

Proletarian



Workers must refuse to be intimidated by the barrage of lying propaganda that fills Britain's corporate media. It is the capitalists' job to try to stop us from taking power and building a socialist society; it is our job to do it anyway!



Ukrainian fascists and their western backers show their true colours

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Are striking doctors really 'greedy' and 'uncaring'?

An answer to 'The Times view on health sector strikes: Uncaring profession'

On Monday 18 September (at 12.01am), the Times dropped its leading editorial opinion piece on the ongoing industrial action of the British Medical Association (BMA), "scheduled to roll out this week on a far more coordinated and systematic basis than previously". (The Times view on health sector strikes: Uncaring profession)

In summary, the editors' opinion is: "For the first time, NHS consultants and junior doctors will this week strike on the same day. *This reckless escalation makes them unworthy of public respect.*"

"Something extraordinary will happen on Wednesday. For the first time in the history of the National Health Service both consultants and their junior

colleagues will strike together, resulting in almost all planned care coming to a complete stop.

"Consultants are striking tomorrow and Wednesday; junior doctors will walk out on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. And they are threatening to continue joint action on three days in early October – during the Conservative party conference – and quite possibly during the remaining life of this government.

"One would imagine that for hospital doctors to *abandon their professional and moral obligations* in such a deliberate and callous way they must be driven by the need to right some terrible wrong – the announcement of mass redundancies in the NHS, for exam-

ple. In fact junior doctors are striking for a 35 percent pay rise. That's right, 35 percent. Their argument is that this figure, redolent of a South American basket case economy, is their due because of real-terms earnings cuts over the past decade." (Our emphasis throughout)

Yes. Doctors have been driven by the need to right a terrible wrong. Real-terms pay cuts of 35 percent are, in fact, a terrible wrong. And if any Times journalist doubts it, let them volunteer for the same. It is not ultimately the journalists, of course, but the finance-capitalist moguls who control the media group who are really expressing these opinions – hoping to convince the nation of their cause, and to demoralise and divide the doctors engaged in the struggle.

In this vein, they continue: "The *radical faction* heading

the junior doctors' committee of the British Medical Association (BMA), the doctors' union, knows full well that this is a *national phenomenon*. But it has convinced itself that its members have some *supernatural right to special treatment*. Presumably, this is because doctors themselves are special."

Special?

All workers are facing a crisis in their raised costs of living in every respect and their decreasing wages. It is not their 'special nature' then, but rather *their character as workers* that leads doctors to fight for pay rates to keep pace with inflation. This is no more than the normal working of 'market forces' – something that both the Conservative government and Labour opposition like to hold aloft as a commandment of their capitalist religion.

Of course, in this matter, the

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Times takes the side of the capitalist class against the workers. It is nothing if not consistent.

In reality, the BMA and doctors as a profession have singularly failed to mount effective resistance over at least a 20-year period of steady real-terms pay cuts. Consultants' pay in England has fallen by more than 35 percent since 2008, falling far more severely than comparable professions and the wider working population.

As the BMA has pointed out: "We don't care for 35 percent fewer patients, carry out 35 percent fewer procedures or work 35 percent fewer hours. Consultants have lost faith in the so-called pay review process, which has been repeatedly interfered with by government – underlined by this year's insulting 6 percent award: a real-terms pay cut of around 5 percent." (Consultants' strike 'for the survival of the NHS' by Ben Ireland, BMA, 20 July 2023)

Decreasing the NHS staff wages bill for privatisation and profit

Doctors' pay has fallen far more than that of the wider workforce. In this regard, they have indeed been singled out for 'special' treatment by the government; both because doctors' pay was higher than average to start with, and because the agenda of health service privatisation, with maximisation of profit, demands a lowering of the wages bill right across the health sector.

The staff wages bill (along with insufficient government funding and the lack of social care for those patients ready for discharge) was cited by the Circle Health group as the reason for its failure to manage Hinchingsbrooke hospital at a profit – as the Financial Times

pointed out when Circle pulled out of its ten-year contract after a disastrous three years in charge, back in 2015.

"But the healthcare industry insisted that the pipeline of other NHS contracts remained strong and pointed to an increasing number of integrated social and healthcare contracts awarded to the private sector, including Circle's £125m deal to provide musculoskeletal services for 440,000 NHS patients in Bedfordshire, Virgin, which holds 325 NHS contracts, said it had been in the market for ten years and would continue to 'pursue opportunities with the same vigour' as before." (Circle ends NHS hospital deal amid losses and criticism by Gill Plimmer et al, 9 January 2015)

Richard Branson remains the nation's largest GP practice manager, with more than three million patients in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. "Private provider Virgin Care has won almost £2bn worth of NHS contracts [between 2011-16]. Virgin Care and its subsidiaries [then already held] at least 400 contracts with more than 40 CCGs across the public sector, which ... amount to £1.8bn. Virgin ... secured over £1bn worth of NHS contracts in 2016/17 alone, which amounted to a third of the total value of contracts won by non-NHS providers in that period." (Virgin Care wins £2bn worth of NHS contracts in the last five years, Pulse, 6 August 2018)

Let's not forget that the Covid pandemic was used to build up record-breaking waiting lists in NHS hospitals, on the back of which, other than the corrupt granting of £450bn in 'emergency Covid contracts' and 'bail-outs' to private business. (Research briefing: Public spending during the Covid-19 pandemic by Philip Brien and Matthew Keep, House of Commons Library, 12

September 2023)

A further £10bn of taxpayers' money was pledged by the government to private hospital groups in August 2020 for "buying operations and treatment in the private sector over the next four years to reduce waiting times [!]" (NHS prepares to spend up to £10bn on private hospital treatments by Shaun Lintern, 17 August 2020)

This real haemorrhaging of funds to the private sector is in full swing, and far outweighs the costs that would be involved in *funding the NHS adequately, and paying actual NHS staff to do the job.*

The subcontracting out of NHS services, with billions in corporate profits being taken from the NHS budget each year, has been accelerating, and is the chief reason that wages are being forced ever lower.

Private healthcare: substandard, expensive and impoverishing

It is worth noting the fate of the patients in the aforementioned NHS hospital when it was in the tender hands of private corporate capital:

"Hinchingsbrooke – the flagship of NHS privatisation – was given the Care Quality Commission's worst ever rating for 'caring'. Both safety and leadership were also bottom of the heap.

"Circle's cleverly branded 'mutual' model, far from 'liberating' NHS professionals to make grassroots-led improvements, had in fact replicated some of the worst hierarchical, bullying practices to be found in the NHS. And it had lost the caring and expertise that are the NHS's strengths, principally as a result of poor leadership and *financially-driven*

staff cuts to satisfy investors."

"The CQC notes: 'We found many instances of staff wishing to care for patients in the best way, but unable to ... prevent service demands from severely impinging on the quality and kindness of care for patients.' It found Circle lacking 'sufficient appropriately skilled nursing staff'.

"Though the details are shocking, the general picture is unsurprising to anyone except those who bought the ideological hype about private sector magic dust. Circle won the contract by promising what the Public Accounts Committee called an 'unrealistic' and 'unprecedented' level of savings – urged on by government officials.

"Circle's full business case said it would achieve this by altering 'nurse-patient ratios', but exactly how was blacked out of the plan when it was eventually published. Leaks suggested plans to cut 320 posts *in total.*" (Hinchingsbrooke – why did England's privatised hospital deal REALLY collapse? by Caroline Molloy, Open Democracy, 14 January 2015, our emphasis)

Why is doctors' pay relatively high? Skilled v 'simple' labour

In its editorial hatchet job, the Times chews over its familiar refrain: "You are highly paid, how dare you complain or ask for more?" We can dub this the 'Oliver Twist' treatment. And it's the same story when any skilled and organised group of workers take action to preserve, restore or increase their pay.

In essence, the diatribe directed against doctors today is not fundamentally different to the handling of train and tube drivers when they strike to defend their pay, conditions *and the safety of their services.*

The main differ- ▶ page 4

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Doctors' strike

◀ **page 3** ence between doctors and other skilled workers is that it takes so very long to train both 'junior' and consultant doctors. Five or six years of medical school, two years of foundation training ('house' jobs as they were formerly known), at least three years of junior specialty training (senior house officer roles, formerly), four to six years of senior training (as a registrar or specialist trainee), with perhaps an intercalated research or education degree (two to five years).

Alongside all this is a litany of professional exams to pass, courses and conferences to attend, journal articles to write, skills to be acquired, mastered and objectively verified, clinical competence reviews to be completed – and perhaps a fellowship in an area of specialised interest.

Training the next generation of doctors and allied professionals is an integral part of doctors' lives and duty: every doctor is also a teacher.

All these steps are competitive; accomplishment and transition from one stage to the next are not guaranteed. Working lives are hugely rewarding, and enjoyable – lifelong learning is a privilege, as well as an obligation – but time, intellectual and emotional pressures are also intense. The support required also becomes expensive, with travelling, living and working combined with child-raising and other family, social and life expenses multiplying in proportion to the time-poverty of the professionals involved.

And no, not everyone can or wishes to do it.

Devotion to duty v the pursuit of money

The Times, however, thinks that the 'special' status of doctors "is that their profession

is one of the ultimate expressions of human civilisation: a *career dedicated not to gain but to the alleviation of suffering*. A profession that is not commercial but caring. How does 35 percent chime with that?"

Hear! Hear! The London Times, daily journal of the British monopoly-capitalist class, now professes self-righteously that there is some 'higher expression of human civilisation' than 'gain'!

Would the Times rage so, one wonders, if doctors, nurses, radiographers, teachers, train drivers, engineers ... in a word, *workers*, asked for *less* money? *Less* culture, *less* education for themselves, *less* schooling for their children, *less* food, *clothing* and *shelter*? *Less* rest and *recreation*? *Less* civilisation? A smaller proportion of the wealth created by our collective labour?

This again is a totally false and hypocritical line of argument. Alas, we are not living in a world where all our needs are catered for, planned and provided by a benevolent society and state that has the interests of the workers at its heart. Quite the reverse. *Maximisation of profit is derived directly by maximising working hours and intensity and minimising remuneration*.

In the immortal words of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

"The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has

pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'.

"It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless infeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade.

Training the next generation of doctors and allied professionals is an integral part of doctors' lives and duty: every doctor is also a teacher.

"In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

"The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. *It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.*" (Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848, our emphasis)

And as wage labourers in a capitalist economy, doctors, like any other workers, must struggle to preserve their pay and conditions against the encroachments of capital – even when NHS employers are the indirect servants of capital, mediated by the Tory [or Labour] government and NHS management apparatus, which all undoubtedly still serve the capitalist class, and which constantly strive to reduce the social wage of the proletariat just as surely as they press down on their direct

wages.

Without adequate pay, training and retention, there will be no NHS

If pay is insufficient to meet the increased burden of training and the lifestyle involved, then ultimately the profession will fail to attract and retain the skilled doctors that the NHS needs to function. Newly qualified doctors (without the bank of mum and dad to draw upon) are now accruing an average £100,000 of debt during their university study.

"In his foundation year one, on £14.09 an hour, Alistair Ludley accumulated £1,044 of interest on his near £90,000 student loan debts – more than his annual repayment of £903." Hardly an attractive proposition for the nation's 'best and brightest'! (Enough is enough: a life of debt by Ben Ireland, BMA, 24 November 2022)

Such a situation also preserves medicine as an elite profession not accessible to the majority of working-class students. And it is British public-school culture, rather than some special preserve of male doctors, that has a negative impact on the culture of our health service.

And here is where the demands of the doctors as a profession coincide with the needs of the entire working population: we all need the NHS to function well. "To provide high-quality care at the point of need, free at the point of need, from the cradle to the grave."

The attack across the board on NHS pay, on training bursaries, on maintenance grants and course fees is a veiled but crucial part of the attack on the NHS system of public healthcare provision itself. *If NHS workers are not able to preserve their pay, there will be*

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no NHS, with the consequential huge detriment to the life of every British citizen, and with a particularly heavy burden falling on the poorest sections of society – the lowest-paid members of the working class.

Let us not forget that an incredible 14 million Britons are now classed as living in poverty, with a further extra two and a half million people ‘just above’ the poverty line, meaning that relatively small changes would force them below it too. Of these, four and a half million are children and one and a half million are pensioners. (More than 14 million people in UK living in poverty, major report finds by May Bulman, Independent, 17 September 2018)

Many of our poorest fellow workers are in this position as a result of chronic ill-health and chronic unemployment and underemployment. We in the NHS help those workers every day. Without an NHS, such workers will fall even deeper into the ‘classic’ Dickensian poverty of the Victorian era. This is, in fact, what our government is aiming at.

NHS decline

Seemingly not a day passes without the media pushing another major ‘NHS’ scandal. It’s as if there were a joined-up political and media campaign aimed at defaming and destroying the NHS; of undermining the NHS as ‘the nation’s last religion’ – and indeed there very well may be.

But it is not the NHS that is failing. Rather, we are seeing the effects of the deliberate destruction, undermining, under-resourcing, restructuring, dismantling and corporate fleecing of NHS funding streams. The crises that wrack our destroyed ‘public’ system of health provision are then repackaged and sold to

us as further evidence that the entire idea of public health provision “from the cradle to the grave, free at the point of use” needs ‘shock therapy’, ‘radical surgery’ and ‘fundamental rethinking’ – ie, a hair of the dog: yet more privatisation!

The policies that have been pursued to destroy our NHS (all pursued illegally, and fraudulently, by successive Labour, ConDem and Tory governments under the guise of ‘improving’ it, one might add) are: introduction of the internal market, patient ‘choice’, decreased clinical autonomy and decision-making, the revolving door between NHS and business management, a target-driven culture, ‘performance-based’ funding (rationing), private finance initiatives (PFI) to ‘build hospitals’ (the great NHS heist), clinical commissioning group (CCG) GP fundholding (dismantling of planning and the takeover by the ‘big four’ accountancy and insurance firms), subcontracting ‘peripheral’ and then ‘core’ services (dating back to the cleaners and building up to entire medial services and hospitals, the Virgin takeover, etc).

The coup de grace will be the rolling out nationwide of ‘clinical networks’, making way for the private health and in particular the insurance industry takeover of NHS funding streams.

If all this seems a bit much, we invite our readers to check out the leading role in the process of Lord Simon Stevens of Birmingham (knighted and then ennobled by Boris Johnson). Stevens was appointed chief executive of the NHS when official ministerial responsibility for health provision was removed by the 2012 Health and Social Care Act under the direction of then Tory health minister Andrew Lansley (does anyone even remember Lansley now?!)

Stevens had formerly advised Labour prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Labour health ministers Frank Dobson and Alan Milburn on the introduction of the private finance initiative to fleece the NHS. He left that job to become corporate executive vice-president and president of United Health’s ‘global health businesses’, spanning the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa, and was also was a director of Brazil’s largest hospital group Amil.

United Health is the world’s largest health insurance company, with an annual turnover of \$400bn. Stevens’ job was helping his bosses to tap into the huge state budgets for healthcare spending around the world. And the NHS was the jewel in his crown – for which he won his enormous remuneration, high-level government access, and his lordship.

When he passed back through the revolving door to take over as chief executive of the NHS, he did so to oversee the final insurance takeover of CCGs – whose task is to reproduce the basis of the US healthcare system in Britain. British clinical commissioning groups will mimic the USA’s so-called ‘health maintenance organisations’ (HMO) – the system that has made US healthcare the most expensive and inequitable (literally the ‘worst’) in the world.

What can we do?

First, don’t be duped. The problem with low NHS pay, including for junior and consultant doctors, is real. As of June 2023, there were 125,572 vacancies in secondary care in England. Of these, 10,855 vacancies were medical, amounting to 7.2 percent of all medical posts.

This vacancy rate is similar to the one seen a year ago. A

recent Royal College of Physicians (RCP) census found 58 percent of consultant physicians reported having vacant consultant posts in their department. As a result, the RCP reports that one in five are at risk of burnout, and seven and a half million people are currently waiting for operations or procedures in England.

The General Medical Council (GMC) estimates that 10,000 doctors left the medical workforce in 2021, half of them to go overseas. Current OECD data shows at least 13,000 British-trained doctors presently working abroad. In the Republic of Ireland, the new consultant pay scale starts at the equivalent of around £185,000 – double that offered in England.

Second, be assertive in our demands. The attack on medical pay is part and parcel of the attack on all workers’ pay, and of an attack on the NHS itself.

We should not be shame-faced in demanding pay restoration; this is central to our fight to save the NHS. We must demand more for all, not less for this or that group of skilled and vital workers. The current economic conditions of inflationary crisis are beyond workers’ control and not of our making.

Workers should not accept paying with their poverty to protect the capitalists’ obscene profits.

Third, defend national provision and demand the reversal of NHS privatisation. This must be our consistent demand across all medical, dental and pharmaceutical services.

(For more on this, see our party’s resolution on the problems that beset the NHS at thecommunists.org/about.)

Industry



Which way forward for the trade unions now?

It is time to break out of suffocating 'unity' with those who serve our class enemies.

The year 2022 saw the emergence of a number of strikes and disputes in both the public and private sectors. As the cost of living crisis began to intensify, workers began to take action to try to restore their deteriorating real-terms pay and conditions.

Most notable were the struggles of the nurses, postal workers and teachers, along with the ongoing action by both train and station staff on the railways.

The TUC even called a *joint day of action* on which several unions took strike action simultaneously and rallies in support of the strikes were held around the country. This appeared to be a real step forward and was met with wide support by workers around the country, in turn

giving confidence to those on strike.

But despite workers' readiness to fight, 2023 has increasingly seen trade union leaders backing down in the face of government intransigence and media vilification. Instead of harnessing the power of their members to demand real pay restitution and restoration of our crumbling public services, the supposed 'leaders' of these struggles have instead been encouraging their members to take below inflation pay 'rises' at the earliest opportunity and to consider such a retreat as a 'victory' – or at least as the 'best that can be achieved / afforded'.

It seems the trade union leaders have found a new kind of unity. They are unified in de-

mobilising the strikes and *demoralising* workers at the exact moment when they ought to have been pushing forward and winning major (and desperately needed) victories in a range of key social and economic sectors.

So what has happened?

Inflation and the cost of living

Throughout the last year, the government has maintained the line that it 'cannot afford' pay rises (although no financial worries have interfered with sending £2.3bn to prolong the war in Ukraine).

Alongside this narrative, there has been a huge push to *blame strikes and pay rises for the inflation crisis*. The issue of pay and inflation is easily dealt with, as it is clearly nonsense, demands for pay rises *follow* inflation, they don't lead it.

In fact, it is the tremendous injection of 'liquidity', aka 'quantitative easing' (ie, money-printing) that took place during the Covid pandemic (creating huge corporate profits at taxpayers' expense) that is the primary culprit for our current inflation crisis. £450bn was 'pumped' into the economy during 2020.

To put this in perspective, the amount that was printed to help bail out banks in 2008 was a 'mere' £137bn (for which we are still paying via draconian austerity measures). More money was printed in 2020 than in the previous ten years combined, with this fresh bailout going to banks and major monopolies that were facing a severe crisis at the start of the pandemic.

Clearly, the connection between the cost of living crisis and rising inflation is not that workers are being paid too much, but that the capitalist ruling class is flailing around trying to keep a lid on the deep crisis of overproduction into which it is sinking further ever day.

The bottom line is that the British economy, along with the rest of the global capitalist-imperialist system, is in terminal decay, and unable to solve its own contradictions.

Aside from printing money in a blind panic, another method capitalists use to try to maintain the profitability of their system is to cut wages in real terms – and this is exactly what has been going on. Workers are finding their wages are worth less and less as inflation and the 'cost of living crisis' hit home.

Even calling it a cost of living crisis is a misnomer, since what we are witnessing is the

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usual mechanisms of the capitalist system at work. Even as workers' living standards are deteriorating, British monopolies are sitting on record profits, and their senior executives are being handed huge salaries and bonuses for their success in keeping profits flowing to shareholders.

Fighting austerity and declining living standards

In the face of all this, workers on the front lines of public service delivery are not only trying to cope with the drastic lowering of their wages, but also with brutal cuts to the services they are working so hard to uphold. A steady rise in anger, frustration and militancy has been the inevitable result.

This increase in militancy amongst workers has not only been a shock to the government, but also to the trade union leaders – a set of people who have till now been very comfortable, with their CEO-type salaries and seats around the bosses' tables.

Ever since the defeats of the labour movement in the 1980s, the trade unions have been increasingly turning themselves into NGOs, reshaping their role as mediators of peaceful coexistence with the bosses, and as sellers of 'membership services' to the workforce. As any trade union member will tell you, these days you are as likely (or even more so) to get a call from a third-party sales team selling you insurance as you are to be notified of your local branch meeting!

Yet unions remain the first port of call for workers who are moving into action against their employers, no matter how hard the union's full-time officials work to avoid or contain such action.

In recent months, these leaders have been put to the test.

In the beginning, they were ducking and diving as strike ballots began. The nurses' (RCN) leaders initially tried to call the strike off, but were met with huge resistance from their members and reluctantly re-balloted. With the strike back on, there was huge support from the public and other unions.

The postal workers, train drivers and teachers engaged in their own parallel struggles, and a real possibility emerged that public-sector workers might combine to put the government on the ropes.

In the meantime, a number of private-sector disputes erupted – most notably at Amazon. It should also be noted that in the private sector, a number of above inflation pay rises were ceded without the need for industrial action. No doubt the signs from the public sector sent a warning to bosses across industry, who quickly settled to avoid being beset by similar levels of rising militancy and organisation.

We note in passing that pay rises in the private sector are also attributable to a lack of available staff – a phenomenon which had been owing partly to rock-bottom wages and partly to the large numbers of workers unable because of untreated medical problems. This backlog of untreated conditions, a result of exponentially growing NHS waiting lists, is now causing serious concern amongst some economists.

Cowardice and treachery of Britain's union leaders

But just when the workers looked as if they were on the front foot, the union leaders shot them in the back. The CWU's leaders urged postal workers to accept a pay deal (real-terms cut) that failed miserably to address the rapidly

intensifying working conditions at Royal Mail, and which also left new staff out in the cold, creating in effect a two-tier workforce with different sets of working conditions across the service.

Under great pressure from a retreating leadership, CWU members voted to accept the 'deal' by a decisive 75 percent, though it should be pointed out that this was on a relatively low turnout of 68 percent (a turnout lower than for the original strike ballot). After months without any strike days, despite a clear mandate for action, members had become demoralised and either accepted the arguments of the union leadership or lacked confidence in the leadership to carry on with the strike.

This latter was especially evident given how determinedly CWU leaders had pushed for the capitulatory 'deal' to be accepted – even at one point reinforcing management's line that the Post Office would go bust if the deal was rejected.

Of course, given the privatisation of the postal service, this is now a real possibility, but the inability of investors to make sufficient profit without forcing the most abject pay and conditions onto workers is an argument for renationalisation, not for meekly accepting the demands of the employers that workers should sacrifice their health at the altar of profitability!

Indeed, a meaningful move in this direction would require the union to organise not only Royal Mail staff, but also workers across the entirety of the private (and very profitable) delivery sector, in which the demands would be not only decent pay, pensions and working conditions, but the total renationalisation of the entire postal service.

The upshot of the CWU's

capitulation has been widespread anger amongst a layer of sincere trade union activists, and demoralisation amongst the membership – many of whom are leaving the union as a result.

In the health service, meanwhile, the Royal College of Nurses (a union that has traditionally avoided strikes, but whose members were some of the most militant engaged in the NHS pay dispute) joined with Unite (a union whose general secretaries have a tradition of radical posturing) and other health service unions in accepting the government's derisory joint pay offer. Once again, union members were stunned and demoralised, believing that they had the commitment and support to have pushed forward and won considerable gains.

Ballots for further strike action failed to meet the threshold required by law owing to the half-hearted way in which they were run and the changed way they were carried out – on a national basis rather than as a series of ballots across the various separate NHS trusts as had been done previously. (It is worth noting that the vote by trust had been assumed to be the *most disorganising* way of conducting the 'resistance', but when this failed to lead to the expected levels of fragmentation and demoralisation, new methods were found!)

Most recently it has been the four teaching unions that have collapsed after their leaders all recommended acceptance of the government's (or rather the 'independent' pay review body's) 6.4 percent pay offer (ie, of another deep real-terms pay cut). The National Education Union's leadership argued that teachers should 'bank' this largesse and 'continue the fight' ... sometime in the future. As ever, members' falling confidence in the highly- **▶ page 8**

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Trade unions

◀ **page 7** paid union leaders to represent their best interests paid a major role in forcing the cave-in.

For the time being, the only disputes that are continuing are on the railways and amongst junior doctors, who have so far refused to accept the public-sector pay offer and continue to argue for real pay restoration.

Working for the election of a Labour government

It is clear that while the capitalists have won this round, the fight is far from over. As conditions continue to deteriorate and inflation continues to spiral, workers will have no choice but to have recourse to industrial action again – and neither the bosses nor the trade union leaders will be able to keep the proverbial genie of collective action inside its bottle.

But what do union activists and the wider working class need to do?

The first thing we need to understand is that the union leaders are not the union, but also that the membership are clearly not in control of the unions either. What has become clear is that no matter how 'left' or 'radical' a union leadership *appears* to be, the union structures have developed in such a way as to keep it essentially divorced from its membership.

Moreover, an overwhelming number of union leaders and officials are institutionally tied to the Labour party. This might not seem like a big deal to many workers, but the result is consistently to subordinate the struggle of the workers to the requirements of the Labour party.

As the next general election

approaches, union leaders and full-timers are under instructions not to not rock the boat – not to allow any strike action to damage the chance of Labour victory and the inauguration of that holy of holies (in which workers have been told to place their faith for more than a century now) – a new Labour government.

All this really means in the present conditions, however, is that the next big wave of strike action is likely to take place against a government run by the very Labour party the strikers' union leaders are tied to. This suits the ruling class very well, as can be seen from the number of disputes where unions have been in dispute with local Labour authorities who are every bit as determined to push back against strikers as their Tory counterparts.

Given the deep economic crisis afflicting our rulers, there is no doubt that the chief role of a Labour government will be to launch further attacks on pay, conditions and services – and the role of the TUC and union leaders will be to instruct workers not to resist for fear of bringing down the government and letting the Tories back in.

This pattern has been repeating itself ever since the first Labour administration of Ramsay MacDonald in 1924, and highlights the fundamental importance of trade unions breaking their links with the Labour party. The severance of this link is a fundamental prerequisite to the organisation of any meaningful fight-back against the ruling class's vicious assault on our pay, conditions and public services.

This is the case regardless of whether the Labour leadership identifies as 'left' or 'right'. A century of experience has shown conclusively that every leader, no matter what

his official 'leaning', has been loyal first and foremost to the system of British imperialism – from Ramsay MacDonald's desire to prove that the British empire was 'safe in his hands' to Clement Attlee's use of the armed forces to break strikes in the 1940s, to Jeremy Corbyn's retreat from every apparently 'anti-imperialist' position as soon as he was elected leader of the party.

Unity with whom – and for what?

Within the unions themselves, one of the tasks that faces socialists is to challenge the misuse of the concept of 'unity', which is in reality used by our class enemies to neuter our ability to organise against them. All too often, it is the forces of 'the left' (Trotskyites and revisionists of the SWP, SP, CPB type) who insist on (and vigorously police) total discipline in backing up a leadership that does not speak for its members and over whose decisions the workers have no input – all in the name of 'democracy' and the 'unity' of the class.

This is a total perversion of the concept of working-class unity based on Leninist organisational principles, where democratic centralism and tight discipline are founded on real, meaningful democratic debate and participation. Whenever a worker is exhorted to show 'unity', his first question should be: with whom, and for what?

Working-class power is, of course, based on organisation and unity of action. Trade unions are the most basic form of working-class organisation, not its highest form, which is the communist party. Unlike a party, which organises workers to change society, unions are primarily *defensive* organisations, organising workers to resist the worst encroach-

ments of capital, which, left unchecked, would inevitably push them down into an abject and dehumanised suffering mass.

Our self-proclaimed 'class warriors' of the so-called 'left', however, have inverted this picture, and insist on presenting trade union organisation as the highest form of working-class activity, demanding the highest level of discipline and unity.

But what kind of socialist denies the right to criticise even the party's leadership, never mind that of a trade union? What kind of unity can be achieved by workers who are told that to campaign to replace deficient leaders with more class-conscious and determined ones is 'disloyal' and 'disruptive' – even 'anti-union'? And what is the benefit of 'unity in action' when that action is not directed in such a way as to serve the interests of the class?

Unfortunately, just this type of false 'unity' with the leadership is being pushed by many 'left-wing' union officials and activists, who have themselves become so institutionalised as to have more in common with the union bureaucracies than they do with the members.

Taking inspiration from our own history

Looking back to the political traditions of the Communist party (CPGB) of the late 1920s and the National Minority Movement it led gives us a different kind of inspiration. Despite its small size, the newly-formed CPGB was able to organise a stable minority of militant trade unionists across industry in an organised struggle that undermined the dominance of the Labour party and provided an alternative pole for rank-and-file organisation after the defeat of the 1926 general strike (a defeat **page 13** ▶

Industry



Joti Brar: a personal account of anti-war struggle against the trade union bureaucracy

Why is it so hard to get anything meaningful done via the existing trade union mechanisms?

The following article written by Joti Brar, former trade union representative for Bectu (the broadcasting union) and author of *The Drive to War Against Russia and China*, is a brief insight into her time as a trade unionist and some thoughts on the role of the trade union leaders in controlling workers on behalf of British imperialism.

So I hear the TUC yesterday pulled a fire alarm stunt to prevent any meaningful debate of the controversial pro-Ukraine resolution.

What a classic piece of manoeuvring by our 'democracy-loving' union bureaucracy.

Years ago, the first time (2004, I believe) my trade union branch (BBC Radio and Music) brought a motion about non-cooperation of media

workers with war crimes to the floor of the Broadcast, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (Bectu) conference (where many unionised BBC workers were attending), the Iraq war was still fairly new and opinion about it was very divided.

The debate was getting heated and there were huge numbers of people queuing up to speak for both sides. Just as it looked like it was getting interesting, a leadership plant stood up from the floor of the congress and shouted "Move next business".

In my naivety, I had no idea what he meant, and certainly no idea of what the procedure might be to counter it, but it turned out the man had done the equivalent of slamming down a 'Nope' card in a game of Exploding Kittens. The union chair on the platform happily

complied and suddenly the whole debate was over and we were talking about something else ...

That was the closest we came to a meaningful debate on the issue. In other years, our branch brought similar resolutions, but each time we had to struggle against ever tighter constraints.

First, the union cut down substantially the maximum length that a resolution was allowed to be (they did this twice as I recall) – and specified also that it must contain "no argumentation" (!) We put on a film show as a fringe meeting to highlight that the Iraq war was a criminal endeavour and that refusing to cooperate with propaganda in its support was essential for any media worker who did not want to be complicit (as set out in the Nuremberg trials after WW2).

We were barred from holding another such meeting, and the time allowed to propose,

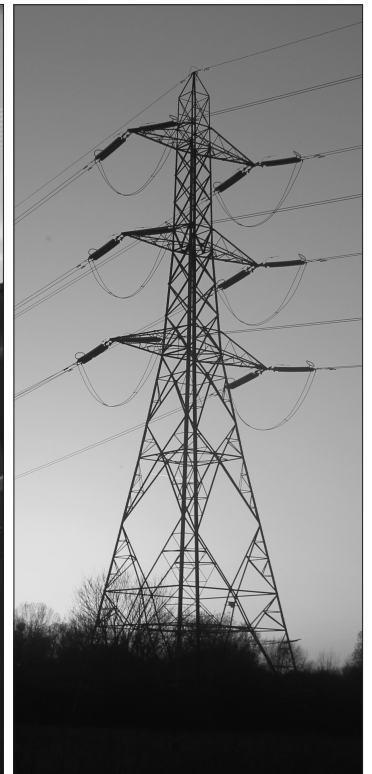
second and speak to a motion was also cut down to the bone. We printed leaflets and put them under the bedroom doors of the other delegates, hoping in this way to get some of our main points across to those who would be attending the 'debate'.

In this ongoing guerrilla war, what the union leadership was most concerned about was not getting to the truth of the matter or ensuring a democratic outcome (although they loved to talk about their 'democratic procedures'), but avoiding a principled conversation about an important topic where they wished to stay firmly on the side of British imperialism *without having to come out and say so explicitly*.

A remark from a member of the leadership the last time we had such a debate stays with me. The war by this time had become extremely unpopular and there was general agreement about the fact that it had been an unlawful aggression, characterised by brutality, criminality and corruption of all kinds. Everyone could see it had been an absolute disaster for Iraq and everyone hated Tony Blair for having knowingly lied to the British public in taking us into the war (not to mention ignoring the two million-strong demonstration against the war in February 2003).

So nobody any longer could object to the main points of the resolution. [See note.] Yet still the majority of those present were not going to vote for it and the union leadership did everything possible to undermine it. The general secretary said to me in a tone of aggrieved long-suffering as I approached the microphone: "What is it you want from us, Joti? Of course we agree with you about the war, but what are we supposed to do? We're not journalists; we're just the technicians."

Social



Oxfam identifies inequalities in shocking detail, but provides no solution

Price-gouging is a real monopoly practice. But is it really at the root of the global economic crisis?

For decades, Oxfam shops have been a common fixture on British high streets. Their twin-track approach of selling cheap second-hand clothes, used books, tantalising bric-a-brac and ethically-sourced products from developing countries, with the promise of charitable contributions winging their way to the wretchedly poor overseas, has appeared to be a winning formula: spending and salvation.

In a single transaction, Oxfam meets the needs of the enlightened shopper worrying about conspicuous consumption – or, with the deepening economic crisis, in need of cheap clothes – while promising to address the global economic inequalities that leave faraway war-torn villages desperate for clean water.

Regardless of how popular or profitable its shops have been, Oxfam is aware that the needs of the global poor will not be met by consumers alone. The economic and political levers of government and capital will need to be tilted in a more favourable direction. Investigating and exposing policies, the machinations of the market and the serendipity of global finance are deemed essential by the charity if the iniquitous distribution of wealth and resources is ever to be bent towards alleviating the suffering of the have-nots.

Report highlights monopoly superprofits in key sectors

To this auspicious end, a recent study published jointly by Oxfam and Action Aid drew

attention to the inordinate profits made by major corporations for the second year in a row, while, according to Katy Chakraborty, Oxfam's head of advocacy: "people everywhere are struggling to afford enough for basics like medicines and heating". Its findings do indeed make for sober reading. (Big business' windfall profits rocket to 'obscene' \$1tn a year amid cost-of-living crisis; Oxfam and ActionAid renew call for windfall taxes, 6 July 2023)

Headline figures attest to 722 mega-corporations raking in \$1.09tn in *windfall* profits (windfall defined as those *exceeding* average profits made by those same corporations in the previous four years) in 2021 and \$1.1tn in 2022. A statistic drawn from Forbes' 'Global 2000' ranking see shows this to be a jump of 89 percent above the years 2017-20.

These would be astounding figures for any economic period, but during a global slump they surely raise some questions. The report provides a breakdown of this fortunate group:

- 45 energy companies made \$237bn, with the industry boasting 96 energy billionaires with a combined wealth of \$432bn.
- 18 food and beverage corporations made on average \$14bn a year in windfall profits.
- 28 drug corporations made \$47bn.
- Major retailers and supermarkets made \$28bn
- Nine aerospace and defence corporations made \$8bn.

Oxfam is not alone in calling attention to the colossal profit surge being enjoyed by key cor-

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porations. The Guardian has highlighted the findings of a team of researchers at Unite, the UK's largest private-sector trade union, whose report analysing the top 350 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange noted that average profit margins increased from 5.7 percent in the first half of 2019 to 10.7 percent in the first half of 2022. (The Guardian view on corporate greed: it's causing inflation, 12 March 2023)

It was the scale of the profits recorded by British Gas that earned the ire of The Times – or, rather, the nature of that profit. Consumer affairs correspondent Andrew Ellson clarified the formula by which the energy corporation calculates its profitability:

“About £500m of its record £969m profit in the first half of the year came from ‘one-off’ increases Ofgem made to the cap to compensate suppliers for past errors ... The cap includes a fixed-rate profit margin of 1.9 percent, so 1.9 percent of a higher cap resulted in a higher absolute profit per customer.” (Why are British Gas profits so inflammatory?, 27 July 2023)

Asked whether British Gas will continue to make high profits, Centrica CEO Chris O’Shea (British Gas’s parent company) is confident that the supplier will continue to make between £150m and £250m profit each year. The government is currently spending billions of pounds of public money to maintain this enormous profit margin.

Andrew Ellson’s article illustrated the fallout on British households: “It may seem hard to believe, but just three years ago the cheapest energy deal available for the average household was £783 a year. The average standard tariff was £1,125 – and that was

considered painfully expensive, with charities warning about the impact of fuel poverty. Today, the average bill is £2,078 ... This amounts to one pound in every four of the take-home pay of someone on the minimum wage, and a quarter of the state pension.”

Huge corporate profits have been a boon for executives and shareholders alike. Oxfam estimated that top-paid CEOs across four countries enjoyed a real-term 9 percent pay hike in 2022. This seems almost niggardly when one learns that the chief executive of Proctor & Gamble, a US-listed firm last year rewarded chief executive Jon Moeller with a 44 percent pay increase (up to \$18m/£14.7) for his efforts in keeping profits above 17 percent for the past three years.

Price-gouging dubbed ‘greedflation’

This bonanza for the monopoly corporations has caused widespread consternation. These superprofits have not been obtained through technological advancement, increased productivity nor, tellingly, by the conquest of new markets. Rather, the accusation being levelled at the big players in the global market is that they are guilty of ‘price-gouging’, defined by Phillip Inman of the Guardian business pages as “systematic and excessive price increases”.

This is a view ratified by Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, who labelled the boost in profit margins with the rather emotive term “greedflation”. The accusation is that, under cover of the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine, monopolies have been exploiting the global energy crisis, global food price inflation and higher interest rates to increase profits by artificially raising prices *above the level demanded* by the afore-

mentioned factors.

Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey maintains that there is “no evidence” that firms have gone beyond the reasonable passing on of unavoidable extra costs to consumers by “loading prices, stealthily and excessively, to enrich their shareholders” – yet the corporations’ profit and loss accounts tell a different story.

Albert Edwards, a senior analyst at Société Générale, has had no qualms in pinning responsibility for the rise in the rate of inflation into double-digit figures in Britain, the USA and Germany onto companies that have “pushed margins higher”. Moreover, he says, they have done so at a time when “their raw material costs are falling away”.

What about the money-printing?

Paul Donovan, chief economist at UBS Wealth Management, has concurred with this view, attesting that the hike in inflation is due to “profit expansion”. Donovan is even prepared to put a figure on the increase: “Typically, one would expect about 15 percent of inflation to come from margin expansion, but the number today is probably about 50 percent.”

All this discussion of monopoly price-gouging leaves entirely out of the picture the huge money-printing programme that has been engaged in by imperialist banks over the last 15 years – and in the last three years in particular.

It is far simpler to blame a few greedy (and allegedly aberrant ‘bad apple’) individuals than explain that every extra billion that has been printed by the Bank of England, the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank has been devaluing the imperialist currencies and therefore lowering the val-

ue of wages, pensions and savings not only in the home countries but all over the world.

Still, the additional burden of being forced to subsidise such engorged profit margins cannot fail to have impacted households and businesses – cutting budgets everywhere to the bone and affecting most severely those who are already least able to afford basic necessities.

Oxfam and Action Aid are quite clear about the damage being wrought by inflation, both in Britain and overseas. The statistics (which they blame entirely on the price-gouging of monopoly corporations) are damning:

- One billion workers across 50 countries took a \$746bn real-terms pay cut in 2022.
- More than a quarter of a billion people in 58 countries have been hit by acute food insecurity.
- It is estimated that one person is likely to die of hunger every 28 seconds across Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and South Sudan.
- Global food prices rose more than 14 percent in 2022.

Blame the ‘bad apples’, preserve the system

The report’s concluding statement that “extreme wealth and extreme poverty have increased simultaneously for the first time in 25 years” sums up the charity’s concern about the current crisis.

It comes as little surprise that heated attacks are levelled at the “privileged few ... big business ... the corporate world” from charities, academics, economists – and even by various mainstream media commentators. Nor that there are proposals for remedies to tackle the rapacity **page 12 ▶**

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Oxfam report

◀ **page 11** of ‘renegade’ companies. Equally, it comes as no surprise that their analysis is vacuous and their proposed solutions moribund.

Workers, those who these self-appointed experts and guardians of liberal democracy claim to speak for, are provided with facts and statistics which outline problems; are furnished with a degree of explanation and context – but only ever within rigidly determined and guarded parameters. The first and more important of which is the undeniable ‘truth’ that capitalism is the only successful economic system.

Not only this, but the overarching tenet of all this ‘investigation’ and hand-wringing is that *it is possible* to ameliorate the excesses of the market; *possible to reform and to regulate*. In short, if we work hard enough, we can create *kind capitalism*.

This is amply demonstrated by the Oxfam press release, in which its much-vaunted concern for the downtrodden takes an effusively moralistic stance: “People are sick and tired of corporate greed. It’s obscene that corporations have raked in billions of dollars in extraordinary windfall profits while people everywhere are struggling ... A few increasingly dominant corporations are monopolising markets and setting prices sky-high to line the pockets of their shareholders ... shamelessly fattening their profit margins.”

Similarly, the parlance of psychotherapy is deployed: “Big business is gaslighting us all – they are hiking prices to make monster profits, plundering people under the cover of a polycrisis.”

This is surely an analysis of the workings of market capi-

talism lifted effortlessly from the playbook of identity politics that will appeal to social democrats everywhere whilst enlightening no one about the true workings of capitalism.

According to Oxfam International interim executive director Amitabh Behar, the blame for profiteering lies with “a few increasingly dominant organisations”. Not only have these corporations taken advantage of the market to build their capital, but they have been allowed to do so unchecked by ineffective “regulation, including progressive taxation”. This leads Mr Behar to the conclusion that governments have “invited this”.

Behar seems affronted by the workings of the capitalist system, expressing frustration that monopoly corporations can set prices with impunity, untethered by government policy or any sense of fair play. His view displays a wilful denial of capitalism’s voracity in exploiting workers and consumers alike: “Capital always seeks maximum profit. It cannot do otherwise if it does not want to be wiped out by the competition.” (Harpal Brar, *Social Democracy – The Enemy Within*, 1995)

The charity’s calls for windfall profits to be curtailed by windfall taxes are at best wishful thinking, and at worst deliberate disingenuity. Their final plea sounds hollow and tokenistic: “Enough is enough. Government policy should not allow mega-corporations and billionaires to profit from people’s pain.”

But this imagines for western governments a meaningful legislative and regulatory role that in reality exists only within the planned economies from which the likes of Oxfam and Action Aid recoil in horror.

Most importantly, what all these ‘analysts’ and commen-

tators are signally failing to do is to *provide an accurate picture of the crisis* – which is in fact a global crisis of capitalist overproduction; a systemic problem of the economic system of capitalist imperialism. While the Covid pandemic and Nato’s proxy war in Ukraine have both *exacerbated* the recession into which the world capitalist economy is plunging, they have also provided *camouflage* for the real problems, which far predate 2020.

So when Paul Donovan calls for a “rebirth of the rip-off Britain campaign that became popular during the recession that followed the 2008 financial crash”, his view is useful to workers only to the extent that it draws attention to a market-driven economy that requires public money to bail out banks.

When Andrew Ellson opines that news of profits for shareholders at Centrica “will fuel the alienation that many people feel about the economy and how it is stacked against them”, one wonders how he keeps his job in mainstream media. However, his unexpected candour about exploitative capitalism is neutralised at the close of his article in his veiled threat that, in the absence of action against these rogue corporations, a solution will be found through the “ballot box”, viz a viz the return of a Labour government. His place at the table is secure.

Isabella Weber, an economist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, on the other hand, believes that what we are seeing is a “rational capitalist reaction to a crisis”, which is seen by those who are positioned to take advantage of it as an opportunity “to make even bigger profits when consumers are primed to expect prices to rise in leaps and bounds”.

There is a refreshing honesty

in this. Capitalism is not broken. The exponential rise in the unfathomable wealth of those corporations and individuals at the top is illustrative of the normal workings of the system: against the needs of working people.

The charities, the NGOs, and the mainstream media have neither the interest nor the capacity to analyse the current economic crisis accurately, for they constitute “the shell which is no longer suitable for its contents”. (VI Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916)

Their role is not to provide a clear and truthful explanation to workers of how they are exploited under capitalism, not to offer any real hope of a way out of the downward spiral of poverty and despair to those they purport to champion, but to *protect the interests of capital* at all costs.

These critics of monopoly claim to represent the interests of the poor, but what they really represent is the handwringing and complaining of the squeezed small and petty bourgeois, endlessly railing against the unfairness of the present system *for themselves*, against their inability to compete against the might of the global corporations, and longing for a return to the halcyon (and purely imaginary) days of small-scale ‘free market’, ‘fair’, ‘entrepreneurial’ etc capitalism.

Oxfam provides a stopgap of sorts, something to soften the blow of cut-throat capitalism. But, as with their high street shops, all they really provide are used and recycled products.

Workers need, deserve, and will demand the new.

Industry

Antiwar in a union

◀ **page 9** Weasel words to cover the truth of the pro-war, pro-imperialist position of the entire union leadership, and to signal to the delegates on the floor that they could quite comfortably vote against the resolution being proposed by our branch without worrying their consciences about the finer points of responsibility for pro-war propagandising.

Of course, the BBC workforce, like every workforce in Britain, had been divided amongst two or three unions (just to make sure there was never any really unified action by workers in struggle), the main ones being the National Union of Journalists (NUJ, which traditionally didn't even think of itself as a union but more as a professional guild) and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (Bectu), which tended to represent those doing the technical studio jobs.

But the truth is that even without the journalists on board, the technicians at the BBC have huge power. The broadcasting mechanisms don't work without them and nor does the website. If they wanted to stop the publication of pro-war propaganda they could do it with the flick of a switch and the collective refusal to allow anyone to turn the switch back on again.

In my lifetime, I have seen such an example of media workers in solidarity with their fellows. During the miners' strike, print workers refused to allow a particularly egregious anti-miner front page to be run, which depicted Arthur Scargill as Adolf Hitler under the slogan "Mine Fuhrer". The headline the editors ran with in the end simply read: "Members of all The Sun production chapels [union branches] refused

to handle the Arthur Scargill picture and major headline on our lead story. The Sun has decided, reluctantly, to print the paper without either."

The leadership of Britain's labour movement, from the Labour party and Trades Union Congress to the leaders of the individual unions (and all those self-identifying 'socialists' and 'communists' whose entire energy is spent on posturing in those organisations and misrepresenting them to the working masses) have *always* served British imperialism. (There have been, of course, a tiny handful of exceptions to this rule amongst trade union leaders, most notably Arthur Scargill, leader of the heroic miners' strike of 1984-5.)

To understand why, read VI Lenin's Imperialism, read Harpal Brar's Social Democracy, the Enemy Within (1995), and look out for our forthcoming pamphlet Britain's Perfidious Labour party, which will be on sale in a few weeks' time.

For some useful thoughts on the way forward, read our Manifesto for the Crisis (2023) and a recent article Which way forward for the trade unions now?

We will make no progress until we break entirely from these pro-war, pro-imperialist, anti-worker, anticommunist controllers, whose organisations long ago became subsumed into the British state machinery.

Note

The resolution proposed by the BBC Radio and Music branch to the 2004 Bectu conference can be found in J Brar, The Drive to War Against Russia and China, 2017, Appendix: Non-cooperation resolutions.

Trade unions

◀ **page 8** brought about, once again, by the cowardice and treachery of the Labour party and TUC leaders).

The Minority Movement did not argue for a position of non-criticism of union leaders, quite the reverse. Instead of providing a left cover for class-collaborationist 'leaderships' or claiming that the leaders were merely responding to the 'wishes' of the membership, it used every instance of their betrayal to help workers understand the nature of opportunism and how their leaders' loyalty was primarily to the capitalist-imperialist system and not to the interests of the working class.

Clearly the type and quality of the leadership in a trade union is crucial, but merely organising to replace union leaderships with "better", more 'left-wing' ones cannot be our aim. What we need is not a rank-and-file movement to change these treacherous and cowardly leaderships, but a rank-and-file movement that can act in its own interests *independently* of the union leaders.

There are plenty of precedents for this in our own history, from the Minority Movement of the 1920s and 30s to the shop stewards committees of the 1950, 60s 70s and 80s.

Beyond this, we need to help workers recognise that trade union struggles will always be limited and restricted. Whilst the struggle for wages is a continual one under conditions of capitalist production, we will never be safe from reversal while that system remains.

Even with strong and effective trade union leaders; even with militant rank-and-file organisations, we

need to move on from the struggle for better wages within the current economic set-up and begin the fight to change the whole unequal, exploitative and decaying system.

In the long run, no matter how large or daunting such a task may appear, this is the only real way forward.

Those who buy into the idea of a fake and demobilising 'unity' with Labour party and imperialist-aligned 'leaders' – a bought-off set of class traitors that is totally wedded to defence of the current system – are pursuing a self-defeating and dead-end strategy.

For trade unionists and militant workers who want to know why we keep going in circles with all these battles and how we can break the cycle, the Manifesto for the Crisis – Class Against Class offers ideas and analysis for the way forward.

Join us!

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Social

Energy debt

◀ **page 28** pact and stress a debt like this can have on many people.

“It’s totally unfair that these energy companies can make such huge profits but can’t help people who’ve turned to them for support in an emergency.” (Reference)

Or we see Melissa, 42, a mother of three who “always paid her rent ‘religiously’ and was never behind on rent payments”. Melissa, a full-time carer for two disabled children, struggled to pay energy bills. The debt now gets taken from her prepayment meter, even if that means cutting off her heating and power.

“At one point we were having to pay £10 a week off on the debt – I would put £10 on the meter and it would disappear onto the debt straightaway, leaving us with no credit. I couldn’t afford to have the electricity on, I couldn’t keep the house warm – but I still had to put money on the meter that we couldn’t use for power.

“It’s fair enough that you have to pay what you owe, but in our situation it felt like we could never pay it off. We were self-disconnecting almost every day; we’d be left without power overnight. Two of my children are disabled and it’s bad for their health. Last winter, my son ended up in hospital because his asthma got so bad with how cold and damp it was. People shouldn’t have to live like that.”

Director Heidi Chow of charity campaign group Debt Justice says: “Energy debt is devastating for millions of households who can no longer afford to cook meals, keep the lights on or operate medical equipment. With winter fast approaching, the government needs to get its head out of the sand and

set up a Help to Repay scheme to tackle unpayable debt in a fair way.” (Rising energy debt creates mental health crisis for households, End Fuel Poverty Coalition, 29 March 2023)

People shouldn’t have to live like this

So what is the ‘right’ (according to the bourgeois state) way to solve the impossible situation of having to pay back a debt you can’t afford at a higher tariff than when you gained the debt while trying to keep yourself fit for work in a cold, damp, drafty home eating cheap, unheated and unhealthy food?

Make a complaint of course! Well, let’s see how that’s working out. Over the last five years, energy firms received 700,000 complaints about treatment of debt-burdened customers. Of these, 161,103 complaints related to disconnection and debt issues – of which 40,458 were about prepayment meters.

Nothing was done over that five-year period until an undercover Times investigation forced Ofgem into begrudging and belated action. The ‘something’ it chose to do was to suspend the energy firms’ right to forcefully install prepay meters ... *for one whole month.*

Powerful monopolies get a padded stick

Ofgem, the government’s supposed ‘energy watchdog’ is tasked with monitoring the energy monopolies’ activities by ‘holding them responsible’ if they rip off customers. The ‘regulator’ sets ‘caps’ on what can be charged, recording and publishing the numbers and types of complaints received about abuses. In extreme cases, Ofgem has the power to impose fines, order ‘redress payments’ (ie, refunds of overcharges) and impose operating

restrictions.

While these powers are occasionally wielded, it is always in such a weak and tokenistic way as to be essentially meaningless. Fines, for example, have been miniscule in relation to operating profits since 2010. Providers were penalised just £83.2m in fines and given redress orders amounting to £559.1m – a total of £642.3m across the entire industry.

Let’s imagine these 12 years’ worth of ‘punishments’ had been received by a single company in a single year. Centra made a profit of £948m in 2019, the entire force of a *dozen years’ industry-wide sanctions* applied to *just this one year’s profits* would have left the company with an operating profit of £305.7m. Not bad pickings when British workers are struggling to access power.

Now consider that Centra’s profits were £3.3bn in 2022 – more than triple what they were in 2019 – and we can see that the existing fines regime is no deterrent at all. Indeed, as a clearly acceptable *cost of doing business*, the present state of affairs might be better described as ‘legal for the rich’.

The state

To look past the *form* of these ‘watchdogs’, supposedly here to safeguard the public from rapacious corporations, and see their real *essence*, we need to understand something about the state and what purpose it serves in class society. The state and its institutions (in this case, the energy regulators) aren’t magnanimous creations, neutral and existing for the betterment of all. Nor are they merely annoying obstacles to ‘freedom’.

“Rather, [the state] is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insol-

uble contradiction with itself, that *it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms* which it is powerless to dispel.

“But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.” (F Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884, our emphasis)

The miniscule fines, endless reports and empty recommendations (efforts to ‘alleviate the conflict’) of the supposed ‘regulators’ do nothing to solve the antagonisms between classes with conflicting economic interests (the proletariat and the bourgeoisie), they merely attempt to ameliorate them – to distract us with the hope that someone is doing something, *anything*, to curb bourgeois looting, or to persuade us that inherent failures of the capitalist mode of production are one-offs, the fault of this or that ‘bad apple’.

To dispel a common misconception that the state is indifferent to both sides of the class divide and acts for the ‘best possible good’ of society as a whole, we again turn to Friedrich Engels:

“Because the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class [today, the bourgeoisie], which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the

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politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class [today in Britain, the proletariat]." (Ibid)

Once this is understood, the seemingly contradictory behaviour of such watchdogs as Ofgem becomes all too clear. They do the bare minimum needed to keep social peace while obscuring the real causes of workers' justified anger. This obfuscation is at best an obstacle to developing a class-conscious understanding; at worst, it can lead working-class people to actively work against their own class interests, instead helping to prop up the crumbling capitalist system that oppresses them.

Not only do Ofgem and institutions like them do as little as possible to impinge on the capitalists' ability to maximise profits – they actively facilitate profiteering. Hence the patently price-gouging nature of the so-called 'price cap' – a licence to rinse the workers if ever there was one.

A workers' state

The bourgeois state's intervention to shield the energy monopolies from the growing public backlash against obscene profits and crippling bills is not what workers need. Asking the dogs to betray the master has ever been a lesson in futility.

What is required is the *permanent and complete nationalisation of the energy industry*, expropriation of the energy monopolies and their subordination to a national plan that serves social need, not corporate greed. This short-term solution would do much to lessen the load on workers, and the act of achieving it would teach valuable lessons in solidarity, class awareness and the power of the proletariat; the ruling class in waiting.

A workers' state – not a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but a dictatorship of the proletariat – is the only path out of the endless cycles of economic crises and the forcing down of workers' living standards. Only with the working class in charge of the economy, with an entirely new type of state built for the purpose, can we bring *all production* (including energy) into collective ownership, allowing industries to be operated, planned and maintained to serve the needs of the producers themselves.

Without the bonuses and dividends being constantly siphoned off our collective wealth (a heavy tax that increases production costs, limits expansion and keeps maintenance to the bare minimum), we could use the surplus created by workers' labour to raise the pay and conditions of every worker, as well as to invest in increasing the powers of production and guarantee access to life's necessities to all.

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Neo-nazi Nato's Proxy War Against Russia



Neo-nazi Nato's Proxy War Against Russia
What's going on in Ukraine?



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Ukraine war



With depleted uranium, nuclear war is underway in Europe

Nato war crimes in Donbass don't stop at DU; Donbass civilians are routinely targeted by cluster bombs and petal mines.

The following article is by CPGB-ML member and RT reporter Steve Sweeney, reporting from Donbass.

Soon after war-hungry US secretary of state Antony Blinken arrived on a surprise visit to Ukraine earlier this week, the ink dried on Washington's latest military aid package.

Included in the bumper \$1bn deal are the armour-piercing depleted uranium shells whose use Russia has described as inhumane and "a criminal act" due to their long-term impact on people and the environment.

The 120mm rounds will be used to arm the 31 M1A1 Abrams tanks that the USA plans to deliver later this year, after promising them last year under pressure from European allies.

Washington's assurances

that Ukraine will use the depleted uranium shells "responsibly" are unlikely to be met, given that Kiev's forces have repeatedly fired banned cluster munitions and petal mines into civilian areas of Donbass.

When Britain announced it was sending depleted uranium as part of the Challenger 2 tank package in March, Russia responded by deploying nuclear missiles in neighbouring Belarus. Moscow warned at the time that the use of depleted uranium on the battlefield would be considered a "dirty bomb" and elicit a tough response.

The resort to depleted uranium is not only controversial but also a sign of desperation. It is no surprise to see the USA finally agreeing to send the shells to its proxies in Ukraine as their much-vaunted 'counteroffensive' flounders.

The decision to send DU

rounds comes soon after the equally controversial decision to supply cluster munitions. This, while provoking criticism from a number of Nato allies, was actually a tacit admission that the USA is running out of regular ammunition.

Covering up the truth about depleted uranium

Previously unheard of beyond locals and the diaspora, the Iraqi town of Fallujah has become synonymous with the deadly effects of depleted uranium, which was used on the civilian population there during the US-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq.

Some 20 years later and locals are still suffering the consequences with a rise in cancer rates, miscarriages and birth defects.

But there has been a concerted effort at a cover-up, despite – or perhaps because – a 2010 study showed results of sickness from exposure that were worse than for survivors

of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs.

The results of the study Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005-2009 were shocking. It found that infant mortality rates had shot up to 80 per 1,000 births as compared with 19 in Egypt, 17 in Jordan and 9.7 in Kuwait.

The types of cancer – including a 38-fold increase in leukaemia and a ten-fold increase in female breast cancer – were "similar to that in the Hiroshima survivors who were exposed to ionising radiation from the bomb and uranium from the fallout".

I spoke to survivors of the 2004 attack in March this year and they told me that even now babies are being born with twisted or missing limbs. One woman said she had had two miscarriages and the two of her surviving children I met were both born with deformities.

Medics confirmed that there was indeed a causal link between the rise in cancers and birth abnormalities and depleted uranium, but they were reluctant to come on record, saying they faced pressure against speaking out from the USA.

Nato, too, has used the deadly munition. The military alliance admitted to dropping at least 31,000 uranium missiles (10 tons) during the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. More than 300 Italian soldiers died from exposure to the material.

Serbia became the cancer capital of Europe after the attack, with thousands of civilians affected, and the water, soil and natural environment poisoned by the toxic munition.

According to the President of the Serbian Society for the Fight against Cancer, oncologist Slobodan Cikaric, depleted

Ukraine war

uranium has a half-life of 4.5 billion years and continues to cause cancer years after the Nato bombing.

Nuclear war is already being fought by the west

Experts say that depleted uranium poses a major global threat. One academic study described it as “the Trojan horse of nuclear war”, with one paragraph of its report saying:

“The use of depleted uranium weaponry, defying all international treaties, will slowly annihilate all species on earth including the human species, and yet the United States continues to do so with full knowledge of its destructive potential.” (Depleted Uranium: the Trojan horse of nuclear war by Leuren Moret, World Affairs, April 2004)

Radioactive contamination of soil is already underway in Ukraine, with a substantial surge reported in the Khmelnytsky region in May. The rise from 80 nanosieverts to 140-160 nanosieverts is likely a result of the explosion of depleted uranium munitions in a storage factory.

And of course, while the USA and Britain supply this horrendously toxic munition, it will be Ukrainians who suffer the long-term effects when it is used on their land.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Washington, along with France and Britain, have led opposition not only to calls for a ban on the use of depleted uranium on the battlefield, but even to the demand for a moratorium that would allow for research on the long-term impact of its use.

Despite all the evidence, the USA denies a causal link to cancers and birth defects, while Britain has laughably claimed that the shells from

depleted uranium do not have higher levels of radioactivity than that of household appliances.

To admit otherwise would leave them open to war crimes charges. But the World Health Organisation (WHO) has raised its concerns over depleted uranium. In a paper, it said that “someone who inhales small, insoluble uranium particles may experience lung damage or lung cancer due to radiation. Depleted uranium may also lead to poor kidney functioning.”

A number of medical experts claim the WHO has been pressured into suppressing evidence into the effects of depleted uranium, adding fuel to claims of a cover-up. There has certainly been a reluctance to carry out any serious research, something the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has called on the British government to fund instead of sending depleted uranium to Ukraine.

But neither Britain nor Washington have any scruples, it seems, as they resort to increasingly desperate measures in their proxy war against Russia.

Drone strikes on civilian areas in Moscow and other parts of Russian territory are hardly likely to affect a population that endured the sieges of Leningrad and Stalingrad. Likewise, the people of Donbass have shown incredible resilience despite being bombed on a daily basis by Ukrainian forces for the past nine years.

Cluster munitions and other war crimes

In a bid to break their will, the United States agreed to send cluster bombs for Ukraine to use against the civilian population. The move proved controversial, with some of the 120 countries that have signed an

international treaty banning cluster munitions raising concerns.

United Nations spokesman Stefan Dujarric heard reports that Kiev had targeted civilian areas with the banned bombs soon after the US announcement, saying they “should be consigned to the dustbin of history and should not be used”.

The following day, cluster munitions claimed their first victim since Washington’s announcement: Rostislav Zhuravlev, a communist journalist working for RIA Novosti in the Zaporozhye region. The reporter was travelling with a group of journalists who had been investigating the use of cluster munitions when their car came under fire from Ukrainian forces.

The killing was immediately denounced as a war crime by Russia, which held Washington responsible for what it described as “a heinous and premeditated crime”.

But the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) hit out at statements from the International Federation of Journalists and Unesco calling for an international probe. Instead it celebrated Zhuravlev’s death as marking “the demise of a Russian propagandist in the service of the Kremlin”.

This is all the more chilling as a journalist working in Donbass. Under the Geneva convention, media workers have civilian status and to deliberately target them is internationally recognised as a war crime. But Ukraine, Britain, the USA and their allies care very little for international treaties, not only ignoring but actively facilitating the war crimes carried out on the people of Donbass – including the use of cluster munitions.

Ukraine forces began using cluster bombs on the people

of Donetsk soon after fighting broke out in 2014. As battle continues, the Cluster Munitions Coalition says people are being killed and wounded by cluster bombs at a higher rate than anywhere else in the world. According to their research, 2022 was the deadliest year on record globally.

Since the US announcement, however, cluster bombs are being used far more frequently. I heard five rounds of cluster munitions in the space of ten minutes while writing this article in Donetsk.

But these weapons are not being used against military targets; they are being fired at civilians – at their homes, their shopping centres and their workplaces. Even a simple task such as collecting groceries has become a dangerous activity for the people of Donetsk.

In early August, the Donetsk University of Economics and Trade was destroyed by cluster munitions, while residential areas were also struck.

I spoke to eyewitnesses on the scene while the building was burning who said they knew immediately that the deadly bombs had been used, with the sound of explosions close together. One family said their son was screaming and they tried to shelter in the hallway, with no basement to hide in for safety.

A day later, I returned to the scene and found that the roof had caved in, while the floor of the university was flooded under inches of water. Exhausted firefighters were on the ground, having collapsed after spending the whole night tackling the blaze.

Cluster munitions are designed for maximum impact. They open up in mid-air and spread scores or hundreds of submunitions over **page 19** ▶

Ukraine war



Zelensky sidelined, Canada's Nazi gaffe and Biden struggling to change tack

As a third Ukrainian army perishes to no avail, now even the west is looking thin of donors when Zelensky rattles the collecting tin.

Imperialism planned to use Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia, engineering a proxy war by which it might advance one crucial step towards the balkanization of Russia – a vast territory just waiting to be looted by monopoly capital.

But things have not gone according to plan. Rather than breaking up Russia, the war which the west initiated has broken up Ukraine. Instead of uniting the 'collective west', it has divided it. And now is the time for mutual recrimination, finger-pointing and the hunt for scapegoats.

As a barometer registering the shifting fortunes of war, there is none better placed than the west-backed stooge Volodymyr Zelensky. Not so long ago, this former actor-turned president was cutting a dash as the poster boy for democracy, European values and the American way. He wowed the United Nations, hob-nobbed with heads of state, received ovations galore, and easily persuaded governments across Europe to part with ever more cash and weaponry.

But as the sanctions campaign against Russia boomer-

anged, doing more economic harm to the west than to its intended object, and the real cost of the war in blood and pelf began to dawn, Zelensky rattled the begging bowl more insistently, warning that failure to come up with the requisite cash and weapons would prejudice the chances of the famous 'spring counteroffensive', which was supposed to change the tide of the war.

But the ignominious collapse of the counteroffensive has finally forced an agonising reappraisal onto the administration of Joe Biden in Washington.

Whilst the neocons like Victoria Nuland might still be urging a fight to the last drop of Ukrainian blood, it seems probable that President Biden and his secretary of state Antony Blinken are now bent on washing their hands of the war, urging Zelensky to quit the heroics and start talking to Russian president Vladimir Putin, with a view to sidelining the war into a so-called 'frozen conflict'.

Of course, all these calculations take no account of the reality that in the real world it is Russia and not the USA that is in a position to call the

shots, and nothing is on offer that could tempt the Russians to stop their mission halfway.

All the same, the moves indicate that some shred of reality is starting to penetrate the hazy minds of US officials and ruling elites. Not so President Zelensky, however. He is like an actor who, half way through the script, realises he is in the wrong play. Oblivious to all the chatter about frozen conflicts, he is clinging desperately to the dogged refrain that all Russian forces must be withdrawn and Vladimir Putin must stand trial – and only then would Ukraine consent to talks!

Perhaps the Kiev junta and its president might have a clearer idea of the reality of the situation if Zelensky spent more time at home and less time hanging around the UN and western capitals. His latest visits to the UN and Washington were very different from his earlier forays, however.

The much-trailed joint Biden/Zelensky announcement in Washington about the transfer to Ukraine of the ATACMS missile system, billed as evidence of Washington's long-term commitment to the war, never happened.

Catastrophic slip of the 'plucky Ukraine' mask

And then, to cap it all, Zelensky went to Canada – a trip to the heartland of his most loyal fanbase that was supposed to shore up his faltering image and restore his wounded pride after the UN general assembly turned a cold shoulder and the US Congress refused to give him an audience. But instead of restoring his flagging icon status, Zelensky found himself pulled into the centre of the most disastrous public relations fail of the war.

Given that the west has been running its proxy war more like a Hollywood movie (complete with compliant actor in the main role) than a military operation, the scriptwriters and producers under Nato's direction have been careful to airbrush out all uncomfortable facts regarding the true context and content of Ukraine's supposedly heroic 'brave resistance' against inexplicable and evil 'Russian aggression'.

Just as BBC journalists have been careful to edit out and avoid mention of symbols and regalia that clearly indicate the fascist ideology and direct Nazi connections with which today's Ukrainian armed forces and polity are saturated, so Ukrainian film editors were assiduous

Ukraine war

in filling in the empty seats that greeted Zelensky's address to the UN general assembly in New York.

Presentation and packaging have been the key to the whole of the west's war, which has been based on the idea that, as invincible masters of the universe, the Russian economy will fall over at their say-so and the people of the world will believe whatever they are told.

In just such a vein, the editors of the UN footage were clearly hoping to fool the credulous and inattentive into believing that President Zelensky remains as popular as ever. Except that rather too many of those who saw that footage spotted a continuity slip-up that placed our 'Churchillian' speaker in the audience for his own speech.

But the indifference and even hostility that met our hero in New York and Washington would certainly not be repeated in Canada. Prime minister Justin Trudeau was keen to show that his personal love for Zelensky, his administration's enthusiasm for the war and their collective keenness to fight to the last Ukrainian remain undimmed.

Equally unshaken it seems is Canada's willingness to scrape the national coffers in the imperialist cause. While Poland shouts 'no more' from the rooftops and the USA itself starts to mumble about the limits of its ability to keep stumping up the \$25 billion that is needed every quarter to keep the Ukrainian army and state afloat, Trudeau was announcing \$650m in new military assistance.

In a jubilant session of the Canadian House of Commons, Trudeau hugged and praised his Ukrainian counterpart, and went so far as to honour him with the presence of a 98-year-old veteran of an earlier 'anti-

Russian' war. Two standing ovations and a Zelensky fist-pump showed that the Ukrainian president was as buoyed up by this tribute as were Canada's parliamentarians – not one of whom made the slightest protest.

When the inevitable storm blew up on social media, however, a flurry of innocent apologies for 'confusion', 'misunderstandings' and 'unwitting ignorance' were issued in quick succession. The speaker of the house was persuaded to take the fall for having 'failed to do the necessary checks' and 'mised the house' and the media ran with the story that it was all an innocent mistake and we should certainly not make too much of it given that further reporting or investigation would only help the cause of 'Russian disinformation' in confirming the presence of nazis in Ukraine.

After all, how could hundreds of well-paid well-educated representatives of the people be expected to understand that if you were fighting against the 'Russians' in WW2, you were fighting with Nazi Germany?

How could the country that gave shelter to thousands of such criminal scum (at the urgent request of the British government, be it noted, and saving them from the Soviet gallows that were their just deserts) have any clue about the ideology this 'Ukrainian-Canadian community' might bring with them? How could they possibly know that those who arrived on Canada's shores fresh from the killing fields, drenched in the blood of massacred innocents, had been perpetuating, celebrating and whitewashing their sins as 'traditions' for the last 80 years and waiting for their chance to continue in the same vein?

Perhaps Trudeau could have sought enlightenment from his

deputy Chrystia Freeland? Herself descended from just such stock, and a graduate of Canada's Ukronazi youth camps, Freeland's former career was as an academic and journalist engaged in the rewriting of Ukraine's history to whitewash the crimes of Bandera-ite fascists and attribute all their massacres to the Soviet defenders of the people.

While all this has been blowing up, Zelensky himself has been noticeably silent. After all, what can he say? "Nazis? Us? Surely not!" Moreover, while whatever he said would stink of hypocrisy and inevitably lead to further discussion of an uncomfortable topic, even the most mealy-mouthed of fake apologies would bring down the very real opprobrium of the very powerful Ukrainian fascists who surround him in Kiev.

This heavily armed goon army has been groomed for decades to act in Nato's service by just such propaganda as Freeland and her family have been pushing – that the wrong side won in WW2 and that they, the upholders of Hitler's legacy, are on a mission from God to cleanse the world of Russian and other Untermensch. And it is on these goons that poor old Vlod depends for the continuation of his political and physical existence.

Zelensky is running out of road fast, and his travels outside Ukraine may increasingly be less to do with international diplomacy than about scouting out future rat runs and bolt holes.

Meanwhile, as military defeats multiply and the wheels are falling off the propaganda machine even in the western heartlands, Biden is not going to find it easy to disentangle his own political fortunes and that of his party from the catastrophic failure of his proxy war.

Depleted uranium

◀ **page 17** a wide area, killing or seriously wounding most in the impact zone. But not all of them explode on impact, and they can lay dormant for years.

These unexploded bombs are often found by children, who mistake them for toys. Washington used the munition to deadly effect during the Vietnam war, leaving tens of millions of unexploded bomblets.

People in Laos are still being killed as a result of the bombs dropped on their country decades ago – and this is now the reality facing the people of Donbass.

Petal mines threaten children in particular

But it is not only depleted uranium and cluster munitions that the population of Donetsk need to worry about, since Ukraine has also been firing the banned Lepostok 'petal mines' into civilian areas for some time now.

Last month, an 80-year-old woman became the latest victim of these innocuous-looking explosives after scores of them were fired into a civilian area in the Kuibyshevsky district of Donetsk city. According to local officials, more than 120 civilians have been wounded as a result of petal mines, 11 of them children, with three succumbing to their injuries.

The petal mine – also known as the PFM-1 – is a Soviet-era small plastic blast mine that was banned under the Ottawa convention, which became an internationally binding law on 1 March 1999. Their use is also considered a war crime under the Geneva convention.

It is similar to the BLU-43 that was used by the United States in Laos during the Vietnam war, with military officials suggesting the PMF-1 **page 23** ▶

Ukraine war



Is Washington preparing to hang its stooge Zelensky out to dry?

As well as losing its proxy war against Russia, Washington is also losing control of the propaganda war.

Now that it is beginning to dawn on everyone that Kiev's 'counteroffensive' is a complete failure and that pouring more and more young lives and vastly expensive weaponry into the bottomless pit of the proxy war against Russia has all been an utter waste of time, it is now proving impossible to keep everyone humming along with the same old song sheets ('Stand with Ukraine!' 'Forward with the Spring Offensive!')

Where before the media air-brushed away anything that jarred with the official narrative and were ready at the drop of a hat to provide wall-to-wall coverage of whatever stunt the psyops team cooked up to slander Russia, there is now a rising crescendo of media chatter that is asking the most blunt questions about what the war was really about and what choices the collective

west have now that the whole bloody shambles stands exposed.

Cackle from the 'free world' hencoop getting louder and louder

Some are blaming the catastrophe on the incompetence of Nato's bought-and-paid-for Ukrainian army and advocate abandoning their stooges. Some (belatedly) blame the west for sabotaging the chance to engage in peace talks early on in Russia's special military operation, instead instructing stooge actor-president Volodymyr Zelensky to make his mad gamble.

Some want to sue for peace, some want to prolong the war indefinitely, some want to 'freeze' the conflict along the lines of Korea, some want to bomb Russia and have done with it. (Be it noted that this

last option would in fact hasten the overthrow of imperialism.)

With the old war narrative in tatters, the pressure is now on the US imperialist administration in Washington to come up with a coherent plan going forward, so all eyes are turning towards President Joe Biden and his secretary of state Antony Blinken.

The signals from that quarter are decidedly mixed, however, as was teased out by one persistent journalist on ABC news who asked Secretary of State Blinken about his recent attendance at the G20 summit in New Delhi. The journo noted that "the joint statement coming out of that G20 meeting does not explicitly condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine", and asked him: "Why is it that you couldn't get world leaders to agree on a statement calling out Russia's aggression, as they've done in the past?"

Blinken simply flannelled his way out of the question, and went on later in the interview to

pretend that "Putin has already lost in what he was trying to achieve. He was trying to erase Ukraine from the map and its independence, subsume it into Russia. That has already been a failure."

The obvious flaw in this argument – that no such ambition had ever been entertained by Moscow – is of no concern to Blinken. This sophistry is solely a way to square the circle: Putin has already 'lost', so if Zelensky agrees to talks, that's okay, because he must have 'won' (despite all the evidence to the contrary).

This 'victory' might fool a few credulous fools in the west, but it won't fool the fascist Banderites around President Zelensky, who have long since marked his card. No wonder the former comedian is looking so grim these days.

Now read the following and decipher it as you may. Here is Blinken discussing what form possible talks with the Russians might take: "Now, where exactly these settle, where lines are drawn, that is going to be up to Ukrainians, but I've found a strong determination to continue to work to get their territory back that's been seized by Russia.

"And as to negotiations ... it takes two to tango. And thus far, we see no indication that Vladimir Putin has any interest in meaningful diplomacy. If he does, I think the Ukrainians will be the first to engage, and we'll be right behind them."

In plain English, the message seems to be: "Carry on with the war if you want, but don't rely on us to keep you propped up indefinitely. And if you'd rather sue for peace – well, that's your war, not ours pal." (It takes two to tango by Tim Hains, Real Clear News, 10 September 2023)

Asia Pacific

How does China encourage involvement of the masses in running their lives?

The 'rule of law' looks very different in China than it does in Britain.

Since the election of Xi Jinping as leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, considerable efforts have been made to overcome the inequalities caused by the policy of reform and opening up (the reintroduction of the market to China's economy) that was adopted in the 1979. It soon became clear after the opening up that the market that was meant to bring development and modernisation was also bringing its inevitable concomitants of exploitation and inequality. Something had to be done.

Comrade Xi's message was that "no one should be left behind" if China was to achieve its goal of a becoming a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

Hence the Communist party set itself the task of adopting a system of governance that would enable it to respond effectively and rapidly to the needs of the entire population. A lot of misinformation is routinely spread in western bourgeois media regarding China's style of governance, which is characterised as a one-man dictatorship in which Xi Jinping has absolute control on everything.

Our readers will probably have guessed that this is very far from the truth. Invited to China by the CPC to see for ourselves some of the results of the Chinese path to modernisation, members of our central committee had a chance in June to take part in a conference named 'Strengthen the Modernisation of the System and Capacity for Community-

level Social Governance'.

During a presentation that was given to international delegates in the CPC's party school in the southwest province of Guizhou, Professor Qui Zhonghui explained the principle of the grassroots model of governance that the CPC has adopted.

Unlike in the west, where we are invited on specific dates to vote for our local representatives and are then completely ignored by those same representatives, China's Communist party makes it a point of honour to listen to its people.

The CPC has set itself the important task of strengthening ideological and political leadership to broaden and deepen its connection with the Chinese masses, and is working to make sure it has a strong party organisation in every community. Party members are regularly sent from the cities to outlying rural areas and encouraged to adopt creative measures to help implement the three principles of self-governance, the rule of law and the rule of virtue.

Guiding principles of Chinese governance

- Self-governance: CPC branches in the community are expected to adapt to the needs of local people, to serve them and to help them to participate in local government.

- Rule of law: the CPC aims to improve workers' understanding of Chinese law and access to legal systems of grassroots party members and cadres and the masses. This is seen

as key to promoting social harmony and enabling the fair and timely resolution of conflicts between citizens.

- Rule of virtue: the CPC aims to cultivate a socialist morality amongst the people. It expects its own members to uphold this virtue and promotes a campaign of emulation, bringing inspiring examples of socialist behaviours to the attention of the Chinese masses in all areas of life.

Visit to a new housing development

After our lecture, we were taken to a nearby housing development to see how the principles discussed are being applied in practice. With enthusiasm and passion, the general secretary of the local party branch took us around her estate, showing us the wide variety of grassroots activities in which she and her comrades are involved.

In this community, party members are divided into several workgroups in order to respond efficiently to residents' needs, and digital and in-person feedback mechanisms have been set up to allow people to identify problems or suggest ideas for improvement of life on the estate.

In the centre of the Jinyuan estate, surrounded by leafy trees and next to a well-tended lily pond, a meeting place has been constructed, with a wooden roof to shade its occupants from the sun and a community screen displaying information and messages. Residents can gather here socially, and can also use the screen to let the

party know about their needs.

One of the party teams here is dedicated to legal work – to promoting the rule of law through such initiatives as a legal book corner, a voluntary legal aid team, and the running of monthly education classes in understanding China's legal stem.

Another group has been dubbed the Red Armband Security Team, also known as "the community's non-staff police". These volunteers are in charge of helping residents with all the small problems in life – whatever direct and practical problems members of the community may be most concerned about or areas in which they need help.

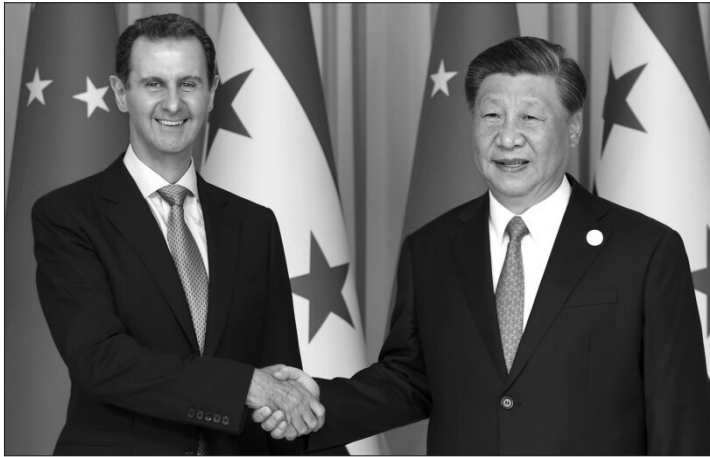
There is a reception in the main block of the estate where the residents can come to get direct access to a party member and report any issues they want help with. The foyer also includes a meeting room, a dancing room and a library amongst its facilities.

Another party group runs recreational activities, and focuses its efforts especially on retired residents, who might be on their own during the day. Activities they run include tai chi, calligraphy, music and traditional modelling.

The overarching principle is to connect with, serve and educate the people, ensuring their needs are being met and creating a self-sufficient community in which everyone feels responsible for upholding the community's welfare.

In this way, the CPC builds social cohesion and stability and deepens its connections with the people.

Middle east



Syria-China partnership signals defeat of US war for regional domination

The middle east has been entirely reshaped – but not in the way the US imperialists planned 12 years ago.

Back in May, in the context of moves to restore Syria to her rightful place in the Arab League, President Bashar al-Assad flew to Riyadh. Now he has flown to Hangzhou to realise even more far-reaching plans for a strategic partnership with China.

For Syria, after so many years of hard struggle to maintain her independence from imperialism, these are very welcome developments indeed.

It will be remembered that, having failed in its attempt to oust the government of President Assad by means of a proxy war fought out by rival jihadi gangs in the pay of the United States, Britain, the Gulf states and Turkey, imperialism has continued the war by other means – namely, by the imposition of a very heavy sanctions regime putting a drag on Syrian reconstruction efforts and greatly increasing the coun-

try's economic problems.

The economic burdens the Syrians have to bear are real and urgent, which is why the economic assistance now being offered by China is so welcome.

But the Chinese promise of assistance in the reconstruction of Syria's infrastructure is just one part of the very wide-ranging strategic partnership that China and Syria jointly announced on Friday in the Chinese city of Hangzhou.

We reproduce the statement in full below.

Xi, Assad jointly announce China-Syria strategic partnership

Chinese president Xi Jinping and Syrian president Bashar al-Assad on Friday jointly announced the establishment of a China-Syria strategic partnership.

The two presidents met in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, ahead of the opening of the 19th Asian Games, scheduled for Saturday.

Syria was one of the first Arab countries that established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and was one of the countries that co-sponsored the resolution to restore the lawful seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations, Xi said.

Over the 67 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the China-Syria relationship has stood the test of changes in the international situation, and their friendship has grown stronger over time, he said.

Xi noted that the establishment of the strategic partnership will be an important milestone in the history of bilateral ties.

China is willing to work with Syria to enrich their relationship and continuously advance the China-Syria strategic partnership, Xi said.

Xi emphasized that China will continue to work with Syria to firmly support each other on issues concerning the two sides' respective core interests and major concerns, safeguard the common interests of both countries and other developing countries, and uphold international fairness and justice.

China supports Syria in opposing foreign interference, rejecting unilateralism and bullying, and safeguarding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said.

China supports Syria in conducting reconstruction, enhancing counterterrorism capacity building, and promoting a political settlement of the Syrian issue following the "Syrian-led, Syrian-owned"

principle, Xi said.

China also supports Syria in improving its relations with other Arab countries and playing a greater role in international and regional affairs, he added.

China is willing to strengthen Belt and Road cooperation with Syria, increase the import of high-quality agricultural products from Syria, and jointly implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilisation Initiative to make active contributions to regional and global peace and development.

Assad said that in international affairs, China has always aligned itself with international fairness and justice, and upheld international law and humanitarianism, playing an important and constructive role.

Syria highly appreciates and firmly supports the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilisation Initiative, and will actively participate in them, Assad added.

The Syrian side thanks the Chinese government for its invaluable support to the Syrian people, firmly opposes any act of interference in China's internal affairs, and is willing to be China's long-term and staunch friend and partner, he said.

Assad said Syria will take the establishment of the Syria-China strategic partnership as an opportunity to strengthen bilateral friendly cooperation and step up their communication and coordination in international and regional affairs.

After the talks, the two heads of state witnessed the signing of bilateral cooperation documents in areas including Belt and Road cooperation, and economic and technological cooperation.

Middle east

The two sides issued a joint statement on the establishment of the strategic partnership.

Senior Chinese leaders including Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Wang Yi and Shen Yiqin attended the activities.

US defeated in Syria, retreating across the region

The Syrian people have endured the most brutal onslaught of imperialism for 12 long years – years of war, terrorism, economic destruction and social upheaval, combined with a vicious media onslaught of imperialist propaganda lies. Yet despite all the horrors and the suffering, they refused to bow down to the immense pressure that was brought to bear against them.

Instead, they have consolidated behind their leadership and stood firm in defence of their existence as an independent, secular, multifaith, multiethnic, anti-zionist and anti-imperialist bastion in the middle east. And with the aid of its Russian, Iranian and Lebanese allies, the Syrian Arab Army has routed almost all the jihadi forces that were thrown into the country by the imperialist aggressors.

The last remaining areas of occupation survive only by the protection of the US army, whose power to maintain them in place is steadily dwindling. Instead of strengthening US domination in the region by wiping out an inconvenient hold-out of Arab independence, the USA's war on Syria has fatally undermined it.

Every western leader who pronounced that "Assad must go" in 2011 is gone. President Assad remains. Syria remains. And its allies Iran, Russia and China have become firmer friends of Syria and stronger regional influences.

Forced to accept this reality and welcome Syria back into the regional community (from which it had been ejected at the USA's command), now even the formerly loyal feudal flunkies in the House of Saud and the Emirates are reconsidering where their best interests really lie.

Turkey's fate has graphically underlined this conundrum. The Ottoman wannabes suffered greatly for their reckless alliance with Uncle Sam and their criminal support of the jihadi armies that were mustered against Syria. They have been forced to backtrack and to try to mend their fences.

Now it is President Assad who issues ultimatums and President Erdogan who has to listen: there will be no meeting of the two leaders until every last Turkish soldier has left the country, says Assad. And it is clear that he means it.

As a result of all this, the remaining US occupation forces are looking isolated in the extreme. Attacks on their bases by local resistance forces are becoming more frequent, and it is only a matter of time before the last of them, kept in place as US president Donald Trump so memorably pointed out "for the oil" (and the wheat), is sent packing.

With their exit, the war will finally be ended, and meaningful reconstruction of Syria's physical and economic infrastructure can begin in earnest.

The middle east, meanwhile, has been entirely reshaped, and not in the way the USA planned.

Depleted uranium

◀ **page 19** was developed after reverse-engineering by the Soviet Union.

Most states destroyed their stockpiles after ratifying the Ottawa convention. However, Ukraine asked for numerous extensions to the deadline. In 2020, Ukraine refused to destroy any more of its deadly arsenal, and in 2021, its stockpile was reported to be more than 3.3 million mines.

Petal mines fall silently and can be dispersed over a wide area. Their green colour and small size make them difficult to see, and their shape resembles a toy, making children particularly vulnerable.

Signs are posted in Donetsk supermarkets warning people to take care, with a cigarette lighter posted next to a photograph of a mine for scale. But despite demining efforts, hundreds are believed to be scattered across the city, and locals are constantly reminded to remain vigilant and to avoid walking on grass as much as possible.

In recent weeks, authorities released an interactive map to help local residents identify areas where petal mines are believed to have been fired in order to take extra care.

Standing with Ukraine?

Meanwhile, news comes to us of the pro-war resolution proposed by the GMB to the forthcoming TUC congress in Britain. Topping this self-declared 'solidarity' resolution's list of demands are:

"1. the *immediate withdrawal* of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territories occupied since 2014 [ie, from Crimea, Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson, all of which have voted to rejoin Russia, and some of which have fought and

sacrificed much to reject the imposition of the fascist rule by the Kiev junta];

"2. the *continuation and increasing* of moral, material, and *military aid* from the UK to Ukraine." (Our emphasis)

The people of Donbass deserve better than this despicable pro-imperialist resolution cooked up by the so-called Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, which is in reality no more than a front for the toxic Trotskyite agents of the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL).

This warmongering motion is one of the most dangerous and reactionary to be debated at a TUC conference for decades. It would effectively see trade unionists calling for the killing of their brothers and sisters and urging British and American imperialists to keep sending weapons to be used against workers and civilians.

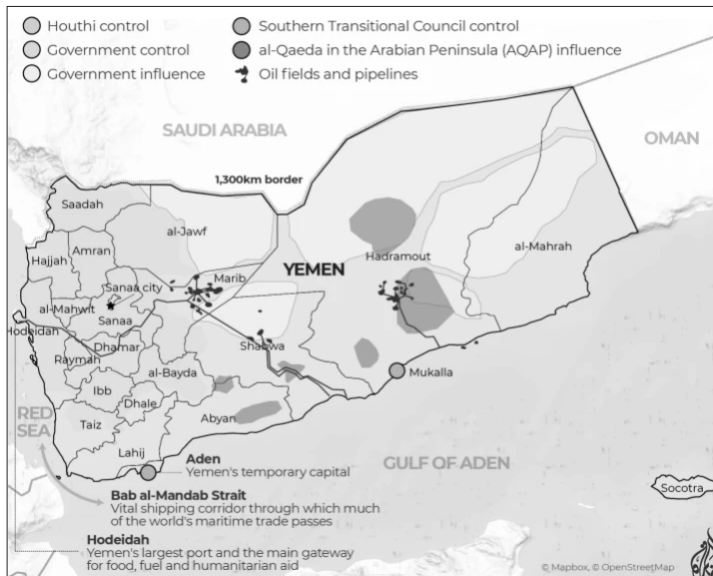
We encourage our readers to read the full text of this warmongering resolution, which tries to camouflage its true import by throwing in inapplicable references to the Spanish civil war, to workers' rights and to peace. But we must not be fooled by such weasel words and attempts to turn reality on its head.

The AWL and its friends in the trade union movement are deceiving workers and trade unionists, they are amplifying western media lies about Russia and Belarus and masking the truth in the service of imperialism – as they always do.

Workers and trade unionists in Donbass do not support this motion, and they are stunned that their counterparts in Britain could be lining up to back their killers. The 'solidarity' of fools is no solidarity at all.

Stand with the people of Donbass and oppose this.

Middle east



Who wants to keep Yemen divided, and who is trying to unify it?

Amid growing resistance to the Saudis in the occupied south, the question of separation is once again raising its head in Yemen.

As of July 2023, protesters have been taking to the streets in Aden, the *de facto* capital of the Saudi/UAE coalition-occupied southern portion of war-torn Yemen.

Amidst a blistering summer heatwave, they are only receiving six hours of electricity a day; this in a region where there is no shortage of natural resources for fuel. Additionally, the economy is in an unenviable state even by the standards of today's capitalist crisis, with sky-high price inflation and the resultant soaring crime rates making life ever more unliveable for Yemenis in the occupied governorates.

Whilst protests over the very low standard of living in the coalition-occupied areas is not a new phenomenon, increasingly the rage of Yemenis at the economic situation is transforming into *political* demands for an end to the occupation.

According to the Jerusalem Post (no friend to Yemen), protesters have adopted slogans such as "Down with the

STC" (Southern Transitional Council – the UAE-controlled occupation force) and openly acknowledge that the situation is better in the northern areas governed by the Ansarullah (Houthi) resistance movement. Unsurprisingly, the coalition's security forces are doing what they can to violently suppress the protests.

One country, three governments

For readers who are unfamiliar with the situation in Yemen, the country is claimed by at least two competing authorities, arguably more.

The northwestern portion where most of the population resides – including the official capital and largest city Sana'a – is administered by the Ansarullah popular resistance movement (typically referred to as 'Iran-backed Houthi rebels' by corporate media penpushers). This movement is fiercely anti-imperialist and anti-zionist, and for the past eight years has been locked in a bloody lib-

eration war with a Saudi/UAE-led coalition force – backed by US and British imperialism – that invaded the country in 2015 to crush the movement and topple its Sana'a-based government.

The southern and eastern portions of Yemen are controlled by the invading coalition forces and, until mid-2022, were administered by two different entities – the so-called 'internationally-recognised government' (henceforth referred to as IRG for brevity) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). These two entities, loyal to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates respectively, previously fought each other for control of the key port city of Aden, and since April 2022 have formed a shaky alliance against Ansarullah, reflecting the interests of their sponsors.

The IRG consists of the old pro-Saudi, pro-US government officials, like ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who were deposed by an Ansarullah-led popular uprising in late 2014. Despite its much-vaunted 'international recognition' and its nominal authority over most of Yemen's southern and eastern landmass, in practice the IRG attracts little loyalty and is barely more than a tool in the hand of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS).

This was brazenly demonstrated last year when Riyadh decided to remove Hadi from leadership on a whim, despite having ostensibly waged a seven-year war to restore him as the "legitimate president". The IRG's forces consist of various rival tribes, many with ultra-reactionary salafist and al-Qaeda sympathies, which are motivated mainly by tribal and sectarian dislike of Ansarullah. They are supplemented by foreign mercenaries fighting for money.

The STC essentially serves as a proxy force for Abu Dhabi, much as Hadi and his cronies do for Riyadh. However, perhaps reflecting the UAE's stronger position in Yemen in comparison to Saudi Arabia's quagmire, its leader Aidarus al-Zoubaidi has been able to harness significant popular support in southern Yemen, even seizing military control of Aden in 2018 when Hadi attempted to remove him from his position as governor there.

The STC has achieved this through a potent ideological selling point: demanding an independent state of South Yemen.

Who wants secession for south Yemen?

At first glance, the South Yemeni independence movement – known as the Southern Movement – may appear to be an obvious candidate for internationalist socialist solidarity. During the cold war, Yemen was split into a capitalist north (YAR) and a socialist south (PDRY), until the south was subsumed into the north in 1990 following the loss of Soviet support.

A bloody two-month war followed in 1994 as southerners tried and failed to re-secede.

Unfortunately, there is very little socialism visible among the lackeys of Prince Mohammed bin Zayed who dominate this movement. Indeed, the movement's website carries an article justifying the murderous imperialist invasion of their homeland, equating it to Nato "saving lives in Bosnia" – an unintentionally apt analogy in this author's view.

There is virtually no mention of Marx, Lenin or any kind of socialist consciousness at all in the movement's propaganda output; rather, all that can be seen is an aggressive, borderline-hysterical xenophobia

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towards anyone residing in the country's northern regions.

It is highly interesting to note that, despite the separatist propaganda, for the vast majority of recorded history there does not appear to have been any concept of north and south Yemen being two distinct nations; rather, Yemen was always viewed as one integral country. Separatist sentiments only appear to have emerged sometime after British imperialists captured Aden and incorporated it into their growing empire in the mid-19th century.

Did Britain deliberately pursue a policy of creating an artificial 'South Yemeni' identity in its Aden colony? The parallels with Hong Kong separatism in particular are striking. A strategic port city, torn away by force from its native country to become a British colony, its people indoctrinated over many generations to hate their former brethren in the old country and view themselves as a superior breed apart.

Such ruthless divide-and-rule policies were (and still are) imperialism's bread and butter. Given the comparative lack of historical literature about the Aden Protectorate compared with well-studied Hong Kong, it is difficult to say for certain, but it seems very likely that south Yemeni separatism is ultimately a cursed child of British imperialism.

A brief overview of socialist Yemen

Nonetheless, the Aden Protectorate was no exception to the global wave of decolonisation that took place in the 1950s and 60s, as a national-liberation movement emerged led by the Marxists of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and began a fierce anti-British struggle.

This liberation struggle was

eventually successful, and in 1967 the colony became the independent People's Republic of Yemen. In 1969, an internal reshuffle consolidated the power of the Marxist-Leninists, who proclaimed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, run on scientific socialist principles.

Socialist countries, particularly those that no longer exist, are always subject to something of an information blackout by mainstream western historians. However, even by bourgeois standards the former PDRY can seem an enigma to those wanting to know more today. Detailed English-language information about its development and history is very hard to find in modern Marxist literature.

Some useful information can be found in out-of-print books such as Fred Halliday's *Arabia without Sultans* (1975) and in the chapter contributed by the same author to the 1983 volume *Revolutionary Socialist Development in the Third World*. A solidarity organisation called the Gulf Committee put out material at the time, but we have been unable to locate an online archive of its material.

From the information that is available, it seems clear that despite the country's poverty and lack of resources, there was a rising standard of living, the building of an encompassing welfare state, and huge strides in promoting equality between men and women in what is traditionally one of the most religiously conservative areas of west Asia. This development relied heavily on fraternal aid from the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, China and Cuba.

In addition, there appears to have been a long internal struggle between rival wings of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), which ruled the country

from 1978: one led by Abdul Fattah Ismail and the other by Ali Nasir Muhammad. The fortunes of the two factions seems to have shifted on the basis of which side was more favoured by the Soviet leadership.

The significant precursor to this later rivalry was the overthrow and murder of the country's second president, Salem Rubaya Ali, who had led the left wing of the National Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (NLF) during the liberation struggle. Rubaya Ali was considered particularly close to China (as well as more militantly anti-imperialist and more in touch with the realities of Yemeni society), while those who deposed him were seen as Soviet-leaning and more bureaucratic (this during the time when the USSR was sinking into revisionism and Mao's China was conducting fierce ideological warfare against this slide).

Rubaya Ali's National Front had merged with other progressive groups to create the United Political Organisation NF in 1975, and he had opposed Abdul Fattah Ismail's plan to replace this united front with a new socialist party. In 1971, Ali Nasir Muhammad was appointed prime minister, but in 1978, Nasir overthrew and executed Rubaya Ali, replacing him as president.

The ensuing rivalry between Ismail and Nasir culminated in a brief but bloody civil war in 1986, during which Ismail was killed, Nasir removed from power and the forces of both sides largely decimated.

Interestingly, relations between the capitalist YAR and the socialist PDRY were generally cordial, as opposed to the extreme imperialist aggression that characterised most similar cold war-era divisions (Germany, Korea, Vietnam). Sur-

rounded by feudal absolutist monarchies and sheikhdoms, the two Yemeni states were the only two republics on the Arabian peninsula.

The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) had been established by a bitter war in the 1960s, in which one side was backed by Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt and the other by the Saudi monarchy. The greater prosperity of the YAR combined with the destruction caused by the southern civil war and the loss of Soviet aid to the PDRY as a result of Gorbachev's policies of appeasing imperialism combined to bring about an overwhelming sentiment in favour of reunification, which took place in 1990.

Reunification and today's separatism

Naturally, this took place on the YAR's terms. Despite promises to the contrary, most power was concentrated in the hands of former YAR officials. Resentment over the loss of socialist securities and a feeling of exploitation by the 'northerners' led to a renewed attempt to secede in 1994.

This was brutally crushed by President Ali Abdullah Saleh with the help of salafist extremists and, crucially, the revisionist leader Ali Nasir Muhammad. Notably, the northern-based Zaydi shia forces gathered around the al-Haq party – the ideological predecessor to the Ansarullah movement – refused to support the war against the separatists and stayed neutral, attracting the ire of President Saleh.

Considering the above, it is perhaps understandable that secessionist views are very popular amongst those residing in the regions of the former PDRY. However, this sentiment is clearly being exploited to the hilt by US and British imperialism – through their **page 27 ►**

Americas



Iran-Venezuela cooperation: another blow to imperialist economic warfare

With one third of the world's countries now subject to some kind of sanction, this favoured tool of coercion is fast losing its power.

Twenty-five years ago, the list of countries denounced as official 'enemies' and targeted with asphyxiating economic sanctions by US imperialism was relatively small. The infamous 'Axis of Evil' trope, utilised to great propaganda effect during the presidency of George W Bush, focused primarily on just three countries: Iran, Iraq and north Korea (with Cuba as an honorary fourth member).

Today, the naughty list has grown to astonishing proportions. Nearly one third of the world's countries are now subject to some form of US, European Union or United Nations sanctions regime. The problem with sanctioning so many countries, however, is that the central purpose – making isolated pariahs of the targeted nations – begins to be defeated.

Inevitably, targeted nations are starting to team up in an attempt to minimise the devastating impacts of imperialist economic blockades. One striking example is the blossoming relationship between two very

different countries on opposite sides of the world: the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Venezuela-Iran cooperation dates back to the first presidency of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, when he made anti-imperialist solidarity a principle of his government's foreign policy. Since then, the two countries have developed a deep politico-economic partnership encompassing industries such as automobiles, petrochemicals, communications technology and tourism.

During Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Caracas in June 2023, a total of 19 separate cooperation agreements were signed, and it was announced that bilateral trade between the two nations would be increased to \$20bn. Iran has shipped many desperately needed fuel tankers to Venezuela in open defiance of US military threats, and an Iranian supermarket chain is now operating in Venezuela, selling a mixture of local Venezuelan

and imported Iranian products.

Does the Venezuela-Iran alliance stem purely from necessity; from a mutual desperation for sanctions relief? Perhaps if the sanctions did not exist, these two countries would quickly drift apart owing to their incompatible and opposing politics?

This point of view is popular amongst the majority of self-identifying 'socialist' and 'communist' organisations in the west. Such organisations tend to idolise – sometimes to the point of embarrassment – anti-imperialist Latin-American countries that speak European languages and share cultural similarities with Europe, whilst dismissing out of hand the achievements of anti-imperialist countries in Asia and Africa, characterising them as reactionary or fascistic simply because they don't share European attitudes on culture war issues like LGBT or abortion.

To be sure, there are many obvious political and cultural differences between Iran and Venezuela. Attitudes towards women's dress and the extent to which religion plays a role in politics, for example. But Venezuela is not as militantly secular a state as some imagine: President Nicolás Maduro makes no secret of his catholic faith, and Venezuela (alongside Sandinista Nicaragua) has some of the strictest abortion laws in the region – presumably owing to the country's catholic majority.

More importantly, since the 1979 revolution, despite rejecting scientific socialism, Iran's Islamic Republic has nevertheless for the most part made it a point of principle to stand in solidarity with nations oppressed by western imperialism. Indeed, Iran is one of a small handful of countries to have maintained this stance even during the height of im-

perialist reaction in the 1990s.

President Raisi's recent visits to Nicaragua and Cuba as well as Venezuela – the three Latin-American states most under siege from the USA – and his warm reception in all three countries are further evidence of this phenomenon.

This is a relatively unique attitude amongst islamic political movements, which generally tend towards reactionary sectarianism and dissociation from non-muslims. Iran has paid a heavy price for this solidarity, not only facing crushing US sanctions and an unprecedented media demonisation campaign but also making an enemy of more reactionary muslims affronted by Tehran's strong support for 'infidel' governments in imperialist-targeted nations like Syria and Russia.

Iranian internationalism, despite playing a crucial role in the victories of resistance movements in Syria, Lebanon, occupied Palestine and Yemen, is almost entirely ignored by most so-called communist organisations in the west, which often do nothing but repeat imperialist media propaganda about defiant feminists and evil mullahs pretty much verbatim. Indeed, many of these self-styled 'socialists' seem to show much more virulent hostility towards anti-imperialist Iran than they do towards any of the US client regimes in the middle east.

The reality is that even from an ideological perspective, Iran and Venezuela have more in common than they have dividing them. In contrast to the disruptive effects of US internal party politics on that country's international agreements, the Iran-Venezuela alliance has thrived despite multiple changes of government in Tehran and a change of leadership in Caracas.

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Venezuela has been helped by the fact that control of foreign policy in Iran lies with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the so-called 'hardliners' grouped around the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who tend to exhibit a much stronger anti-imperialist consciousness compared with the more pro-western 'reformists' who tend towards Gorbachev-style appeasement politics.

Unlike the petty-bourgeois chauvinist parties that pass for 'socialist' in the western imperialist world, the Venezuelan PSUV is well aware of who the allies and the enemies of the oppressed peoples are. Whilst western leftists typically depict Iran's 1979 revolution as some great tragedy that produced nothing of value, President Maduro has repeatedly praised the Iranian revolution and directly compared it with the Bolivarian revolutionary process, in the sense that both have not only effectively liberated their peoples from imperialist interference, but actively seek to help others throw off their chains as well.

At the meeting of the World Anti-imperialist Platform in Seoul, a Swiss comrade spoke of the need to understand the current historical phase and its primary contradiction: the contradiction between Euro-Atlantic imperialism and the emerging Eurasian anti-imperialist bloc.

Those in the communist movement who fail to understand this, and dogmatically hold that capitalism v socialism is the sole contradiction of our era, will inevitably scoff at President Maduro's analogy.

Those comrades who do understand this reality have a heavy responsibility to educate the masses. The future of humanity depends on it.

Yemen war

◀ **page 25** Emirati allies – to foment division in Yemeni society and prevent Yemenis from uniting under the anti-imperialist leadership provided by Ansarullah.

Thus it is no mere coincidence that the frontline between the liberated regions and the Saudi/UAE-occupied regions roughly corresponds to the old border between the YAR and the PDRY.

If there are any anti-imperialist or Marxist elements amongst the southern secessionists of today, their influence is negligible. The movement is entirely controlled by the pro-imperialist, pro-zionist STC, whose senior officials go as far as to openly express support for the Israeli regime – a taboo in muslim nations that is rarely crossed even by US allies.

In summary, the issue of 'north' and 'south' Yemen – as far as the Marxist perspective is concerned – is not related to the national question, nor has it ever been. During the existence of the PDRY, it was a question of capitalism vs socialism; ie, the *raison d'être* of the PDRY was its existence as a socialist state, similar to that of the former GDR.

As soon as the question of socialism was removed from the equation, the 'South Yemen' separatist movement quickly degenerated into an objectively reactionary, xenophobic, pro-imperialist phenomenon built on divisions artificially created by British imperialism and perpetuated by imperialist-aligned Gulf states with expansionist ambitions.

The leadership of Ansarullah understands this well, and refuses to acquiesce to a *de facto* partition of the Yemeni nation that will only benefit western

imperialism. The separatists, in turn, try to disingenuously portray Ansarullah as foreign colonial invaders, the irony apparently being lost on these unashamed collaborators with zionism and imperialism.

Hence we are faced with a scenario that is intriguing but far from unprecedented in world history: those who were communists three decades ago have now become the worst pro-imperialist compradors, whilst those who were previously mired in reactionary tribalism have now become the foremost torchbearers of revolution and national liberation.

China-brokered peace offers hopes to an end of the war

Another vital piece in this complex puzzle is the earth-shaking events that are occurring in the middle east as a result of Chinese diplomacy.

Quietly, behind the scenes, China's combination of non-interference, mutual respect, assiduously delivering on commitments, and offering no-strings-attached trade and development opportunities has persuaded Saudi Arabia's rulers (formerly the imperialists' most reliable axe-wielders in the region after Israel) to bury the hatchet with what had seemed to be their most intractable regional opponent, Iran (cornerstone of the anti-zionist and anti-imperialist axis of resistance).

This has both angered and terrified the imperialists, since it opens up the prospects for the isolation and defeat of many US-backed forces whose job is to maintain US hegemony in the region, from Yemen to Syria and on to Palestine.

This seismic shift in geopolitics was evidently a first step towards bringing both Saudi Arabia and Iran into Brics – the grouping of five major de-

veloping economies that has been steadily pushed into ever more united and overtly anti-imperialist activity. The recent expansion of Brics from five to 11 nations had been long expected. In the current conditions of a deep economic crisis combined with US economic brigandage, no fewer than 22 countries had formally applied for membership in recent months, while a total of 40 had expressed an interest.

Anyone who had been following the progress of the war in Yemen – and of the heroic resistance to imperialism and its proxies put up by the Ansarullah-led forces – immediately understood when the leaders of Iran and Saudi Arabia shook hands with one another in front of the world's press that not only the politics of the middle east in general were changing, but that Saudi involvement in the war in Yemen specifically was likely to be progressively wound down.

The huge losses that had been inflicted on Saudi oil infrastructure by the resistance forces, and the resistance's increasingly sophisticated use of drone warfare no doubt also played their part in creating an atmosphere in which the Saudis were becoming amenable to the idea of a negotiated end to the war.

Subsequent to the Saudi-Iran deal, talks have begun between the Saudis and Ansarullah and prisoner exchanges have been made. While the war will not be over till all the occupation forces have left the country, the prospects for this being achieved before too long are looking increasingly good.

And perhaps even more so with the recent news that not only Saudi Arabia but also the United Arab Emirates has been admitted to the Brics.

Proletarian



Ofgem serves corporate energy profiteers

The energy regulators work, just not for workers.

Energy debt has soared over the last few years, with Ofgem, the government's energy sector 'regulator' estimating that collective gas and electricity debt is in the order of £2.3bn. Debt on prepay meters alone now sits at a staggering £1.032bn; an increase of more than 300 percent since 2019, when it stood at £328m.

Almost eight million people had to borrow money to pay their energy bills in the first six months of 2023, and this number is expected to rise. And this at a time when energy corporations are bragging about record profits to their shareholders.

On top of their usual expro-

priation of the surplus labour created by workers, these monopoly energy corporations are making use of rising inflation to hide obscene price-gouging – using the state to facilitate the process through what are laughably termed 'price caps'. This is combined with a rapid expansion in the forced installation of prepay meters under threat of imprisonment.

Prepay for those who can't pay

We've included the figures regarding prepay meters above as this is becoming the energy monopolies' preferred method for getting to the front of the

queue to receive their share of workers' pay packets. It is also an extremely efficient way to get 'bad' customers disconnected without too much publicity; a process euphemistically described by these corporate bandits as 'self-disconnection'.

A bailiff 'educator' for Arvato, the debt collection firm that Centra (British Gas parent company), uses to enforce meter changes, has bluntly stated: "Honestly, it's a little bit cheeky. Basically, the government says you can't disconnect residential customers, so what we do is we install a prepayment meter and then if they don't top up, they self-disconnect. So, we don't actually disconnect them. It's a bit of a laughable loophole."

We fail to see the humour.

For customers already 'privileged' enough to have a smart meter (which we paid for in increased energy bills since their inception) even stopping entry to our home isn't proof against being switched to a more expensive and precarious prepay system.

As 350,000 households found out last year, this can be done remotely by energy firms if a smart meter has already been installed. (Hence the £50 inducement offered by every energy company to have a smart meter put in, and the accompanying barrage of PR about 'efficiency', 'convenience' etc.)

'Bad' customers

The antagonistic relationship between capital and labour is on display in the language the bourgeoisie and its representatives use behind closed doors in their 'not for workers' ears' financial conversations. Where the bourgeoisie and their army of hired managers see 'bad' customers, customers who can't pay, customers who can't aid them in their insatiable quest to realise a profit, proletarians see Bridget a 53-year-old mental health therapist from Darlington:

"I had to ask for help. It was the first time I turned to the energy company to ask for help and now, every week, I have to put money onto the meter, which goes straight onto the debt. As a mental health professional, I do have tools to manage my anxiety, but I know the emotional im-

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