to become the first Republican to do so since George H W Bush in 1988. The latter was not so much because of the increase in his vote, which went up from 74m to nearly 77m - but because the Democrat vote plummeted from Biden's 81m to Harris's 74m.

However, given the US's first-past-the-post electoral college system, the decisive factor was that Trump took six of the states Biden had won in 2020 - Georgia, Wisconsin, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Arizona - despite Harris actually increasing the Democrat vote in the first three of them. The biggest falls in the Democrat popular vote tended to be in states where they had no chance of losing: in New York and California, for example, Harris won but with a combined total of 2.79m fewer votes than had been cast for Biden. With Trump's vote falling in California and rising only marginally in New York, most of these missing voters must have sat on their hands.

Democrats abandon their voters

The drop in the Democrats' popular vote was not for want of money. In the presidential election, the Democrats spent \$929m compared to the £519m spent by the Republicans. [2] So, how did Trump manage this? A big factor was undoubtedly the self-

inflicted wound of the Democrats consciously turning their back on working class voters.

In 2016, in outlining the party's strategy for beating Trump the first time around, the New York senator, Chuck Schumer, said, "For every blue-collar Democrat we will lose in western PA, we will pick up two, three moderate Republicans in the suburbs of Philadelphia. You can repeat that in Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin. Voters who are most out there figuring out what to do are not the blue-collar Democrats, they are the college-educated Republicans, who lean Republican or independent and in the suburbs." [3]

In fact, the reverse of what Schumer predicted happened. The polls suggest that any advances the Democrats made among moderate college-educated voters were more than cancelled out by a drop in blue-collar support. Whereas Obama narrowly won in 2012 among people with no college degree, the Democrats casual disregard for that group had by 2024 led to them to lose millions of those voters to Trump. Of people who had never attended college, he won a 62% to 37% majority; of those who had attended college but received no degree, he won by 50% to 49%. The same trend can be seen when voters are analysed by income.

On the day after the election, this loss of working class support for

the Democrats prompted a scathing statement from Bernie Sanders, who had campaigned for Harris, in which he said, “It should come as no surprise that a Democratic party which has abandoned working class people would find that the working class has abandoned them. First, it was the white working class, and now it is Latino and Black workers as well.” [4]

As well as losing working class voters generally, the Democrats were hit by a drop in support among Arab-American and young voters. The latter has been presented by most of the media as Trump doing well with young people, but the polls suggest his support remained the same and the Democrat lead among 18-29-year-olds narrowed from 24 to 13 percentage points mainly because turnout fell. Meanwhile, loss of Arab-American support was a big factor in Michigan where the community makes up a large proportion of the voters in three cities - Hamtramck, Dearborn and Dearborn Heights – in which Democrat support fell by “at least 22,000” votes, representing nearly 27% of the 81,000-vote difference between Harris and Trump across the state as a whole. In addition, a US-wide exit poll by the Council on American Islamic Relations found that 53% of Muslim Americans voted for Green candidate Jill Stein, 21% for Trump and 20.3% for Harris. [5]

According to the exit poll conducted by NBC and other news organisations, only 4% of voters said foreign policy was what mattered in deciding who they had backed. However, that is more than six million people, and Trump won a 57% to 37% majority of them. And this is before you add those who the Democrats lost because they did not vote at all, voted for a third party or were among the 32% who told the pollsters that the economy was their top issue but who resent the tens of billions of dollars the US spends on foreign wars.

While Harris did not even recognise war weariness as an issue, Trump was adept at exploiting it. In every speech, he would say – as he did on election night – that in his first term “we had no wars” and that he was “going to stop wars”. This was taken mainly to refer to Ukraine – since no one doubts he backs Israel to the hilt – but it belies the reality that Trump endorsed giving Ukraine another \$60 billion for the war in April after designating \$10 billion of it as repayable loans. Senator Lindsey Graham said afterwards that the funding “would not have passed (the House of Representatives) without President Trump” who had “created a loan component to this package that gives us leverage down the road.”

Trump and the world

This takes us to the question of what the election means for the world. Trump’s immediate circle is populated by people – like Tucker Carlson, Marjorie Taylor Greene and Elon Musk – who think that the Ukraine war should never have happened because it pushed Russia closer to China, which they perceive as the main enemy. This camp is still vocal, as indicated by their reaction to President Biden allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with US-made long-range weapons.

Taylor Greene accused Biden of “trying to start WWII” on his way out of office. She said, “The American people gave a mandate on Nov 5th against these exact America-last decisions and do NOT want to fund or fight foreign wars. We want to fix our own problems. Enough of this, it must stop.” [6]

Trump’s nominees for the key foreign policy posts are, however, not of this faction. The *Financial Times* said, “His picks are not universally disastrous. Marco Rubio as secretary of state and Mike Waltz as national security adviser are traditional foreign policy figures who believe in a strong America and spending on its armed forces.” [7]

On the day after the election, this loss of working class support for the Democrats prompted a scathing statement from Bernie Sanders, who had campaigned for Harris, in which he said, “It should come as no surprise that a Democratic party which has abandoned working class people would find that the working class has abandoned them.

Where the overlap lies is in recognising the reality of the situation on the ground in Ukraine. The Russians are steadily advancing in the grim war of attrition and firing missiles into their territory is not going to change that.

Even Graham, who has been among the most belligerent of US politicians on Russia, is now talking about the end game, though not in terms of defending any high principles. In an interview for Fox News on November 20, he said, "This war's about money. People don't talk much about it. But the richest country in all of Europe for rare earth minerals is Ukraine, two to seven trillion dollars' worth...We can make money and have an economic relationship with Ukraine that will be very beneficial to us with peace. So, Donald Trump's going to do a deal to get our money back, to enrich ourselves with rare minerals. A good deal for Ukraine and us, and he's going to bring peace." [8]

The corollary to this plan to fill the pockets of US corporations – while Ukraine and Russia mourn their dead – is that it frees US military resources to escalate its confrontation with China.

Since the US shifted to seeing China as a major threat during the first Trump administration, it has developed new anti-China military alliances, such as the Quad and AUKUS, and new military bases in the region, alongside the strengthening of existing ones. The risk now is that Trump – faced with the failure of sanctions to stop China's economic advance – could provoke a Ukraine-style proxy war by recognising Taiwan.

The widely respected French commentator on China, Arnaud Bertrand, says he expects the new Trump administration to be "extremely provocative" and acknowledges "the US's long history of using proxy wars to weaken its rivals". But he adds, "I also think that, unlike most proxy wars, almost everyone sees that one coming and, if triggered by the US recognizing an independent Taiwan, would blame the US more than China since it would so clearly be a provocation. And, in war, narrative management is absolutely crucial... I also doubt the Taiwanese could be so stupid." [9]

Bertrand is probably right about the narrative, at least as far as most of

the world is concerned. What actually happens depends, to a large degree, on how the more immediate issue of the Israel's US-backed war in the Middle East develops and on US capacity to mount two wars at the same time. Of one thing there is no doubt, Trump will be as shameless in his support for Israel's genocide in Gaza and attacks on the Lebanon, Syria and Iran as Biden.

[1] Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), president of Tanzania (1964-1985)

[2] *Open Secrets*, www.opensecrets.org, Elections Overview 2024

[3] From an interview clip posted on X by David Sirota (former Bernie Sanders speechwriter), @davidsirota 7/11/24

[4] Statement by Senator Bernie Sanders, 6/11/2024

[5] 'They blew it: Democrats lost 22,000 votes in Michigan's heavily Arab American cities', *The Guardian*, 9/11/2024

[6] Tweet by Marjorie Taylor Greene, @RepMTG, 17/11/24

[7] *The FT View*, *Financial Times*, 16-17/11/2024

[8] Senator Lindsey Graham, interview with *Fox News*, 20/11/2024

[9] Tweet by Arnaud Bertrand, @RnaudBertrand, 20/11/2024

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Policing the borders of paradise as Schengen disintegrates



by Clare Bailey

'Europe is a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle and the jungle could invade the garden.' October 2022, Josep Borrell (head of the European External Action Service – the EU diplomatic service)

When top EU diplomat Josep Borrell described Europe as a garden and the rest of the world as an invasive jungle, he gave unusually clear expression to the racist underpinnings of EU foreign policy – a policy enacted not only in high-level diplomacy and official statements, but also more directly and lethally at the EU's external borders by Frontex, the EU's border agency.

Frontex expansion

Frontex came into being under a more cumbersome name in 2004 as a small organisation with a few hundred officers. Its powers and size have grown exponentially in the last five years and there are plans to expand them much further. Standing ambiguously – and ambitiously – as something between an army, an intelligence

agency and a police force, Frontex is the only EU agency with a uniform. Its annual budget has grown from €6m in 2005 to €922m in 2024, most of that growth taking place in the last 3 years.

Its headquarters are in Warsaw where its directors oversee an organisation with around 8000 officers, all potentially armed, expanding to 10,000 by 2027. Frontex has its own planes, boats and vehicles, which supply and use its border surveillance system EURO-SUR. From mid-2025 Frontex will be introducing the new European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) designed to further strengthen Europe's internal security with pre-travel screening for all non-EU travellers. It also has powers to act independently, without the consent of Member States, in undefined "exceptional circumstances" (EU Regulation 2019/1896).

Frontex operations are not confined to EU countries with external borders; its reach is growing. As of October 2023, it had nearly 600 staff deployed across ten joint

operations or 'partnerships' in eight non-EU countries, including Moldova, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. As part of EU plans to externalise its borders, Frontex is attempting to set up a similar operation in Tunisia, with whom it already has a contentious agreement on migration control.

Lack of accountability

Frontex is an opaque agency. It is officially accountable to the European Parliament but MEPs have found it almost impossible to hold it to account, and the legal teams of organisations campaigning for the rights of migrants have great difficulty in obtaining Frontex documents that should be in the public realm, as EU regulations stipulate, "The Agency... shall make public relevant information, including...comprehensive information on past and current joint operations...". (EU Regulation 2019/1896) This would include information on all interventions, return or 'pushback' operations, and repatriation deals with third countries.

In April 2022, Sea-Watch, the maritime search and rescue organisation, filed a lawsuit for the release of information proving Frontex's involvement in human rights abuses, "For two decades, the EU has been investing billions in an organization (Frontex) that operates with impunity and without transparency, like a secret service, and is particularly notable for its human rights violations.", said Bérénice Gaudin of Sea-Watch

Frontex had previously refused all requests under the EU Freedom of Information Regulation. Despite this blatant refusal to cooperate, the General Court of the European Union in Luxembourg, in a ruling on April 24th this year, predictably failed to impose transparency and accountability on Frontex and a complaint process via the European Ombudsman, which found in favour of the complainant requesting access to documents, resulted only in Frontex agreeing to 'consider' releasing them. But investigation of Frontex's activities over the past few years by determined journalists has nonetheless brought some previously hidden documents and records to light and following these investigations and

Fortress Europe – protecting Schengen

Frontex's core task is to ensure the proper functioning of Europe's Schengen Area – the area governed by the 1985 Schengen Treaty inside which movement between countries takes place without border controls, facilitating the free movement of labour and goods within the EU. Assuming national responsibilities of the states concerned where and when necessary, and thus far by agreement, Frontex controls these external borders with a particular emphasis on the designated key 'access routes' into the Schengen area via the Mediterranean. These gateways into the EU are defined by Frontex as: the Eastern route via the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean; the Central Mediterranean; and the Western Mediterranean. Between them they account for most 'illegal' entries into the EU.

Since 1993, alongside Frontex air and sea patrols, 40,000 people have drowned attempting the crossing from the North African coast in unsafe, overcrowded boats. SOS calls go unanswered and search and

Other organisations monitoring the EU's migration policy are of like mind. In an article published in April 2023, the European Institute for International Relations – a research centre for international law – ascribes Frontex aggression in the Mediterranean to the EU's treatment of migration as a security problem. Referencing the International Organisation for Migration (a United Nations NGO), the article has this to say, "The International Organization for Migration (IOM), from the beginning of 2021 to date, has made it clear that the migration policy the EU is using is a total failure: too many deaths are recorded and too many people are missing. The EU has concentrated its funds in order to make Frontex a frontier giant, aimed solely at armouring the EU "fortress" and its borders, rather than rescuing lives."

In its 2024 report 'Crimes of the European Coast Guard Agency Frontex', Sea-Watch focuses on activity in the Central Mediterranean where boats from Libya and Tunisia are tracked by Frontex planes and drones. The information they gather is not relayed to search and rescue ships in the area, but is forwarded instead to militias running the 'Libyan Coast Guard' who use it to intercept the boats and return people to Libya where they face violence, torture and forced labour, according to the UN, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs. In other words, Frontex uses its surveillance capacity not to support rescues, but rather to facilitate interceptions and 'pullbacks' of people in distress by violent militias who profit from their exploitation. In doing so it breaches both maritime and human rights laws.

This is the world's most lethal migrant route, "Instead of offering those seeking protection legal and safe routes, the borders are being turned into a human rights-free space and the Mediterranean into a mass grave"

Bérénice Gaudin

some unfavourable public attention, Frontex was accused of acting outside its remit and of not being compliant with EU human rights laws. It was then subjected to greater scrutiny by the European Commission itself, since when its public documents have been careful to stress its human rights concerns.

rescue missions by Sea-Watch and other organisations are impeded. This is the world's most lethal migrant route, "Instead of offering those seeking protection legal and safe routes, the borders are being turned into a human rights-free space and the Mediterranean into a mass grave," Bérénice Gaudin

Wanting to move away from all too visible pushbacks where Frontex is the key actor and which are damaging to the EU's reputation, the agency's work in Tunisia indicates the way things have been moving – that is, towards the externalisation of the EU's borders. In June 2023 the

EU Commission signed an agreement on 'migration control' with the Tunisian government under whose terms the EU pays Tunisia to stem the flow of people making for the sea and deport those it arrests at sea. This involves, amongst other measures, the funding of 6 coast guard vessels.

In October 2023 Statewatch, an organisation monitoring state activities that threaten human rights and civil liberties, reported the following, "...in Tunisia, the coast guard has been conducting pullbacks of people who have subsequently been dumped in remote regions near the Tunisian-Algerian border. According to testimony provided to Human Rights Watch, a group of people who were intercepted at sea and brought back to shore were then detained by the National Guard, who: '...loaded the group onto buses and drove them for 6 hours to somewhere near the city of Le Kef, about 40 kilometres from the Algerian border. There, officers divided them into groups of about 10, loaded them onto pickup trucks, and drove toward a mountainous area. The four interviewees, who were on the same truck, said that another truck with armed agents escorted their truck. The officers dropped their group in the mountains near the Tunisia-Algeria border, they said. The Guinean boy (interviewed by HRW) said that one officer had threatened, "If you return again [to Tunisia], we will kill you."'

According to an article in the German publication *Migazin* in November 2023, crossings from Tunisia fell dramatically in the months following the signing of the country's agreement with Frontex. This was due not only to increased coast guard activity but to other related factors, for example the expulsion of thousands of sub-Saharan Africans from the port city of Sfax to the Libyan and Algerian borders. The EU is also pressurising the Tunisian government to introduce visa requirements for neighbouring West African states.



PHOTO BY MOHAMED ALI MHENNI

Freedom of movement in the Schengen area would thus be protected at the direct expense of freedom of movement between African states.

Managing migration

Stripped back, Frontex's job is first and foremost to ensure that immigration of cheap labour into the EU only takes place officially, for example through enlargement as when Bulgaria and Romania were admitted to membership in 2007. Its second remit is to keep asylum claims to a minimum. But it has to perform its role under the guise of protecting 'European values' of freedom and democracy – and thanks to some persistent journalists and monitoring organisations, this has become an increasingly precarious balancing act. Frontex's response can be seen in part in the language of its 2024 Strategic Risk Analysis Report where, in what is a clear attempt to distance itself from the deportation of desperate people, it expands its role to include countering 'emerging threats' – while at the same time 'upholding shared European values' by developing 'a proactive intelligence-led framework'. One of the threats it has recently

identified is 'hostile geopolitics', a term they use to refer to the use of migrants as political weapons. For example, during the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarus border in November 2021, Belarus was accused, by NATO's Secretary General Stoltenberg amongst others, of instrumentalising migration by inviting refugees into the country in order to push them across the Polish border, a charge categorically rejected by Belarus. Poland rejected the 3-4,000 migrants trying to cross the border, along with its EU treaty obligations to accept asylum seekers. But within a year it had accepted 3 million refugees from Ukraine without question. The EU takes in large numbers of refugees from time to time, when it suits the purposes of its capitalists. Germany has twice in recent years taken in huge numbers to boost its workforce. But in 2015, when it took in 1 million refugees fleeing the war unleashed on Syria by the US, hundreds of thousands of other Syrians were forced to find illegal routes, and this influx caused a rapid acceleration of an ongoing review of EU's immigration policy and the role of Frontex in policing the borders.

This in turn resulted in the adoption in June 2024 of the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Pact's provisions include the speeding-up of processing at borders and a far greater emphasis on deportation and arrangements with non-EU countries – externalisation again. The Pact is also designed to address disputes between EU countries affected differently by migration by replacing earlier mechanisms, like the 'return to the country of entry' requirement, with what they hope is a more equitable distribution of responsibilities and obligations; the inequities – for example between Italy and more northern countries – have been putting the Schengen Agreement itself under enormous pressure. This may be a forlorn hope however; according to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, some member states are already demanding stricter measures. Earlier this year, an Associate Director of the Migration Policy Institute research centre in Europe suggested, in an unusually frank assessment of the contradictions in EU migration policy, that the new Pact is both essential to containing the rise of far-right parties in the EU and a danger to the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers.

A further contradiction arises from the plan to expand Frontex's technological capacities. The agency admits that increased border surveillance will lead to a corresponding increase in illegal border-crossings as more people try to get round the new controls, including increased document and identity fraud.

But the contradictions run much deeper than this.

What Schengen Area?

A future full of "ominous scenarios and hybrid threats" leading to the "destabilisation of Member States" that Frontex conjures up in its public documents has another dimension it doesn't mention. As guardian of the Schengen area, Frontex's own



future is called into question by the increasingly frequent suspensions of the Schengen Treaty. Temporary suspensions in certain circumstances are provided for, but France has had some restrictions in place since 2015 and has not removed further restrictions it imposed during the Olympic Games. There have been border controls in place since 2023 between Slovakia and Hungary, the Czech Republic and Switzerland and others.

Much more serious in terms of its implications was the suspension of the Treaty in early September 2024 by the weakened Scholz coalition in Germany. Freedom of movement into Germany is now halted with all nine countries on its borders in an attempt to shore up support amongst voters attracted by openly racist solutions to Germany's economic woes offered by the far-right AfD. As reported in the *Financial Times*, "Interior minister Nancy Faeser said... that the move — an extension of existing controls on borders with four countries — is designed to 'further restrict irregular immigration and protect us from the acute dangers posed by Islamist terror and serious crime... We will do everything to better protect people in this country.'" In an article published in *El Pais* on September 16th 2024, Gloria Rodriguez-Pina suggests this move will impact not just the nine countries sharing a border with Germany but the whole of the EU and the future of the entire Schengen Agreement. Poland's PM Donald

Tusk agreed, calling it a de facto suspension of the whole treaty. If that weren't enough, in mid-November the far-right Wilders coalition government in the Netherlands also announced it would suspend the Treaty from December 9th, taking advantage of violence created by Israeli football fans in Amsterdam to close its borders. In recent coalition discussions, the PVV (Wilders's party) had not been able to persuade its partners to declare an asylum crisis and so was denied the opportunity to push through the full migration and asylum restrictions it wanted. Blaming the Amsterdam Moroccan community for what it called 'pogroms' against visiting Israeli Jews, Wilders was suddenly able to pursue his racist programme – he not only pushed through suspension of the Schengen Agreement but also threatened to immediately deport any dual nationality citizens found to have been involved in the violence.

Paradise dismantled

The Schengen Agreement is one of the main pillars of the EU architecture. If it cannot be shored up, the project totters. Leading figures have not been slow to recognise the looming problem and to understand the need to strengthen Frontex's hand in securing the union's external borders. If individual countries with centre-right governments under pressure, as well as far-right governments openly pursuing racist agendas, are not to take matters

completely into their own hands, the Commission has to act. Enter Frontex's call for the formation of 'a grand policy on migration'. In a speech at the Sorbonne in Paris on April 25th this year, facing political challenge from the right and from the left and just two weeks before calling the snap election, Macron saw it as expedient to stress the significance of the new Pact on Migration, "Sovereignty cannot exist without a border.... ...this agreement enables us to improve control of our borders by establishing compulsory registration and screening procedures at our external borders, to identify those who are eligible for international protection and those who will have to return to their country of origin, while enhancing cooperation within our Europe."

As part of her pitch for re-election this year as head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen also stressed the importance of collective borders and collective action against instrumentalised migration in her speech to the

European Parliament on July 19th 2024 and said she would increase the number of Frontex officers to 30,000, "...we must also do more to secure our external borders. Our Eastern Border in particular has become a target for hybrid attacks and provocations. Russia is luring migrants from Yemen up north and pushing them deliberately against the Finnish border. We should always keep in mind that a Member State's border is a European border. And we will do everything we can to make them stronger. This is part of the reason why we must strengthen Frontex. To make it more effective, while fully respecting fundamental rights, I will propose to triple the number of European border and coastguards to 30,000."

She went on to praise the new Pact – and to add a quick post-script about migrants being human beings, "The Migration and Asylum Pact is a huge step forward. We put solidarity at the heart of our common response. Migration challenges need a European response with a fair and firm approach based on

our values. Always remembering that migrants are human beings like you and me. And all of us, we are protected by human rights. Many pessimists thought that migration was too divisive to agree on. But we proved them wrong. Together we made it."

The contradictions in the Union are becoming not only visible but also unignorable. If the Schengen Agreement is falling apart as national economic exigencies take precedence over the free trade & movement area that created them, it is not only Frontex's role that will be thrown into question. Without Schengen the identity of the EU itself becomes a problem. Over what exactly would the Commission then preside? It is interesting that at this critical point the Commission has at its disposal, if not the long-debated European army, a sizeable and expanding armed force with some of the characteristics of a standing army.

Paradise, it turns out, is being dismantled from within.

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The Earth is closing in on us

The Earth is closing on us
 pushing us through the last passage
 and we tear off our limbs to pass through.
 The Earth is squeezing us.
 I wish we were its wheat
 so we could die and live again.
 I wish the Earth was our mother
 so she'd be kind to us.
 I wish we were pictures on the rocks
 for our dreams to carry as mirrors.
 We saw the faces of those who will throw
 our children out of the window of this last space.
 Our star will hang up mirrors.
 Where should we go after the last frontiers?
 Where should the birds fly after the last sky?
 Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?
 We will write our names with scarlet steam.
 We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh.
 We will die here, here in the last passage.
 Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree.

Mahmoud Darwish

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) is regarded as Palestine's national poet. He published his first book of poetry when he was 19. At 20 he joined the Israeli Communist Party and became the editor of its literary journal. He joined the PLO in 1973 and was elected to its Executive Committee in 1987. In 1988 he wrote the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. He resigned from the PLO in 1993 in opposition to its adoption of the Oslo Accords. At the time of his death, he had published 30 volumes of poetry.

HOUSING CRISIS

causes & cures

by Pat Turnbull

The roots of the housing crisis we have now go back chiefly to the election of the Thatcher government in 1979 – though there were stirrings in the recessions of the 1970s. A Hansard report of a parliamentary debate on housing on 16 December 1981 reveals that in that year housing subsidies had been cut by more than £600 million and that they were due to be cut by a further £400 million in 1982 and virtually ended thereafter. The government had repealed a system under which about 66% of the cost of building local authority houses and improving older houses was paid by the Government in subsidy. This was the start of over forty years of neglect and underfunding of what is now called the social rented housing sector, because it now encompasses not only council housing but a large amount of housing association housing.

Negative results of these policies

The run down of the sector has had a very negative effect on the provision of housing as a whole, allowing the market to dominate. In 2023 the average market rent for a one-bedroom home in London was 46% of gross median pay.

The Thatcher government is most notorious for the Right to Buy policy which started in 1980, where council homes were sold off to their tenants at big discounts. By 31 March 2023, over 2,017,590 council homes had been sold off through Right to Buy. Forty percent of these are now rented out privately at market rents.

Homeless protest in Manchester



PHOTO BY MATT HARROP

1.3 million households are on the waiting list for a council or housing association rented home. Even this is not a true figure of the level of need, as councils keep cutting the numbers by reducing eligibility to be on the list. In England, 117,450 households were in temporary accommodation as of 12 August 2024, according to Housing Today, a 12.3% increase since 31 March 2023. This includes more than 150,000 children.

The rising cost of paying private landlords to house homeless families in insecure, inadequate and poorly regulated private rented homes has brought many councils to the verge of bankruptcy. Newham Council in London has asked for 'exceptional financial support' due to temporary accommodation housing pressures amounting to £100 million over three years. By 2027/28 one third of its budget could go on temporary accommodation.

In fact 18 councils have currently been granted exceptional financial support, which is actually no extra money from government but merely either permission to borrow, or permission to use capital budgets to cover day to day expenditure. Hackney Council, also in London, has had an increase in net expenditure on homelessness from £7.38 million in 2017/18 to £21.5 million in 2023/24, due to the huge rise in the cost of temporary accommodation.

Continuing the road to crisis

The Labour government of 1997 to 2010 could have stopped the sell-off of council homes, started building more, and bought back those sold. But its standpoint right up to the financial crisis of 2008 was that everyone could be a home owner. In addition, on its watch and due to its policies, thousands of council homes were transferred from public



ownership to housing associations, private bodies. Government subsidies which acted as an incentive to the housing associations were gradually withdrawn. Housing associations were encouraged to become developers of market housing to boost their finances.

It's ten years since the 2014 publication of the Lyons Housing Review, a public policy review initiated by then Labour Party leader and leader of the opposition, Ed Miliband. It reported that the 2010 government spending review had seen capital investment in housing cut by 63% in real terms. For the past 14 years government funding to councils has also been steadily cut, with many councils chasing the same pipe dream, that building and selling market homes would make up for the lost finance.

So now we have a housing crisis and a Labour government which has stated its commitment to building 1.5 million new homes in five years. One of the first steps it has taken has been to undertake a review of the National Planning Policy Framework. This is the basis for city-wide and borough plans. The government claims to believe that the housing shortage is down to a failure of the planning system which is preventing homes from being built. Of course, housing is being built, over-

whelmingly for market sale, often to investors. If anyone lives in it, it is at high market rents and with the lack of security offered by the so-called no fault eviction system where the landlord can evict without giving a reason. This system deters tenants from complaining about the state of the property, or rises in the rents.

Speculative private development

The government's claim that the planning system is to blame comes up against a range of opposing evidence. First, developers have large amounts of land with planning permission not being built on. Steve Howell, writing in the *Big Issue* on 26 July 2024, pointed out that *Big Issue* research in 2023 found that the land held by the top eight house-builders alone was 918,823 plots, an increase of 49% on 2018 and, as he said, "enough to keep them going until around 2040 at their current output".

Second, developers keep the amount being built at a level where their profits will remain high. The Competition and Market Authority in their *Housebuilding Market Study* of February 26 2024, say this of speculative private development, "The evidence shows that private developers produce houses at a rate at which they can be sold without

needing to reduce their prices, rather than diversifying the types and numbers of homes they build to meet the needs of different communities (for example, providing more affordable housing)."

Third, leaving house building to private developers who only build for profit will never produce housing which people on average, let alone low, incomes can afford. The Competition and Market Authority's study revealed that around 60% of all houses built in 2021 to 2022 were delivered by speculative private development which, they said, 'has seen the gap widen considerably between what the market will deliver and what communities need.' We have evidence from the same year in London. The 19th Annual Monitoring Report on the London Plan noted that in the year 2021/22, the number of net housing completions was 37,852. Only 3,721 of them were at what is described as 'low-cost rent', which also includes the separate category of London Affordable Rent which is about 50% higher than social rent. In 2017, the last time the Greater London Authority assessed housing need, the requirement for low-cost rent was put at 30,425 every year. So there is a huge contrast between what was needed and what was delivered.

The government appears also to believe that more housebuilding will bring down prices. So they have set a London target of 80,000 a year. Note again the huge difference from the actual delivery in 2021/22, a figure fairly similar to other years. In addition to the evidence already presented, an article in *The Economist* on 8 August 2024 entitled, *Would building 1.5 million homes bring down British house prices?*, answered itself - 'not by much' - pointing to a range of other factors that also affect house prices.

Need for council housing

The only times council housing has ever been built in large num-

bers has been when funding was provided by the government. High points were after the First and Second World Wars, when a rebellious mood in the country, a determination to fight for better living conditions, induced governments to take action. The other pressure was the existence of the Soviet Union and socialist Europe, with their public house building programmes and their very low rents. Under a planned economy, the German Democratic Republic achieved the goal of eliminating housing as a social problem by 1990. But then the country ceased to exist.

In addition to the loss of council housing through Right to Buy, so-called estate regeneration has led to the demolition of many more council houses – and housing association homes on former council estates. These are largely replaced by much denser developments, mainly of market homes for sale. The government's proposed changes to the planning system will make approval of such schemes easier. The government proposes that there should be a presumption of approval for development on what is called brownfield land. Brownfield land is any land where there has ever been a built structure. Obviously housing estates come into this category.

A wide range of bodies are now saying the only solution to the housing crisis is government funding to build or buy back council homes. Housing associations are keen to get government money as well. There is, however, little sign that the government plans to respond to the call. Secretary of State for Housing Matthew Pennycook has recently written to the Chair of Homes England calling on them to 'maximise' the numbers of social rent homes in the building programme of so-called affordable homes. The £500 million to be added to this programme, as announced in the Autumn Budget, together with changes to Right to Buy, is supposed to achieve a standstill position – no

overall loss of stock – by April 2026. And while Right to Buy was ended in Scotland on 1 August 2016 and in Wales on 26 January 2019, there are no plans to end it in England.

Tenant's problems

As far as tenants are concerned, the prospects for a united stance in their own interests have been complicated by what has happened in the past forty years. Council estates now have council tenants, council leaseholders who bought their homes under Right to Buy, leaseholders who have bought these homes since, and private tenants renting homes bought under Right to Buy. Forty percent of Right to Buy properties are now let out at market rents. Housing association estates have tenants on social rents and tenants on so-called affordable rents, at up to 80% of market rents, because they were allowed to change the rent level of certain properties when they became empty. Shared ownership is another category that has appeared, especially on estates which have been subject to regeneration. Here the tenants pay a part mortgage, plus part rent, and is responsible for all repairs. There are many problems with shared ownership, not least that it is counted as affordable housing even though it is aimed at households earning up to £90,000 a year. So there is a great weakening of the common interests tenants on a council estate once had.

At the same time, the government has taken over rent setting for social rented homes. For most years a formula of above inflation rent rises has been applied. The Lyons Housing Review of 2014 reported that social sector rents had risen by about 46% in the previous decade while average earnings had increased by only 28%. About half a million more people depended on housing benefit than in 2010. In the 1970s one-fifth of public spending on housing was on rent subsidies with the rest channelled directly

into house building. Council and housing association tenants had a 7% rise last year and a 7.7% rise this year. Freedom of information data from local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland showed the number of social homes in arrears increased by 19% from 2019. In March the Regulator of Social Housing recorded an 8.4% rise in rent arrears owed to housing associations. (*Hundreds of millions owed in rental arrears to councils and arrears on the rise, new data shows. The Independent, 30/9/24*)

In the Autumn Budget the government proposed to consult on a programme of rent rises of inflation plus one per cent for five years. Council and housing association landlords have been calling for it to be ten years. If tenants are finding it hard to pay the rent now, what will happen as they rise each year? Tenants are becoming increasingly fearful of being unable to pay the rent and losing their homes. Housing association tenants in particular are on assured tenancies not secure tenancies like council tenants. Assured tenancies mean tenants can be evicted if they are as little as two months in rent arrears.

Pressure on government?

Council housing used to house about a third of us. Its very existence acted as a brake on private rents – which were also regulated before 1979 – and the prices of homes for sale. The winners from the loss of council housing have been developers, builders, investors and private landlords. They have a vested interest in keeping the status quo. The government is business friendly. But will they come under increasing pressure from Labour councils faced with the huge cost of housing the homeless in the private rented sector? Will tenants themselves rebel? Will the government be forced to implement the only solution to the housing crisis – government funding for more council housing?



LABOUR'S PLANNING REFORMS

A step backwards...

PHOTO BY COLIN SMITH

by Peter Latham

The Labour Government has already hobbled itself by keeping the Conservatives' fiscal rules on public spending. Worse, Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves have claimed for months that the planning system gets in the way of the growth on which they have pinned their economic strategy.

Like the Tories before them, they forget that the purpose of the planning system, successfully implemented by the 1945 Labour Government, is to enable development, including building work and changes of land use, to be carried out in the right place and at a suitable scale, taking into account relevant local conditions. Today most planning applications receive permission from local councils. Most

refusals are upheld on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, disappointing those whose schemes are turned down. This indicates that overall the system works pretty well at local council level, despite circumstances. It still has the tacit support of many housebuilders, because the housing permissions, whether implemented or not, keep up the value of land to their advantage.

So what is meant by the allegation that "planning causes delays"?

Planning delays

The planning applications system is now very cumbersome, not least because of the extra duties heaped upon planning professionals in recent decades. Good design, for instance, was once a low priority. Now it is a national requirement,

introducing design assessment processes that take time to do. Mixed use schemes with shops, offices, bars and flats are encouraged by development plans, but the extra complexity means there are more conflicts to iron out before approval, not helped by the Licensing Act of 2003, allowing bars to open late close to residential buildings. Flood Risk became a big issue after the floods of autumn 2000. Local planners were given the job of implementing the specialist requirements of the Environment Agency, who became a statutory consultee meaning they cannot be ignored. Questions of land contamination need more staff time, with more brown-field land being redeveloped than before.

All these things, and more, lengthen the assessment of developments

without much increase in planning staff, and in many cases a reduction.

Privatisation of development plans

A bigger change, however, was the attempt to bring nationally significant infrastructure projects under proper control. Such schemes include power stations, large renewable energy plants, airports, major roads, large sewerage schemes etc. At first, these schemes were assessed under Labour's Infrastructure Planning Commission established by the Planning Act (2008). Later, the Conservatives' Localism Act (2011) transferred the approval regime to the Planning Inspectorate. It is a distinct arrangement, separate from the local authority system of town and country planning.

The snag is that private firms, albeit with much government funding, might have the initiative in building these schemes, or not. If their shareholders want their 10 or 15% return, depending on conditions, they may choose to invest abroad rather than plod through a system increasingly beset by delays, as has become the case. The public interest, the entire purpose of the system, is the loser.

The year 1979 was a watershed. Before then, the state took a leading part in carrying out development. Local authorities built their own council houses on land allocated for them in the development plan. Early comprehensive redevelopment of old, poor housing was planned and designed by councils by departmental discussions in town and county halls, in accordance with current thinking. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government led councils in experimental public housing design to Parker Morris standards that often broke new ground. Town centres were designed and rebuilt as part of normal work by local councils, making new provision for

ring roads that allowed shopping streets to be pedestrianised, mostly with attractive results compared with previously. Councils would submit applications to themselves under a procedure known as council's own development, governed by regulation.

After 1979 the Conservatives launched their attack on planning with the infamous Circular 22/80, heralding the beginning of deregulation. Over the years, council house construction was scrapped, compulsory purchase of land to enable comprehensive redevelopment was discontinued and councils had to balance their books upon pain of rate-capping. In addition the new towns programme was wound up and assets sold off, despite their commercial success for the Exchequer. Councils could do little as developer. Money had to be raised from various agencies by competitive bidding, a smoke-screen for injustice and delay. The National Lottery Heritage Fund, for example, takes money from the working class in the form of bets to finance projects supported by the capitalist state, but not before the operating company takes a profit. The upshot is that implementation of development plans is in private hands, as it is developers that apply for permission to build.

Contrast this with the words of Sir Ernest Simon in 1945 on the rebuilding of Britain, "If we tackle this great task on the same broad lines as those that are winning the war: the planning must be done by the Government and the local authorities, the decision as to what is built and how and when and where must be made by the Government." [1] Some senior professionals have gone backwards ideologically, thinking that implementation should remain a private business. Others, such as the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), assert that state-led development with the nationalisation of uplifted land values created by

After 1979 the Conservatives launched their attack on planning with the infamous Circular 22/80, heralding the beginning of deregulation. Over the years, council house construction was scrapped, compulsory purchase of land to enable comprehensive redevelopment was discontinued and councils had to balance their books upon pain of rate-capping.

housing permissions, is the way forward. [2]

What Does Labour Mean?

Labour ministers do not seem to understand their planning history. Their predecessors, such as Lewis Silkin MP, piloted three Bills through Parliament on New Towns (1946), Town and Country Planning (1947) and National Parks (1949), taking a broad, visionary approach. Such people were much clearer about the state's role in dealing with private business.

We are left trying to interpret Labour's disjointed remarks about green belt and grey belt, mandatory housing targets, an extra 300 planning officers (welcome, but a drop in the ocean), more onshore wind generation, and a review of the National Planning Policy Framework [3]. Where is the logical thread? The allegation about parts of the green belt being "grey belt" is worrying. The purpose of green belts is to keep towns from coalescing. Green belts achieve this whether they are "green" or not, whether of plain appearance or of high landscape value. Quite ordinary sites can be an effective part of the green belt, and should not be developed.

Mandatory housing targets mean little in themselves. If private housebuilders do not build all the houses that they have been given permission to build, local councils can hardly make them. If something must be built then the state should do it.

Angela Rayner is to write to local authorities "making clear what is now expected of them" [4]. She should be aware that planning work thrives on co-operation, consultation, and joint effort towards a common purpose. Genuine difficulties become clear in the process, and often a way forward emerges. A big stick may not succeed.

Labour has talked about new towns, no doubt to provide sites for big housing developments. This is a welcome result of ten years' campaigning by the TCPA, amongst politicians and others. In the past all new towns covered not only housing, but industry, employment, transport, community provision, schools, public utilities, waste disposal, shopping centres, neighbourhood planning, parks and recreation and so on. The picture is different now. Corporate power is greater. Manufacturing has declined, so has public transport, town centre shopping, and social support of all kinds. Unemployment is higher, and the skills gap is greater. Many workers commute 30 or 40 miles to the next town to work. Building new towns in these changed conditions brings a whole crop of fresh challenges that will take a great deal of input to resolve. Labour should not fall into the trap of ordering these things without building up the will and means to do them.

Finally, let us remember that the previous new towns despite many strengths disproportionately benefitted the skilled working class. The late Peter Hall commented that despite being aimed at the least fortunate, the overcrowded and the ill-housed, the programme had the reverse effect. The most fortunate gained the most benefit, whilst the least fortunate gained very little. [5] There is a big issue here.

Labour has not shown much vision with their recent announcements, or a grasp of the complexities, especially of the need for the regional approach that the Conservatives abolished. Many planners envisage green new settlements and town extensions, with higher densities along mass transit routes, exemplary design for healthy living, a reduced role for the motor car with more walking and cycling, and enhanced local shopping provision. But where will people work? There is everything to play for, but much for Labour to prove.

[1] The Politics of Town Planning, Gordon Cherry, Longman 1982. Chapter 3.

[2] Planning 2020, Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England, November 2018. Town and Country Planning Association.

[3] The NPPF is the government's guidance to local planning authorities about carrying out everyday development management. The assessment of national infrastructure projects by the Planning Inspectorate is a separate matter.

[4] The Planner, July/August 2024, Royal Town Planning Institute.

[5] The Politics of Town Planning, Gordon Cherry, Longman 1982. Chapter 1.

From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

Venezuela: coup attempt defeated

"It has been estimated that in the last 15 years \$90 million in [US] 'aid' has been pumped into opposition groups...to support 'transition', build organisational infrastructure and develop things like social media. Aid has gone to political figures leading the violence such as Leopoldo Lopez and Maria Corina Machado....In recently uncovered emails between Machado and other rightists she indicates not only a desire for the overthrow of the government, but also for the 'annihilation' of Maduro..."

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Frieda Park

ISRAEL interfering with democracy



PHOTO BY ALISDARE HICKSON

by John Moore

Russia is routinely accused of interfering in elections in the West. The Russiagate smears were an important element of Hillary Clinton's campaign against Trump in 2016. No hard evidence was offered, but the word of "the US intelligence community" was deemed sufficient. Similar charges against Russia were wheeled out by Democrat supporters and media during this year's US Presidential election campaign.

Pro-Israeli interference

Meanwhile, Israel is interfering in Western elections blatantly and with clear proof. One example: in the US, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other lobbying committees spent \$25 million on ads to defeat progressive pro-Palestine Democrat candidates Jamaal Bowman in New York and Cori Bush in Missouri this summer, according to Politico. As a result, two mainstream Democrats replaced them as candidates. [1] A Reject AIPAC campaign has begun, headed by progressive groups as

well as organisations focused on Palestinian rights, including the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights Action and Jewish Voice for Peace.

Meanwhile, in Britain scrutiny of Israeli influence is non-existent in the mainstream media, which makes the work of Declassified and other investigative journalists all the more important. Declassified has done particularly useful work in highlighting Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) which describes itself as "a Westminster based lobby group working within the British Labour Party to promote the State of Israel". While LFI does not disclose its funders, it is known to have close links to the Israeli embassy in London. Some years ago, LFI's parliamentary officer, Michael Rubin, was secretly filmed by Al Jazeera for its documentary, *The Lobby*, admitting that LFI and the embassy "work really closely together, but a lot of it is behind the scenes". [2]

According to Defend Democracy Press, "37% of Labour MPs are associated with LFI, with an additional 37 members of the House of Lords. The

current and all seven recent shadow foreign secretaries have been members of LFI or financially supported by the pro-Israel lobby". [3] Seven members of Sir Keir Starmer's cabinet have gone on LFI-funded trips to Israel, and Health Minister Wes Streeting meets regularly with LFI at Westminster. Senior Labour ministers Rachel Reeves, Pat McFadden, Jonathan Reynolds – the trade secretary who oversees arms exports to Israel – and technology secretary Peter Kyle, are all vice-chairs of LFI and funded by it. Other pro-Israel lobbyists have donated to 13 of Labour's 25 cabinet ministers, according to Declassified. They include Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, David Lammy, Yvette Cooper – as well as Reeves, Reynolds and McFadden.

And it's not just politicians, it's also their advisers. Another pro-Israeli lobby group called the European Leadership Network has paid for Streeting and Bridget Phillipson's parliamentary staff to visit Israel. One of them told openDemocracy, "There was a clear and obvious agenda to make sure people had a

pro-Israel stance going into government". [4] Demonstrating the direct involvement of the Israeli state, the Israeli embassy asked one of the participants, "Did you enjoy the trip we sent you on?"

These pro-Israel organisations are part of a network. The European Leadership Network's funders include the American billionaire Bernie Marcus, who also donates to AIPAC.

Trevor Chinn, a big donor to Cabinet ministers, is a British oligarch who has funded both Labour and Conservative Friends of Israel since the 1980s. Chinn gave £50,000 towards Starmer's party leadership campaign in 2020. His father, Rosser Chinn, was the president of the Jewish National Fund in Britain, "a quasi-governmental organisation that has supported illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine and was described by historian Ilan Pappé as a 'colonialist agency of ethnic cleansing'. As Declassified explains, "Another pro-Israel tycoon, former hedge fund manager Stuart Roden, has donated over £1m to Labour since 2023, with £80,000 supporting the office costs of Philipson and Nandy,".

Political pressure

Other pressure groups in Britain include the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which lobbies "unashamedly for Israel", according to recent Board president Jonathan Arkush, and boasts that it enjoys a "close working relationship" with the Embassy of Israel. Though it claims to represent Britain's Jewish community, many of the strictly orthodox Jewish communities, which make up a large and fast-growing percentage of British Jews, neither recognise the Board nor support Israel. The same goes for the tens of thousands of non-religious, progressive British Jews, many of whom are anti-Zionist. Meanwhile, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis – who also represents only a

fraction of Jewish people in Britain – strongly condemned the government's partial ban on exporting weapons to Israel, as did LFI.

Another recent pro-Israel offensive was launched by UK Lawyers for Israel – the group that ensured that an art display by Palestinian children was removed from a hospital. It mounted a legal challenge to the government's partial suspension of weapons exports to Israel, on the grounds that the ban cited Israeli denial of aid to Gaza and abuse of Palestinian prisoners, neither of which crimes require or make use of the exported arms components that David Lammy suspended.

The pro-Israel lobby has also targeted individuals. The British Israel Research and Communications Centre (BICOM) – described as "one of the most persistent and slickest media operations in the battle for influence over opinion formers" [5] – attempted to remove the rapper Lowkey's music from Spotify, through its advocacy arm We Believe in Israel, whose director is Luke Akehurst MP. We Believe in Israel aimed to prevent Lowkey from airing his "extreme anti-Israel" views against genocide in Palestine. The group also targeted Sally Rooney for complying with the BDS campaign in refusing to allow an Israeli publisher to translate her recent novel, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, into Hebrew. [6]

Undermining British sovereignty

Combined with state harassment of prominent pro-Palestine activists such as journalists Richard Medhurst and Sarah Wilkinson, the pro-Israel lobby in Britain is a powerful and dangerous anti-democratic force. In aggressively shrinking the space for progressive campaigning – by menacing British individuals and organisations – and in pressing members of the government and other politicians to promote the interests of a foreign power, the

pro-Israel lobby attacks not only freedom of speech, but also undermines British sovereignty.

It was to combat the use of "weaponised" information by foreign powers that the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme was introduced – clearly aimed at Russia and China rather than Israel. But UK politicians who allow themselves to be used by the pro-Israel lobby and act as mouthpieces for the Israeli narrative of events may fall foul of the Scheme, whose related National Security Bill introduces a new offence against "state-sponsored disinformation" from abroad. [7] Propaganda, vilification and censorship campaigns emanating from the Israeli embassy and broadcast through British politicians and organisations clearly invite closer scrutiny.

[1] <https://www.politico.com/.../progressives-aipac-elections...>

[2] <https://www.declassifieduk.org/israel-lobby-funded-half.../>

[3] <https://www.defenddemocracy.press/who-funds-labour.../>

[4] <https://www.opendemocracy.net/.../pro-israel-lobby-in.../>

[5] <https://www.theguardian.com/.../biscom-israel-lobby-poju...>

[6] <https://www.middleeasteye.net/.../lowkey-spotify-remove...>

[7] <https://www.gov.uk/.../journalistic-freedoms-national...>

A WINDOW INTO RUSSIA

by Gregor Tassie

Visiting Russia in October 2024, the first impressions after an absence of five years were positive - clean streets and everyone going about their affairs and no one would suspect a war was ongoing. The first evidence of the conflict were the soldiers at the railway station and the electronic surveillance machines at all metro and station entrances. Otherwise, on a weekend morning everyone was going shopping, strolling the wide avenues and parks of Moscow, visiting exhibitions or chatting in the parks. Chinese and Korean tourist groups were very noticeable compared to European or American tourists, who were nowhere to be seen.

MOSCOW LIFE

Of course, the welcoming warmth of public transport, whether on the metro on an electro-bus, or entering any shop, café or restaurant was a sharp contrast with the EU. In Moscow, traffic was moving day and night; the whole city was alive, and there was a vibrancy in the atmosphere unseen before. Absent was the poverty and the despair of Russia in the nineties, when one could see beggars and down-and-outs asking for a drink - now Moscow is an ultra-modern city with a high lifestyle. Just getting a place in a restaurant was difficult and, when we did get a place, the cuisine was excellent and inexpensive (the equivalent of £14 for a two-course meal plus drinks). The receptionist was a young man from Senegal (where he learned Russian), who was working part-time while studying at Moscow University.

AN INTER-CITY JOURNEY

Travelling by train from Moscow to central Russia (13 hours overnight) was a new experience after the modernisation of the railway system. We travelled on a new double-decked train with two- or four-bed compartments, and the coach had three pristine toilets and a shower.

An attendant introduced himself offering tea, coffee and snacks, and there was an option to pre-book either an evening meal or a breakfast - and free Wi-Fi. On the return journey, we met with orphaned children whose cheerful singing and running up and down the corridor kept us entertained. They were on a trip around the country organised by members of the People's Front - a patriotic charity volunteer organisation arranging humanitarian aid for victims of the war.

IN CENTRAL RUSSIA

Arriving in the Mari-El autonomous republic near Kazan, the same spotlessness of the streets was evident, as was the heating of Russian homes with constant hot water and free Wi-Fi. The biggest difference was the price of basic food items, through to alcohol and luxury items, which were half those in Moscow. The shops were well stocked and also selling fashionable Western goods; the best Scotch malt whiskies were available as well as Italian and French wines and cognacs. Most fruits and vegetables were from Central Asia and the Caucasus and were expensive.

The city has expanded significantly with new housing appearing where



PHOTO BY US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

nothing existed before and, importantly, children's play areas were nearby along with health centres, shops, cafes and restaurants. The city has a population of 300,000 and has recovered from the Wild West of the nineties when the three biggest factories closed, transforming it into a ghost town with young people leaving for the bigger cities of Kazan and further afield to Moscow. Now three further education colleges attract foreign students and factories have opened up. The unemployment level of 0.5% is below the national average of 2.5%. The previous mayor was jailed for corruption after he built a fashionable town area with Russian and Dutch-style architecture to attract tourists. In the last elections, the city elected a Communist to represent them in the State Duma, and, unquestionably, life has improved. Public transport has become more frequent with trolleybuses, electro-buses and small private minibuses normally charging about 40p for one journey. New private enterprises have opened up, and attractive restaurants where a meal in a Georgian restaurant for four plus drinks costs about £27 and was very popular among young people.

The city now has three Olympic-sized swimming, ice skating and athletics stadiums, plus a newly built arena for multiple sports events and concerts. There are seven state drama and opera/ballet theatres plus a newly built philharmonic hall. A visit to the grave of a relative was memorable in that portraits of the deceased and the achievements of the person are inscribed on the gravestone. I did notice there were some twenty

graves for soldiers who had lost their lives in the Ukrainian war and notable for displaying the Soviet red flags and Russian tricolours.

EFFECTS OF THE WAR

I met with a middle-aged soldier returning home and congratulated him on his safe return from the frontline; another meeting was with a young cadet who had completed his studies at an army academy and was joining his unit to serve as a professional officer. He was intelligent, very well-spoken and had no qualms about serving his country, his manner was exemplary and proficient, and he took great care in his vocabulary and dress. Talking to friends that we met, the overwhelming impression was one of stoic fortitude and support for their soldiers; everyone wants a peaceful outcome - but one which is acceptable. Generally, people were not discussing the war in public but posters of heroes were often to be seen on buildings and advertising billboards as well as recruiting posters on public transport. No graffiti was to be seen anywhere.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Of course, Russia is a market economy and many basic rights were abused in the final years of the Soviet Union with the abolition of entire industries and the sell-out to western capital of the country's resources. However, essential elements of the socialist state remain in force: the right to affordable housing, free health service and education, the right to work, equality for women and equal opportunities for different races and religions. It is unheard of for people to be sacked or to be evicted - there are laws protecting citizens in the most basic conditions.

Council homes are well-heated and inexpensive - to rent a private flat in Moscow is between £400 and £500 monthly, while to buy a flat can cost £30,000. Community charges are low, about £12 a year, and state

housing is the cheapest anywhere in Europe. While I was there, a Gazprom inspector and the local council visited the flat to check the water. We have had no visits or inspections of our flat back home since before the pandemic! The health service is excellent; a phone call to the local health centre led to an appointment the same day and a brief pain-free operation for a fee of about £11 (as I do not live there, I had to pay). I now have a health record online which can be accessed on a future visit. The health clinic was spotless and free of long queues. Sadly, I ran out of time to get some dentistry done.... next time.

OPENING THE ARCHIVES

TV and radio have lively discussion programmes with in-depth analysis of the war and world politics by specialists and Western journalists. One notable event in the media was the 60th anniversary of Khrushchev's overthrow in 1964. Several articles mentioned the crimes committed by him in the late fifties and early sixties by which time he had brought the country's economy close to collapse and harmed relations with China. Khrushchev released thousands of the terrorists who had fought Soviet power in Western Ukraine between 1946 and 1955. The state decree gave preference for these people to join the Communist Party or get influential jobs. In a strike over hugely increased food prices, Khrushchev ordered the shooting of workers in Novocherkassk. The housing programme was a disaster and for years homes were called 'Khrushchev slums'. This information was released from archives and the only exception to these views of Khrushchev was a favourable article in the 'Dissident' magazine which helpfully warned its readers that the writer is 'a foreign agent'. The Marxist historian Yevgeny Spitzyn argued that Khrushchev's 'thaw' laid the groundwork for Gorbachev's Perestroika and the breakup of the Soviet Union thirty years later.

BOOKS

It is always enlightening to discover what people are reading, and I was surprised to see an entire section devoted to Stalin's collected works (24 volumes) in Moscow's biggest bookshop. This section was about the same as that devoted to Marx, Lenin and Soviet politicians. There was a section on Soviet espionage and Soviet history, and also one devoted to writers covering the Crimea and Donbass, with the politician, writer and war veteran Zakhar Prilepin having all his books on display. This huge bookstore also has a café and a room for writers to launch their books.

A COMMON BOND

The most impressive and unexpected aspect of my visit was the social consciousness amongst the people that I met. The brief period of the war has brought people closer with a common bond that I can only remember in the former Soviet Union before Perestroika. New organisations like the Pioneers encourage patriotism and social values, uniting hundreds of thousands of children plus the millions in the Peoples' Front helping in charity work. Walking around some of the streets, one could see people simply taking pride in their city and how it has improved in recent years. After years of dismissing Soviet history, now the achievements of the USSR are publicised in the media, through the release of archives, documentaries and even feature films portraying the true history of the country between 1917 and 1991.

Of course, one of the reasons why the streets are so clean is because people do not throw away papers or cups, they look after each other. Sharing the belief that they are fighting a common enemy has united them in a social bond that will undoubtedly help Russia emerge victorious in the war with the collective West.

BRICS - Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security



PHOTO BY PRESS OFFICE OF AZERBAIJAN

by Jay Woods

The BRICS alliance of Emerging Markets and Developing Countries took a major step forward at its 16th summit held in the Russian city of Kazan on October 22-24. Following decisions taken at last year's summit in South Africa, a total of nine countries took part as full members for the first time, with Ethiopia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran joining Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. BRICS now represents nearly half of the global population. A total of 36 countries participated in the summit, along with the leaders of six international organisations, which included Antonio Guterres, United Nations General Secretary.

While in Russia, Guterres met with Vladimir Putin and, despite his strong condemnation of Russia's action in Ukraine, Guterres was attacked by Ukraine and its western backers for going to the

summit at all. In the face of this the fact that Guterres did attend underlines the continuing shift in world affairs with the growing importance of BRICS, the imperialist powers increasingly isolated, and the Global South pulling together and asserting itself.

United Nations

Furthermore, the United Nations and its bodies have become a renewed arena for struggle with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice both finding that Israel has a case to answer for violating international law and committing genocide. It is a powerful signal that the ICC has issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant. This sits alongside the many UN resolutions declaring Israel to be in breach of international law.

This was taken further forward by a wide-ranging resolution

passed by the UN General Assembly in September, when the UK abstained. [1] Among other things the resolution demanded that Israel "bring to an end its unlawful presence" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Measures it demanded from the international community included: that the Secretary General bring forward proposals to pursue Israel's violations of the UN Convention on the elimination of racism and apartheid; a call on member states to cease imports from the occupied territories, to stop arms exports where they might be used in the occupied territories, and to initiate sanctions against individuals and bodies maintaining the occupation of Palestinian land.

BRICS Pay

Countries of the Global South have increasingly been subject to the coercive use of sanctions by the West, particularly the United States. In the declaration from the

Kazan summit the BRICS nations stated: “We are deeply concerned about the disruptive effect of unlawful unilateral coercive measures, including illegal sanctions, on the world economy, international trade, and the achievement of the sustainable development goals. Such measures undermine the UN Charter, the multilateral trading system, the sustainable development and environmental agreements. They also negatively impact economic growth, energy, health and food security, exacerbating poverty and environmental challenges.” [2]

With a view to challenging this and underlining the shift from a US-dominated world order, BRICS announced the introduction of a new inter-bank payment and information exchange system – BRICS Pay – as an alternative to the Western SWIFT system. This is a practical step towards meeting the objectives of BRICS to support economic collaboration and trade between members and to make countries less vulnerable to Western coercion. Or as Norman Lamont, former UK Chancellor, said recently in the House of Lords, “If [BRICS pay] ever happened, it would be a major threat to the West-led financial system, but above all it would make it impossible for the West to impose sanctions on countries like Russia, China or Iran or other malign countries.”

New partners and stronger cooperation

In a further development at the summit, a new category of “partner countries” was formally initiated which is seen as a stepping stone to full membership for the several dozen countries that have expressed an interest in joining. An initial tranche of 13 countries was invited to be partners in Kazan. Partners will have observer status and get support from BRICS. The new partners in BRICS are: Algeria,

Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

On October 23rd, the nine full BRICS members adopted the Kazan Declaration, *Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security*. Running to a little over 13,300 words, and with 134 clauses, the declaration covers a vast number of subjects and itself reflects and reinforces the growing – although not without challenges – cohesiveness of key players in the Global South.

A total of 36 countries participated in the summit, along with the leaders of six international organisations, which included Antonio Guterres, United Nations General Secretary.

It states: “As we build upon 16 years of BRICS Summits, we further commit ourselves to strengthening cooperation in the expanded BRICS under the three pillars of political and security, economic and financial, cultural and people-to-people cooperation and to enhancing our strategic partnership for the benefit of our people through the promotion of peace, a more representative, fairer international order, a reinvigorated and reformed multilateral system, sustainable development and inclusive growth.” It further notes the emergence of new centres of power, policy decision-making and economic growth, which can pave the way for a more equitable, just, democratic and balanced multipolar world order.

The declaration reaffirms support for a comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including its Security Council, with a view to making it more democratic, representative, effective and efficient. It also advocates for an increased representation of developing countries in the Council’s membership so that it can adequately respond to prevailing global challenges. Such a move would also support the legitimate aspirations of emerging and developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America, including BRICS countries, to play a greater role in international affairs, in particular in the United Nations and its Security Council.

There were also significant bi-lateral meetings at the summit, improving relationships between members including where there have been tensions. These meetings were: China-Russia, India-China, India-Iran and Russia-South Africa.

The BRICS nations constitute a very varied group, each has its own history and interests. They certainly are not in accord about everything, and there are tensions and negatives as well as the positives, but the Kazan summit demonstrated a will among the members to work better together in the financial, economic and diplomatic spheres to advance the interests of each and all in the face of increasing US and Western bullying.

[1] UN General Assembly demands Israel end ‘unlawful presence’ in Occupied Palestinian Territory | UN News

[2] Microsoft Word - Kazan Declaration_FINAL[1].docx

COPS and Robbers in the Climate Crisis

Speakers at COP29



United Nations
Climate Change



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan



PHOTO BY VICE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE OF BRAZIL

by Brian Durrans

“[...] international cooperation is the only way humanity survives global heating”. Opening address by Simon Stiell (UN Climate Change Executive Secretary) to world leaders at COP29, Baku, Azerbaijan, 12 November 2024. [1]

Much has been, and continues to be, argued about the climate crisis/emergency, not least by socialists and other increasingly concerned citizens. This article attempts an initial overview from a socialist perspective, linking climate crisis and the challenge of controlling it to some other class-related problems in our tumultuous world. Worrying about the climate crisis prompts too few to action and too many to disengagement, but whilst the evidence and comparisons considered below acknowledge real concern, they also allow cautious optimism.

Climate targets

The landmark treaty known as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change was ratified in 2015 by 196 parties of the United Nations (195 member-states and the EU) and passed into international law a year later. Its signatories are bound by the treaty’s obligations, initially designed to limit the rise of the global average temperature to within 2°C above pre-industrial levels during the 21st century. Since then, it has become clear that missing an even lower target of 1.5°C increase, risks more severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall than earlier supposed, with potentially devastating consequences for millions of lives and livelihoods, especially among those already struggling to survive. Some of these consequences could be irreversible, impacting on and jeopardising not only our successors but even life itself.

To confine global warming within a 1.5°C increase (averaged over the final decade or longer), global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will need to peak before the end of next year and reduce by at least 43% by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. Net zero is an ambiguous term referring to offsetting any further greenhouse gas emissions by measures generically described as carbon capture, use and storage (CCUS). Although such measures seem to have little to offer in the short term, they are sometimes included in the prospective toolkit after 2030; and in any case focusing on carbon dioxide emissions - the main form of the carbon - leaves other gases such as methane out of the frame. There is, however, a big difference between capturing carbon as CO₂ already in the atmosphere, in existing, protected or extended “sinks”, such as oceans and wetlands or forests, and using or storing it through a technological fix instead of releasing it into

the air. This is especially so when the technology has yet to be fully developed at least at the required scale, and with an appropriately low supply chain carbon footprint and cost to users. In the meantime, CCUS is under suspicion as a potential alibi for the primary polluting fossil fuel industry to undermine the Paris Agreement.

Snapshot of climate options

Climate Action Tracker drew up the accompanying chart shortly before COP29 (11-22 November 2024) to project likely increases in future global warming according to actions or pledges taken to control it. [2] It is a stark reminder that existing policies, even with improvements so far promised, will probably miss the recommended 1.5°C target by the end of this century.

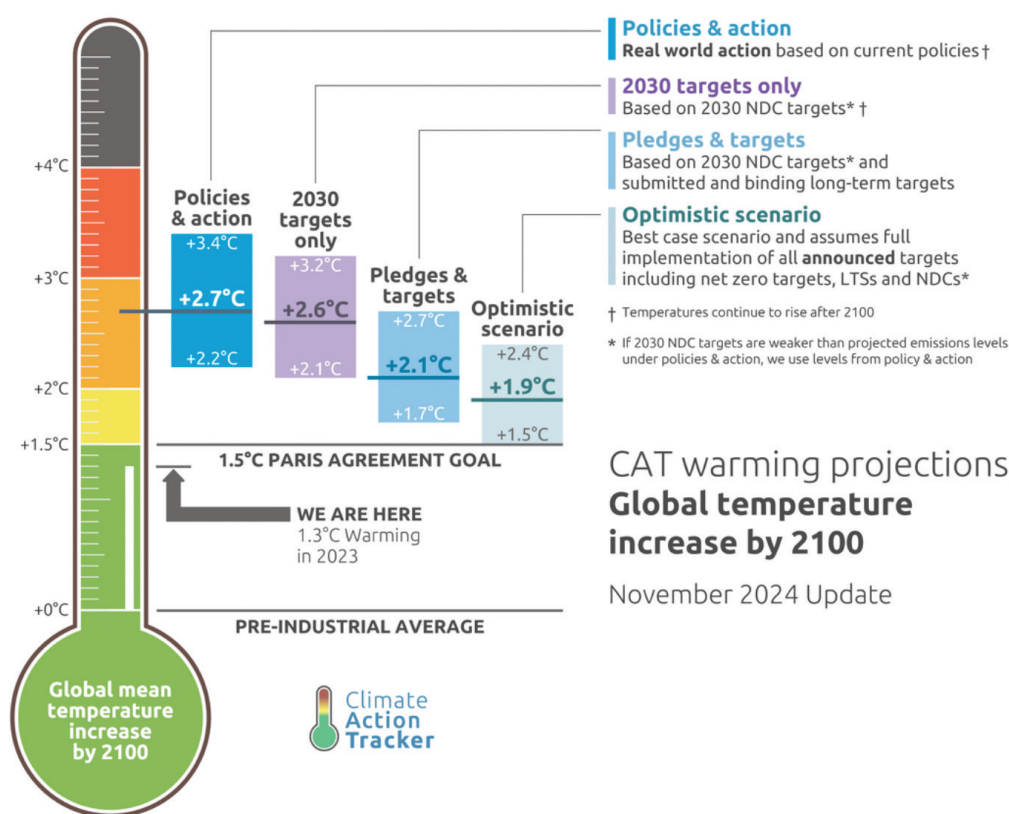
The chart, like other similar ones, is both a criticism of missed opportunities and an increasingly urgent reminder to do better. But it is also, and importantly, a powerful expression of organised understanding, with the potential to help overcome the problem it addresses.

Recognising why average temperature measurements matter so much is the outcome of an unprecedented scientific collaboration across the world. Based on the pioneering work of meteorologists and other specialists, including influential contributors in the Soviet Union, the global perspectives on climate and ecosystems (that is, life support systems) which have been developed since then have informed the Paris Agreement and every subsequent COP. The arresting scientific insight is that whilst global warming is ulti-

mately the most systemic threat to life on Earth, it is already pushing fragile sub-systems to their limits. If interlocking patterns of winds, rainfall, pollination, ocean currents and other phenomena continue to diverge sharply from those on which human, or any, life depends, then when any of them collapses, others will swiftly and automatically do the same.

Capitalism and the climate crisis

While investigating the ailing ecosystem to monitor the developing problem and find ways to control it, this same collaborative scientific enterprise found its cause was industrial capitalism [4] and the crisis it caused now puts capitalism in a dilemma. We might expect its continuing drive for profits – “business as usual” – to impede a solu-



CAT warming projections Global temperature increase by 2100

November 2024 Update

tion to global warming and ecosystem collapse, but no business can operate in conditions unable to support life. Capitalism will either adapt accordingly or be the death of us. On current evidence, humanity can't afford to wait for the collapse of capitalism before fixing the climate problem. Startling as it may seem, there is, however, a precedent for this sort of question.

How to defeat a global threat

Faced with Axis fascism in the late 1930s, nations of very different politico-economic systems united to defeat it. The unity that clinched victory in the Second World War and the huge benefits of winning it hold important lessons for the present fight to save the planet. That victory in 1945 came at an appalling price. Millions of lives could have been saved if an anti-fascist alliance had been formed earlier to defeat Franco in Spain, or eject the invading Japanese from China, or later, as requested of its Western allies in 1942 by the beleaguered USSR, to distract some Nazi forces from their race to Moscow by opening a second front.

Today's battle against climate change can draw two lessons from this experience.

First, whilst it may be better to act sooner rather than later, or even later rather than too late, mature statecraft will be necessary if less urgent or lower priority differences are to be shelved in favour of the unity capable of defeating a larger, shared or more imminent threat. Second, once a shared, existential threat has been neutralised through co-operation between different countries or socio-economic systems, the differences earlier set aside to help it happen, might, in the afterglow of that shared achievement, no longer seem so intractable as they did before. Take the United Nations, for example.

The UN came into being in the wake of the Second World War, and its present composition and functions have inevitably been shaped by a variably divided world's legacy of advances, defeats and compromises. For its current role of leading the world against the climate crisis to succeed, those nations most responsible for the historical rise of global warming will need to make the biggest contribution to reduce it, while those with least responsibility who are among the most vulnerable, deserve sufficient protective compensation, not only to save lives but also to uphold the principle that the UN is the body for all its members, whom it treats with equal respect. As this example suggests, a success for the UN against the climate crisis would be a success for all of humanity; but for that to happen, the UN will need to resist current attacks from the US and its allies and undergo progressive reform so it can fully represent the global interest. Serious discussion of such a development is already beginning, though not specifically focused on climate. (4)

Whether or not those changes happen soon, or the world somehow muddles through the crisis with the help of a UN not yet in the best shape, and whether we win the climate battle decisively or by the skin of our teeth, the climate emergency already puts the geopolitical order in the spotlight and any order that might emerge in a newly-sustainable world would certainly be an enhanced version of the UN itself.

In the wake of overcoming the climate crisis, such a body could do the same with war and poverty and even begin to facilitate a global transition to socialism, at least by denying capitalist elites the option of blowing everyone up in an attempt to hold onto power. Securing any future – let alone that promising scenario – will be up to what is done in the next few years.

Faced with Axis fascism in the late 1930s, nations of very different politico-economic systems united to defeat it. The unity that clinched victory in the Second World War and the huge benefits of winning it hold important lessons for the present fight to save the planet.

Western capital's responsibilities

The Climate Action Tracker chart expresses the present challenge in statistical terms. The final report of the meeting in Baku had to say something about the commitment of COP29 to quantify the contributions and compensations meant to help solve the climate crisis by bridging the huge gap between the rich, polluting West and the poor, barely polluting South. Eventually poorer nations were, as they saw it, railroaded into accepting a package of £300bn for this from wealthy nations up till 2035. This was an increase of \$50bn on what was previously on the table, but well short of the \$500bn which the G77 group of developing nations wanted and there was a great deal of anger expressed by representatives of those countries at the end of the summit. At least the G20 meeting that took place in Rio de Janeiro agreed that taxing extreme personal and corporate wealth could help what COP29 was simultaneously grappling with in Baku.

Another reminder of the complex and dirty politics of climate mitigation is that drastically reducing emissions from fossil fuels is both the single most effective way of reaching 1.5°C by 2100 and the most contested, above all by the oil industry, which is preponderantly though not all Western. This nets a couple of red herrings.

The US and some of its allies extract and sell their own fossil fuels (mainly oil and natural gas) on a huge scale, which adds considerably to global warming. This has supported their own industrial base since at least the 19th century. More recently developing countries, such as India and China, and to a lesser degree Russia, use or extract fossil fuels to develop their own industries and have therefore also contributed to GHG emissions, but have been doing so for a shorter time. Since their own economies

have invested heavily in renewable energy (China is by far the biggest producer, user and exporter of solar panels), their emissions have begun tailing off as required under the Paris Agreement and are set to meet its target goals.

China's unprecedented success in lifting more people out of absolute poverty than has ever been achieved anywhere now places it, at least for its Western critics, alongside South Africa as a "middle income" country. As they see it, this makes China liable to pay proportionately more towards helping low-polluting, highly climate change-vulnerable nations,

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almost all of them former colonies of Europe, which would also reduce the bill to which the far longer-polluting West would be liable.

Such arguments illustrate how UN bodies have always operated in terms of geopolitics (see note 4). The question of the appropriate levy on China diverts attention from both the reluctance of the historically primary polluters of the wealthier West to pay their due and, above all, from the status of compensation as a pivot of the Paris Agreement itself.

Pulling out the stops

This article has reviewed a few of the options and challenges facing the attempt to solve the climate crisis at the level of UN-co-ordinated actions and monitoring. As well as member-states, corporations and smaller businesses and their lobbyists, scientists, NGOs and global and local civil society actors have skin in the game and hugely variable control over outcomes.

It's time to pull out all the stops. The climate justice movement has the potential to influence and leverage opinion in the heartlands of the capitalist West, especially if it can highlight and mobilise inclusively around climate change as a vital issue for the working class. Geopolitics and capitalist interests currently obstruct progress but if they can be mitigated, so might the crisis itself.

[1] The recent COP29 was the 29th Congress of Parties, the UN's system of updating and monitoring progress towards globally-agreed climate control measures: <https://unfccc.int/news/worsening-climate-impacts-will-put-inflation-on-steroids-unless-every-country-can-take-bolder>

[2] https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/1277/CAT_2024-11-14_GlobalUpdate_COP29.pdf. CAT helpfully summarises the significance of the information displayed in this chart (glossary: NDC=national declared climate [target]; LTS=Long-Term [low GHG emissions development] Strategy).

[3] https://monthlyreview.org/2022/11/01/anthropocene-capitalocene-and-other-cenes-why-a-correct-understanding-of-marxs-theory-of-value-is-necessary-to-leave-the-planetary-crisis/?mc_cid=a54dc7f8d4&mc_eid=6ae113ca2f.

[4] <https://richardfalk.org/2024/11/08/how-can-the-un-be-liberated-from-geopolitics>