



weekly
worker



Joe Biden's Ukraine green light to use Atacms takes the world one step nearer to the nuclear abyss

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WAR CRIMINALS



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Party press

Mike Macnair's contribution to Prometheus's 'What is the party?' series was characteristically useful and thoughtful ('What sort of party?' November 21). However, I wanted to respond to his comments about the party press and online publications. There are important problems here, but Macnair does not get to the heart of the matter, and I worry that this reflects a more significant weakness in his outline of the party - specifically a neglect of the party's organising functions and of its relationship to mass struggle.

Macnair's claim that an online publication cannot be agenda-setting seems self-refuting - his own article was written as a response to a call-out by an online publication! And there are plenty of other examples - during the Corbyn years, online publications such as Novara Media or Skwawkbox at times had significant impact in setting the agenda for the left. Meanwhile, online rightwing publications, such as *Guido Fawkes*, have often had enormous effects on setting the agenda for mainstream media.

Macnair says the issue is that, unlike print media, online media "is not fully regular", but this isn't strictly true. The practicalities of print production obviously force you into a rhythm of periodic releases of larger bundles of content, and that can certainly help with agenda-setting, but it doesn't have to be regular. *Salvage* and *Notes From Below* are both print publications that are not "fully regular", operating with a more or less flexible schedule, depending on capacity, priorities, etc. Conversely, there is nothing to stop the editors of a purely online publication from operating a newspaper-style schedule if they thought that was appropriate (albeit there may be countervailing incentives, encouraging them to run a different schedule).

Probably it's true that print media is generally better at or more naturally suited to agenda-setting, so perhaps this is a pedantic quibble, but I think there is some importance to the nuance.

However, there are much more significant problems in trying to use purely online publications to do the job of a party press, which Macnair doesn't touch on in this article. Famously, in *What is to be done?* Lenin talks about the newspaper as a "collective organiser" and as "the scaffolding" used to build the party. This is the root of the infamous Trotskyist obsession with selling newspapers - something which is often treated as the butt of a joke, yet reflects one of the most profoundly consequential political insights of the 20th century.

The functions fulfilled by a national newspaper - and the work and forms of organisation involved in setting up and running it - synergise profoundly with the work of building a national party. You need significant collective organisation even to be able to afford the printing press, and you need to build up national networks, in local communities and connected across the country, to distribute the paper. Running the paper trains party members in basic organisational skills, while writing, reading and discussing the content of the paper helps to train them politically and intellectually. And the newspaper itself helps to communicate essential information,

both practical and intellectual - not just to the masses, but also between party members. By building the newspaper, you build the party and, by building the party, you build the newspaper. And on top of all that, the whole operation is self-funding, because you can sell the newspaper for money!

Online publications, on the other hand, do not synergise with the work of building political organisations in anything like the same way that a national newspaper could. This is actually in part because online publications are too cheap, too convenient, too effective. One person on their laptop can act as their own personal party press, dictating their own personal party line, sometimes to an extremely large audience, and they can do this without even needing to get out of bed - let alone having to build a national organisation.

Even in cases where online media is used effectively to mobilise people into action, it often helps lead the organisers away from building real organisations. Why bother doing the work of building a more deeply rooted organisation with local branches and internal democracy if you're able to mobilise hundreds or thousands of people with an Instagram page and some WhatsApp groups? Momentum's degeneration into a glorified email list, rather than the kind of 'party within a party' which many of us had hoped for, is perhaps the most infamous example in Britain, but there are countless similar cases - it can affect everything from major national organisations to small community groups. Paolo Gerbaudo's book on *The digital party* is worth reading here.

Perhaps the solution is simply to return to the newspaper, but there are obvious difficulties there. Certainly it will be much less effective than it was in the 20th century. Nowadays people are much more reluctant to spend money on a newspaper - why should they, when they have virtually free access to almost unlimited content online? Perhaps you then give away your newspaper for free instead, but then the model becomes a drain on funding, rather than a generator of it - self-funding was one of its key advantages.

Or perhaps it's still possible to find configurations of digital media, or combinations of digital and print media, which are capable of effectively taking the place of the 20th century party newspaper, but it's not something that's easy to work out. The almost infinite variation of different possible models and combinations of different digital communications infrastructures makes it dizzyingly difficult to work out the optimal solution here. Certainly it's not clear that anyone has yet found a good solution. The problem of what can replace the newspaper as 'collective organiser' remains perhaps the million dollar question for revolutionary socialists in the 21st century.

To take us back to our starting point, I fear that Macnair's neglect of the role of the party press as a 'collective organiser' for the party reflects a neglect of the role of the party as an organiser for militants. He makes dismissive reference to "the common far-left idea of the party as coordinating 'struggles'", and his outline of the party seems to have little space for any direct involvement in or connection to mass struggle. Readers may be forgiven for thinking, on the basis of Macnair's article, that the party does nothing except engage in parliamentary politics and publish propaganda around a programme of policies it would enact in government.

I wonder if this stems from a more fundamental oversight in how Macnair defines the point of a party. This borders on a truism, but the most fundamental purpose of any political party is to achieve its political objectives (ie, for a Communist Party, communism!). It therefore must do whatever needs to be done in order to make it possible to achieve those objectives, and it must be capable of working out what needs to be done. Everything else flows from this.

While Macnair is correct to emphasise the importance of the political tasks he lists in the article, this is not an exhaustive list of the party's important functions. Coordination across different struggles is certainly something that's necessary for any successful revolution, and inevitably is something which the party would have a role in - since there are no other organisations capable of or interested in coordinating revolutionary struggle across all different fronts. Even just in terms of propaganda, the Comintern defined "participation in struggles by the trade union and political workers' movement" as one of the three main forms of communist propaganda and agitation, and therefore as one of the most important tasks of a Communist Party and of its militants.

Perhaps this is merely a question of emphasis and of language, and that Macnair is just 'bending the stick' to counterbalance prevailing narratives, which neglect these more specifically political functions. But the relationship of the party to mass struggles outside of parliament is still essential - not just as a theoretical consideration for future party-building efforts, but also for our role now as propagandists, making the argument for the necessity of the party and the importance of political struggle.

While Macnair is correct that large sections of the left in Britain fetishise social struggles divorced from political struggle, these people are not going to be won over except by demonstrating the connection of the party and the political struggle to those social struggles, and by demonstrating the necessity of the party for fulfilling their potential.

Archie Woodrow
RS21

Secular Israel

Andy Hannah has a point in focusing on a contradiction in CPGB policy on Israel-Palestine (Letters November 7). He asks some important questions about socialist borders, Zionist settlements in the West Bank and what happens to the Palestinians.

Israel-Palestine is two nations in the territory from the river to the sea. Jack Conrad seems to agree (Letters November 14), but fails to mention the Israeli nation and differentiate from socialists who want to liquidate or destroy it. Jack should have mentioned again that he is not a liquidator of any nation. The issue at the heart of this is whether the two nations can find a peaceful coexistence with democracy and freedom. The best and most democratic answer is for two nations to coexist in a voluntary federal, secular republic.

Against this Jack proposes a maximum programme of socialism in the form of a pan-Arab socialist republic. He refuses or fails to address the question of the democratic republican minimum programme or does so only partially. He says: "In terms of immediate demands we would certainly say that Israel should cease seeding the West Bank with colonists and withdraw from all occupied territories: ie, Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights."

If we add to this the end of the Zionist republic, the recognition of two nations (an Israeli, *not* Jewish, nation) and a rejection of the imperialist 'two-state solution', we have arrived at a democratic, secular, federal republic. Yet the failure or reluctance to fully embrace the democratic imperative leaves open the questions raised by Andy.

We should add the failure to recognise or defend the rights of Arab Israelis, who are discriminated against and oppressed by the Zionists and normally forgotten by everybody. If we accept the existence of an Israeli nation, then Arab Israelis must never be forgotten or ignored, and must be fully equal Israelis in a 'non-racist, non-Zionist', democratic Israel.

Jack asks Andy, "Does he agree that the slogans, 'Down with the war' and 'the main enemy is at home', are the right ones to use?" The answer is surely yes, but it needs qualification. 'Down with the war' between the Zionist state and the Palestinian people - certainly, but a real democratic peace between the Israeli and Palestinian nations, rather than simply a ceasefire, requires the replacement of the Zionist state by a democratic, secular Israel in a free association with the Palestinian nation.

This does not set the minimum democratic programme against a socialist maximum. The first leads towards the second or is transitional to it, rather than setting up an artificial left-communist position, with the maximum programme fighting against the minimum. In England, of course, the main enemy is the United Kingdom and what does the minimum republican programme have to say about that?

Steve Freeman
email

Further right

Following three regional elections in September, the German 'Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht' (BSW) party has now agreed to participate in two regional governments, as a minority. In Thuringia, the BSW will govern with the social democratic SPD and the conservative CDU - the first ever so-called *Brombeer Koalition* (blackberry coalition). In Brandenburg, the BSW and the SPD have enough votes to go it alone.

In both federal states, Wagenknecht was clearly eager to show how 'responsible' she is, ahead of the early national general elections in February 2025, caused by the collapse of the German coalition government. The populist BSW has moved further to the right in record speed and Wagenknecht's so-called 'red lines' have gone up in smoke. A mere month ago, she insisted that BSW government participation was dependent on coalition agreements that seek to use the states' votes in the Bundesrat (the second German chamber) to oppose sanctions against Russia, the stationing of US medium-range weapons and arms exports. But the text agreed in Thuringia, for example, merely states: "We view the stationing [of US weapons] and use without German input critically." And presumably we will do nothing to campaign against it.

Sanctions against Russia - a key reason driving up already high German energy prices - are not opposed in either contract. Instead, the BSW has agreed rules to help small businesses that are hit the hardest. Wagenknecht also dropped the BSW's insistence that Covid sceptics (many of whom voted for the BSW) should no longer be on the official watchlist of the German spy agency.

In both states, there will be no blockade on the establishment of new arms companies. Previous demands by the BSW were removed from the agreements. In fact, the planned expansion of the Holzdorf air base in Brandenburg and the stationing of anti-aircraft missiles there remain entirely unaffected by the coalition agreement.

However, some of Wagenknecht's promises *did* make it into the coalition agreement: Brandenburg will campaign at federal level for tax exemption for pensions under €2,000. And, the crowning glory: the future coalition also promises to campaign for the "containment, prevention and rejection of irregular migration". This includes more border controls, accelerated asylum procedures and the strict implementation of the 'Dublin 3 Agreement' (which prohibits asylum-seekers from applying in more than one country of the European Union).

This almost makes you wish that the dire Die Linke party, from which Wagenknecht split earlier this year, was not going down the pan. But years of chasing government participation at all costs and keeping their mouths shut, when it comes to the Ukraine war, means that Die Linke will be very, very lucky to even get back into parliament on February 23. Many of the smaller opposition parties will not be able to run, because, with the early election call, they are unable to gather the required 2,000 signatories in each of the 16 federal states.

A truly dire choice for socialists in Germany.

Carla Roberts
email

Kevin tribute

Further to the recent tributes to Kevin Bean, can I add one more? This is the role Kevin played as a dedicated Marxist educator and organiser.

Kevin was an early member of the Merseyside and West Lancashire Socialist Theory Study Group. Initially this was based in the basement of Liverpool's radical bookshop, News from Nowhere, but the group later moved to a room in Jack Jones House - the local Unite building. It went online under the impact of Covid in 2020.

Kevin attended meetings regularly. He quickly became a prominent leader, volunteering to introduce a series of study sessions about Marx's writings on the 1848 revolution. Under his guidance, the group addressed the concept of permanent revolution and its relationship to actual political and social revolutions. We learned a lot from Kevin and the texts he selected for us to study.

In 2016, Kevin organised a meeting on Brexit, at which Jack Conrad and Sandy McBurney spoke, and in 2017 he was pivotal to the success of a day of talks and discussion to celebrate the centenary of the October Revolution in Russia. Hillel Ticktin spoke about its relevance to today's world and Raquel Varela on the Portuguese revolution of 1974. These events took place in Liverpool's Central Library. They were well attended, informative and lively.

Kevin's legacy as a Marxist educator and organiser live on in recordings of the talks he gave for the Why Marx? initiative. His delight in sharing his knowledge of the history of struggle for working class emancipation and his thoughtful contribution to establishing the classless, stateless, moneyless society of the future will not be forgotten.

Paul B Smith
email

TURKEY

Hypocrisy in action

Erdoğan speaks fire and fury. Meanwhile, despite the sanctions, it is business as usual. **Esen Uslu** looks at the relationship between Turkey and Israel

The ongoing war in Palestine is a shining example of the hypocrisy of the Islamist politics currently ruling Turkey. As with other Sunni Islamist regimes in the region, Turkey's government did not lift a finger to oppose Israel. As the massacres reached a staggering level, the rhetoric of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reached ever higher levels of fire and fury, but still the government did nothing.

Immediately after October 7 2023, the government kindly asked Hamas representatives, who had been in Turkey for years, to quietly leave. However once the international hue and cry about Hamas 'terrorism' had died down, Turkey backstepped. Despite that, rhetoric and action remain in flat contradiction. Some from the government likened Hamas to the Turkish National Forces during the initial stages of the 1920 war with Greece.

The National Forces were a mixture of local militia and regular soldiers from the demobilised Ottoman army, and started the organisational work, as well as the armed struggle against Greek occupation. Following their victory, the National Forces were held in high esteem in the Turkish nationalist mindset. They were also used as an example all round the Middle East to denote national liberation movements. So, establishing a similarity between the National Forces and Hamas ran in direct opposition to the 'terrorist' charges.

However, Turkey did nothing in the international arena to stand up against such accusations. And now, at the bottom of the page of many international documents presenting Hamas (or Palestinians in general) as terrorist, Turkey has added its signature. True, Turkey has imposed limited export restrictions to Israel on certain items, as Israel was blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza in April 2024. The level of sanctions increased with a blanket ban on all exports in May. It had exported \$5.4 billion worth of goods to Israel a year ago, including steel, chemicals, automotive products, cement, and textiles.

Immediately after the sanctions on exports, firms started looking to fulfil their contracts with Israel by exporting through third party countries. Suddenly Turkey's exports to Palestine increased a hundredfold - the same steel and cement, etc is now exported to Palestine through Israeli ports. Also Greece and other countries in the region, such as Slovenia, have played their part in supporting Israel by sanctions busting.

Turkey did not impose a blanket ban on third party ships loading and carrying cargo to the regional ports. Many carrying armaments and ammunition to Israel go via Turkish ports, where they load and unload some cargo. For example, 124 vessels from Israel's ZIM Integrated Shipping Services were expected to use Turkish ports in the three-month period starting from October this year.

There has recently been a government-controlled pro-Palestine demonstration in the centre of Istanbul. However, when students, including Islamists, organised independent demonstrations in city centres, they faced the fury of government forces. They moved their demonstrations to the ports, where many participants were beaten and some arrested.



Carlos Latuff caricatures Erdoğan's Israel and Palestine policy

In the services sector, Israeli companies play a major role in the cyber-security field in Turkey. Some ministries, and even the top army command, are still working with Israeli companies. Even the Turkish Radio and Television Institution has made new contracts with Israeli companies for their digital and mobile services.

The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (Socar) provides the crude oil to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, which is run by an international consortium dominated by BP, and brings crude oil from the Caspian Sea shore to the north-eastern Mediterranean coast. Then tankers carry the crude oil as well as distilled products - including jet fuel, supplying the Israeli airforce - to the Israeli ports, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Haifa.

Despite export sanctions this trade has continued unabated. Facing an increasing domestic opposition to sending fuel to the genocidal military machine of Israel, Erdoğan's government claimed that none of the above are *Turkish* exports, since they are part of an international transit contract, and Turkey as the operator of the pipeline only earns \$1.27 per barrel handled, and has no say on who would be the purchaser. Such a shameless line is still maintained by the state-controlled media, and is a glaring example of the continuing decay of the regime led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Actually, Turkey could abide by the International Court of Justice's interim decisions (while the case brought by South Africa is adjudicated) that Israel must undertake to prevent further harm to civilians by stopping the flow of fuel to the Zionist regime. The ICJ measures are legally binding, and Israel has thus far ignored the court's demands, so Turkey could seek to avoid complicity in a crime against humanity by implementing the ICJ decision.

We must also remember that Israel was the major supplier of arms and ammunition to the Azerbaijan army during the offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia. Turkey also supported the Azerbaijani cause, and the policy lines of Israel and Turkey tacitly ran in parallel, though there was no open agreement. Israel also appeared to support Azerbaijani claims for a land corridor between the Nakhchivan exclave and Azerbaijan proper along the Armenia-Iran border as part of its plan to contain Iran from the north. This policy is also in line with Turkey's anti-Iran policy.

Israel and Turkey have deployed increasingly fiery language against

each other, and some small, but prickly, incidents have characterised their relationship. Some Israeli ministers and parts of the media started to talk about the rightful resistance of Kurds against Turkey's invasion and occupation of northern Syria and northern Iraq. Erdoğan responded sharply with a speech about "strengthening the internal front", mentioning that there was a possibility of open hostility from Israel to Turkey's security and territorial integrity. He claimed that the concept of a 'Promised Land' of Israel includes what should be Turkish territory.

Israel's foreign minister responded by claiming that Erdoğan was more and more resembling the former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. The Turkish minister of war made a speech saying that Turkey was ready for every possibility, including open hostility, although we should not expect things to go that far soon. Then the foreign minister jumped in to say that a war between Israel and Iran is highly likely, and it may spill over into Turkey, so we must be ready for any such eventuality.

Even though such speeches are for domestic consumption, for the first time Israel was described as a potential enemy. However, such hyperbole may also fan the anti-Semitic tendencies dormant in Turkish society, including Islamist as well as nationalist-secular diehards.

If a Gaza ceasefire is agreed, would Turkey and Israel relations return to *status-quo antebellum*? Both countries' expansionist policies are bound to create more trouble. The disputed maritime jurisdiction and exclusive economic zones are matters kept under the lid nowadays, but after a possible ceasefire they may come to the fore once again. Greece, Israel and Egypt tended to stand together against Turkey on these issues before the war, but now Egypt seems quietly to have toned down its big talk, while nowadays Greece is very much aligned with US policies, appearing as a regional champion of Israel. That may also have an effect on Greece-Turkey relations.

So even a ceasefire in Gaza would not do any real good, when it comes to regional politics. Turkey would like to continue its lucrative trade with Israel, while maintaining a rhetorical stance against the Zionist state. Israel would very much like the flow of oil from Turkey to continue, while snapping at Erdoğan's heels.

Expect 'business as usual' to continue for a while - unless, of course, unforeseen circumstances bring about yet another round of alarming changes ●

ACTION

Protest L3 Harris, complicit in Gaza genocide

Friday November 29, 5.30pm: Protest outside L3 Harris, 390 The Strand, London WC2. L3 Harris makes and sells military equipment used to bomb Gaza. End the genocide - stop arming Israel. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/protest-l3-harris-gaza.

Socialist ideas to change the world

Saturday November 30 to Sunday December 1: Marxism weekend for students and young workers, venue in Peckham, London SE15. Build a fighting left to take on racism, imperialism and the system. Weekend ticket £22.38 (£16.96). Day ticket £11.55. Organised by Socialist Workers Party: x.com/MarxismFestival/status/1839626188588789805.

End Israel's genocide in Gaza

Saturday November 30, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1, march to Whitehall. End Gaza genocide, hands off Lebanon, don't attack Iran, stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Banks: divest from companies arming Israel!

Tuesday December 3, 7.20am: Protest outside the global banking summit, Convene Sancroft, Paternoster Square, London EC4. Barclays bankrolls Israel's genocide, and its CEO is speaking at this event. Tell all the banks to stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/protest-at-the-global-banking-summit.

Bring back our winter fuel payment

Tuesday December 3, 12 noon: Rally, Scottish Parliament Building, Cannongate, Edinburgh EH8. Pensioners need more than warm words - demand the Scottish government reinstates the winter fuel payment. Organised by Unite the Union: www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/defend-the-winter-fuel-payment.

What made us human?

Tuesday December 3, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Tavistock Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Modern metaphors from political resistance movements applied to human evolution'. Speakers: Jerome Lewis and Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/872860297660829.

No work for genocide: striking for Palestine

Wednesday December 4, 4pm: Online seminar. International law won't stop Israel's genocide in Gaza, and its more recent escalation into Lebanon and the wider Middle East. Speakers include workers and organisers from Palestine, the United States, Italy, and Australia. They will discuss strategies for worker resistance. Registration free. Organised by University and College Workers for Palestine: x.com/seminarmarx/status/1859567728652120130.

The Soviet women's movement - was it feminist?

Thursday December 5, 7pm: Online discussion introduced by Anne McShane. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/whymarxism.

Apollo 13 and the future of space exploration

Thursday December 5, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: oxfordccs@aol.com.

Stop arming Israel, end the war on Gaza

Friday December 6, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Methodist Central Hall, Warwick Lane, Coventry CV1. Speakers include Zara Sultana MP. Organised by Coventry and Warwickshire Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Red threads - a history of the people's flag

Friday December 6, 6.30pm: Book event, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Henry Bell introduces his book that follows the workers' flag in struggles across the globe. Registration free. Organised by Bookmarks the socialist bookshop: www.facebook.com/events/8719432728169781.

Strikers! the Vale Rawlings story

Friday December 6, 7.30pm: Drama, Burton Town Hall, King Edward Place, Burton upon Trent DE14. The story of Vale Rawlings, who was jailed in June 1914 for allegedly assaulting a police inspector on a picket line. Tickets £11 (£7). Presented by Vale Rawlings - a forgotten Burton story: www.facebook.com/events/1032746131601034.

Labour's employment rights bill

Thursday December 12, 6pm: Online webinar to examine what's good in the bill and how to campaign on its shortcomings. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS) and John Hendy KC. Registration free. Organised by Campaign for Trade Union Freedom: www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk.

Fenians and the 1867 Clerkenwell explosion

Thursday December 12, 6.30pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Local historian Mark Aston provides an introduction to the Irish Republican Fenian movement in 19th century Clerkenwell. Free entrance. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/482.

CPGB wills

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WAR CRIMINALS

Grand imperial claims

America does not consider itself bound by the 'law governed world order'. Mike Macnair gives the background to the denunciations of the International Criminal Court's warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant

On November 21, the International Criminal Court in the Hague issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister of Israel, and Yoav Gallant, until recently defence minister.¹ At the same time and in the same investigation, it also issued a warrant for the arrest of Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri, known as 'Deif' - a Hamas military commander who is possibly dead, but who, the court opined, may be alive.²

It should be flagged at the outset that this is entirely separate from the litigation by South Africa and other countries against Israel at the International Court of Justice (also at the Hague).³ The ICJ is a part of the United Nations, descending from an older League of Nations institution. It is concerned with disputes *between states*. The ICC is concerned with criminal prosecution of *individuals* for crimes under 'international criminal law'. It was set up in 1998 under the 'Rome statute' - which not only established the courts, but also lists the crimes over which it has jurisdiction: in broad terms, genocide, 'crimes against humanity', war crimes and (by a 2010 amendment) 'aggression'.⁴

The charges against 'Deif' are "the crimes against humanity of murder; extermination; torture; and rape and other form of sexual violence; as well as the war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, torture; taking hostages; outrages upon personal dignity; and rape and other form of sexual violence". All in relation to the October 7 'Al-Aqsa flood' prison breakout from the Gaza concentration camp or besieged territory.

The charges against Netanyahu and Gallant are "the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare; and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution and other inhumane acts". The ICC noted: "The Chamber also found reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Netanyahu and Mr Gallant each bear criminal responsibility as civilian superiors for the war crime of intentionally directing an attack against the civilian population."

The Israeli state objected to the warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant on two grounds. The first is that the court has no jurisdiction. Israel has not signed up to the Rome statute (nor has the United States). The court asserts jurisdiction on the basis that the acts in question took place on the territory of the state of Palestine, which *has* signed up to the Rome statute. The Israeli state responds by denying that Palestine is a state, to which the court replies that this claim is premature: under the terms of the Rome statute, they say, the right of states to object to the court's jurisdiction only arises *after* an arrest warrant has been issued.⁵ The second objection is the purely procedural point that the notification of an investigation in the ICC of the situation in the occupied territories, given to Israel on March 9 2021, was insufficiently specific, and that a new notification was required. The court rejects this argument as merely dilatory.⁶

Like the ICJ decision in January, this one has very limited practical significance. In the first place, the decisions are merely that there are "reasonable grounds to believe"



Accused of war crimes at last

that the individuals against whom warrants have been issued have committed the crimes in question. This is a low standard (think about English law arrests, which use this standard ...). Secondly, the court is careful to display 'even-handedness' by also issuing a warrant against a Hamas military commander, who may be dead. Thirdly, the court's rejection of Israel's claim that it has no jurisdiction, because Palestine is not a state, is merely procedural - that this objection is *premature*. That is, it is still open to Israel to raise it.

And fourthly and most fundamentally, as I already said, Israel is not signed up to the Rome statute, and neither is the USA. A number of Rome statute signatory states have said that they will arrest Netanyahu or Gallant if they enter their territory, including - after some delay - the UK. But this is at most an inconvenience. (The Hungarian Fidesz regime, in contrast, has said it will *not* implement the arrest warrant and will invite Netanyahu to visit.)

Symbolic

The decision is nonetheless of *symbolic* importance - as the ICJ decision in February was. The symbolism is different, though. The ICJ's was a sharp blow against the claims of the Israeli state, the USA and its supporters (the UK included), and for the Palestine solidarity movement. The war has now dragged on for nine more months; it has spread to Lebanon; and the ethnic-cleansing policy of the Israeli state has become more and more transparent. Under these conditions, for the ICC to have *denied* a warrant would have amounted to an overt assertion of US and Israeli impunity in relation to 'international criminal law'.

The symbolic importance, then, does not come from the decision itself, which merely tells us what we already knew: that the conduct

of the Israeli state is criminal. It comes, rather, from the *reaction* of the US and of US-supporting media outlets. Joe Biden said that the decision was "outrageous" and that "whatever the ICC might imply, there is no equivalence - none - between Israel and Hamas. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security."⁷ Republican senators demanded the US impose sanctions on ICC officials, and one even suggested that the US uses force against the ICC (an existing US 2002 act authorises such use of force in the event of US personnel being prosecuted in the ICC).⁸ Senator Lindsey Graham (Republican, South Carolina) called for sanctions against any country that "aids and abets" the ICC.⁹

US political actors (and the Israeli regime) and their political and media supporters elsewhere claim that there is no 'moral equivalence' between Israel and Hamas, and that Israel is merely exercising the right to self-defence. The 'moral equivalence' argument exactly *reverses* the moral *inequivalence*, by pretending that the history of the Gaza war began on October 7 2023. In reality, Israel (and its US sponsor) responded to the election of a Hamas majority in the Palestinian legislative council in 2006 first by supporting an attempted coup by Fatah against Hamas in Gaza, and then, when that failed, putting Gaza under a siege that has effectively converted the whole territory into a very large concentration camp. October 7 2023 was merely a large-scale and temporarily unusually successful attempted prison-break. That atrocities were committed in this situation is inherent in the nature of war, as can be seen from (for example) Allied war crimes in World War II.¹⁰ They pale into relative insignificance by comparison with the Israeli state's deliberate revenge-obliteration of Gaza. So Israel and Hamas are not morally equivalent,

true: both are guilty of crimes, but Israel's crimes are much worse, especially given the context of Hamas's crimes.

Equally, Israel *does not* have the right of self-defence in relation to its continued occupation of territories since 1967. Assume for the sake of argument that the Six Day War in 1967 was a war of self-defence (an argument that depends on pre-emptive use of force in response to threats counting as self-defence, which is rather questionable). But, on this assumption, as soon as Israel started to annex land and to plant settlements in the occupied territories, it became (to draw an analogy with English law) a trespasser *ab initio* (from the beginning) - as where an original lawful entry on land is turned into trespass by damaging the property. Israel thus converted its self-defence (if it was self-defence) into a war of aggression in violation of the Charter of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal and the UN Charter.¹¹ Hence, until it revokes the annexations and withdraws the settlements, Israel has no more right to self-defence than a burglar has against the householder's efforts to expel him.

The very low underlying plausibility of these claims from the US, its Israeli settler-colony and their supporters is reflected in a recent intensification of efforts to silence dissent from them: for example, with the British government's use of anti-terror legislation against pro-Palestinian voices.¹²

Imperial

The US response to the ICC ruling is, then, an increasingly explicit claim that the US as such is the absolute sovereign emperor of the world: that it is, as was said of the Roman emperor, *princeps legibus solutus* - "the emperor is not bound by the statutes" - and that *quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem*, that "what pleases the emperor has the force of statute".¹³ The US as absolute sovereign of the world is not to be bound by international law (as it showed already by invading Iraq) and as absolute sovereign of the world is (as the emperor Justinian in 533 CE said of himself¹⁴) the *only* one entitled to make and interpret international law.

This is not a complete novelty. I have already referred to the 2002 "Hague invasion act" directed against the ICC.¹⁵ The USA and its 'coalition of the willing' invaded Iraq without UN authorisation, and John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN in 2005-06 and national security advisor in 2018-19, in 2008 proposed defunding the UN to force it to vote in compliance with US wishes.¹⁶ However, the intensified threats round the ICC amount to increasingly strident claims of US imperial authority.

We have to see these increasingly strident claims alongside other acts of US unilateralism. In spite of talk of a "rules-governed world order", the Biden administration has continued the first Trump administration's trade war with China - in effect committing repudiatory breaches of the general agreement on tariffs and trade (GATT). It has dragged the Europeans into war with Russia in Ukraine, and probably bombed the

Nord Stream gas pipelines in order to stop Russian gas supplies and force Germany to buy liquefied natural gas from the US and its client states. And so on.

The *rise* of the US to world dominance was accompanied by claiming that its hegemony was that of "national self-determination" - first against Austria-Hungary and Russia (but not against Britain and France) in 1918-21, then against Britain and France in the 1950s-60s. And the US claimed to offer a "law-governed world order", starting with the League of Nations (which Woodrow Wilson promoted, but the US failed to join), and then, from 1944, the United Nations. With the fall of the USSR in 1989-91, US power seemed to be at its apogee, and the UN was celebrated, along with other international institutions (the International Monetary Fund and World Bank; the World Trade Organisation; and so on).

But, underlying the triumph, the US has been in relative decline as an industrial power, as others began to catch up. And, indeed, already from the later 1970s after the US scuttle out of Vietnam, it became clear that the declining US could not in fact create *order* - even at the level the old European empires had created order for capital investment - but only inflict destruction and state failure on its enemies.

More and more, it is driven to the tag said to have been beloved of the Roman emperor, Caligula: *Oderint, dum metuant* ('Let them hate me, so long as they fear me'). The threats against the ICC and anyone who cooperates with it are emblematic of this evolution ●

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Notes

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2. www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-issues-warrant-arrest-mohammed-diab-ibrahim.
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11. [www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text-articles-1\(1\)-and-2\(4\)](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text-articles-1(1)-and-2(4)).
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14. Constitution *Tanta*, confirming his *Digest* (533 CE), section 18.
15. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Service_Members'_Protection_Act.
16. J Bolton and R Holbrooke, 'Reforming the United Nations' *Brown Journal of World Affairs* Vol 14, pp11-21 (it should be noted that Bolton's and Holbrooke's contributions were separate and opposed).

NHS

Continuing the decline

After 14 years of Tory austerity the health service has been left broken. But can Wes Streeting fix things?
James Linney lambasts his idea that league tables are part of the solution

On November 12 health secretary Wes Streeting spoke at a gathering of health service leaders - the NHS Providers conference in Liverpool - where he unveiled his vision for how Labour plans to 'fix' the NHS, which he rightly pointed out has been left broken by 14 years of Tory mishandling.

The Tories launched their attacks on the NHS with Andrew Lansley's 'reforms' in 2012, which supercharged private health's access, by making it a requirement that NHS service contracts be periodically offered to "any qualified provider". This launched a 'race to the bottom' - multinational health investors could offer cut-price patient care, resulting in a predictable drop in quality. Over the next decade things went from bad to catastrophic - bureaucracy steadily increased, staff had been haemorrhaging with no attempt to train more; meanwhile wages had been frozen, leaving workers demoralised and burnt out. Running parallel to this, there was a wilful defunding and undermining of the NHS, whilst more and more private health companies were encouraged to cherry-pick the more profitable elements.

Left in the hands of the Tories, the NHS was clearly heading towards collapse, so it is understandable that many felt some sense of hope when Labour won the general election in July. And there have been some promising signs; in the autumn budget chancellor Rachel Reeves announced an extra £22.6 billion for the NHS over a two-year period - not enough to reverse its decline, but perhaps the beginning of a turnaround? Unfortunately the reality is rather bleaker: despite the headlines generated by the budget, the NHS is facing a deficit of at least £4.8 billion this financial year; according to the Nuffield Trust, this means it needs at least a 3.6% increase in its budget just to meet its day-to-day running costs,¹ but is only being offered a 3% increase, adjusting for inflation, between 2023-24 and 2025-26.² This means the health service is still facing the need for some eye-watering savings just to stay still.

So the future of the NHS is still in the balance and going to need some major TLC just to resuscitate it, so it was with some trepidation that we awaited Labour's first major announcement regarding plans for reforming the NHS.

Sadly any hopes that it was going to be treated better by Labour took a major blow in the conference in Liverpool, where Wes Streeting focussed on his "no-holds-barred, sweeping review" - his plan to introduce hospital league tables. These, we were told, would use a range of performance criteria such as waiting times in accident and emergency departments, etc, and financial deficits, in order to rank hospitals and 'name and shame' those performing most poorly. The hospitals at the bottom of the league will have their managers replaced and face "turnaround teams", made up of "expert leaders", to try to correct things.

Leading doctors, unions and patient groups have rightly been highly critical of these league tables, that Streeting aims to start publishing in April next year - they are likely to further demoralise staff and undermine patient trust for hospitals.



Aneurin Bevan, Labour minister of health on first day of the NHS, July 5 1948

Beyond this though, a more fundamental concern is that to aim simply to improve a few arbitrary targets and force overspent hospitals to make cuts is to completely misunderstand both the causes and extent of the current NHS crisis, and is essentially a continuation of the harmful policy of previous Tory governments. Don't get me wrong: I won't lose sleep over the sacking of a few NHS bosses, but there is nothing to celebrate if they are immediately replaced by others who are equally inept - and who will presumably be parachuted in from the private sector to offer their own complete lack of any experience on how to run a health service.

Past failures

If this all sounds familiar, then it is probably because you are old enough to remember Labour's last attempts to introduce NHS league tables back in 2001 - when Alan Milburn had the same idea. Milburn's league tables lasted a few years and then were abandoned due to justified criticism that a few arbitrary performance markers are not an accurate way to reflect quality of care or how well the staff are performing.

To put it mildly, things are more nuanced than this. A&E waiting times, for example, are more a reflection of how much a hospital is under pressure rather than what kind of care patients are getting when they do get treated. Enforcing arbitrary targets with threats as well just leads to staff being forced to play the system to make the numbers look better without improving the service. In the past, for example, if patients are about to breach their four-hour waiting time limits in A&E, managers simply pressured staff to move patients to holding wards, so that they could be marked as having been 'seen' and the performance numbers looked better.

Despite league tables previously failing, this attempt to resurrect them is a continuation of Sir Keir Starmer's infatuation with Tony Blair's 'New Labour'. Hence we have seen Streeting recently appointing Milburn as one of his top advisors. Milburn also just happens to be a strong believer in incorporating more private health companies to tackle NHS backlogs and is a consultant to Bridgepoint Capital (which owns Care UK) and the Price Waterhouse Coopers health practice.³ With the likes of Milburn

helping to steer the ship, Streeting's statement that the NHS must "reform or die" sounds more like an ominous threat of continuing privatisation than a genuine attempt at improving standards.⁴

So league tables for hospitals already struggling will likely just equate to undermining staff morale and patient confidence. Meanwhile those hospitals at the top of the league will be rewarded, by allowing them to keep budget surpluses and choose how they reinvest that money. Wes Streeting claims that these league tables will create an environment of accountability and supposedly 'competition between hospitals' that he hopes will raise standards. More likely, as seen with another league table - eg, that of football's Premier League - punishing those at the bottom and rewarding those at the top will result in exacerbating the difference in performance.

The belief that competition has an inherent tendency to raise standards is, of course, a myth central to capitalism - one that figures particularly strongly in the narrative of explaining scientific and technological advances of the past two centuries. The reality is the opposite: advances in science are hindered by having to be made within the framework of capitalist competition - which preferences profit and the protection of intellectual property over the sharing of information and cooperation.

That is not to say that all competition is bad: it clearly makes football more entertaining, for example, but this does not automatically mean that it is the best way to raise the standard of all teams equally. And sport is one thing - when it comes to something like providing a state-of-the-art health care system, competition between hospitals will have a negative impact: it will lead to an environment of fear and discourage cooperation.

We do not need to wait for the publication of the first NHS league tables to confidently predict that they will demonstrate that - barring a few possible outliers, hospital trusts in the more deprived areas will fare less well. This tells us nothing about the staff who work in these hospitals or how they are run: it is simply a reflection of the fact that deprivation is the primary driver for poorer health - in these areas people have more complex mental and physical

health needs, yet there the NHS gets proportionally less funding. People in these areas tend to be more vulnerable to rising costs of living, can less easily afford healthy food, have access to less recreational time or less green spaces.

Utopian

Here perhaps we have stumbled on a possible positive reason for league tables - not in an exercise of naming and shaming, but to determine which communities should be prioritised for providing more access to parks, healthy and affordable, high-quality food, more direct control in their workplaces, more recreational time, better-quality housing and so on. Sadly in the current climate under this Labour government such minimal demands sound utopian.

If these league tables signal the future direction of travel for the NHS under Labour's stewardship, then the final destination will likely be the same as when it was in the hands of the Tories - namely, heading downhill towards a crash. Streeting could instead have used his

first big NHS reforms to commit to undoing the harms done to it during the Tory years, to start the process of extracting the private health profiteers, introducing a scheme to pay NHS trainee students and committing to a fully funded NHS that allows the staff to properly perform the job they were trained for.

As communists, we also would further point out that accountability will not come through the imposition of arbitrary league tables, but through the introduction of *democracy* into the NHS, where the leaders are directly appointed or removed by the staff. If this was the case, the likes of Wes Streeting would not last very long, of course ●

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/nhs-labour-nuffield-trust-rachel-reeves-b2635315.html.
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Fighting fund

Finish the job!

Good news once again, comrades. With three days still to go to reach our £2,250 fighting fund target for November, we have now received £2,136! In other words, we need another £114 to get there once again.

Thanks to all those contributors who together raised just over £400 over the last week. Pride of place goes to comrade JC, who transferred no less than £166 to our account, while regular donors DB (£50) and BD (£40) made their usual contributions via PayPal.

Then there is comrade TT, who travelled down to London from up north to sort out some technical problems in our office - and insisted that the £37 he paid to get here should be treated as a donation. That's comradeship for you!

Other standing orders/bank transfers came our way from

comrades SO (£35), JT (£25), JF (£20), SS (£16) and TT (£6), while comrade Hassan handed his usual banknote to one of our comrades - this time for £10.

So now we have to finish the job and make sure we reach that target by Saturday November 30. You can do it! Please either make a bank transfer or click on that PayPal button on our website as soon as you read this.

We absolutely rely on our readers to continue publishing the *Weekly Worker*, so, if you want to play your part, please go to the link below and read how to do so. I know you won't let us down! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are
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WELLBEING

Your health, comrade

Physical and mental health is central to the communist project. Not only would people be healthier in a communist society, writes **Ian Spencer**, but such health would help deliver the full realisation of human potential

Marx and Engels wrote extensively on health. Engel's *The condition of the working class in England* contains numerous references to the way in which capitalism in general, and industrialisation and urbanisation in particular, ruins the health of the working class. If one adds to this Marx's discussion of alienation in the 1844 manuscripts, it is easy to see that health is at the heart of Marx's ontological project.

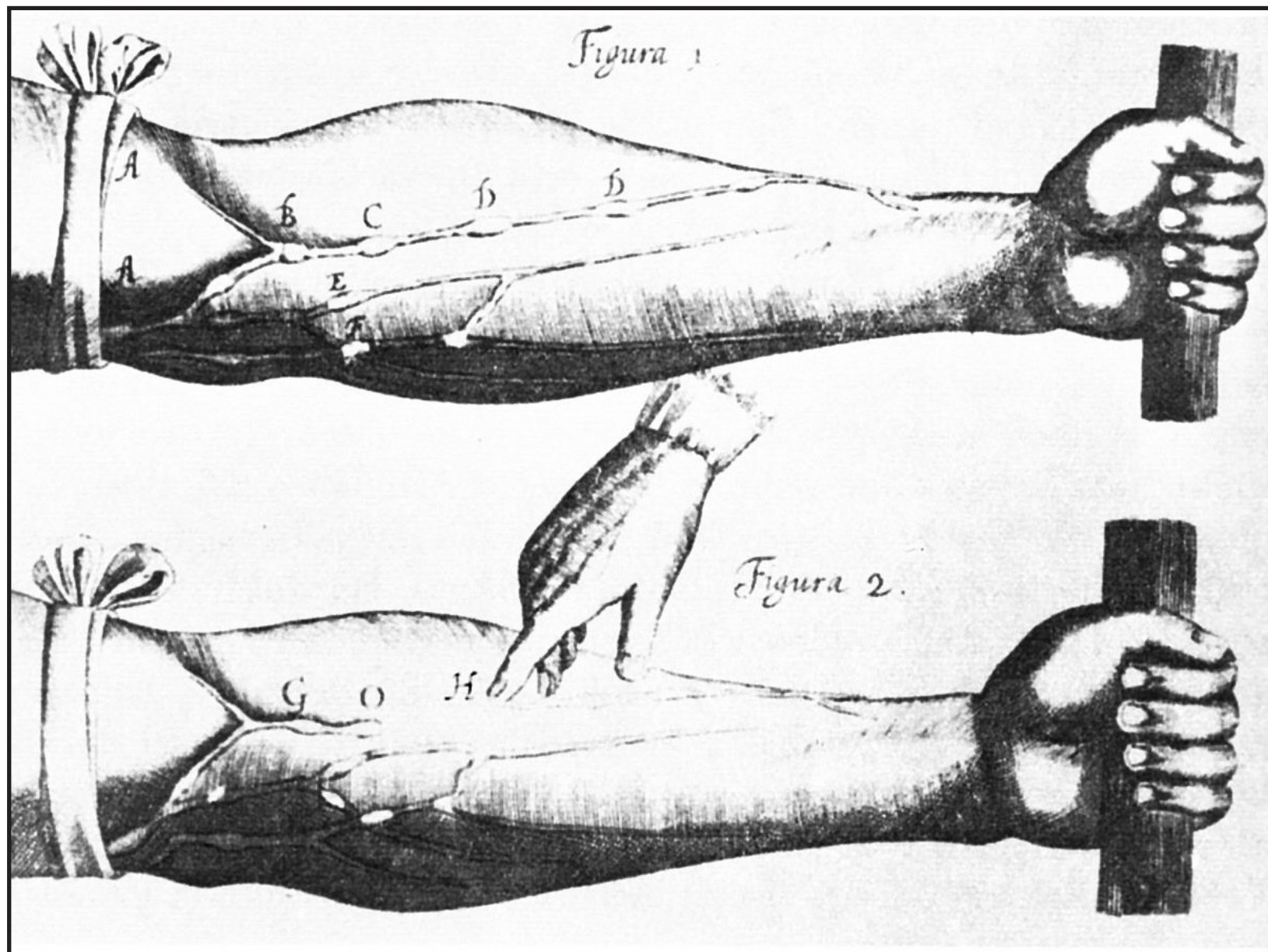
Volume 1 of *Capital* is replete with quotes from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Factories, from which Marx draws attention to the way the health of workers is destroyed by capitalism. In some factory districts average life expectancy had dropped to just 15 years. The working class was not living long enough to reproduce itself. Of course, this can be misleading, since the low average life expectancy reflected high rates of infant mortality. If you lived to be 5, you would probably reach the age of 55. Also, industrialisation did not falter, because the urban population was constantly replenished by people displaced from the land (in particular, in Ireland).

More than this, the emphasis by Marx and Engels on communism being the full realisation of what it is to be human gives a richness to the concept of health, which does not exist in the bourgeois sociology of health and illness. The latter tends to focus on a deviation from a statistical norm or the presence or otherwise of a disease process. Furthermore, sociology obfuscates class relations and makes the consideration of health and illness one of relative inequality, rather than the realisation of human potential, which will only come into being with the abolition of class society.

Sociology plays as important an ideological role as does Keynesian economics in providing an intellectual prop for reformism. However, just as Marx was not squeamish about making good use of empirical data, neither should we be afraid of the empirical insight sociology offers. After all, with few exceptions, it shows class as being the most important social determinant of longevity, morbidity and general wellbeing. But, as with all data it needs a critical eye, something which has not always been applied by many on the left, especially when it comes to a discussion of mental health or the nature of the National Health Service. This has effectively left the field open to those who would provide a justification for the attack on the free universal provision of healthcare.

Moreover, such explanation as is provided tends to focus on 'lifestyle choices', such as diet and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, as crucial in determining health inequalities. The victims of health inequalities get the blame for their apparently feckless choices, rather than those choices being the product of class society. In the coming years this will be a key battleground for the working class, as our standard of living is attacked to increase expenditure on a war economy.

There is every reason to believe that the Labour government intends to move closer to a US-style system of private health insurance, with a Medicare/Medicaid type of backstop



William Harvey's experiment in blood circulation illustrated in his *De Motu Cordis* (1628)

for those of us who cannot afford the premiums (as we have already seen with NHS dentistry).

Inequality

Britain is unusually well provided with an extensive literature on inequalities in health. What is interesting is that it has started to reveal some of the mechanisms by which class society disproportionately kills the poor.

The Whitehall Studies, beginning in 1967-87, with a cohort study of 17,500 male civil servants, showed that civil service rank was the best predictor of health outcomes. This was followed up with Whitehall Two (1985-88), which studied 10,308 civil servants of both sexes and confirmed that status seems to exert an influence independent of poverty.¹

The endocrinology of stress gives us a clue to why there is a class gradient in health and illness, and the mechanism by which low status and poverty lead to high rates of type-two diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Stress hormones, such as cortisol, are essential for life. They act as part of the 'fight or flight' response, to increase blood sugar and aid in the metabolism of calories, which, when facing an immediate threat from a predator, can make the difference between life and death. Having escaped, naturally, cortisol levels return to normal. However, under conditions where the threat is constant, such as in a work environment, where subordination is unceasing and control over one's life is limited, then raised cortisol leads to

not only higher blood sugar, but the suppression of the immune system - essential, among other things, for controlling the incidence of cancer. It also reduces the sensitivity of peripheral tissue to insulin - a key feature of type two diabetes.

Moreover, a similar pattern is also observable in other primates. Robert Sapolsky's work, looking at baboons in Africa,² shows how blood profiles relating to stress between high- and low-status primates are remarkably similar to high- and low-status civil servants in England. Interestingly, he was also able to show how being social can mitigate some of the worst effects of low status, supporting the view that high levels of social cohesion and cooperation can mitigate the adverse effects of low status.

Further support for this can be seen in a study of Roseto, Pennsylvania,³ the population of which was unusually healthy, compared to the surrounding populations of relatively more affluent towns. They, on average lived longer and had in the mid-1960s no incidents of coronary artery disease requiring surgery. The population of Roseto consisted mostly of poor Italian immigrants. Early speculation that their exceptionally good health was due to diet was quickly refuted. Most people had a higher fat content than more affluent towns and many smoked. We now know that dietary fat is not the culprit once assumed, but it was a revelation at the time. The researchers, John Bruhn and Stewart Wolf, concluded that the adverse effects of poverty were more

than ameliorated by a strong sense of social cohesion. The fact that the society was hierarchically flat also produced a culture of mutual aid and interdependence. Tellingly, as the standard of living of Roseto rose to closer to the standard of the USA, then levels of heart disease also rose, as levels of social cohesion declined.

In 1976, a young Richard Wilkinson wrote an open letter to the Labour Health Secretary, David Ennals, which was published in *New Society*.⁴ He pointed out that notwithstanding the existence of the NHS, there was a class gradient in virtually all categories of mortality and morbidity. Sticking to the registrar general's classification of social class, derived as it was from Weberian sociology, the lower the social class, the higher the mortality and morbidity rates.

One of the outcomes of this letter was that the government established, in 1977, a royal commission on inequalities in health, under the then president of the Royal College of Physicians, Sir Douglas Black. By the time the commission reported, Labour was out of office and the incoming government of Margaret Thatcher was largely indifferent to its findings. Nevertheless, it was legally required to publish them, which it did in the fewest numbers consistent with satisfying its legal obligations: that is, one for the copyright libraries, the House of Commons library and so on. However, in 1982, it became something of a best seller, when it was published as *Inequalities in health* by sociologists Peter

Townsend and Nick Davidson.

Relative inequalities in health and death rates have real consequences in absolute terms. To take the example published in the Black Report⁵ in 1980:

If the mortality rates of occupational class I (professional workers and members of their families) during 1970-72 (the dates of the latest review of mortality experience) had applied to classes IV and V (partly skilled and unskilled manual workers and members of their families), 74,000 lives of people aged under 75 would not have been lost. This estimate includes nearly 10,000 children and 32,000 men aged 15 to 64.⁶

While the health of the UK population has improved significantly since the 1980s, the class gradient in health inequality remains a constant feature and has been supported in study after study ever since - as has the apparent inability of social policy measures to mitigate it.

Richard Wilkinson, with Kate Pickett, went on to make their own distinctive contribution to the debate with a wealth of research, which made international comparisons and supported the idea that inequality exerts an influence on health independently of poverty.⁷ Put simply, the wider the gap between rich and poor, the worse the health outcomes for society. Drawing on a wide range of social indicators, such as rates of imprisonment, obesity, life

expectancy, use of narcotics, teenage pregnancy and levels of social mobility, Wilkinson and Pickett made comparisons with a range of different countries.

Typically, the Scandinavian countries tended to do well, and the USA was almost always among the worst, notwithstanding the fact that it spends more on ‘health’ as a proportion of GDP than any other country in the world. Similar patterns were also seen in each of the states of the USA. The more unequal the state, the worse was a basket of different social indicators.

They followed up this research with a later study focusing on aspects of mental health, such as anxiety and depression, which revealed a remarkably similar picture.⁸

Inequality, it seems, is bad for us all, even the rich. This naturally fits very well with the reformist political perspective, which can also been seen in the online publications of the Equality Trust, which seeks to persuade politicians of the imperative of shifting social policy in the direction of the redistribution of wealth and income.⁹ Every indication, so far, is that the Labour government has no intention of reducing inequality across British society, and inequalities between different countries is also likely to widen.

Mental health

The consequences of leaving the field open to the enemy is particularly glaring in the case of mental health.

There were very few who defended the old asylums, when their intended closure was announced in 1961 by the then Conservative health minister, Enoch Powell, in his ‘water tower’ speech. Yet the ‘crisis of social care’ has its historical origins with the privatisation of dementia care. Dementia, almost alone amongst neuro-degenerative disorders, has been removed from the care of the NHS and now must be paid for, typically by the sale of the sufferer’s house. If the estate of the patient is over £23,250, it must be paid for in full. After that, a proportion is paid until their estate is down to £14,250, at which point it is the statutory responsibility of the local authority. This has played an important part in increasing the crisis of local government funding.

It is not accidental that in the same year that Powell announced the decision to close the psychiatric hospitals Erving Goffman published his book *Asylums*. Goffman’s critique was pushing at an open door. Bourgeois sociologists often provide the ideological justification for social policy measures, often with the superficial appearance of a critique from the left. In fact, Goffman’s book makes facile comparisons with other ‘total institutions’, including the armed forces, concentration camps, monastic orders and prisons, as if there were not rather more important distinctions between them!

Other critics of psychiatry were explicitly of the libertarian right, such as Thomas Szasz in his *The myth of mental illness* in 1961, but it was a refrain that was taken up by many on the left in one form or another. At the time, the absence of any evidence of pathology for the ‘functional’ mental disorders seemed to support critical perspectives that asserted that mental illness was a ‘social construct’ and by implication less ‘real’ than disorders with a discoverable causal organism. Psychiatry was lumped together with the state and assumed to be repressive, part of an apparatus of control over the working class.

The scene was then set for the closure of hospitals, which were an important part of the trade union base for the NHS. Very few nurses in mental health were members of the

Royal College of Nursing. Almost all staff there were members of the National Union of Public Employees or the Confederation of Health Service Employees and campaigning for a 12% pay rise for all NHS staff. More importantly, health workers were widely supported by solidarity action by rail, mining, post, print and other workers - one of the last times that the TUC organised such action.

Unsurprisingly then, after the defeat of the 1982 health workers dispute, the programme of closures of mental health hospitals accelerated. More than that, the 1982 health workers dispute was the government’s dress rehearsal for the crushing of the miners’ strike. Most of the legislation that was used to outlaw ‘secondary’ picketing and other solidarity action by workers during the miners’ strike was tried out first in 1982 against health workers. The government knew in advance that to defeat the health workers they would first have to come to a settlement with the Royal Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery, which settled for a pay rise above the 4% offered to other staff in exchange for a pay review body that subsequently delivered a significant rise for qualified nurses and midwives only. The longer-term consequences of the loss of that trade union base have been seen by the relative weakness in strike action in the NHS since.

I am not suggesting that there are no political aspects to psychiatry. A great deal of psychological distress has its origins in class society, but is regarded as an individual disorder and the growth of diagnostic categories illustrates the point. For example, post-traumatic disorder came into being in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III, partly in response to the needs of the US Veteran’s Administration to have a diagnosis for the treatment of those who suffered mentally because of the Vietnam war.¹⁰ This does not mean that all psychiatric disorder would vanish with communism, but, as we have seen, there is well-established evidence for a class gradient in poor mental health and as consistent materialists we would not draw a distinction between somatic and psychiatric disorders.

For those of us who have worked in mental health for many years the reality of people’s distress is readily observable and, with the development of medical imaging, demonstrable. Positron emission tomography, for example, can demonstrate areas of the substrate of the brain which are relatively inactive, such as the frontal lobes, in people with some mental health diagnoses.¹¹ This is not to fall back on a simplistic biological determinism, which is a criticism which could be levelled at Sapolsky, for example. There is a growing body of evidence about the complex interrelationship between biology, genetics, epigenetics and environment, which has a distinctively dialectical feel to it.

Anti-psychiatry

The difficulty with what is sometimes referred to as the ‘anti-psychiatry movement’ is that, while there were writers such as RD Laing, who had insights into the nature of mental health and illness, they were unable to theorise the question in a way that could provide any explanatory capacity.

Laing, for example, did not regard himself as ‘anti-psychiatry’. In fact, in his training, he was a highly orthodox psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, even if his practice in subsequent years became somewhat less so. The term was coined by David Cooper in his forward to the publication of the proceedings of the Dialectics of Liberation conference held in London’s Roundhouse in

1967. This featured a galaxy of stars of the ‘new left’, such as Herbert Marcuse and Paul Sweezy.¹² The reason Laing did not object to the term, ‘anti-psychiatry’, was simply because he did not read the proofs prior to publication!¹³ Laing’s son and biographer described his father as “a reactionary, against the status quo” and said that, when talking to Marxists, Laing senior spoke ‘fluent Marxese’ and spoke to Buddhists in a way that showed his understanding of Buddhism.¹⁴ Laing had undoubtedly studied Marx. His copy of volume one of *Capital*, currently held in the special collection of Glasgow University, is annotated throughout. Volumes two and three are, however, pristine.

‘Anti-psychiatry’, then, is a term applied to a disparate array of thinkers, many of whom had little in common except for writing at a time when ideas were in a state of flux and mental health, like so much else, was open to question.

What is also true of RD Laing is that he did much to popularise the questionable historiography of Michel Foucault, when he wrote a glowing review of *Histoire de Folie*, in the *New Left Review*. Foucault’s 1961 book was published in English as *Madness and civilisation*, thereby setting a trend among sociologists and historians to use the term ‘madness’ to refer to ‘mental ill health’ - supposedly to distance themselves from the stigmatising positivism of medical diagnoses. If you think ‘mentally ill’ is stigmatising, try ‘madness’ on your sicknote from the doctor!

Foucault has powerful insights in his work, but no explanatory theory, not least because he would probably deny that such a theory could exist. Laing was on very friendly terms with Foucault, as he had been previously with Jean-Paul Sartre, and their correspondence is again currently held in the special collections at Glasgow University.

The fact is, few Marxists have extensively researched or theorised mental ill health. Peter Sedgwick, once part of the editorial board of *Critique*, made a worthy attempt to begin the process but, sadly, died young.¹⁵ His book *Psychopolitics* is, however, a useful corrective to those who take Szasz, Goffman, Laing and Foucault too seriously. Andrew Scull in his earlier histories of psychiatry employs a Marxian language in a good empirical history. His insight that the asylums grew out of the custodial provision of poor relief in workhouses is convincing. It was necessary to separate those who were too sick to work and a disruptive influence in the workhouse. It is out of this need that the expansion of the asylums increased.¹⁶

Scull’s thesis on decarceration¹⁷ has, however, been disproven by subsequent events. In fact, what we have seen is *recarceration*. As the number of mental health beds have declined, the number of people in prison has risen. While we cannot infer a direct causal relationship, it is demonstrable that many currently in prison have diagnosable mental disorders. In the meantime, the care of organic mental disorders, which once took up a large proportion of mental health beds, has now been privatised to thousands of non-NHS care homes.

The establishment of the NHS saw the nationalisation and rationalisation of Poor Law infirmaries, charitable hospitals and county asylums, paid for out of the local taxation. The hotchpotch of provision before 1948 was failing. The creation of the NHS was a concession made at a time when the USSR was considered by the ruling class to be a viable pole of opposition. Its demise has now rendered that concession obsolete in the eyes of many.

Ironically, the one proven case of the political abuse of psychiatry by the state was in the USSR, where in the period after the death of Stalin psychiatry was used as an ameliorated form of labour camp against a dissident intelligentsia. Psychiatry was not abused under Stalin. Why would they bother? Opponents would just be killed or sent to a labour camp. In fact, there is evidence that psychiatrists may have saved lives by diagnosing mental illness in someone who might otherwise have been executed for, say, telling a joke about Stalin. The patient would then be discharged, apparently cured, sometime later.

The peak of the political abuse by the Soviet state was in the period after the uprising in Czechoslovakia in 1968.¹⁸ The Soviet elite needed a way of incorporating the intelligentsia to achieve its ends. Terrorising and imprisoning philosophers may have few immediate consequences, but it is hard to have a space programme by terrorising *physicists*.¹⁹ Members of the working class would be sent to a labour camp, but the intelligentsia could be subjected to psychiatric harassment, while negating their pronouncements as evidence of psychopathology, and appearing to show solicitude for their welfare. RD Laing was fully aware of this. The book by Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, *Russia’s political hospitals*, is in his Glasgow collection.

It is not that psychiatry has never been used in this way in the west. Siegfried Sassoon was sent for a psychiatric assessment at Craiglockhart, a former spa, outside Edinburgh, after beginning to oppose the war in 1917, which probably saved Sassoon from having to face a court martial. However, it is very much the exception that proves the rule.

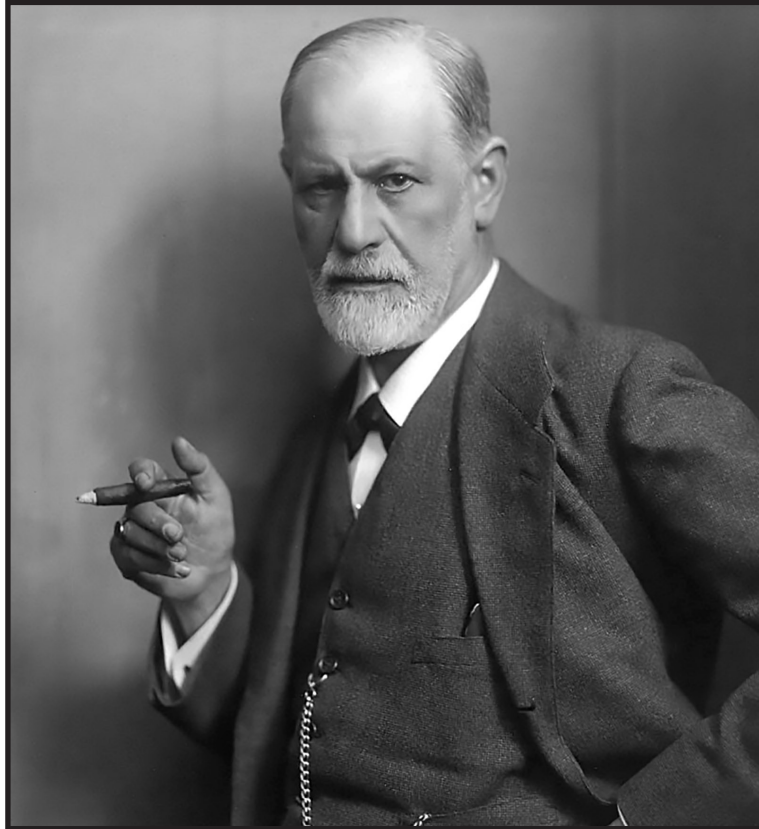
The proletariat is controlled in the first instance by commodity fetishism, furthermore by the reserve army of labour and only as a last result by the threat of violence by the state. Psychiatry has little to do with it. The mental distress suffered by millions of people, at least some of which is attributable to class society, is as real as the incidence and prevalence of heart disease.

Our task as communists is to eliminate both as part of our maximum programme, but also oppose further privatisation and the further implementation of a US-type system of healthcare, which has been so unsuccessful - except for those who can afford the premiums, of course ●

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UKRAINE

Notes on the war

Volodymyr Zelensky lost no time in using Atacms and Storm Shadows. In response, Putin changed Russia's nuclear doctrine and issued orders for an intermediate-range ballistic missile strike. **Jack Conrad** assesses the growing dangers of walking towards the nuclear abyss

Frankly, I did not expect it. No, I thought Donald Trump would win on November 5. But what I did not expect was that, having held back for so long, Joe Biden - now a lame-duck president, after all - would give the go-ahead for Ukraine to use its Atacms (Army Tactical Missile System). No surprise, Britain instantly followed suit. Sir Keir's government granted permission for Storm Shadows to hit targets inside the Russian Federation. Just a few days later, France did the same with its Scalps.

Germany, for its own reasons, is another matter entirely. Chancellor Olaf Schultz stubbornly refuses to even supply Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine - that despite constant nagging from his warmongering Green coalition partners.

Volodymyr Zelensky was quick to give his own go-ahead. A battery of Atacms was launched on November 19 - Russia claims it shot down five and damaged a sixth. US military sources, on the other hand, admit that, while two of them were indeed intercepted, six of eight successfully hit their target - an ammunition storage site in Karachev.¹ Next it was Storm Shadows. Twelve were launched. Success is, of course, claimed by Ukraine and its western enablers. Either way, these missiles are not war winners ... Ukraine has nothing like an endless supply. In fact, stocks are very limited. There usage is, therefore, more of symbolic than military importance at the present time.

Hence the knee-jerk assertion, made by the *Morning Star's* editorial, that green-lighting Atacms and Storm Shadows is an attempt "to try and tip the military scales back in Kiev's [sic] favour before Trump enters the White House", reveals a truly profound ignorance of the real state of play.² Methinks too that Ben Chacko still entertains a certain 'official communist' fondness for the occupants of the Kremlin - that despite nowadays their having far-right, deeply reactionary politics that ideologically closely aligns them with the Orthodox Church.

Nuclear doctrine

The Putin-FSB regime responded to yet another red line being crossed with Atacms and Storm Shadows, by changing Russia's nuclear doctrine. Previously, the nuclear option was reserved for when Russia's "very existence" was in jeopardy. Now the bar has been lowered to an attack, or attacks, that "create a critical threat to the sovereignty and (or) territorial integrity" of Russia and its neighbour and ally, Belarus. The new Putin doctrine also states that countries aiding and abetting an attack will be considered cobelligerents. Russia is therefore threatening Nato with a nuclear response to what is a Ukrainian attack using conventional weapons. A strategy widely known as "escalate to de-escalate", but John Hyten - former chief of the US Space Command - says is more accurately rendered as "escalate to win."³

To underline the new doctrine an Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile - designed to carry a heavy nuclear payload - was launched from the Kapustin Yar rocket base in Russia. Some 15 minutes later it hit targets 500 miles away in Dnipro. Not only are such missiles very fast



Atacms launch: another red line crossed, another escalation followed

- 10 times the speed of sound - they can manoeuvre mid-course and are therefore very difficult to intercept. This one carried six independently targeted warheads, though, to state the obvious, none were nuclear (the US was given a 30-minute warning "through nuclear risk reduction channels", presumably because they are strategic weapons⁴).

Incidentally, Atacms, Storm Shadow, Scalp, etc are regularly called "long-range missiles" in the popular media. This causes endless confusion - after all, they have a range of only around 150-190 miles. That is a lot, compared with battlefield anti-tank missiles, true, but they hardly

give Ukraine the ability to strike "deep into Russia".⁵ The country is, after all, rather big, with 11 time zones, and measures 5,600 miles east to west. Intermediate-range ballistic missile, note, have a range of *under* 3,420 miles. Intercontinental ballistic missiles *over* 3,000 miles.

Anyhow, *The New York Times* reports that Biden's change of heart over Atacms was due to the deployment of North Korean troops to fight in Kursk.⁶ There are some 12,000 of them there at the moment and it is suggested that their numbers could eventually rise to 100,000.⁷ Russia itself has amassed an army of 50,000, ready for yet another

bid to retake the Ukrainian-held salient captured back in August. The first failed, presumably because Ukrainian forces quickly dug in and put in place dragon's teeth and other such defences. Russia reportedly counterattacked with tanks in the lead and sustained heavy losses. Nonetheless, Ukraine has already lost more than 40% of the territory it first took. At its peak, Ukrainian forces controlled roughly 531 square miles of Russian territory, this has now been reduced to approximately 309 square miles.⁸

But surely Biden's main target with his Atacms decision is less Russian ammunition dumps, command posts

and fuel silos. It is more the incoming Trump administration. After all, albeit hyperbolically, candidate Trump pledged to bring peace within 24 hours of being elected. No-one - no-one who is not irremediably stupid - believed that for one moment, but it is clear that he has every intention of forcing Ukraine to the negotiating table and offering Russia some kind of deal.

The Biden administration's determination to use the Ukraine conflict as a "proxy war to hurt Russia" rather than help Ukraine win the war explains why the US has "done nothing" to promote a ceasefire or a peace agreement - the argument of the Make America Great Again camp. Trump's pick for Ukraine-Russia special envoy, Keith Kellogg, therefore insists that "once" the Russo-Ukraine conflict "became a stalemate and a war of attrition, it was in the best interests of Ukraine, America and the world to seek a ceasefire and negotiate a peace agreement with Russia".⁹

Basically Trump's immediate plan is to freeze the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and establish an 800-mile buffer zone along the existing front line - Margus Tsahkna, Estonia's foreign minister, has already volunteered "boots on the ground".¹⁰ Baltic, Polish, British, Netherlands and Nordic contingents are envisaged. Note, however, peacekeepers easily become peacemakers: ie, active combatants.

With fighting ended, negotiations follow. Trump, we are told, insists that Ukraine will have to cede Crimea to Russia and thereby allow it free access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean. Besides that particular bit of real estate, the deal could well see Ukraine compelled to concede either the whole or part of the Donbas. That or giving the two oblasts autonomous status within Ukraine. Zaporizhzhia and Kherson could be likewise conceded, divided or, conceivably, traded off in exchange for the Kursk enclave. There is talk too of Trump blocking the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to Nato - another strategic concession to Russia.

A grossly unequal treaty could, I have argued in a string of recent 'Notes on the war' articles, easily see Zelensky ousted by an Azov putsch. One can already imagine lieutenant colonel, Denys Prokopenko - comrade 'Redis' - contemplating his march on Kyiv. The putschists, if they succeed, would charge him with selling out, being a Jewish traitor, not being properly Ukrainian. But without powerful outside backers any such post-Zelensky regime could do nothing serious. Ukraine lacks, after all, an independent arms industry. Eg, though Ukraine can upgrade Soviet-era T-72 'coffins', it is overwhelmingly reliant on western supplies of military hardware.¹¹

Nor, when it comes to Trump's peace plan, should we discount the fact that a Democrat-Republican war party exists and still exerts a powerful influence - yes, there is a vocal Republican minority in Congress that wants war, war, not jaw, jaw.¹² Essentially what unites the war party is the plan to reboot US global hegemony outlined in Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1987 bestseller, *The grand chessboard*.

At the cost of a relatively paltry \$64.1 billion over what is now nearly three years since the ‘special military operation’ began, Russia has successfully been bogged down in what is a 21st century version of the 1914-18 western front.¹³ A quagmire that has so far claimed between 113,000 and 160,000 Russian lives.¹⁴ And, the more Russian casualties, the more Russia’s coffers are drained, the more inflation rips, the nearer comes a colour revolution and installing some pliant neocolonial regime - so goes the reasoning both in the Pentagon and Langley, Virginia. Ukraine must, therefore, be manacled hand and foot to the commitment to keep fighting till the withdrawal of every single Russian soldier from every single inch of pre-2014 territory ... a US strategic conception which serves the core aim of surrounding China and putting a stop to its ‘inevitable’ rise.

Remember then, Trump comes not only bearing an olive branch: he carries a big stick too. If the Putin-FSB regime rejects his peace deal, that would see the threat of “increased American support for Ukraine”.¹⁵ Perhaps Trump would embrace Zelensky’s victory plan *in its entirety* ... that is, including its three secret clauses (reportedly supplying subsonic Tomahawk cruise missiles with their 1,350-1,550-mile range and, far more importantly than that, the west providing a non-nuclear “deterrence package”¹⁶). In other words, though Trump is seeking some kind of accommodation with Russia, failing that, there is the “phasing into World War III”.

Morale matters

It is a commonplace amongst a neo-isolationist strand of US commentators - and echoed on the glibbule left, not least the pro-Kremlin, the Z left - that the Russian invasion is succeeding; that Ukraine is doing terribly badly; that the Kursk incursion was a dreadful mistake, a brilliant Putin trap; that Zelensky foolishly diverted vital troops from the Donbas front; etc.

This can be seen from various contributors at a symposium on the Ukraine war staged by the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft in mid-August 2024 - sponsors include George Soros and the Ford Foundation. Ivan Eland: “Ukraine risks being surrounded by superior forces”. Mark Episkopos: “unlikely to yield any strategic benefits for Ukraine and will demand a massive sustained investment of troops and equipment that may weaken Ukrainian defences.” Lyle Goldstein: “legitimate questions can be asked regarding the wisdom of the new offensive.” Sumantra Maitra: it might “embolden the hardliners in the Russian government, and dissuade Putin from pushing for any negotiations for peace.” Stephen Walt: “a sideshow” which “will not affect the outcome of the war.” John Mearsheimer too: “a major strategic blunder, which will accelerate [Ukraine’s] defeat”.¹⁷

That sort of assessment about Ukraine’s *successful* Kursk incursion goes hand-in-hand with the claim that the US has met its limits in Ukraine. But no-one in Europe’s ruling circles, let alone America’s, *seriously* expected Ukraine to defeat Russia and send its armed forces scuttling back to its pre-2014 borders. That was never going to happen. No, not even with Javelin anti-tank missiles, Leopard II main battle tanks, F-16 fighter aircraft or Atacms cruise missiles. Indeed the widespread expectation was of a Ukrainian surrender in February 2022. Stalemate - even if Ukraine is on the back foot at the moment - is, therefore, a major victory, as far as hawks in the west are concerned.

Moreover, when it comes to Kursk, not only have Ukraine’s forces managed to hold the Sudzha salient - so far. It has been Russia which is being forced to divert precious resources in order to expel them - reportedly Putin has given a February 2025 deadline. If attackers need a 3:1 advantage over defenders, that certainly explains the 50,000 Russian troops readied for a “massive fight” in Kursk.¹⁸ It also explains the presence of those 12,000 Korean People’s Army soldiers.

Having said that, a Ukrainian collapse cannot be completely ruled out. Not simply due to the slow, grinding Russian advance on the eastern front. More than 386 square miles has been captured between September 1 and November 3, indicating that Russia’s forward momentum has marginally accelerated in recent months.

No, in conditions where a Trump presidency is just weeks away and where he is threatening to cut off arms supplies unless Ukraine agrees to a significant loss of sovereign territory, morale must be very low. Are Ukrainian troops going to be up for dying for a little sod of land that might well be traded away in some grand deal? Do they believe that they can still win? And, given that they are outnumbered and outfired, there must be a growing reluctance to go over the top in some futile counterattack. More and more will defy barking orders, sneak away at night, refuse to return from leave. Others, perhaps, will seek out the traitor in Kyiv. The most extreme expression of a loss of morale is “mutiny”, writes Edgar Jones of King’s College London¹⁹ ... in the case of the Azov brigade this would, ironically, be an expression of their continued *esprit de corps*.

Morale matters. It is far more important than all those Leopard II tanks, F-16s and Atacms put together. As Napoleon Bonaparte famously remarked: “In war, three-quarters turns on personal character and relations; the balance of manpower and materials counts only for the remaining quarter.”²⁰ Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz put “moral quantities” at the centre of his classic 1832 study, *Vom Kriege* (‘On war’). Tellingly he writes of the physical components of war being “little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade”.²¹

Not surprisingly, morale has long been explicitly acknowledged in official military manuals. Eg, the 1914 edition of the British Army’s *Field service regulations*: “Success in war depends more on moral than on physical qualities. Skill cannot compensate for want of courage, energy and determination The development of the necessary moral qualities is therefore the first of the objects to be attained.” The manual goes on to state: “Superior numbers on the battlefield are an undoubted advantage, but skill, better organisation and training, and above all a firmer determination in all ranks to conquer at any cost, are the chief factors of success [and a] lack of determination is the most fruitful source of defeat.” It also notes that the decisive point of a battle is achieved when the enemy becomes “morally and physically exhausted”.²²

There can be little doubt, however, that the average Ukrainian soldier is more driven by moral considerations than the average Russian soldier. They - that is, the Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians - are fighting for their homeland, their right to self-determination, their patriotic honour, their family, their friends, their children, their age-old traditions: that against a foreign invader which denies their very national existence and has

already overrun some 20% of the country. So, despite a mounting death toll, power outages, the difficulty in conscripting new recruits and soldiers going AWOL, a Ukrainian collapse is unlikely ... unless it foolishly decides to defy Trump.

What about Russia’s soldiers? What are they fighting for? A Greater Russia? De-Nazification? Halting Nato’s eastward expansion? Hardly worth a candle ... perhaps that is why conscripts are officially excused from serving in Ukraine. However, Russia is increasingly turning to contracted troops to do its fighting. Three years of service, room and board and lots of fringe benefits. That and a monthly salary of 200,000 roubles (about £1,500).²³ Good wages in Russia - especially in poorer oblasts, where the majority of recruits come from.²⁴ Of course, there is a high chance that they will not survive. In that case Russia has provided for a posthumous payment worth 11 million roubles for families.²⁵ As for those poor North Korean buggers, they must be terrified. They are about to be fed into the meat grinder for the glory of the Great Successor!

When it comes to the Ukraine war, too much commentary concentrates on the purely physical components: men deployed; numbers killed, captured and wounded; output of artillery shells; missile capabilities; supplies of fighter aircraft; gas pipelines; electricity grids. It is easy to see, therefore, why the gradgrindian conclusion is so often reached: Ukraine must lose. Of course, leave aside that such an assessment ignores the cardinal fact that Ukraine is fighting a proxy war on behalf of Nato and the United States, the global hegemon, the question of morale is rarely treated with the seriousness it deserves.

The fact of the matter is that, while the morale of Ukrainian troops is doubtless low at the moment, the morale of Russian troops is in all probability an awful lot lower. Their lives are being squandered on a colossal scale in criminally irresponsible human wave attacks. Discipline is brutal. Food is appalling. Corruption in the higher ranks rampant.

For their own obvious reasons the Ukrainian military authorities circulated an FSB report captured in the Kursk region in August, which paints a vivid picture of morale amongst Russian troops. It cites the example of a soldier who killed himself in January this year. He had, the report said, “a nervous and psychological breakdown, caused by his prolonged state of depression due to his service in the Russian army”. Unit commanders were given instructions to ensure soldiers consume Russian state media daily to maintain their “psychological condition”. Further instructions on keeping up morale came in an undated, typed document, urging that soldiers should get 5-10 minutes a day as well as an hour once a week of political instruction, “aimed at maintaining and raising the political, moral and psychological condition of the personnel”.²⁶

We want our sort of politics to feature here, of course. Not impossible if rank-and-file troops assert themselves over junior officers and NCOs, and elect their own political commissars. Many front-line soldiers will have parents and grandparents with an elementary knowledge of the writings of Marx, Engels and, above all, Lenin. There is certainly a collective memory about how an imperialist war was turned into a revolution in 1917. We know that that fear palpably haunts the upper echelons in both Ukraine and Russia.

A gut recognition that rank-and-file soldiers have got more in

common with each other than the top brass, the grasping oligarchs and the corrupt politicians in Kyiv and Moscow - surely that already exists. Indeed away from the intense fighting around this or that front-line town or village, there are doubtless unofficial truces being observed in the freezing, water-clogged trenches and dug-outs, as soldiers abide by that old adage of ‘live and let live’ ... from here fraternisation is just one step away.

Middle East

There are some on the left who do not see how the war in Ukraine “could potentially trigger World War III.”²⁷ With Russia possessing 5,580 nuclear warheads ... and threatening to use them against Nato under its new Putin doctrine, such a view is hard to credit. After all, the US has its own arsenal of 5,044 nuclear warheads and a military budget that outstrips its nearest six or seven allies and rivals put together. Then there is Britain (225 nuclear warheads) and France (290 nuclear warheads), both of which are locked into the US-dominated Nato alliance.

Moreover, Russia has an ‘everlasting’ friendship with China, a country which boasts the world’s second largest economy and its third largest stock of nuclear warheads (500).²⁸ And, as we have repeatedly argued - and demonstrated citing numerous reliable sources - America’s main target in getting Russia bogged down in a draining Ukrainian quagmire is China - its only serious rival. Surely a recipe for World War III.

Instead, we are told that, while the Russo-Ukraine war could become a full-blown Russo-Nato war, the “real trigger” for a World War III comes from an escalation in the Middle East. Eg, “With the intensification and spread of Israel’s war on Gaza and Lebanon, backed by US-led imperialism and fully supported by British and other capitalist governments, there is the distinct danger of (a nuclear) World War III.”²⁹ Muddled thinking worthy of Ben Chacko himself.

In the Middle East there is just one nuclear weapons power - Israel. Though it neither officially admits nor officially denies its nuclear stockpile - pursuing a strategy of ‘deliberate ambiguity’ - it refuses to sign the non-proliferation treaty, which would open it up for regular inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Despite that, Israel is widely reckoned to have between 90 and 400 nuclear warheads, which can be launched from land, sea and sky.³⁰

Israel might conceivably attempt to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities - which has given the country near weapons-grade uranium. Israel, note, launched such ‘surgical’ military strikes against Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). However, neither Operation Opera nor Operation Outside the Box triggered a world war - not even a regional war.

If something like that happened in 2025 or 2026, the chances of Israel deploying nuclear weapons to take out Iran’s nuclear facilities remains around zero. Its nuclear weapons are there to deter. No, as in Iraq and Syria, Israel would use conventional missiles and bombs - although in this case it would have to include very powerful, precision-guided bunker busters. Iran has put its most valued nuclear sites underground and covered them with thick layers of cement and steel. So something up to and perhaps including America’s GBU-57A/B Massive Ordnance Penetrator would be needed, along with the sort of aircraft capable of delivering such a payload - the GBU-57A/B MOP weighs in at a cool 30,000 pounds (far beyond

Israel’s F-16s and F-35s). A B2 stealth bomber could do the job though ... and maybe Trump would agree a lend-lease deal.

Either way, Israel would not fight a war as such with Iran - there will be no invasion for sure. No, Israel would seek to strategically degrade Iran ... and that could only be done with the implicit say-so of the US - that or its direct participation. Eg, an initial Israeli ‘pre-emptive’ strike sees an Iranian retaliation, which, in turn, sees an extensive and intensive US blitz to prevent a second holocaust. Such would be the playbook.

Neither Russia nor China would, under these or similar circumstances, rush to Iran’s rescue. They will not - repeat, not - go to war with Israel over an attack on Iran. Nor, to state the obvious, would any other nuclear power (India, Pakistan, North Korea). To attack Israel, after all, would be to attack the US. No, there would be diplomatic protests ... but little more than that.

The Arab street might well react altogether differently. However, that is another story ●

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BRICS

An acronym versus the hegemon

America and its arrogant bullying is much resented. But, asks **Yassamine Mather**, does the expanding Brics alliance represent a viable alternative?



Brics 2023: other than hostility to the US they have little in common

Brics is comprised of (and gets its name from) five major emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The acronym 'Brics' was coined in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neill from Goldman Sachs, when highlighting the economic potential of these countries, which were predicted to be big players in the global economy. Originally, it was called just 'Bric' (Brazil, Russia, India and China), but then South Africa joined the group in 2010.

Its formal birth happened in 2006, when the foreign ministers from Brazil, Russia, India and China met in New York to discuss common issues and ways to work together. Since then, Brics countries have held annual summits to discuss global economic development, trade, political cooperation and more. One of its biggest achievements was the setting up of the New Development Bank in 2014. The NDB was created to fund infrastructure and sustainable development projects in the Brics countries and other emerging economies. It is seen as an alternative to western financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which often favour richer nations.

The group now includes not only the five member-states upon which its name is based, but also Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates. This expansion shows that Brics is becoming more influential, with countries from different parts of the world wanting to join - over 40 other countries have also expressed interest in following suit, including Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia. All this reflects its growing appeal.

These countries are eager to join Brics because the alliance claims to provide a platform to push for a more inclusive global system - one that is not completely dominated by the current US-led powers. It is positioning itself as a counterbalance to organisations like the G7 or the World Bank, claiming it will give emerging economies more of a voice on the global stage.

China is, of course, the biggest and most influential player in Brics. As the second-largest economy in the world, China is driving much of

the trade, investment and economic power of the group. Its huge population, advanced infrastructure and tech sector make it a vital partner for countries like Brazil, Russia and South Africa, which rely on Chinese investment and trade.

Politically China's foreign policy has shifted over the years, especially under president Xi Jinping. With policies like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is building infrastructure across Asia, Africa and Europe, aiming to boost trade. While this sounds great on the surface, critics argue that it sometimes leads to "debt traps" for participating countries - who receive so much Chinese investment that they end up owing China more than they can handle, which can make them economically dependent on Beijing.

Imperialism

The question is posed as to whether China is using its economic power to dominate other countries, or is just looking for better global connections. China often insists it is all about the need for cooperation and mutual benefit, but its growing influence - especially in Africa and south-east Asia - has led not a few to believe it is a new form of imperialism, only without the old-school colonial tactics.

Even though China does not have colonies or engage in military conquests like the traditional imperial powers of the past, it still wields a lot of global influence, especially in terms of trade, investment and infrastructure. This influence is often seen as a modern form of economic imperialism, but, of course, it is not the same as the kind of colonial imperialism where countries directly control foreign lands.

Many argue that China's actions are an example of 'economic imperialism'. It is not taking over countries militarily, but instead using investment and trade to build influence. Others might say that this is not really imperialism at all, but just China doing what every big power does - looking to expand its reach and solidify its place in the global order. While China has become a dominant force in global trade, it is also promoting its vision

of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, which makes it seem less like a traditional imperialist power.

No-one in their right mind considers China to be *anti-imperialist*, but, in the end, whether you call it a proto-imperialist or an imperialist nation depends on how you define those terms. Is it simply a rising power looking to increase its influence, or is it using its economic might to shape the world in its image? Either way, its role in Brics and global politics is undeniable and will likely continue to evolve, making it a central player in future international relations.

China is now the world's largest economy, when you look at it through purchasing power parity. Its rapid economic growth is changing the global political and economic landscape. It is often exploiting cheap energy and raw materials from developing countries. A number of Marxist thinkers and political groups, inspired by Lenin's theory of imperialism, argue that China has turned into a capitalist-imperialist state. They believe that China's monopoly capital and its aggressive push into global markets reflect this transformation.

With the BRI and its trade practices, China invests in infrastructure, while extracting raw materials - a dynamic often called neocolonial. At the same time, many developing countries see China's approach as better than what is offered by the IMF or World Bank. For example, China provides lower interest rates and better co-investment terms. But this is not a new pattern. Back in the late 1940s and 50s, the US as a rising imperialist power offered favourable development deals to replace the old colonial powers, especially Britain.

There is also another side to the argument. Critics of the 'Chinese imperialism' idea point out that China sends more surplus value - profits from labour and production - to the US and western Europe than it takes from developing countries. This shows China's deep integration into global value chains, where much of the profit ends up in transnational corporations in wealthier nations. Some argue this makes China a

'semi-peripheral' country in the global capitalist system, but others believe its growing economic influence and capital exports are pushing it toward becoming a core, dominant power.

Those who reject the idea that China is an imperialist power often reference Lenin's classic definition in *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. There Lenin outlined the key features of imperialism, including the dominance of monopolies, the merging of banking and industrial capital, and the export of capital. However, critics note that today's global economy is very different from in Lenin's time. For instance, the colonial division of the world he described no longer exists, thanks to national liberation movements and decolonisation in the mid-20th century. Modern Marxist theories of imperialism have shifted to focus on global systems of economic exploitation and the unequal distribution of wealth and power.

In the ongoing debate about whether China is imperialist, there are those Marxists who argue that it has become a monopoly-capitalist economy internally and that its export of capital abroad proves this. NB Turner, for example, points to China's massive state and private monopoly capital. He highlights how the country's four largest state-owned banks dominate the economy, showing the power of finance capital. Turner also notes China's growing overseas assets and its position as one of the largest exporters of capital, engaging in resource and labour exploitation worldwide. Similarly, Yang Heping (under the pen name, 'Hua Shi') argues that Chinese state-owned capital has become the largest concentration of industrial and financial capital in the world, making it a global monopoly powerhouse.

Between 2004 and 2018, China's foreign assets jumped from \$929 billion to \$7.32 trillion, while foreign investment into China rose from \$693 billion to \$5.19 trillion. By 2018, China had a net investment position of \$2.13 trillion, showing how much capital it is exporting and how it has become a major global

creditor. For many, this looks a lot like the behaviour of an imperialist country.

Significantly, China's dominance is the main reason for the projected rise of Brics. By 2050, it is expected that Brics countries will produce 40% of global economic output. Between 2012 and 2022, they contributed around 45% of global GDP growth, and a quarter of that came from China alone.

The new members are a mixed bunch economically and politically. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are net creditors with strong economies, while others, like Ethiopia and Egypt, face significant debt challenges. Three of the new members - Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran - are big fossil fuel exporters, while Ethiopia and Egypt highlight Africa's increasing importance in the foreign policies of China and India.

Brics has been pushing for changes in global institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and UN to give developing countries more say. It is also working on ideas like using local currencies for trade and making global trade rules more transparent.

China played a massive role in shaping the economic narrative of the original five Brics members. Thanks to its strategic policies, huge manufacturing sector and focus on exports, China has far outpaced the other Brics states in expanding trade. It has become a key trading partner for both wealthy and developing countries. Meanwhile, the others have struggled to keep up. Brazil, for example, relies heavily on agricultural and mineral exports, mostly to China, but has not diversified much. Russia is focused on energy exports, but geopolitical issues often hold it back from expanding its trade network. South Africa is also heavily reliant on mineral exports and faces internal economic challenges that limit its competitiveness.

Currency

Sanctions have left Russia unable to use major currencies like the dollar and euro, forcing it to turn to alternatives like the Chinese yuan and gold. But these come with their

challenges. Russia has ramped up its yuan reserves and shifted from dollar-based trade to direct rouble-yuan transactions, with trade between the two currencies growing 80-fold between February and October 2022 alone.

However, this creates new vulnerabilities for Russia. China controls the yuan-rouble exchange rate, which could make Chinese goods more expensive for Russia or Russian exports cheaper than they would like. On top of that, if Beijing imposes capital controls, Russia could struggle to cash its Chinese bonds. Russia also depends on currency exchanges with China, but, if the US exerts enough pressure, China might cut these off.

As Russia leans more on the yuan, the balance of power in the partnership shifts heavily toward China, cementing Russia’s position as the ‘junior partner’. Gold is another option for Russia, since it holds about \$140 billion in reserves and is a major producer. But using gold as a financial workaround is tricky:

- Western sanctions, along with bans by institutions like the London Bullion Market Association, limit where Russia can sell gold legally.
- Smuggling or masking gold’s origin through intermediaries is risky and slow.
- Countries like China, India and the UAE are cautious about buying large amounts of Russian gold because they do not want to provoke western retaliation.

China, meanwhile, supports Russia’s move away from the dollar, seeing it as a chance to promote the yuan on the global stage. By ‘yuanising’ Russia’s economy, China

gets a controlled environment to test financial strategies and push the yuan as an international currency. With Russia in a tight spot, China is accelerating this process, solidifying its influence. While using the yuan helps Russia deal with sanctions in the short term, it also makes the country more dependent on China in the long run.

Gold could offer a backup plan, but logistical, legal and geopolitical hurdles limit its usefulness. For China, this collaboration is a way to advance its global financial ambitions, turning Russia’s isolation into an opportunity to experiment and grow its influence. This dynamic is complicated: Russia wants financial independence, but its moves often end up strengthening China’s hand instead.

China’s relationships in the Gulf - especially with Saudi Arabia and the UAE - have grown far beyond oil. While the energy trade remains a big part of their relationship, they are now working together on infrastructure, technology, renewable energy and even AI. Major projects include joint ventures in electric vehicles, the Mohammed bin Rashid Solar Park, and digital collaborations with large Chinese companies like Huawei and Alibaba.

The Gulf states, rich in oil and gas, are attempting to carve out a role as ‘independent middle powers’. They are balancing relationships with both China and the US, especially as tensions between the two superpowers heat up. Recent conflicts like the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have sped up their shift away from western-centric partnerships and toward greater alignment with China’s perspectives.

China is a vital economic partner for the Gulf, as the largest buyer of its hydrocarbons. Gulf states are also using their ties with China as leverage in negotiations with western powers, especially in areas like technology and nuclear agreements. Long-term oil deals with China are a cornerstone of these relationships, but technological and military cooperation are growing too. For example, China provides advanced technologies like drones and AI, which are not always available from western partners.

That said, the US still dominates, when it comes to arms sales, and remains the Gulf’s main ‘security’ guarantor. So, while the Gulf is strengthening its ties with China, it is carefully balancing these relationships to maximise its strategic position.

Iran-Russia-China

Iran has been working hard to get around US sanctions, and one key strategy has been shifting from the US dollar to the Chinese yuan for trade. In 2022, Iran’s central bank even made the yuan one of its main foreign exchange currencies. While this might seem like a natural fit, given both countries’ shared interests, their relationship is not without friction.

The ties between China and Iran are largely economic, focusing on trade and infrastructure. Meanwhile, Russia’s relationships with both countries add another layer of complexity, especially since Moscow sees Beijing and Tehran as key players in its multi-polar world vision. Russia, China and Iran are all pushing back against western dominance, promoting state sovereignty and regional autonomy over ‘liberal’ ideals. This shared outlook has driven forward their cooperation on issues like Iran’s nuclear programme, ‘security’ and efforts to bypass US-led global financial systems.

That said, this is not a solid alliance. Their cooperation is often reactive and lacks the deeper, institutional framework needed to form a strong partnership.

When it comes to Iran’s nuclear programme, Russia and China have been pivotal in shaping Iran’s nuclear development. It was Russia that built Iran’s Bushehr nuclear power plant, while China initially offered support, but backed off under US pressure. Both nations supported multilateral talks through the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN security council, opposing unilateral US sanctions. They favoured negotiation over confrontation, even working with western powers at times to address non-proliferation concerns.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has given Iran a platform to focus on sovereignty and combat regional threats. Iran has been an active observer since 2005, but has struggled to achieve full membership. China, in particular, is cautious about letting the SCO appear overtly anti-western. Despite this, Iran sees the SCO as a tool for stability and influence, even if the organisation’s overall capacity is limited.

Iran also plays a critical role in connecting Russian and Chinese economic initiatives, like the Eurasian Economic Union and China’s own BRI. For instance, joint projects in railways and ports aim to boost regional connectivity, but US sanctions and funding issues have slowed progress.

All three nations are eager to ditch the dollar in favour of other currencies, but, despite shared goals, the China-Russia-Iran relationship has clear limits:

- Ad hoc: most of their cooperation is situational rather than deeply integrated.
 - Economic imbalances: China’s dominance can overshadow Russia and Iran, creating tension.
 - Different priorities: Russian and Chinese broader strategies often sideline Iran’s interests.
- So, while they align on challenging US power, their collaboration remains loose and opportunistic rather than part of a stable alliance.

Lessons

The proposed 25-year partnership between Iran and China, signed on March 27 2021, has stirred a lot of debate, especially among Iranian exiles. Though not yet finalised, the deal outlines extensive Chinese investment in Iranian infrastructure - like ports, airports and oilfields - in exchange for discounted Iranian oil. Payments would sidestep US sanctions by using China’s digital yuan and goods-based trade.

According to a report of the agreement published by *Petroleum Economist*, “China will be able to buy any Iranian oil, gas and petrochemical products at a minimum guaranteed discount of 12% to the six-month rolling mean price of comparable benchmark products, plus another 6% to 8% of that metric for risk-adjusted compensation.” The same report added that the agreement would allow China to deploy security personnel on the ground in Iran to protect Chinese projects, and that there would be additional personnel and material available to protect the eventual transit of oil, gas and petrochemical supplies from Iran to China, where necessary, including through the Persian Gulf.

Some critics, especially Iranian regime opponents, have spread misinformation, claiming the deal is a “land grab” or that China would take over Iranian assets like Kish Island. But leaked details suggest this is more about economic exploitation than territorial control. China aims to secure cheap resources, gain port access and expand its markets, while Iran uses the deal to counter its economic isolation.

This partnership is part of China’s broader BRI strategy to lock in energy resources and increase its geopolitical influence. Iran, which supplies much of China’s oil, fits neatly into this plan.

The backdrop here is the shifting global order. The rivalry between the two superpowers has only intensified, with nations like Iran leaning more toward China in response to US isolationist policies. In the tech space, China is also making big moves, particularly in graphical processor units and quantum computing and processors. Although it still trails the US, heavy investments suggest it is determined to close the gap in the coming years.

For Iran, the pivot to China reflects its desperation under crippling sanctions and Europe’s failure to offer meaningful alternatives. While Tehran might prefer closer ties with the west, it has been left with little choice but to deepen its relationship with Beijing. Ironically, US policies designed to weaken rivals may have inadvertently strengthened China by pushing nations like Iran into its orbit ●

What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Speaker: Jack Conrad

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Israel’s war mongering and how to respond

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Should people
be free to
choose?

Slope really is slippery

Legalisation of assisted suicide is not progress, argues Paul Demarty, but rather gives capitalism free rein to throw the seriously ill in the trash-can

Parliament has been discussing what is called, according to the latest officially sanctioned euphemism, “assisted dying”. (When you think about that for five seconds, it sounds like one of those innuendoes people use to avoid being demonetised by YouTube - ‘unliving yourself’, and so forth. So I will stick to the word, ‘euthanasia’, and the phrase, ‘physician-assisted suicide’, for that particular subtype.)

Though it was not in Labour’s manifesto, it has sailed to the top of the government’s agenda via a private member’s bill to be moved by Kim Leadbeater. There has been much earnest verbiage from the bill’s supporters, certainly; but also more cynical reasons leap to mind - for instance, that it is popular with the public, unlike the government, and thus a bankable ‘quick win’ if they can get it through the two houses in short order.

It is my own view - and I stress my own *rather* than that of the *Weekly Worker* or the Communist Party of Great Britain - that this policy should be opposed. There are many reasons to do so, but I will focus first of all on the strong likelihood that a ‘right to die’ with onerous legal safeguards will lead rapidly to a more ‘liberal’ regime, and from there to *pressure* on the very ill to take advantage of this new ‘right’. I will then discuss the questions of personal autonomy and dignity that largely motivate supporters of the bill and laws like it.

Canada

My first argument is, in the form I stated it above, open to the objection that it is a ‘slippery slope’ argument, and presents as inevitable a development without establishing the basis for that inevitability. (Or perhaps not even inevitability - just an unacceptable *risk* of such a development may be enough to reject legalisation, say.) Yet we in England and Wales have the advantage of having held out for so long, while other countries have leaped ahead. And, frankly, the evidence is that the risk is real.

In several countries, it is notable that the numbers seeking death under such laws have tended to grow and grow. Nor is it always a mere matter of statistics. The case of Canada’s ‘medical assistance in dying’ (‘Maid’) legislation is particularly disturbing. Initially restricted in 2016 to the terminally ill, the scope was expanded in 2021, removing that hard requirement and various safeguards for those whose death was, as the legislation states, “reasonably foreseeable”. The 2021 bill also included a clause extending Maid to people with severe treatment-resistant mental health disorders, but the enactment of that clause was delayed until 2023, then 2024, and now 2027. In the meantime, the government considered the possibility of reducing the age of consent for Maid as low as 12.

Annual ‘unalivings’ under this



Albrecht Dürer ‘Portrait of the artist’s mother aged 63’ (1514)

programme have correspondingly increased from 1,000 or so in the first year of operation to 13,000 in 2023. Individuals with long-term, incurable conditions have alleged, in increasing numbers, that doctors have suggested euthanasia to them. In one grim case, a 51-year-old woman with a disability that made her extremely sensitive to fumes from cigarettes and certain chemical cleaners had herself killed under Maid, after unsuccessfully attempting to find suitable housing in Toronto. If they do ever get around to throwing the mentally ill into the mix, there are a whole other set of issues - after all, a common symptom of severe, treatment-resistant mental disorders is suicidality ...

Premier Justin Trudeau does not seem an *unusually* murderous ‘centre-left’ political leader (unlike Starmer, perhaps). And Canadians - who overwhelmingly support Maid, and supported its extension in 2021 - do not seem to be an *unusually* callous population among the various nations of the liberal west. Yet they do seem to have slipped down the slope. All those safeguards, all those assurances, turn out to be worthless. Why?

A few reasons suggest themselves - some more laudable than others. The restriction to the terminally ill is ultimately at odds with the reason people seek euthanasia in the first place, which is the alleviation of suffering and endless degradation. That is the emotional argument made by euthanasia’s advocates, and with good reason. Terminally ill people who are not, for the time being, crippled by their conditions are not at issue. So if it is appropriate to offer the dying the opportunity to escape their suffering, why not

people who live lives of excruciating misery due to conditions that are not fatal in the short term? Indeed, could you not argue that the latter case is *more* morally urgent, since terminal illnesses are, by definition, time-limited? This, at least, is a *rational* extrapolation from the premise that it is morally licit to end suffering through suicide or euthanasia.

There are also structural reasons at work, however, which are not so attractive. To put it bluntly, long-term illness costs the taxpayer (or the insurer) money. Treatments must be paid for. Specialised accommodation must be procured, care workers employed. It is estimated that Maid saves the Canadian government hundreds of millions of dollars - not a *huge* number by state budget standards, but not tiny either. Meanwhile, in the neoliberal era, all these support systems are overstretched at best, and frequently flogged off to parasitic private providers. The NHS lurches from winter crisis to winter crisis. Social care gobbles up ever more of the meagre funds available to local councils.

Normally this case is not made explicitly, for reasons that I hope are obvious, but it was put in remarkably bald terms by the wet-Tory *Times* columnist, Matthew Parris, who wrote in March that “the argument against [euthanasia] is that pressure will grow on the terminally ill to hasten their own deaths - that’s not a bad thing”. After summarising the usual demographic problems - ageing population, declining birth rates, etc - he goes on:

It may sound brutal, but I don’t apologise for the reductivist tone in which this column treats

human beings as units - in deficit or surplus to the collective. For a society as much as for an individual, self-preservation must shine a harsh beam on to the balance between input and output. To protect its future, a healthy society must adapt its norms, its cultural taboos and its moral codes.¹

It is this perverse incentive that ensures the expansion of this policy. So long as assisted suicide is just illegal, the question cannot (legitimately) arise as to whether the ill and infirm are simply a burden. Once it *is* legal, for however restricted a population, the question is opened *for everyone* whether their life is ‘worth’ living, according to the kinds of calculus favoured by Parris, and whether the law should not be tweaked a little to allow us the ‘right’ to unburden society of our needs.

Kim Leadbeater, the MP who is advancing this legislation as a private member’s bill, insists that the safeguards in her bill are watertight, and that sign-off will be required from two doctors and a high court judge (though, oddly, this is not actually how the bill is worded). Coercing someone into euthanasia will be punishable by up to 14 years in prison. But much the same was true in Canada back in 2016. All these ‘safeguards’ are necessary, because we all know, fundamentally, that we live in a society that considers large numbers of people ‘useless mouths’, and resents the outlay of resources required to allow such people to live with a modicum of dignity. It is no surprise that disability rights campaigners typically oppose assisted suicide, as is indeed largely the case in Britain currently.

Autonomy

Most supporters of legal euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, of course, would not talk about useless mouths or the “deficit or surplus to the collective” mentioned by Parris. Something like the direct opposite of such callousness is more commonly the case. Front of mind is the sheer extremity of suffering that sometimes attends mortal illness. We surely have the duty to take what measures are necessary to alleviate that suffering, and in certain cases the only means available is the deliberate ending of the patient’s life.

Related, but distinct, is the question of personal bodily autonomy. The decision to end one’s life must in the end be the responsibility of each individual. To argue otherwise is infantilising and paternalistic. Put these two arguments together, and you have the elements of the common slogan, ‘Dying with dignity’. Dignity is offended *both* by the degradation of extreme suffering *and* the denial of autonomy.

The trouble with this is that it is ultimately an argument from a

specifically *bourgeois* conception of autonomy or freedom, which consists of the right to enter into contracts regardless of any substantive commitment to the good life. The freedom to die is, in fact, a freedom which could only make sense if no such link existed between freedom and fulfilment. Marxists have never considered this an adequate form of freedom. We oppose the ‘freedom’ to work 14 hours a day precisely for this reason. Freedom for the proletariat to pursue its *positive* ends is conditional on its ability to exercise collective self-discipline. In the same way, the ‘right to die’ *itself* infringes on the right of the severely disabled to have their needs met by society as a whole.

The argument on suffering has its own plausibility. (I must admit that my convictions on this issue wobbled a little earlier this year, when I had a bout of shingles, and got a small taste of what it really felt like to be in continuous, untreatable pain.) If our societies really had exhausted all other options - if we had universally available, high-quality palliative care, for example, and a strong supply of specially-adapted homes for people with permanent health conditions - then the question of euthanasia *in extremis* would be more plausible. This is plainly not the situation we face. Wes Streeting, who opposes Leadbeater’s bill, is right to point out that gearing up the NHS to kill people entails taking resources away from other work. But those resources are inadequate anyway.

As such, we counterpose the bourgeois conception of freedom with not only our own such conception, but also with the *political economy* of the working class - a commitment to production for need. That demands realism at precisely the point where bourgeois ideology retreats into fantasy - in its assumption that the ‘normal’ subject is a fully autonomous individual. On the contrary, radical dependence on others is not some weird, exceptional condition suffered only by the very unfortunate, but a *universal* feature of human life, at least in infancy and very commonly in old age or long-term sickness.

A sustainable idea of personal autonomy must in the end be open to the irreducible vulnerability of the human condition, and the limits it imposes on each of us as individuals. We seek a society that produces for need, among other reasons, because our needs are frighteningly mutable over time. Assisted suicide is directly counterposed to this - it is an admission that society considers the meeting of certain needs either beyond its capacity or not worth the bother ●

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Notes

1. www.thetimes.com/article/we-cant-afford-a-taboo-on-assisted-dying-n6p8bfg9k.