

# THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

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There is a crisis of the traditional parties of the establishment in Britain. Their support is declining and they are unable to convince the electorate that they deserve their votes when all they offer is more hardship. In *Politics in crisis but the drive to war continues*, Frieda Park explores the problems faced by Labour and the Tories and the challenge from Reform UK. The Tories are in an existential crisis and risk terminal decline but Labour has big problems too. In addition to Reform's rise, other parties are eating into Labour's vote from the centre-left. Yet the Labour leadership remains fixated on the challenge from the right, both validating the right's narrative on immigration and driving left and liberal Labour voters into the arms of other parties. Having entered government with a stonking majority, Keir Starmer seems unable to gain the political initiative, relying instead on worn out neo-liberal policies.

Though there are few who believe Starmer is doing a good job, even on the right, nevertheless there is one area where the establishment is very pleased with his performance and that is in international affairs. He is ramping up arms spending while people continue to experience declining living standards and crumbling services. He has also been at the forefront of ensuring the war in Ukraine carries on and has supported Israel in its genocide against the Palestinians. He has tried to modify this latter position somewhat, for example by recognising Palestinian statehood, but fundamentally is still not taking steps, like an arms embargo, which might have a real and immediate impact on Israel. This is not a view shared by Labour members, who voted at their conference to reject the government position, recognising that a genocide is taking place and calling for an arms embargo and sanctions.

Of all Starmer's policies those on international issues are the most dangerous for the working class as he drags us closer to war. It is, therefore, welcome that the TUC has reversed its previous backing for increased arms expenditure and that slogans such as "Welfare not Warfare" are becoming more current.

## Immigration

The question of immigration is dealt with in more detail by Noah Tucker in *Immigration, capitalism and cruelty*. Immigrants are essential to the functioning of advanced capitalist countries. Immigration provides workers for industries such as social care, as well as more highly skilled jobs, and immigrants are therefore a source of exploitation and profit. The immigration system is used to provide these workers, to drive down wages and conditions in the formal and informal economies and to create divisions within the working class. But there is a distinction to be made between immigration, government policy, and immigrants themselves who are human beings and workers. Immigrants old and new, and settled communities, are all part of the British working class so in the battle against capital and for workers our primary objectives are to combat racism and to build solidarity and unity between these different groups.

## War plans

The preparations for war continue as rhetoric increases round so-called threats, particularly from Russia and China. There is increasing evidence of false-flag operations designed to create the conditions for war. The role of one institution and its intimate links to the British state and military are explored by Clare Bailey in *The Department of War Studies, King's College London*. She examines how pro-war narratives and policies

are formed and fed into the public domain. The power of the establishment is laid bare and gives us an understanding of what the peace movement is up against in combating the relentless war propaganda in the media.

Of course, Britain is not alone in its preparations for war. In *European powers set their sights on war*, Simon Korner looks at the bigger picture on the continent. Arms spending is being massively increased and Germany is aiming to take a lead in aggressive military posturing. It will partly pay for this by its ability to exploit EU markets. Though they are ultimately both subservient to US interests, Germany's move to become the leading military power in Europe creates tensions with the other big power in the EU, France. The threat of war, however, is not diminished by these differences as both countries increase arms expenditure and are agreed on the drive to war.

## Let us speak of freedom!

In the grim world situation in which we find ourselves, it is good to be reminded that things were not always so negative. Alex Davidson writes about a key moment in the history of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa in *Let us speak of freedom! 70th anniversary of the Freedom Charter*. The process of writing the Freedom Charter brought together anti-Apartheid forces representing all races, and the final document was drafted on the basis of massive input from across the population. The result laid out the foundational requirements for a democratic South Africa. It was a short and clear declaration of the principles of a non-racial South Africa, of unity in struggle and of the right of people to economic, political and legal equality.

Past struggles remain a source of learning and hope for the future.

# POLITICS IN CRISIS, BUT THE DRIVE TO WAR CONTINUES

by Frieda Park

Labour and the Tories, the traditional parties of the political establishment, are beset by problems which they seem unable to address. They lack a sense of purpose, political acumen, talent and leadership. Above all they cannot resolve the contradictions of neo-liberalism which increasingly alienate them from the electorate - the central contradiction being that they expect people to vote for them while giving them nothing in return apart from declining living standards and decaying services. All the banal soundbites of the spin-doctors have worn thin. As Reform UK has a substantial lead in the opinion polls,

The Tories have been steadily shifting right, a move exacerbated by fear of Reform and its predecessors and a mistake which the current Labour government seems to be repeating.

there is a real possibility that, come the general election, a new party will be the biggest in parliament for the first time in over 100 years, that is since Labour formed its first government in 1924.

Until relatively recently Britain seemed to buck the trend of the decline in traditional parties across Europe, with the Tories and Labour being returned regularly. Apart that is from the significant rise of nationalism in Scotland, where the voters had already found an alternative to Labour in the Scottish National Party

(SNP). This should have been seen as a warning not to take party allegiances for granted, but it was not and now Labour is in crisis and the Tories seem in terminal decline.

## Tory decline and the rise of Reform

The malaise of the Tory party is perhaps the most significant change as it seems less and less likely that it has a way back as Reform UK takes over its electoral territory. The Tories have been steadily shifting right, a move exacerbated by fear of Reform and its predecessors and a mistake which the current Labour government seems to be repeating. The

dynamic within the Tories resulted in the elections of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss as party leaders, further alienating many potential voters. It is incredible that the party which was a by-word for stability and has been in and out of office for nearly two hundred years, running Britain on behalf of the ruling class, should decline so quickly and apparently irretrievably.

Current polling puts the Tories at around 17% with Reform UK the biggest party on 27%. Labour is on an almost equally dismal 20%. The Lib

Dems are snapping at the heels of the Tories with 17% and the Greens now sitting on 12%. A low point for the Tories was the recent defection to Reform of Danny Kruger, a member of the shadow cabinet, who held influential posts as speech-writer to David Cameron and political adviser to Boris Johnson.

As in other countries where insurgent right-wing parties have come close to or, as with Georgia Meloni in Italy, have won power, the establishment has changed tack from opposing them to taming them to ensure that they follow an acceptable pro-capital agenda. We can see this beginning to happen with Reform too. Nigel Farage has been at increasing pains to distance himself from other right-wing forces like Tommy Robinson, albeit he will benefit from their demonstrations and flag-waving. So maybe it won't matter too much to the ruling class if they can tame Reform, which as a bonus might be more adept than the Tories at winning working class votes.

## Starmer flounders

Despite having a massive majority in Parliament and a completely ineffectual Tory opposition, Starmer is unable to gain political momentum, with even right-wing MPs rebelling over benefits cuts. At the mercy of his own lack of skills and without a coherent political perspective, Starmer was quickly captured by the New Labourites of yesteryear who then proceeded to try to apply their old (and ultimately failed) political recipes to today's very different problems.

Politics has become more complex with the rise of the SNP and Reform UK, as well as some success for the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and independents, meaning that there is no longer a guaranteed electoral base for Labour. As the leadership of Labour concentrates on the threat of Reform, the Party is also losing votes to these other parties who are making their pitch to the centre and left. Fragmentation of votes to smaller parties will give centrist, liberal policies more rather than less clout as electoral pacts are cobbled together round the lowest common denominator, diluting further any class divide between the parties. Underlying all of this is the objective fact of the changed nature of the working class, its reduced size and the decline in its communities and organisations.

Although Labour faced a difficult task in government, it has added to its woes by making unforced, major errors in a variety of areas. It quickly signalled that far from improving people's living standards - the principal reason people had voted Labour - it would instead increase their hardships. It launched an attack on benefits and pensions, first abolishing the winter fuel allowance for older people not receiving pension credit. Bashing "scroungers" used to work quite well but the breadth of the attack, hitting the "deserving" as well as the "undeserving" meant that this political gambit failed to fly and even right wing MPs rebelled against cuts to Personal Independence Payments. A further dent to the government's credibility were the partial U-turns that it was forced to make on these policies. Meanwhile working people are still under pressure with prices rising especially for basics like food and energy.

The second area where the government's performance has been disastrous is over the question of migration. This is a complex and



PHOTO BY NUMBER 10

*Error of judgement. Keir Starmer with Peter Mandelson*

intractable problem which cannot be addressed by slogans about stopping the boats or by posing in front of Union Jacks. In fact, this knee-jerk response allows Reform and the right to continue to control the agenda and makes things worse rather than better, seeming to confirm they are correct in their views. By feeding the right-wing narrative, Starmer and those around him are, therefore, enabling the very people who are now set to deliver them electoral defeat. Even more dangerously they are helping the right not just to win disgruntled voters but also, since

their ideas go unchallenged, to begin to win those voters for their politics, embedding nationalist and racist divide-and-rule ideology.

Government support for Israel as it conducts genocide in Gaza, as well as being abhorrent, has not gone down well, to say the least, with Labour voters and banning Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation is an authoritarian excess.

Another significant problem has been the poor quality of personnel in and around government.

There is one area in which Starmer has, however, received plaudits in the establishment media and that is in upholding Britian's international interests and warmongering abroad.

Advisors, civil servants and ministers have been reshuffled, so far to no avail. Along with the forced U-turns this also makes the government look weak. Starmer and others accepting freebies from rich backers revealed them to be shallow, entitled and deaf to how this would play out when others were being asked to make sacrifices. The worst example of poor judgment round personnel was the appointment of Peter Mandelson, a central New Labour figure, as ambassador to the United States.

This is not to say that there have not been some positives from the government, particularly in relation to workers' rights and the increase in the minimum wage, which certainly would not have been achieved under Tory or Reform.

### Supporting the war drive

There is one area in which Starmer has, however, received plaudits in the establishment media and that is in upholding Britian's international interests and warmongering abroad. He has managed to be successfully supine to Donald Trump, and achieved a 10% tariff agreement. But there is nothing that appeases Trump. Although rewarded with a second state visit, Trump soon after delivered a kicking to the UK in his speech at the United Nations, claiming that it was being overrun by immigrants and Sharia law was set to be introduced in London. The establishment and Starmer will do anything to try to keep the US on side, but Trump's excesses do not play well with the public.

In particular Starmer's efforts to ensure that the war in Ukraine continues and ramping up arms spending have met with approval and overall the establishment is pleased with his continued support for Israel. Under pressure he has had to respond to Israel's accelerating genocide with some criticism and recognition of a Palestinian State although practical measures

to attempt to halt Israel, such as an arms embargo, are lacking. The establishment will also be happy with this.

Though lauded by the ruling class, Starmer's warmongering is, of all his anti-working class policies, the most damaging for the future of the British people as billions are poured into armaments while everything else falls apart and he drags us closer to war.

### The end of Starmer

Few in Labour would be sad to see the back of Starmer, the only question for his right-wing opponents, who want a more effective leader, is how he can be got rid of and who to impose in his place. The Deputy leadership election might prove to be a foretaste of a possible leadership challenge. Bridget Phillipson has the unenviable position of being Starmer's candidate with a pitch for a united leadership. Meanwhile Lucy Powell, recently sacked by Starmer, has stood on a critical (if not radical) platform which might prove a winning formula, but because she is seen as proxy for Andy Burnham's leadership aspirations, the right will want to keep her out and rally round Phillipson. Burnham was recently instrumental in setting up Mainstream to promote a broad centrist/centre-left alliance within the Labour Party, a challenge to the rightward direction under Starmer.

More of the current fare will not suffice if Labour is to retain power at the next election. But even if they want to do things differently, faced with the intransigent neo-liberalism of the British establishment, what Burnham or anyone else might actually achieve in government remains to be seen.

### Your Party

Within Labour the left has been weakened by expulsions and administrative measures such

as excluding left candidates for elected office. Many have given up and left.

In this situation, great hope was placed in the foundation of a new political party led by Jeremy Corbyn and Zahra Sultana. Those who questioned the wisdom of setting up (yet another) new party of the left as an alternative to Labour were dismissed as a wave of optimism carried the project forward. Some 800,000 people, an impressive number, signed up to express an interest in it.

Yet even the most trenchant critic would not have foreseen the virtual collapse of the project before it was even born.

The predictable problems were all there from the inception. The outfit was provisionally named Your Party, which encapsulated part of the weakness. It was a project into which anyone could project their individual aspirations, somewhat removed from finding collective common cause. There was a slim founding statement, with much of the hard work and potential disagreements put off till a later date. And what would the class base of the new party be? The Trade Unions were scarcely mentioned and did not seem to be engaged. Would policies focus unequivocally on addressing working-class interests or be captive to middle-class concerns? This was an unresolved problem that bedevilled Corbyn's period as leader of the Labour Party, particularly on the EU, and which contributed hugely to his ultimate downfall.

The founding process of Your Party, along with, it seems, deep differences among the leadership, failed to address any of the possible problems in setting up the party and instead seems to have made them worse. Critics pointed out the danger for any new party, as has happened with past efforts, of being overrun by hyper-active

Trots and ultra-leftists. And this seems to be happening on a widespread basis. No structures or plans for structures were put in place, thus enabling self-appointed grouplets to take on the mantle of Your Party in localities - grouplets not representing the people who had signed up and who were often unaware that meetings were taking place in the name of Your Party.

Despite recent efforts to patch up the differences, it is difficult to see a way back for Your Party as a credible force after the bad blood at the top of the organisation and the chaos below.

Even if one believes that the move to found a new party was ill-advised, its implosion is also tragic and a betrayal of the hopes of the hundreds of thousands who saw a future left project taking shape. Many of them will retreat into demoralisation and disengage from politics. Rather than advancing the left, this debacle is a big setback.

## Alternatives

To challenge Reform UK, it is important to deal with its actual policies and not just put labels on it. We have to understand where Reform supporters are coming from and that they are not a homogenous mass of racists. Blanket denunciations of them as "far-right", "ultra-right" or "fascist" prevent us engaging with them to try to change their minds and may ultimately prove counter-productive, pushing alienated working class people closer to the right. What would be more effective would be exposing what Reform and other rightist groups actually stand for and, even more importantly, explaining what the alternative is.

It is clear that the fight is still going on within Labour as the vultures circle around Starmer. This gives



*Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK*

PHOTO BY OWAIN DAVIES

the left opportunities to press for policies which would address the problems faced by the British people, such as wealth taxes, against privatisation and for further investment in the NHS, a drive to build social housing, investment in infrastructure such as transport, and for a peace dividend. Most Trade Unions, including the biggest, remain affiliated to Labour and provide another avenue to influence the Party in favour of the working class.

The campaign for peace and against the war drive and the billions that the government plans to spend on armaments is vital to our very survival. There are signs that the campaigns for "Welfare and Jobs not Warfare" are gaining traction. It was very welcome that the TUC reversed its position in support of increased arms spending at its recent Congress and is now in opposition to this.

The campaign against Israel's genocide and in solidarity with the Palestinian people remains a priority. It is vital to the interests of Palestine and it is mobilising masses of people in an anti-imperialist cause. This demonstrates that in Britain there is strong support for peace, justice and progress, and that there is hope for the left.

# Immigration, capitalism and cruelty...

by Noah Tucker

It was pure coincidence that two events, shocking in very different ways, happened within hours of each other, on 29th July 2024. But together, they became the triggers for what has since been a dramatic rise in ethnic hostility in Britain, much of it expressed as antagonism to immigrants, along with a surge in support for the ‘far-right’ in Britain.

Less than a month into Keir Starmer’s term as prime minister of the UK, his finance minister, Rachel Reeves, made the announcement (presumably to impress the City of London and the money markets) that the universal Winter Fuel Payment for pensioners would be abolished. Thus, the government signalled the continuation of austerity and dashed any hopes that the new Labour administration would prioritise reversing the downward path of living standards and public services. Prospects for any serious challenge to the direction of the newly elected government from within the Labour Party had already been diminished with the help of the use of disciplinary powers against party members and MPs on the left (and more such measures were to follow).

On the same day as that announcement, in the town of Southport in the North West of England, three very young girls were murdered and others seriously injured by a behaviourally disturbed 17 year-old. Fuelled by rumours and online claims about the perpetrator, hotels where asylum seekers were being accommodated were besieged by riots and violent protests, and there was an arson attack on a mosque.

It later transpired that the young man who had carried out the frenzied attack on the children is a UK citizen who was born in Wales, and is from a Christian family. His parents had emigrated to the UK from Rwanda in 2002. But the scene had been set for much of the inevitable public frustration with the recently installed Labour government to take the form of hostile discourse around the ‘immigration issue’, in which immigrants (and their descendants) have been portrayed as embodying fearful threats of criminality, sexual harm, and cultural takeover. And, in addition, for the political benefit of this to be accrued by Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party as well as the open racists and anti-Muslim activists around the figure of Tommy Robinson.

## Tailing Reform UK

The policy response of Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his advisors, in accepting much of the framework of this discourse and even attempting to take the lead in demonising immigrants, created a competitive spiral which has strengthened, rather than deflected, this poisonous narrative. The PM issued statement after statement focussing on “foreign criminals exploiting our immigration system”, “closing the book on a squalid chapter [of immigration]”, and Britain becoming “an island of strangers”. This went along with tweeting out lurid images encouraging fear of immigrants, changing the regulations around the skilled worker visa scheme in a way that threatens hundreds of railway workers and civil service staff with deportation, and using the issue of immigration as a pre-

text to bring in a compulsory ID card system.

For their part, Reform UK merely upped the ante by proposing more and more extreme anti-immigrant measures, until the point came where, with Farage’s proposal for the deportation of 600,000 people with settled UK status, Starmer was unable to follow and had to pivot to accusing Reform UK of being a racist threat to the rule of law and our way of life. But the damage had been done.

## Material roots of hostility

The issue of demonisation is crucial. The worst aspect by far of this public anti-immigration campaign is not that it might result in a reduction in the levels of inward migration to the UK (which, for good or ill, have varied widely over the years). It is that it encourages and whips up hostility to and promotes fear of immigrants, as well as putting them at risk.

Immigration and immigrants are not the same thing. The former is a process and a phenomenon, taking place mainly according to global inequalities and the capitalist labour market, induced also by conflicts or social disruptions caused by global capitalism, and influenced or regulated by the actions and policies of the world’s richer countries. The immigrants, on the other hand, are the people, the human beings, who, following from that process, are now living in (for example) Britain, rather than in the land of their birth, or of their parents’ birth. They are not just living in Britain, but, those of working age, are mostly

working in Britain (whether legally allowed to or otherwise), and working for employers based in Britain or conducting operations in Britain.

They are part of our country's economic and social structure, and, irrespective of citizenship or other legal status, the place of the vast majority of immigrants in this economic and social structure is that of being part of the British working class.

Of course, the current hostile discourse on immigration does not target all immigrants, and even the most extreme of its proponents do not set themselves against foreigners as such, or even against foreign political influence in Britain. The big-name speaker at the September 2025 'Unite the Kingdom' demonstration in London, depicting immigrants as posing a violent, existential threat and inveighing on the crowd to 'fight back or die', was a man who is not only a foreigner to the UK, but an economic migrant to the country where he lives. But it is such apparent contradictions that often reveal the true nature of things. Elon Musk, after all, is white and 'Anglo-Saxon', has a close (albeit turbulent) relationship with the ruling faction in the overwhelmingly most powerful country on the planet, and he is one of the two richest men in the world. The other major known ultra rich backer of Tommy Robinson is the American businessman Robert Shillman, a board member of Friends of the IDF, and a major donor to pro-Israel and anti-Islam campaigns.

Regarding Elon Musk, it is notable that he not only built his business empire using cheap migrant labour, much of it by hiring undocumented workers, but he used his influence on the Trump presidency to ensure the continuation of the H-1B visa scheme, which, as Senator Bernie Sanders has highlighted, allows employers to undercut established US workers by bringing in people from abroad on lower rates of pay and without basic rights. Senator



PHOTO BY DOYLE OF LONDON

Flags from Unite the Kingdom Demonstration 2025

Sanders added, "The cheaper the labor they hire, the more money the billionaires make." [1]

In this way, Musk can be seen to encapsulate the nature of the 'immigration issue'. It is a double game in which the wealthy in the rich countries derive financial benefits from immigration. At the 'higher skill' levels, they profit from the work of better salaried specialists whose education and training were resourced by, or took place in, poorer countries. In addition, they profit not merely from the cheaper labour of lower paid foreign workers, but also from the impact of labour migration in pulling down the wages of more established migrants, as well as those of the 'indigenous' workers.

### Exploiting workers

An example from an article in *The Conversation* (May 2023) illustrates the dire impacts at the lower end of the UK labour market, where workers are unprotected by trade unions or compliance with regulation: "[A]t hand car washes, undocumented labour from Albania, sub-Saharan Africa, Iraq, and Kurdistan

now competes with documented workers from eastern Europe. This has pushed day wage rates down to subsistence levels, with workers in some cases forgoing wages in favour of food and shelter." [2]

Such is par for the course under capitalism, which - nationally and globally - is an exploitative and competitive system which pits individuals and groups of people against each other, not only in relation to employment but in access to resources such as housing and healthcare. When wages are stagnating or falling and the social infrastructure is decaying, anti-immigrant rhetoric and imagery are bound to find fertile ground.

The corroding of these fundamental material conditions is inextricably connected also with the readiness among sections of the public to imbibe the 'cultural' critique of immigration and immigrants (and, especially, hostility to Muslims). Decaying economic and social conditions rooted in the vagaries of the capitalist system (often accompanied by the unavailability of social housing and house prices in urban areas rising beyond the reach of

most people) become associated in people's perceptions with changes in the look and feel of an area after people with different religions or cultural traditions have moved in. This becomes the resentful counterweight to the palette of vibrant cosmopolitanism which can be enjoyed most by those with the least pressing material concerns.

## Perceived unfairness

Paradoxically, net migration to the UK was already falling very substantially when the current wave of anti-migrant sentiment began, with estimated numbers of 430,000 in 2024, compared with approximately 800,000 in 2023 and similar numbers in 2022. The level of inward migration (the vast majority of it legal and encouraged) had previously risen substantially due to policy changes under Boris Johnson's premiership, with workers from outside the EU being brought in, many of them to work in the health and care sectors. This was alongside a campaign to increase the numbers of foreign students (whose fees subsidise the British higher education systems). The subsequent Conservative prime ministers had already drastically reduced immigration levels before Keir Starmer took office.

Since July 2024, public politics in Britain on the 'immigration issue' has focused on two much smaller groups of people: those arriving across the Channel from France in small boats, and those who are residing in 'migrant hotels' while awaiting appeals in the asylum process. Although a small minority of the people moving to the UK, both these groups have been made highly visible, and used to promote the perception of chaos, lack of control on the part of the authorities, and threats allegedly posed by the migrants themselves.

There are other, connected, reasons why these groups are highlighted. Barred from working officially, so

able to take up only the most meagrely paid and insecure employment, these 'asylum seekers' are provided with accommodation by the state, but no money. All they receive is a pitiful allowance on a payment card (currently £49.18 weekly for a single person, or £9.95 where meals are provided by the accommodation), an amount which, even supplemented by whatever miserable wages can be obtained by illicit employment, do not allow the person to take part in social and community life, to mix and develop a bond with people living nearby.

Thus, the widely believed rumours and tropes (eg, that the authorities give each new asylum seeker an iPhone and / or an iPad, and the existential threat motif in which male asylum seekers are described as 'men of fighting age') are not dispelled by social contact. As distinct from commercially sponsored and legally encouraged economic migrants, where at least an argument is put (however well or badly it may be received) that they are making a contribution by increasing this country's GDP, or filling vacancies, eg in the care sector, in the case of these asylum seekers there is no such positive case put publicly in their favour. Even in respectable mainstream discourse, they are presented effectively as receiving something for worse than nothing, as they have managed to frustrate the UK authorities' various attempts to deny them entry to Britain, and in return are rewarded with access to a legally defined procedure, as well as accommodation and subsistence (however inadequate these may be in reality).

So the perceived unfairness by participants in demonstrations outside 'migrant hotels' is that any legal or international obligations to the residents they are besieging are being disbursed at their expense. Both the failure of the government to challenge this view, and the efforts of this group of migrants to find work, and thus to be in some position to

pay their own way, are used as a further reason to condemn and disparage them.

Here it must be acknowledged that some of the arguments used by well-meaning people, in the face of increasing prejudice, can miss the point, particularly when they take the form of defences of immigration, rather than defence of, and solidarity with, the immigrants themselves (which is not to say that persuading people on the latter basis is an easy task). The assertion that immigration increases GDP, while absolutely true, has limited relevance given that the beneficiaries of rising GDP under capitalism are, in the main, the very rich rather than the working class majority.

## The 'high cruelty' solution

A week after the large anti-immigrant demonstration in London in September 2025, *The Financial Times* published an analysis by its associate editor Stephen Bush, which rooted the issue in a demographic trend. Entitled *The truth about immigration*, the article presented a dilemma:

"Across the rich world, almost every state faces a version of the same problem: their people are living longer and having fewer children. Every year, tens of thousands of citizens will hit state pension age or retire, and fewer of us are having enough children to maintain our care-dependency ratio (the number of working people supporting those who are too young, too old or too sick to work themselves)...Immigration is how states have filled the gap. Immigration has filled vacancies in the country's care and construction sectors...Most wealthy states now have more immigrants than ever before."

Carefully avoiding mention of the profits made by care sector and construction companies, the article went on, "But politicians have a



PHOTO BY WIKIPEDIA

Giorgia Meloni – high cruelty

problem: immigration is the subject of fierce political opposition... In the UK, France and Germany, a party of the nativist right has been leading in polls, in part because of opposition to immigration.” [3]

As could be expected, the FT article also avoided consideration of the economic system in these rich world countries, or the changes towards more aggressive forms of capitalism in recent decades; and it gave an impression of mainstream policymakers as honest managers of society’s overall interests, merely trying to find balance in a perplexing situation. But the article did suggest a way forward, which Stephen Bush entitled the ‘high immigration, high cruelty’ approach. Comforted somewhat by the statement of a Reform UK leader who acknowledged immigration to be the ‘lifeblood of Britain’, the FT associate editor referenced what he sees as the positive experience of Italy:

“Giorgia Meloni, the prime minister, has kept immigration high but she has held on to political support and an opinion poll lead by sharply limiting paths to citizenship...and to family reunion. She has in part been able to do this because her party is trusted on immigration...”

As Stephen Bush’s appellation suggests, this approach works politically by encouraging resentment against immigrants and assuaging that resentment by punitive measures against immigrants rather than by reducing immigration. On the economic side, making citizenship harder to achieve renders immigrants more vulnerable to exploitation and this boosts profits. Preventing family reunion ensures that resources which might have been needed for schooling or care of the elderly can be retained and inevitably find their way (along with many other resources) into the increasing incomes and wealth of the ultra-rich.

There have been aspects of this type of approach also in UK policy, eg the surge in economic migration from Eastern Europe which was facilitated by the Blair government, accompanied by measures to reduce the rights of asylum seekers to legal employment; and the major rise in non-EU labour migration under Boris Johnson (who was ‘trusted on immigration’ because he had delivered on Brexit). It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, however, that a potential Reform UK government, in the context of a further spiral of even more extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric (perhaps in the future involving competition for support between Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson) might be driven to go much further than would serve the economic interests of capitalist business, and actually try to deliver on promises of mass deportations, internment of hundreds of thousands of people, etc.

### A socialist immigration policy?

But in terms of policy, what could be proposed by people who are not merely well meaning, but aim to move towards changing society in the interests of the working class majority? The slogan of ‘no borders’ is simply unfeasible given the very steep international inequality

under current global capitalism. State involvement in management of migration will continue to be a necessity in the near and medium term.

And even without government participation in anti-migrant discourse, the competitive nature of capitalism and the race to the bottom that it generates make it hard to conceive of a beneficial stand-alone policy. But that surely strengthens the arguments for major overall changes in the direction of socialism. Internationally, the changes that would best help to overcome that global inequality would be an end to direct and indirect UK military intervention and Western political interference in other countries; and promotion, rather than restriction, of technology transfer, to allow the currently less developed countries to catch up with Western levels of GDP.

As part of a wider transformation, elements of a socialist immigration policy would need to involve channelling the economic benefits of inward migration, alongside economic planning to ensure full, decently paid and productive employment, and deployment of resources including in housing, investment in infrastructure, and regional and local development.

As experience shows, achieving working class unity is not something that happens spontaneously under capitalism.

[1] <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/op-eds/h1-b-visas-hurt-one-type-of-worker-and-exploit-another-this-mess-must-be-fixed>

[2] <https://theconversation.com/im-always-delivering-food-while-hungry-how-undocumented-migrants-find-work-as-substitute-couriers-in-the-uk-201695>

[3] The truth about immigration, *The Financial Times*, 20/9/25



# The British State

Like the Hydra of Greek myth, the British state has countless heads whose purposes and powers are unified at root. Some wield power directly; others act on behalf of the ruling class in less visible ways.

The bourgeois state reaches into all aspects of life, constantly developing its forms and methods. It responds ruthlessly to serious challenge, however small. In a period like this one, where a huge transfer of wealth away from the working class to an ever-smaller section of the oligarchy is well underway and a major war is in preparation, all bodies of the extensive state have to work harder to stifle opposition.

The more visible 'heads' of the British state – the armed forces, the police force, the monarchy, Parliament etc. – are not the subject of this series of articles, which will instead look at some of the smaller bodies performing essential functions for the state, often going unnoticed.

# THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR STUDIES

## King's College London

by Clare Bailey

The Department of War Studies at King's is ostensibly a university department but the function it performs for the British state goes well beyond the academic study of military science and strategy.

### Military origins

King's College London (KCL) has a long association with the British military, going back to its foundation in 1829 by a group of reactionary politicians and churchmen wanting to establish a counterweight to the secular University College London. This group included the Duke of Wellington, victor at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and Prime Minister at the time.

Twenty years later, in 1848 – the year of revolutions across Europe and of the publication of the Communist Manifesto – the Department of Military Science was founded at King's to provide an education for trainee army officers. Inaugurated at a moment of high anxiety for the ruling classes of Europe, the department's later fortunes ebbed and flowed with the outbreaks and resolutions of wars. It was abolished after World War 1, but in 1927 the British War Office funded a new Military Studies Department at KCL with instructions to write the official history of the 1914-18 war. Telling 'the national story' has been part of its brief since then.

Today's 'trainee officers' at the Department of War Studies (DWS)

are more numerous and are no longer confined to the army; they take up their posts in a much wider array of organisations in a more extensive state apparatus. The purpose of training them remains, however, the same: to advance the interests of British imperialism.

### World leader in war studies

The Department of War Studies sits within the School of Security Studies at KCL, part of what they describe as the largest faculty in the world devoted to the study of war. The teaching faculty is mostly drawn from British intelligence, the diplomatic service and the military; at least until 2022 that included former chief of GCHQ David Omand, former foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind, former head of MI6 John Sawers and the former chair of the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee Peter Ricketts. The list amply demonstrates the level of overlap between DWS and the core bodies of the British state. The department prides itself, indeed sells itself internationally, on the access it can provide to key individuals with recent hands-on experience of deciding on and directing affairs of state.

The Department of War Studies is structured along conventional academic lines, offering four undergraduate degree courses to approximately 1000 students. The BA in War Studies offers a long list of modules in its third year, focusing on areas of expertise currently required in posts

that graduates will be applying for – cybersecurity, insurgency, globalism, terrorism, genocide etc. A list of titles of PhD's awarded in the last 12 months likewise provides some insight into the research areas DWS is privileging: *Revisiting NATO's History Through Civil-Military Relations*; *Understanding Maritime Power in Putin's Russia*; *An exploration of leadership and management of the UK's secret intelligence community*; and others.

Students graduating from the department are rewarded with employment in think tanks, diplomatic missions and departments of defence. They also find jobs in risk analysis and Open Source Intelligence work in banking, international business and cyber security. The Department of War Studies is effectively a nursery to key administrators of the militarised surveillance state and the future architects of its foreign policy, inside and outside government.

## Manufacturing support for war

The Department's faculty members participate as experts in government defence reviews and enquiries, and they write official war histories. These documents and testimonies feed future research and, over time, disseminate information into the public realm.

When required DWS can act more rapidly in helping to form opinion. An example of how narrative control works in practice dates from February 24 2022 when Russia began its military operation in Ukraine. Along with other faculty bodies, the Department immediately launched a website page called *Ukraine Explained* and within 24 hours of what it designated the 'full-scale invasion' the site had published no fewer than 11 academic essays plus a *Foreword* by Lawrence Freedman, its erstwhile Director. The Department

was clearly well-prepared and ready to define the way in which this event should be understood. A further dozen essays followed within a week.

In the absence of proper investigative reporting, these essays provided the instantaneous analysis and information the compliant media needed for the avalanche of news items that then followed. According to *Wikipedia*, in the first year of the war the Department's output on this web page contributed to over 26,000 articles and news broadcasts for organisations like the *BBC*, *Channel 4*, *Associated Press*, *Newsweek*, and the *Financial*

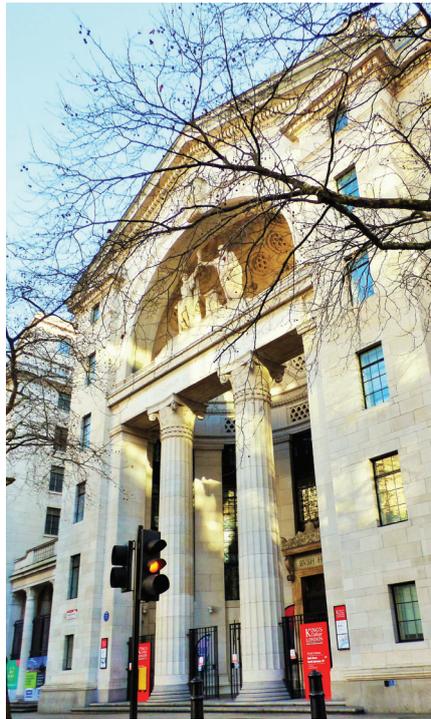


PHOTO BY GRASSROOTSGROUNDNEWSWELL

King's College London

*Times*, along with many others. Shaping the news on this scale was central to the UK's role in the US/NATO campaign in Ukraine and in generating widespread public support for it.

There is a similar profile to the Department's work on Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. Straight after October 7th 2023, there was an immediate agenda-shaping

series of articles, interviews and appearances by DWS staff in a range of media outlets – led, again, by Lawrence Freedman, who was straight out of the traps, publishing an influential article in the *New Statesman* on October 8th.

## Shaping policy

A closer look at Lawrence Freedman, referred to by colleagues as 'dean of British strategic studies', shows how senior faculty members at DWS work to shape British foreign policy. Freedman was the official historian of the Falklands War and co-founder of defence think tank the International Institute of Strategic Studies, whose major funders are Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, Raytheon, Boeing, and Rolls-Royce. Freedman was Professor of War Studies at DWS from 1982-2014 and remains part of the Department as Emeritus Professor. Under his management the Department expanded significantly. According to Professor Joseph Maiolo, the period of greatest expansion took place in 2001 after 9/11, with the launching of the 'War on Terror', at which point, he writes, 'defence studies changed in scale and scope.' [1]

Of particular note is Freedman's role in influencing and forming government foreign policy. For example, he helped prepare Tony Blair's 1999 Chicago speech by offering advice and opinion in a letter in which he defended the then ongoing NATO bombing of Belgrade and advocated greater military intervention elsewhere. He mentions Saddam Hussein as a problem to be addressed. Some years later, after Iraq had been destroyed, he was appointed as one of four members of the seven-year long Chilcot inquiry into the UK's role in the 2003 Iraq War, to ensure that whatever price had to be paid for the lies and the manipulation, it would not be too high and would not touch Blair. Freedman's advice

King's College London (KCL) has a long association with the British military, going back to its foundation in 1829 by a group of reactionary politicians and churchmen wanting to establish a counterweight to the secular University College London. This group included the Duke of Wellington, victor at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and Prime Minister at the time.

to Blair in 1999 – that intervention is both necessary and must be properly managed – can be read in full [2] though it has been given more succinct and contemporary expression by the US Secretary for War, Pete Hegseth: 'Maximum lethality; not tepid legality.'

While Department of War Studies courses and theses are tailored to the current needs of the governments of the NATO alliance and their arms industries, its many (often independently funded) research centres go further in that they have the explicit aim shaping those needs and intervening on decision-making. The King's Centre for the Study of Intelligence is one such.

The DWS has been central to the development of UK intelligence analysis both as a field of activity and as a profession extending well beyond the core intelligence agencies. Two of its key figures, Michael Goodman and David Omand, explained the need to create a new academic discipline in a 2008 paper for *Studies in Intelligence*. [3] In making their case for the new course at the Department, they refer to the American experience: 'The CIA had recognized as early as 1960 how beneficial it would be to use universities as a means of intelligence training.'

Goodman is the current director of the Centre for the Study of Intelligence. Examples of its work alongside the Department of War Studies include its co-hosting of the month-long annual International Security & Intelligence Programme at Cambridge University where speakers have included former heads of MI5, MI6, GCHQ, the CIA and the French Security Services; and a one-day conference, *Strategic Intelligence for Senior Executives* designed to teach company executives 'how to apply strategic intelligence at board level' and

offering 'a peer network of global leaders'. Chair of the conference, which advertised itself as providing 'a unique link between the worlds of business, government and academia', was Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of MI6.

## Universities, corporations and the state

The DWS's flagship conference is the annual *London Defence Conference (LDC)*, launched in 2022 and much favoured by prime ministers. It was at the 2023 conference and following the G7 summit in Hiroshima that Rishi Sunak first described China as posing an 'epoch-defining challenge to us.' The LDC 2025 was chosen by Keir Starmer to make a speech on May 8th, VE Day, a speech short on substance, long on patriotic symbolism – ranging from Churchill & bunting to lion hearts and the beaches of Normandy. He concluded by sharing 'the pride of stepping into our national story'. [4]

The connections between the British state, its universities, and the corporate frontrunners in the arms/war industries are made clear in the list of LDC 2025's main sponsors – Palantir, Anduril, Exiger and Blackstone, specialists in supply chain logistics, asset management, data mining, counter-terrorism, intelligence and government surveillance, defence and security technology.

The opening speech at LDC 2025 was given by retired Royal Navy Commodore, Neil Brown. [5] He began by describing the UK military as 'dangerously hollowed out' and went on to outline pressing questions the conference was designed to address, introducing one of them, 'How can the public debate on defence be won?', as follows: 'On the populist left and right an anti-defence argument is developing. The likely slogan is "welfare not warfare". If the danger is defence fatigue, and voters

thinking defence has already been ticked off the list, how can we educate leaders, officials, and voters of the risk and explain the responses required to deter our adversaries?’

Brown perhaps had in mind the Welfare Not Warfare demonstration, which had taken place two months earlier, and was highlighting its unifying potential. The ‘anti-defence argument’ he identified is indeed developing as he feared it would; in September 2025 the TUC reversed its position on the massive increases in defence spending the government is planning, switching from approval in last year’s motion to outright condemnation and launching a second slogan: wages not weapons.

Along with the other departments in the School of Security Studies, the Department of War Studies at King’s exerts influence in the British state. In the words of its own website:

“We are tackling some of the most critical security challenges of our time, from peacekeeping and counterterrorism to the impacts of climate change and emerging technologies. Through partnerships with governments, NGOs and industry, we turn research into meaningful, real-world solutions.”

### Preparing for war

One recent real-world solution was crafted by a DWS research centre, the Freeman Air & Space Institute (FASI) founded in 2020 and funded by the RAF via the Defence, Science & Technology Laboratory, ‘an executive agency set up by the Ministry of Defence’ and part of the National Armaments Director Group [6] that oversees the implementation of the government’s Strategic Defence Review.

Like DWS, the Freeman Institute is an improver and facilitator of the war machinery of government



PHOTO BY PETER D. LAWLOR

Sir Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King’s College

essential to weapons production and war profiteering. It expedites matters. This can be seen in one short profile of its work, in this case a report written for the RAF two years ago into ‘risk-aversion’ in the air force. [7] In a nutshell, this is a recommendation for a change of operating culture from one that minimises risk by maximising safety to one that embraces high risk – including operating outside the rules of engagement – as the price for combat effectiveness. It is one of the small, significant (and hidden from the public) moves in the readying of the UK military for war, defining this readying as “the shift in risk-appetite that takes place between peacetime and war”, as though the shift happens all by itself.

The FASI report is prefaced by a long quotation from Roosevelt rebuking those who aren’t willing to get their hands dirty in an hour of need; the quotation ends like this, “Shame on the man of cultivated taste who permits refinement to develop into fastidiousness that unfits him for doing the rough work of a workaday world.” Theodore Roosevelt *Citizenship in a Republic*, Paris, 23 April 1910. The Freeman Institute and the Department of War Studies, and

others, are facilitating the ‘rough work’ of the coming wars by recommending and finding ways of removing peacetime obstacles like ‘risk-aversion’ in pilots, like public reluctance to go to war, like firewalls between government and corporations – and by providing the analysis, the legal defences, the rationales and justifications for war.

[1] [https://www.isc.meiji.ac.jp/~transfer/papers/en/pdf/04/02\\_JOSEPH\\_A\\_MAIOLO.pdf](https://www.isc.meiji.ac.jp/~transfer/papers/en/pdf/04/02_JOSEPH_A_MAIOLO.pdf)

[2] <https://terrapapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/What-Analysts-Need-Understand.pdf>

[3] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-remarks-at-the-london-defence-conference-8-may-2025>

[4] <https://londondefenceconference.com/2025/05/02/alliances-under-pressure/>

[5] <https://humanities-research.exeter.ac.uk/warningsfromthearchive/files/original/d34e74c9aedf6d675fedaefc2281e60c.pdf>

[6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/national-armaments-director-nad-group>

[7] <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/warstudies/assets/paper-19-sophy-antrobust-back-to-the-future.pdf>



PHOTO BY NUMBER 10

# EUROPEAN POWERS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON WAR

by Simon Korner

As the US prepares for war with China, it is exerting enormous pressure on its allies to re-arm. Germany, France and Britain have all raised their defence budgets towards the 5% of GDP stipulated by NATO. The aim of the US is to consolidate a single military and economic bloc under its full control. The European allies are to continue funding and organising the war against Russia, keeping it tied down, while the US focuses on China. [1]

In this division of labour, Europe has so far spent \$95 billion on the Ukraine war, far more than the US's \$75 billion, with 63% of European arms spending going on US-made weapons. [2] The Europeans' call for a US 'backstop' in Ukraine is a desperate attempt to keep the US engaged in its outsourced war. But even as the allies do the US's bidding, the re-armament drive forced on them is feeding their own individual long-term ambitions and appetite for war.

## Germany re-arms

Germany's steep rise in arms spending began in 2022 immediate-

ly following Russia's intervention in Ukraine. The then Chancellor Scholz announced a *Zeitenwende*, a watershed moment – increasing arms expenditure from €65 billion to €100 billion and jettisoning Germany's principle of not delivering weapons to a country at war. The current Chancellor, Merz, is accelerating the process, having pushed through a constitutional change to scrap the 'debt brake' on German borrowing, so that Germany can now borrow billions for weapons procurement. Over the next five years, Germany will be investing an estimated €1 trillion in arms production and related infrastructure, making it the biggest spender in Europe and the fourth biggest in the world. [3] It is the largest German armaments programme since World War 2. [4]

This militarisation is evidence of Germany transforming itself into a belligerent power once again. The country's top general has promised that Germany will be war-ready by 2029, which means reintroducing conscription. Germany is also lobbying for nuclear-sharing arrangements with NATO's nuclear powers, with the aim of joining the nuclear club, and pushing for

left to right, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, French President Emmanuel Macron, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz

a seat on the UN Security Council commensurate with its global status. Former foreign minister Annalena Baerbock's recent appointment as president of the UN General Assembly is a step towards Germany's goal.

Progressive academic Thomas Fazi points out that Germany's re-armament programme differs from anything since World War 2, not only in monetary terms, but in the way the whole of society is being prepared for war. Fazi says, "Merz's vision is one of total mobilisation — a 'whole-of-society' approach that seeks to prepare not just the armed forces, but the entire German economy and civil infrastructure for confrontation with Russia. Media, education, industrial policy and civil defence are all being aligned to support this new war footing." [5] Government rhetoric talks up the Russian 'threat', while German missiles are being sent to Ukraine with all restrictions on their range lifted.

## Destroying socialism, preparing for war

The reorientation away from Germany's peaceful postwar constitution – which had been constrained in the way Japan's had been – had its beginnings in 1990. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which immiserated the former East German population (life expectancy sank for several years afterwards) stimulated the united Germany's ambitions to regain its status as a great military power. With the annexation of the German Democratic Republic, Germany at a stroke overtook France as the leading power on the Continent. Unification handed German capitalists an advanced socialist industrial base to plunder and a highly educated workforce to exploit. Over the following decade Germany achieved its aim of EU enlargement, fuelling its economy further by incorporating eastern and central Europe's markets, resources and large pool of cheap labour, a process that is ongoing.

Immediately after re-unification, Germany began offensive military operations abroad. It participated in the Iraq invasion Desert Storm in 1991, funding the war to the tune of \$10 billion out of a total \$61 billion. It also led the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, which began in the same year, by early recognition of Croatian and Slovenian independence. It sent troops to Afghanistan and Mali, and in 2014 intervened in Ukraine by undermining Ukraine's elected president Yanukovich and then siding with the Kiev coup government against the Donbas rebellion.

In 2022, after Russia sent troops into Ukraine to stop NATO's eastward expansion, Germany became one of the most bellicose anti-Russian western powers. A leading supporter of the Ukrainian regime, it rapidly sent anti-tank weapons and Stinger missiles, and later dispatched Leopard tanks to the

frontline as well as missiles whose range kept increasing, in the belief that Russia would succumb rapidly to concerted western power. A large protest banner displayed on the Day of German Unity in 2023 in Leipzig underlined the new order, "This border was lifted so that we can go to war together again." [6] War was precisely what the socialist, anti-fascist half of Germany existed to prevent. With that impediment removed, Germany could rise again.

Reality in Ukraine turned out differently from western expectations. Russia didn't collapse but, rather, made advances on the ground, which are continuing. Yet despite Russia's gains, Germany has not let up. Along with France and Britain, it is pressing forward with the formation of the so-called Coalition of the Willing.

While the Coalition is an American instrument designed to over-extend Russia and relieve the US of the burden of underwriting the conflict, it also expresses the interests of each of the Coalition partners in escalating the war. Each European power wants access to Ukraine's rare earths and coal, rich agriculture, transportation hubs and cheap labour – Germany's Rheinmetall arms-manufacturer has already built a factory in Ukraine to profit from rock-bottom labour costs and as a result its share price has risen 2000% since before the war. Each power is chasing a share of the spoils and vying with the others to secure them. Each is profiting from the vast Ukrainian market for weapons. European oligarchs and their political representatives are enthusiastic warmongers in their own right, even as they follow America's orders.

## Europe's subjugation

Despite the US's hegemonic power, it needs to keep a close eye on its European allies to quash any potential challenge. Germany has, since

World War 2, been "kept down" by NATO and by the biggest contingent of US forces on the continent, 40,000 strong, along with an unspecified number of US nuclear weapons on its territory. Britain likewise hosts US bases and nuclear weapons. Though Britain has its own nuclear weapons, has no control over their use.

While France has a degree more autonomy, it is rapidly losing ground to the US in its African protectorates and in 2021 was barged aside before completing its major submarine deal with Australia.

Once the US decided that Germany's relationship with China and Russia had reached unacceptable levels it acted decisively. China had become Germany's most important export market in 2016 and Russia had been supplying Germany with 40% of its energy supplies before the war. In February 2022, Biden announced that he would "bring to an end" the part-German owned Nord Stream pipeline – and a few months later, the undersea pipeline was blown up. This act of war, confirmed as such by Lloyds of London, who used the fact to avoid paying out insurance, provoked no condemnation from Berlin. Germany was also instructed to replace Russian energy with far more expensive American liquified natural gas, leading to economic recession for the past 3 years. Germany has also complied with US orders to decouple its economy from China by prioritising Poland as a market for its exports. This crushing of German strategic independence was one of the US's reasons for provoking war with Russia in the first place.

While Germany's acceptance of US orders appears self-sabotaging, its ruling circles calculate that their interests are best served by giving in to US demands and entering the warlike bloc against Russia and China. An economic hit can be compensated for by squeezing its

own fiefdom, the EU, which Germany dominates with its massive GDP, sucking in wealth from the other countries. A 2017 report by the Centre for European Policy found that Germany earned €1.9 trillion in the first 20 years after adopting the euro, while France lost €3.6 trillion and Italy €4.3 trillion. [7] The foundations for this German dominance were laid by Walter Funk, the director of the Nazis' Reichsbank who envisioned a European single market under German control. The current Bundesbank is a direct descendant of the wartime Reichsbank.

As for Britain, its re-armament is perhaps even more dangerous, given the UK's record of active warmongering over the past two years alone – against Russia, China, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Qatar and others.

### French-German rivalry

Like Germany, France has embarked on an unprecedented arms race, earmarking €413 billion for its military over the next 5 years. Macron has doubled defence spending since 2017 when he took office. While the increase is lower than Germany's, France begins from a stronger position, with the most powerful armed forces and biggest arms production base in the EU. France also has the advantage over Germany of being the sole nuclear power on the European continent (it has 290 warheads deployed on submarines) and of having a seat on the UN Security Council. Its Pacific island territories make it the world's second larg-

est maritime power, and, despite recent setbacks, its economic control over 14 countries in western and central Africa via its Communauté Financière Africaine gives it a lucrative neo-colonial hinterland.

The rivalry and mutual suspicion – historically determined – between France and Germany mean that co-operation is unachievable. De Gaulle famously called France the 'jockey' and Germany the 'horse', meaning France should direct European policy powered by German economic growth. France has, since the 1963 Elysée Treaty which symbolized reconciliation between two European powers, used its military weight to offset German economic strength.

But German reunification upset that balance, and France has struggled ever since to reassert its superiority. Nevertheless, France still believes in its natural entitlement to European leadership, acting as the guardian of European security – always in its own interests.

The two main areas of contention are energy and defence. On energy, France's large-scale nuclear power infrastructure has made it less vulnerable than Germany to raised energy costs caused by European sanctions on Russia. France, pressing home its advantage, objects to Germany granting a massive €200 billion subsidy to its industry to pay for expensive US energy, accusing Germany of flouting EU rules on state aid. [8]

On defence, collaboration between France and Germany over the development of next-generation aircraft fighters, the Future Combat Air System, Europe's supposed flagship defence project, has stalled because of French plane maker Dassault's insistence on remaining the "uncontested leader" of the project, and because of Germany's purchase of US F-35s instead of French (or jointly

produced) planes. The German purchases are part of its attempt to move towards nuclear power-sharing, as F-35s can carry nuclear bombs.

One French official said: "We are basically betting the future of the French defence industry on co-operation with Germany... What we do not agree to is that Germany decides unilaterally for us." [9]

On the joint tank project, the Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), Germany has been reluctant to commit fully because its Leopard tanks, battle-tested on the Ukraine frontline, have rendered the MGCS potentially redundant. Its recent order of 600 new Leopards for its army may sink the joint project altogether, which has anyway been dogged by disputes and delays. On missile defence, Germany has joined the Sky Shield project with other European powers, leaving France out. The project covers the Baltic and east European countries, and France fears it will give Germany too much control over the region. There are similar differences over space weapons.

Other major issues of contention include an EU free trade deal with the Latin American countries in the Mercosur trade bloc. Germany favours the deal as a route to new export markets, but Macron fears agricultural dumping will hurt French farmers.

Another issue is Poland, busily re-arming itself to form the largest land army in Europe. France, which earlier regarded the enlargement of the EU to include Poland as evidence of German expansionism over its eastern neighbours, is now seeking to befriend Poland in order to extend its security hegemony over eastern Europe – and has hinted at providing Poland with the French nuclear umbrella. This jockeying is why the so-called Weimar Triangle triple alliance of France, Germany and Poland has consistently failed to progress.

Leopard 2A5 Tank



PHOTO BY BUNDESWEHR

## Competition and division

For the same reasons of competition, the Coalition of the Willing is unlikely to succeed on the terms it has set itself – as a co-operative western venture to intervene with boots on the ground in Ukraine. Either France, Britain or Germany will seek to lead the other aggressors. A leaked French map of the division of Ukraine’s spoils reveals how they are planning to manage the ‘scramble’ – France wants the minerals, Britain wants control over the logistics hubs, and so on. It also highlights Polish, Romanian and Hungarian ambitions to seize Ukrainian territory they claim belongs to them. [10]

European divisions have also made it easy for the US to impose punishing 15% tariffs on all European products – in a ‘deal’ made between the US and the EU Commission. The strategic capitulation on tariffs exposed the myth that by pooling their sovereignty into a supranational bloc, the European nations could stand up to the US. Instead, the EU has only intensified European competition, allowing the US to strengthen its hold over the continent. While Merz bemoaned the fact that the agreement would “substantially damage” his nation’s finances and Macron called it a “humiliation” for Europe, neither resisted it. While they talk about gaining strategic autonomy from the US, in reality, the ruling circles in each European country are confirmed Atlanticists

riding on US power – look at VW and Mercedes shifting huge investments to the US while the Germany economy is deindustrialised. [11]

To compete globally, both France and Germany need each other to achieve economies of scale and technology-sharing, but the contradictions between the two have made co-operation problematic. Despite the fact that there have been 25 meetings of the Franco-German Council of Ministers since 2003, [12] and despite French and German ambitions to set up a joint defence and security council, co-operation hasn’t materialised in a meaningful way. Each power instead seeks to use the EU to promote the interests of its own capitalist class, ceding areas of national control to the unelected EU Commission in the hope of gaining an advantage for themselves. The Commission is in turn exploiting these divisions within the EU to grab power from the member states, with the aim of taking de facto control over European policy – for instance, when Ursula von der Leyen in 2022 went beyond her remit and assumed the role of EU commander in chief, in effect supervising the outsourcing of US warmongering in Europe.

In the longer term, re-armament has set the conditions for future European armed conflict – both against Russia, but also eventually between the European powers themselves – conducted by countries massively armed and nursing

newly-fed ambitions. A re-militarised Germany with all spending restraints removed will seek to go it alone, outside French security ‘protection’. A heavily militarised France will never accept the renewal of German military power that has led to three invasions in 150 years.

As for Britain, its re-armament is perhaps even more dangerous, given the UK’s record of active warmongering over the past two years alone – against Russia, China, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Qatar and others.

[1] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esQR6N8uT\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esQR6N8uT_4)

[2] [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/04/europe-is-now-ukraine-s-main-source-of-military-support\\_6745030\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/04/europe-is-now-ukraine-s-main-source-of-military-support_6745030_4.html)

[3] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovOByuczdxk>

[4] <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/06/26/germany-plans-to-double-its-defense-spending-within-five-years/>

[5] <https://unherd.com/2025/06/germanys-dangerous-submission/>

[6] <https://www.globale-leipzig.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-10-02-Ausstellung-in-Leipzig-Unentdecktes-Land.jpg>

[7] <https://www.dw.com/en/cep-study-germany-gains-most-from-euro-introduction/a-47675856>

[8] <https://www.ft.com/content/f833a122-3388-11e9-bd3a-8b2a211d90d5>

[9] <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/01/07/the-rising-tensions-between-france-and-germany/>

[10] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TQ6seCVC0c>

[11] <https://fortune.com/europe/2024/02/19/german-companies-pouring-record-investments-us-germany-tight-economic-relationship-china-wobbles/>

[12] <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2025/09/01/franco-german-economic-agenda>



# GEOSTRATEGIC FIGHT FOR THE CAUCASUS

*Nikol Pashinyan, Prime minister of Armenia during the 2018 “velvet revolution”*

by Gregor Tassie

The Caucasus has long been fought over by empires seeking control of this strategic region bordering Europe and Asia. For thousands of years, the trade routes have been a crucial element in empire building by the Roman, Byzantine, Mongol and Ottoman empires. In 1828, Qajar Iran ceded territories to the Romanov Empire, and by 1864, the entirety fell to Russia after the Caucasian Wars. Currently, the region is occupied by Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan with several autonomous republics; Nakhichevan, former Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

## The Soviet Caucasus

Under the Soviet Union, the peoples of the Caucasus enjoyed unprecedented economic and social progress with the abolition of poverty, unemployment and discrimination based on race or gender. Between 1922 and 1936, on Lenin’s initiative, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, was formed embracing four peoples: Russian, Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani, with Tbilisi as its capital and was among the founding Soviet republics of the USSR. With the new 1936 Constitution, three separate republics were formed, each having its own government, parliament and economic development.

If the Caucasus enjoyed a boom in economic and social well-being, in 1985, these advantages declined

when Gorbachev launched Perestroika and permitted foreign NGOs to spread influence into the region. They notably fostered division where few divisions existed before. These interventions, to propagate Western values of ‘freedom and democracy’, were from the EU, US Aid, the Soros Foundation, and Islamic groups.

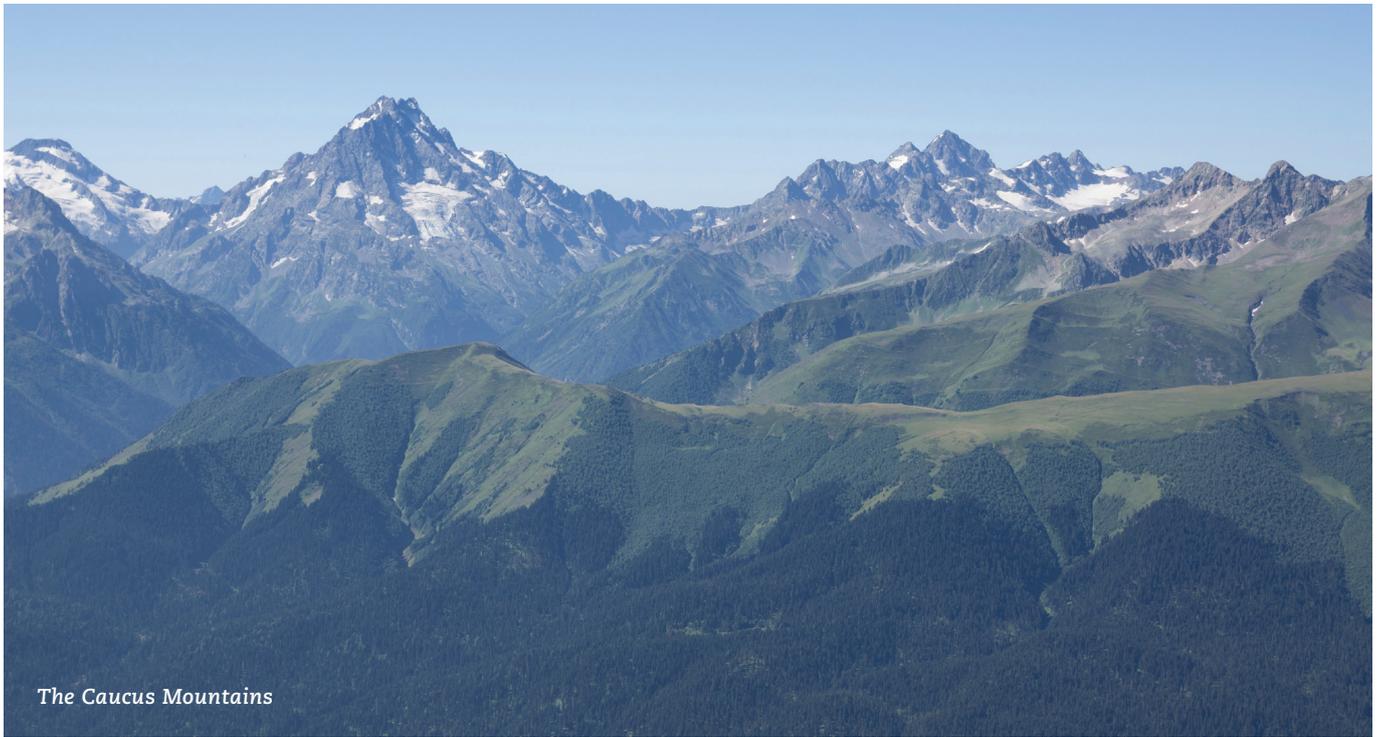
Armenia was the victim of a genocide executed by the Ottoman Empire in 1915 which led to Armenians becoming refugees across the world with large diasporas in the US, France, and the Middle East. It was Soviet power which gave statehood to Armenia following the October Revolution, and Armenia became one of the leading republics with Armenians allowed to use their own language and culture. Many Armenians occupied leading positions in the Soviet state, including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and in education, science, sport, and culture.

## Recent conflicts

One of the sources for creating disorder by the US and the EU was to revive the animosity from the historic conflict of 1918-1921 between the Armenians and the Azeri population. Among the most disturbing developments was a pogrom in Azerbaijan when Armenian workers were attacked in the large chemical city of Sumgait in 1988. More intense clashes developed in the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous republic (with a majority Armenian population), which

resulted in many deaths. This led the Armenian population to declare their own Artsakh state separate from the Azeri SSR. Partisan militias and Armenian army involvement in four local wars continued to 2023 when the Azeri army (with help from Turkey) defeated the Armenians, who were forced to take refuge in Armenia. Russia assisted with peacekeepers despite attacks from the Azeri army. The capitulation by the Armenian government in surrendering Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan led to violent demonstrations against Prime Minister Pashinyan. In Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, atrocities were committed against those Armenians left in the city. The leader of Artsakh, Robert Kocharyan, emigrated and formed a party, which is a major opposition group in the Armenian parliament.

The signing in Washington in August 2025 of a treaty between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the US gives the US control of the Zangezur corridor between the Caspian and the Black Seas. This manoeuvre presents an existential threat to the security of all the states in the region. Armenia surrendered territory to Azerbaijan to allow the use of a pipeline to Turkey. While being posited as a ‘peace treaty’ between two countries which have been at war for four decades, the arrival of US influence represents a dangerous escalation. Following on from this, during assaults on Iran by Israel and the US, their air forces were permitted to use Azeri airspace for these attacks.



The Caucas Mountains

PHOTO BY VYACHESLAV ARGENBERG

The US threat to the sovereignty and security in the region has been present for decades. Reflecting on globalist expansion worldwide, George Keenan in 1997 said, 'The expansion of NATO will be the biggest mistake.' Keenan's concerns were ignored. A former advisor to Presidents Carter and Reagan unveiled the true strategy of the US when Zbigniew Brzezinski stated American policy was 'to weaken Russia'.

## Nikol Pashinyan

Now Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, edited the Soros-funded Armenia Times between 1999 and 2012 and was jailed for libel against Serzh Sargsyan, then the Minister of Security. When the latter was elected President in 2008, Pashinyan was jailed for 7 years after organising demonstrations that led to 12 deaths and was released in 2011 in an amnesty. Elected as a member of the Petrosyan-led National Congress in 2012, he defected by breaking with Petrosyan and set up 'Civil Contract'. After leading the protest movement - the 'Impeachment Union' - Pashinyan led the so-called velvet revolution in 2018. His policies are right-wing populism, neo-liberalism and Russophobia. Among his allies are mafia forces, TV and film actors

and businessmen. His studies in journalism were never completed as he was expelled for alleging corruption in the university. He opposed Armenian politicians from Nagorno-Karabakh and was also jailed for contempt of court. Currently, he controls a small majority in government over two strong opposition groups. Pashinyan's wife is now the editor of *Armenia Times* which controls most of the social media sites.

## Aliev Clan

The second president of Azerbaijan, Geidar Aliev, was a member of the counter-intelligence agency, SMERSH, and was an officer in the KGB until Andropov promoted him to the Politburo in 1982. He was ejected six years later by Gorbachev for corruption and sycophancy. With the breakup of the USSR, he appears to have experienced an epiphany and switched to Islam. He made Azerbaijan his fiefdom and set up talks in Florida, which resolved the second Armenian-Azeri war over Nagorno-Karabakh. He tied Azerbaijan to the US by signing military and security treaties with Clinton and Bush. Aliev's son Ilmar took over following Geidar's death in the US and enforced an authoritarian regime excluding

all opposition parties. His ruling party is globalist-authoritarian, embracing neo-liberal policies and Russophobia. Ilmar appointed his wife as Vice-President, and his stepson owns the Bayraktar drone company which was effective in defeating the Armenians in the war. It has built a factory in the Ukraine. The two communist and socialist groups have been excluded from the media and all public government.

## Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is part of a Turkic alliance with Central Asian states led by Turkish President, Erdogan. Aliev has sought to widen his links by joining BRICS, but this was rejected owing to the mafia clans in the country. After the tragedy of an Azeri airliner crashing last December with 38 deaths, Aliev accused Russia of attacking the plane however, the enquiry cleared Russia of being involved. Aliev demanded an apology and compensation, which was refused, and has intensified Russophobia, closing Russian cultural centres and arresting Russian journalists in Baku. Russophobia was developed in the 1990s by two anti-Soviet academics rewriting school textbooks and inciting anti-Soviet ideas,

preaching that the Azeris were occupied after 1917. Aliev accused Russia of aggression against Azerbaijan without giving verification.

A factor in the declining power structures in Baku was the development of links with the Israeli Mossad spy agency. These strong links with Mossad were evidenced when the Iranian president Rafsanjani was killed while returning from a brief visit to Baku, when his helicopter mysteriously crashed while other helicopters were untouched. The death led to an election in which a reputedly pro-Western candidate was elected. In the recent attack by Israel and the US on Iran, Azerbaijan allowed the use of its airspace to launch these air attacks on the Iranian presidency and government.

There have been increasing incidents of arrests of Azeri citizens in Russia accused of mafia corruption, and killings of gang rivals, also of recruiting saboteurs against military targets in Russia. The most invidious case has been the arrests of a gang in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk, of the gang leader (appealed for personally for by Aliev), and the arrest, and deportation of the head of the Azeri community in the Moscow region. Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan, in retaliation, there have been arrests of Russian journalists working for the Sputnik radio agency in Baku. Additionally, there has been the closure of a Russian cultural centre in Baku and the halting of Russian language tuition in schools in Azerbaijan. Most recently, trade has dropped with products being turned back at customs controls to Georgia, Russia, and the European Union, causing huge losses of Azeri agricultural exports. The stopping of Chinese imports of gas from Azerbaijan is another source of woe for Aliev. Recently, Aliev has claimed northern Iran should belong to Azerbaijan.

## Armenia

In Armenia, there have been increasing tensions caused by

Pashinyan taking action against the Orthodox Church in Yerevan, arresting the Patriarch for solidarity with Russia, and the detention of a leading businessman for expressing support for Russia amid the worsening of relations between Armenia and Russia. There have been large demonstrations in support of both individuals and against Pashinyan's increasingly bellicose statements on Russia. Armenia has been a partner with NATO, holding joint exercises with the US in Armenia at a time when Armenia is also a member of the Collective Security Treaty with other post-Soviet states.

The recent meeting with Ursula von der Leyen in Yerevan on joining the EU has been criticised, together with an application to join NATO, and that is not even taking account of the payment of over 2 billion euros as an advance for entry to the EU. The closer relationship with the US raises concern that the Armenians will be used as proxies against either Russia or Iran. The US Embassy in Yerevan employs 400 'diplomats', the biggest US embassy in the region, and has long been a lever in espionage with Armenia's southern neighbour, Iran.

Pashinyan has been seen as becoming increasingly isolated for his turn towards the West and away from traditional alliances with BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Collective Treaty Organisation and the former Soviet republics. Of course, owing to Armenia's history, there is a large diaspora in the US and France which has funded projects and ensured Western influence. Yet there is a bigger diaspora in Russia which has been equally influential, if not more so. To this day, Armenians play an important role in the Russian Federation across diverse fields of society.

Trade with Russia plays a vitally important role in the development of Armenia. Recently, Pashinyan told Putin that the two countries were 'brothers' and has attempted

to maintain his presence in two camps. Likewise with Azerbaijan, the peoples of the two countries cannot afford to lose the traditionally strong economic and strategic relationship with Russia.

## Prospects

In Azerbaijan, there is unlikely to emerge any threat to the Aliev family's hold on power, yet the growing economic plight of the country will lead to consequences and perhaps even a military takeover, as was the case in 2003. In Armenia, there are elections scheduled in 2026, and if the two main opposition parties can unite on a single programme, then the rule of the pro-Western Pashinyan will disappear in dust and there will be a return to a government which supports the country's traditional allies and not NATO and the EU.

Recent demonstrations against worsening economic conditions have led to a political crisis in Baku, caused by the corruption of the various clans there. The importance of Azerbaijan to Turkey may dissipate with the latter's growing economic crisis. Erdogan's long-held plans to build a Turkic alliance of states embracing Central Asia may end as a pipedream. Britain also has interests in Azerbaijan, with 450 companies operating there.

The US will play a major part in the short term, yet Russia's ability to forge a partnership across diverse political and geographical areas may well play the most important role in defining the future of the region. That, together with the declining role of Europe and the growth of alternative partnerships through BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, offers a solution to the problems of the Caucasus peoples in casting away the dictates of the US and the old European powers and guaranteeing their sovereignty and long-term prosperity.

# Let us speak of freedom!

## 70th anniversary of the Freedom Charter

by Alex Davidson

Seventy years ago, on 26 June 1955, the South African Freedom Charter was adopted by the Congress of the People (COP) at Kliptown, near Soweto, South Africa. There were 2,884 delegates from across the country in attendance at the Congress over two days. The delegates present “included wizened black countrymen and office workers with bright American ties, smooth Indian lawyers with their wives in saris, and swaying black grandmothers in wide skirts in the ANC colours.” [1]

The Congress presented the special award of Isitwalande to Chief Albert Luthuli (*see above right*), Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Father Trevor Huddleston. Only Father Huddleston was present to hear the cheers as Chief Luthuli and Dr Dadoo were banned. [2] Many others, including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, who would have attended as delegates, were also banned at that time.

The Freedom Charter opens with the words, “We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people.”

The Freedom Charter then lays out the requirements for a free and democratic South Africa with a set of aims (*see right*). It concluded, “These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty.”

### Background: The Defiance Campaign

In 1952 the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress demanded that the government repeal six specific apartheid laws. If it failed to do so, the Congresses would launch a mass campaign of defiance of apartheid. The government ignored the demand, and the enrolment of volunteers began with Nelson Mandela as volunteer-in-chief. Volunteers would break selected laws after notifying the authorities that they would do so and therefore invite arrest. They would offer no resistance to arrest nor pay any fines. Volunteers took up positions at ‘whites only’ post office counters and railway stations, sat at ‘whites only’ park benches and remained in town after curfew. They were duly arrested, offered no resistance and were tried and jailed. The campaign quickly caught on and the numbers jailed grew into thousands and the jails filled to overflowing.

The government struck back with a new law creating the crime of ‘offence by way of protest’ with penalties including long-term hard labour or the imposition of lashes. This posed a problem for the leaders of the Defiance Campaign as in a few places volunteers had reacted to provocative acts of violence by the police. Consequently, peaceful acts inviting arrest had sometimes turned into minor riots. The use of the new act with its brutal powers would further increase the volunteers’ anger and encourage a decline into violence.



### FREEDOM CHARTER AIMS

The people shall govern!

All national groups shall have equal rights!

The people shall share in the country’s wealth!

The land shall be shared among those who work it!

All shall be equal before the law!

All shall enjoy equal human rights!

There shall be work and security!

The doors of learning and of culture shall be opened!

There shall be houses, security and comfort!

There shall be peace and friendship!

Continuing defiance in these circumstances would be reckless. The congresses therefore called a halt to the campaign to avoid risking bloodshed and a dangerous setback for the movement.

Defiance had not brought the repeal of a single unjust law, “but we never had any illusion that they would be. We selected them as the greatest way to engage people in the struggle. Prior to the campaign the ANC was more talk than action... As a result of the campaign our membership swelled to 100,000. The ANC emerged as a truly mass-based organisation with an enormous corps of experienced activists who had braved the police, the courts and the jails...From the Defiance Campaign onwards going to prison became a badge of honour among Africans.” [3]

The end of the Defiance Campaign allowed time to re-group and prepare for the next round of struggle.

## What to do now?

In 1954 the ANC called a meeting of its allies, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation, the Congress of Democrats (white progressives) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions to discuss next moves. Each organisation would have a delegation of eight. The meeting was held in a rural school for Indian children, near Stanger, where ANC President General Chief Albert Luthuli had been confined by ministerial decree. “A meeting at leadership level without Luthuli was unthinkable. Mahomet could not come to the mountain, so the mountain came to Stanger.” Luthuli presided over some forty delegates, “who tucked themselves uncomfortably into children’s desks. The classroom, murky enough with its dusty windows by day, was even murkier when only lit by storm lanterns at night. The atmosphere was somewhat conspiratorial, since several of those present were in breach

of ministerial bans. Such a high-level meeting of all the congresses was unprecedented.” [4]

There was no agenda and no prepared proposals. The meeting had been called to consider ‘what to do now?’ According to Rusty Bernstein most of the ideas thrown up were “uninspired and had been aired many times before – proposals for an anti-pass campaign with mass burning of passes, a nationwide petition, a mass conference, a day of stay-at-home. All sounded tired and routine and seemed to be a step backwards from the high confidence and militancy of the Defiance Campaign.” [5]

Professor Z. K. Matthews reiterated his proposal which had been carried at the ANC’s Cape Provincial Conference and passed on to the national executive some time before. It had seemed to run out of steam as conference resolutions often do. He proposed that the congresses join forces to convene a Congress of the People where a Freedom Charter would be adopted. The ANC’s failure to act initially on his proposal may have reflected the poor state of the organisation at that time or that the idea appeared to be too moderate and seemed like a retreat away from acts of mass confrontation with the authorities.

“Prof”, as he was known, explained that a Congress of the People would be a step forward and that it would provide a detailed programme of fundamental social, political and economic change which could point the way to an alternative South Africa. He explained that it could start with a nationwide canvas to enrol all adults on a single non-racial voters’ roll; design constituencies and arrange elections for seats at the Congress of the People.

## An idea whose time has come

The Prof’s idea was accepted in principle. “It seemed to have just the

sweep of vision which we needed to break out of the quietus, and to inspire the movement with new enthusiasm. It felt like an idea whose time had come.” [6]

A Resolutions Committee was elected to formulate it in detail. Nelson Mandela was appointed convenor and the committee met that night. The committee thought that the practical implementation of the Prof’s plan appeared to require the resources of a small state. It was agreed to trim the concept down to a manageable size. In place of the national voters’ roll and constituencies it was agreed to run a campaign to persuade people to formulate their own proposals for a Freedom Charter. A Congress of the People would be called comprising delegates from all organisations and groups.

The committee’s proposal was adopted by the conference next day and a National Action Council was elected bringing together representatives from the different congresses including Walter Sisulu (ANC), Adam Daniels (CPC), Piet Beylveld (GPC) and Rusty Bernstein (COD) under the chairmanship of Oliver Tambo. This National Action Council’s composition was significant in that it served as the first truly non-racial forum for the planning of joint political work for the Congresses. It set about putting into action the agreement made at Stanger.

“Politics is not a controlled happening. The Prof had proposed something new without intending to cause a revolution. But that was what happened. Relationships between Congress and the people had to be turned on their head; the people had to be encouraged to speak for themselves and, for the first time activists had to learn to listen. From that process came a radical Freedom Charter and the first outlines of a revolutionary new South Africa.” [7]

The National Action Council published a “Call”, written by Rusty Bernstein, which crystallised its essence as ‘Let Us Speak of Freedom’, asking people everywhere to collaborate in setting the terms of the Freedom Charter. This provided the agenda for the different organisations to set up thousands of meetings up and down the country. An army of volunteers was established to gather the ideas of the people.

“Literally tens of thousands of scraps of paper came flooding in: a mixture of smooth writing-pad paper, torn pages from ink-blotched school exercise books, bits of cardboard, asymmetrical portions of brown and white paper, and even the unprinted margins of bits of newspaper.” [8] A small team separated and collated all these bits of paper and then divided them into various categories of demands. From this, Rusty Bernstein drafted the Freedom Charter which was a statement of core principles characterised by the opening demand “The People Shall Govern”. The Freedom Charter was then agreed by the National Action Council and presented to the people over the two-day Congress of the People.

## Congress of the People

On the first day (25 June 1955) of the Congress of the People the Freedom Charter was recited in three languages, English, Sesotho and Xhosa, and was approved with shouts of ‘Afrika’ from the crowd.

On the second day as the Congress moved through the aims of the Freedom Charter the afternoon proceedings were suddenly disrupted by plain-clothes detectives and police armed with Sten guns. Another group of police armed with rifles formed a cordon. An officer took the microphone and announced that they were investigating high treason and were searching for subversive documents. The people responded by singing loudly *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika* and adopting the Freedom Charter. The police took the

names of all those present one by one before they were permitted to leave.

Mandela, along with Walter Sisulu, who was also banned from attending, had watched the gathering from among the crowd of some 7,000 beyond the assembled delegates. He commented, “I knew that this raid signalled a harsh new turn on the part of the government.” He also wrote, “Though the Congress had been broken up, the charter itself became a great beacon for the liberation struggle.” [9]

Mandela was correct on both counts. On 5 December 1956 the apartheid police arrested 156 people from all over the country and charged them with high treason. The key document in support of the charge was the Freedom Charter. The “Treason Trial” lasted four years when eventually the last group of accused were acquitted. The trial was partly designed to remove the leaders of the liberation movement from active struggle. However, because it brought together the leaders from across the racial divide and from across the country it welded them together and served as the organising and unifying centre of the people. It was an unintended consequence of the actions of the apartheid state.

The process of creating the Freedom Charter brought together Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites. This development was the antithesis of apartheid which divided racial groups by race. It laid the basis for the non-racial policy of the ANC, It also led to the breakaway of the “Africanists” who rejected the idea that South Africa belongs to all who live in it as stated in the Freedom Charter. They split from the ANC and set-up the Pan-African Congress.

The Freedom Charter created the basis for the emergence of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Mass Democratic Movement in the

1980s which brought together people of all races in the struggle against apartheid. The UDF was comprised of hundreds of organisations including trades unions, students’ unions, churches and women’s organisations. Its slogan was “UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides”.

The Freedom Charter captured the hopes and dreams of the people, and it became a great beacon for the liberation struggle throughout the ensuing decades until the defeat of apartheid on 27 April 1994 in the first democratic election in the history of South Africa with the resounding victory of the African National Congress.

The Constitution of the free South Africa is largely based on the Freedom Charter.

[1] Sampson, Anthony, *The Treason Cage*, Heinemann, 1958

[2] Isitwalandwe is the highest honour awarded by the ANC to those who have made an outstanding contribution and sacrifice to the liberation struggle. Isitwalandwe, literally translated, means “the one who wears the plumes of the rare bird” and was traditionally bestowed only on the bravest warriors of the people, on those who distinguished themselves in the eyes of all the people for exceptional qualities of leadership and heroism. Luthuli, Dadoo and Huddleston were the first recipients of the award by ANC at the Congress of the People in 1955

[3] Mandela, Nelson, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown, 1994

[4] Bernstein, Lionel (Rusty), *Memory Against Forgetting*, 2nd edition, Wits University Press, 2017

[5] *ibid*

[6] *ibid*

[7] *ibid*

[8] Slovo, Joe, *The Unfinished Autobiography*, Ravan Press, 1995

[9] Mandela, Nelson, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown 1994

# POLITICS, CLASS AND INEQUALITY

by Paul Sutton

The election of the Labour government last year and the strong electoral performance of Reform at the English local elections this year has attracted a lot of comment and analysis. The Labour government won 411 parliamentary seats on a vote share of 34%, the lowest of any party forming a majority government since the last war. The Conservative result was the worst since 1832, winning only 121 seats with 24% of the vote. The overall turnout was 59.7%, the lowest since 2001.

In the local elections in May, Reform won 677 seats and control of 10 councils while the Conservatives lost 674 seats and the control of 16 councils. Labour lost 187 seats and also the parliamentary by-election in Runcorn to Reform. Reform won the mayoral contests in Greater Lincolnshire with 42% of the vote and in Hull and Grimsby with 36%, as well as coming second in three others. Professor John Curtice, the much-cited election expert, stated “Reform are clearly the winners of Thursday’s local elections”, going on to claim that “the party seemed able across the country to tap into voters’ widespread dissatisfaction with Conservatives and Labour”. [1] The result was much worse than both Labour and the Conservatives expected, while at the same time the Liberal Democrats and the Greens did well.

Much of the commentary on these results has focused on whether the UK is at a political turning-point signalling the end of the two-party system based on Conservative and



Thomas Piketty

PHOTO BY B. SUTHERTON

Labour dominance, to be replaced by a more open multi-party system. Fuelling this view was Curtice’s ‘Projected National Vote Share Score’ based on the local election results, which estimates what the overall vote share would have been if the whole country had been voting. This gave Reform 30% of the vote, Labour 20%, The Liberal Democrats 17%, the Conservatives 15% and the Greens 11%. [2] Needless to say, this raised alarm in many places.

Before adding to this cacophony, it is well to take a break and look at the issues in the long term and in a wider perspective, as well as to reflect on what Marx might have had to say. This reveals a more complex picture than a simple breakdown by party.

## Politics and the British Working Class

In 2017, James Tilley and Geoffrey Evans published a study, *The New Politics of Class*, with the subtitle *The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class*. [3] They argued that, contrary to arguments in the previous fifty years, the British working class had neither disappeared nor changed but that it had become politically marginalized: “We show that while the size of class groups has changed, there are remarkably stable class divisions in values and policy preferences. Class division thus remains a key element of Britain’s political picture, but in a new way. Whereas working class people once formed the heart of the class structure and the focal point of political competition, they now

lack political representation. This is because the political environment has changed. Political parties have reacted to changing class structures by changing their ideology, policy programmes, rhetoric, and elite recruitment strategies. Vote-seeking parties now focus on the middle class, not the working class, and it is the working class, not the middle class, that has become a 'class without a party'. That, in essence, is the argument of this book" (p8).

Their understanding of the working class is based mainly on occupation, comprising skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in manual occupations, including agricultural labourers. These workers would once have been concentrated in heavy industry and found on the factory floor but now "are more likely to be found in service jobs" characterized by the same "erratic and insecure incomes" of the traditional working class. These unfavourable circumstances contrast them with the more fortunate middle class, which has grown considerably in recent years, largely on account of education, to become much larger than the working class by the year 2000. Precise figures are not given but graphs indicate that whereas the working class made up 60% of the census data for 1931 they were only 20% in 2001.

Tilley & Evans also draw a distinction between social continuity and political change, arguing that the former "has remained remarkably unchanged despite Britain's transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society", whereas the latter has altered dramatically, not among voters "but among parties, politicians, and the media" (p11). Such distinctions, along with change in class sizes, have led to Labour reconfiguring its electoral base to win the middle class by shifting its ideology toward the Conservatives, promoting professional career politicians as political leaders and indulging the media to lead to "a perfect storm, whereby

electoral strategy has resulted in the convergence of political parties on the middle class voter and the exclusion of the preferences of working class people from the political mainstream, which in turn has been amplified by the disappearance of class politics from the press". The result has been that "references to the working class that were standard practice by Labour (and even the Conservatives) in the post-war era, started to fall dramatically from the late 1980s onwards. At that point class effectively disappears from the lexicon of party politics".

The effects of this, they argue, have been "the demise of class voting" and "class-based abstention from voting", the combination of which has led political parties to abandon the working class, leading to its political exclusion from electoral politics. Much of this has now become commonplace assertion by political commentators and even within the Labour Party, where it has fed the rise of Blue Labour. More recently it has been given as a cause for the success of Reform, where the claim is that it has shifted in part to represent the working class, delivering a 'seismic shock' to the political system and allowing new political themes to be introduced as well as improving the prospect in the future of a Reform led government. [4]

However, there is a final pause for thought. While political parties have abandoned the working class, Tilley and Evans also conclude that "class divisions in social attitudes and political preferences remain robust" (p16), leading to the possibility - contrary to their expectations - that this could be reversed, even if it is unlikely that for electoral reasons any would do so.

### **Inequality and Politics**

It is also important to widen the perspective. Tilley and Evans make the closing point that "the most

Class division thus remains a key element of Britain's political picture, but in a new way. Whereas working class people once formed the heart of the class structure and the focal point of political competition, they now lack political representation.

significant feature of the post-industrial class structure is not its disappearance but the changing size of its classes. Inequalities have not only survived but have in some respects actually increased” (p16). This is unquestionably the case and has been extensively documented in two much acclaimed books by the French economist, Thomas Piketty.

The first, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* [5], charts in detail the growth of inequality in the last two hundred years in the major capitalist countries and demonstrates that for most of this time the rate of return on capital has exceeded the return on output and income, leading to the significant growth of wealth, mainly in the form of capital, and its unequal distribution. The exception was the thirty years after the Second World War (what the French term ‘les trente glorieuses’) in which economic growth improved and inequality declined, leading to marked improvements for the working class. The current situation is one of ‘spiralling inequality’ (“hypercapitalism”) demanding drastic action to correct it.

The second book, *Capital and Ideology* [6], widens the study historically and globally to explicitly link politics to economics to show that ideology is used to justify inequality. It discusses regimes from the seventeenth century onwards including European societies (especially France), slave and colonial societies (especially India), the great transformation of the twentieth century (including European social democracies, the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia and China) and the hypercapitalism of the twenty-first century. The final section focuses on what is to be done and includes a detailed consideration of what he terms ‘the Brahmin Left’ and Social Nativism which, in his view, offer different and wrong solutions to the current crisis, which can only be resolved by a new form of ‘participatory socialism’.



PHOTO BY DIMITALAN

In Piketty’s analysis, the Brahmin Left and its opposite the Merchant Class represent the ideological left and right in the electoral politics emerging from class conflict in advanced capitalist societies. The former includes social democrat, socialist, communist and green parties and the latter conservative, Christian democrats, anti-immigration parties and liberal democrats. While there has been little change in the composition and views of the Merchant Class, the Brahmin Left has been transformed largely by education. Whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century the low income and low educated working class voted overwhelmingly on the left and the high income and highly educated to the right, by the end of the century many of the highly educated had shifted to the left and many among the low educated working class had abandoned politics or were seeking alternatives to the right. This had the combined effect of weakening class-based politics and class conflict, introducing a ‘multi-conflictual system’ based on a variety of issues from gender to the environment. Piketty arrives at these conclusions from detailed consideration of massive data sets over time [7] and argues that they apply among others to France, the Democratic Party in the US, where it explains ‘lost opportunities and incomplete turns’, and ‘the transformation of

the British party system’, especially the Labour Party. In all three there was a failure dating from the 1980s “of the postwar social democratic coalition to update its political agenda, specifically in regard to fiscal, educational and international issues” (p720) when faced with growing financial globalization, the end of the old colonial empires and the fall of Soviet Communism. Inequality everywhere increased, along with a vast concentration of income and wealth.

Not surprisingly, Piketty concludes this can only be countered by new policies promoting new forms of social ownership, which would include: power sharing within companies; progressive taxes on property and wealth to fund a universal capital endowment; progressive income taxes and a basic income; educational justice; and the reorganization of the global economy ‘to favour a transnational democratic system’. They constitute what he terms ‘participatory socialism’ and are based on “the historical lessons presented in this book” (p969). To sum them up he borrows from Marx the famous line ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’ (*Communist Manifesto*, 1848) and reformulates it as follows: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the struggle of ideologies and the quest for justice. In other words, ideas and ideologies count in history” (p1035).

## Marx’s analysis

In turn, this invites a consideration of what Marx might have had to say. In another famous line, Marx argues: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (*Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859). This seems to present a direct refutation of Piketty - ideologies grow from existing material situations and are not independent of them as

Piketty suggests. The problem here, though, is a much bigger one and concerns how Marx (and Engels) conceptualise politics. This in itself is a highly contested area as Ralph Miliband notes, not only because many of Marx's political commentaries are fragmented, hurried and specific, but also because neither he nor Engels was an economic determinist, insisting instead that economics (the mode of production) must be the starting point of analysis in which political forces may have a degree of autonomy. "In this usage" Miliband notes, "the notion of 'primacy' constitutes an important and illuminating guideline, not an analytical straitjacket. The ways in which that 'primacy' determines and conditions the political and other forms remain to be discovered, and must be treated in each case as specific, circumstantial and contingent; and this leaves open for assessment the ways in which political forms and processes in turn affect, determine, condition and shape the economic realm, as of course they do and they are acknowledged to do by Marxists, beginning with Marx" [8] (pp8-9). Piketty's approach is therefore not inconsistent with Marx although the autonomy he gives to ideas in politics is greater than many Marxists would approve.

The other issue concerns the working class. Marx, of course, puts this class at the core of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Tilly and Evans, however, note it is now much reduced in size and increasingly marginal to political life, and this raises objective and subjective questions as to its role. Yet they claim the working class remains essentially unchanged and it is the middle class that are now more significant. Their definition of class on occupational grounds, however, misses Marx's point that it is not what one does that matters but whether your labour is a source of surplus value that is appropriated by capitalists. Most of the middle class identified by Tilly and Evans are exploited in this way and so are real-

ly a working class. Together both classes may not reach the fabled 99% super-majority of the population claimed in the Wall Street demonstrations some years ago to be the losers in the current class war against the capitalist oligarchs, but they do not fall all that far short.

But can such a mass ever develop a subjective understanding of the need for decisive political action in their interests? In Marx's day the core of the working class were the industrial workers, but changes in capitalism and class structure have introduced what Tilly and Evans identify as middle-class elements and by Miliband as the "new working class" of a "vast and ever-growing number of people who man the technical, scientific, supervisory and cultural posts of advanced capitalist societies" and are "sharply pulled in contrary directions" (p37). To these Tilly and Evans add the petty bourgeoisie, identified by Marx as a separate class opposed to the working class. It is difficult to conceive of such a 'differentiated mass' ever developing a coherent political consciousness, but it is not difficult to conceive of them being the targets of political parties for votes. It is this choice which the Labour Party has taken and which Reform now and in its former incarnation as the United Kingdom Independence Party has taken. Elements of the working class rightly feel ignored by such action, but what action they might take, to become "a class for itself as distinct from a mere 'mass' in a common situation and with common interests" (p19) in order to pursue their real interests, as Marx (and Lenin) said they must, is as difficult to determine now as it has been in the past.

In conclusion, the continuing objective existence of the working class has not been matched by its subjective understanding and this remains even more problematic to achieve under the current conditions of hypercapitalism (and its

associated continuing dominance of capital) and growing inequality. These are complicated issues, which can both be traced in different ways through the rise of Reform and the return of Trump, and to which there are no immediate knee jerk answers. They require the exhaustive analysis which Marx gave them in his day. Their resolution, however, remains the same as then: the end of the capitalist mode of production and its replacement by socialism.

[1] Sir John Curtice: *Reform's sweeping election wins shake Tory and Labour Dominance*, BBC News, 2 May 2025

[2] Electoral Reform Society, *The end of two-party system?*, May 7, 2025

[3] James Tilly and Geoffrey Evans, *The New Politics of Class* (Oxford University Press, 2017)

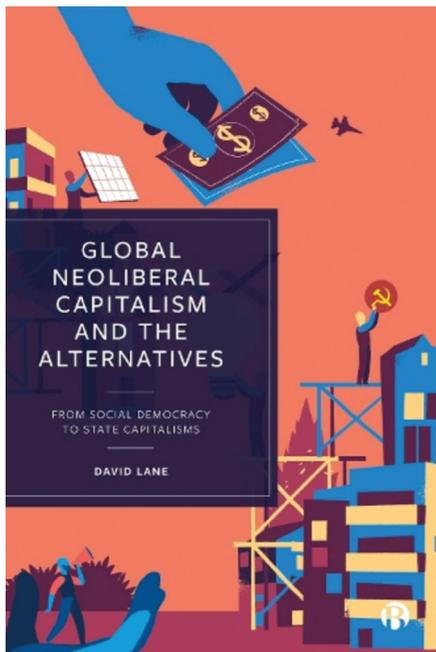
[4] Caroline Wheeler, *Seismic Shock*, *The Sunday Times*, December 29, 2024

[5] Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press, 2014)

[6] Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Harvard University Press, 2020)

[7] See also his consideration of data on 300 plus elections in Amory Gethin, Clara Matinez-Toledano, Thomas Piketty *Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies 1948-2020*, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol.137, 1, 2022. Available free online

[8] Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1977)



# GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM AND THE ALTERNATIVES

by David Lane / Bristol University Press 2024

Review by Marianne Hitchen

For anyone seeking a dispassionate account of neoliberalism, what it is, where it came from and (possibly) where it's going, this is the book for you. David Lane describes how global neoliberalism became the current dominant mode of capitalism, by adopting the theories of Friedrich von Hayek and its later developments by Milton Friedman in the USA. Hayek received the Nobel Prize for economics in 1974, and his ideas directly influenced the widespread dismantling of European 'state socialist' and welfare-based governments that arose after World War 2. His argument - that there is no better economic alternative to market capitalist competition - was widely accepted as gospel in the developed world and even now, while urgent, intractable problems show no signs of either improving or going away, but only of getting worse, the proponents of neoliberalism (the rich and powerful few who are doing very well out of it) insist that more of the same is the only solution. As Lane observes, "When economic policies do not work, the errors are attributed to faulty application rather than to the underlying ideological assumptions on which institutions and policies are based".

David Lane examines the claims that neoliberalism makes for itself alongside the reality, explores other economic and political systems with particular reference to China, and suggests that regulated market socialism could provide a realistic alternative to out-of-control, neoliberal capitalist globalisation

in the twenty-first century. The million-dollar question of course is, is anyone listening? And what are the conditions that could halt the apparent reckless plunge towards human extinction? As the economist Ha-Joon Chang puts it, "there is simply too much money, too much power and too much intellectual prestige at stake for the neoliberal regimes to go quietly".

## What is neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism is a normative theory, that is, a theory that makes claims about what is good or bad, and what ought to be done to achieve these desired objectives. Thus it does not use existing reality as a starting point. Everything hinges around the needs and wants of the individual; social classes and collective interests are not considered. Competitiveness between individuals is resolved through a mystical process called 'catallaxy', which is the supposed economic order that arises from individuals pursuing their various goals through exchange, and the resulting intervention of a hidden, 'invisible hand'. The seven main theoretical pillars of neoliberalism, outlined by Lane, are:

- Psychological - motivations of self-interest act as drivers of economic development. Such psychological drives must be allowed to flourish, unfettered by the state;
- Legal - supremacy of law which defends individual liberty, defines rights to property, enforces the supremacy of the free market and limits state activity;

■ Economic - unrestricted market activity through competition at all levels of the economy;

■ Political - the state is subject to law and cannot override it. The state exercises law enforcement legitimated by electoral bourgeois democracy; it maintains property rights and the institutions of market exchange; state activities are subject to market forces;

■ Social - individuals, families and other autonomous groupings such as charities. The promotion of diversity and anti-discrimination, and the monetarisation of human relationships;

■ Coordination - the market is the principal form of exchange; the process of catallaxy (mutual spontaneous adjustment) and exchange between people promotes well-being. International institutions set and enforce rules between national and global economic entities;

■ Boundaries - the international system, mediated by agreements

between states, promotes free geographical movement of capital, labour, goods and services. Global institutions enforce rules to promote free capitalist intercourse on a world scale. Political intervention in 'unfree' states by 'liberal' states is legitimate, to secure 'freedom'.

### Alternatives to neo-liberalism

In only 300 pages, David Lane examines (and dismisses) theories such as 'post capitalism' (as put forward by Paul Mason); in short, capitalism still exists. He discusses the problems of the former socialist countries, the rise of the BRICS economies, the changed nature of the ruling class (changed apart from the fact it still rules), his 'six main structural alternatives to neoliberalism', the significance of new technology, the self-destructing propensities of global capitalism - and the extent to which these are caused by globalism or capitalism. His tone is measured and scholarly, illustrated by the

breadth of footnotes, graphs and references to other sources, while remaining highly readable and persuasive.

David Lane appears to aim his book at left of centre theorists and policy makers, with the goal of throwing a critical spotlight on our current system and pointing to positive immediate changes that could be made, without frightening the horses as it were. Revolution is not mentioned. He points to the huge public popularity of the idea of nationalising utilities and health services, for example, while highlighting the pernicious role of the media in forming public opinion. His eloquent plea for a 'democratically controlled socialist state' does not underplay the obstacles and difficulties in achieving this, but does seem to rely on an awful lot of people, at all levels of society, being won over by the argument. In describing the current world we live in and its ideological drivers, this book provides much food for thought and is well worth reading.

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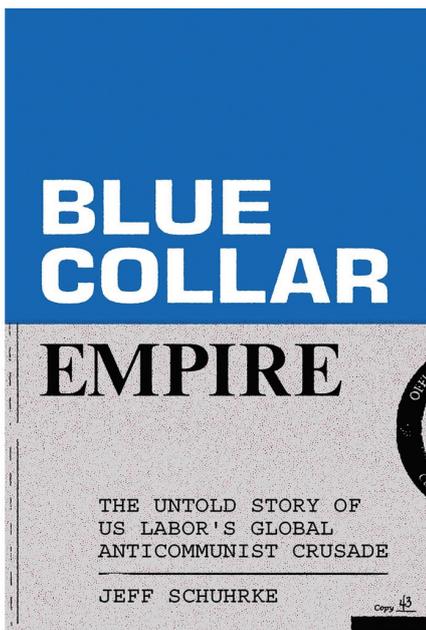


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# BLUE-COLLAR EMPIRE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF US LABOR'S GLOBAL ANTICOMMUNIST CRUSADE

Jeff Schuhrke / Verso 2024

Review by Pat Turnbull

Jeff Schuhrke opens his book with a bang. April 1964 – Jerry Wurf wins election as president of AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees). In ‘the union’s Washington headquarters...he discovered a mysterious group of men, with no apparent ties to the union, working out of the building’s fourth floor in the “International Relations Department”. Wurf made inquiries and learned the men were, in fact, CIA operatives.’ Wurf shut the department down and fired them. This is a good news story. In the end, Wurf ‘would transform AFSCME from a corrupt and lethargic bureaucracy’ into a union which ‘would organise hundreds of thousands of public sector employees – many of them African Americans who had traditionally been excluded from organised labour.’

Most of the central characters in the book, however, spent a lifetime working through the trade unions in the interests of the US state – expelling left wingers, most of whom were the most active defenders of the interests of the working class, collaborating with and taking funding from the CIA and government departments, and splitting trade union movements at home and abroad.

## Anticommunism: cover for anti-worker attacks

In his introduction Schuhrke expands on the use of the word ‘anticommunist’ in the title of the book, ‘In practice, “anticommunism” did not only mean opposition to actual communists, but also an intolerance – sometimes a violent hatred – for almost any progressive, left-leaning ideas challenging the capitalist status quo and for the people or groups advocating them.’

The three sections of Jeff Schuhrke’s book are entitled, *Free Trade Unionism 1945-1960*; *Free Labor Development 1960-1973*; *Free Market Revolution 1973-1995*. He clarifies the use of the word ‘free’ which features here. ‘To justify their overseas interventions, top labor officials insisted they were promoting “free” and “democratic” unionism around the world. In fact, their anticommunist fixation tended to only make unions more autocratic, both at home and abroad. In the United States and in other countries, worker organisations frequently had large numbers of communists or other leftists. Union democracy allowed such radicals to win leadership positions and gain influence over labor movements. For anticommunists, this was intolerable, and genuine union democracy was therefore unacceptable to them. As the book shows, this served the interests of US capital.’

‘With unions around the world rendered docile and undemocratic, and with labor movements divided and weakened, it became far easier for capital to exploit workers both in the United States and overseas.’

Schuhrke puts the responsibility squarely on the leaders of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organisations) the largest federation of unions in the United States. ‘Additionally, while touting the virtues of autonomous unionism free from state control, the AFL-CIO itself took millions of dollars from Washington to bankroll its foreign programs, while closely collaborating with US government agencies across the globe.’

He describes ‘US officialdom’s quest to control the workers’ movements of Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia between the 1940s and 1990s...Like a roving picket marching from country to country, the AFL-CIO’s international agents carried out their own imperial intrusions, expending incredible energy and resources to block revolutionary ideologies and militant class consciousness from taking hold in foreign labour movements...the AFL-CIO became closely allied with almost the entire US foreign policy apparatus – not only the CIA, but also the State Department, Agency for International Development, and the National Endowment for Democracy...AFL-CIO officials, without consulting the millions of workers they represented, chose to be partners in the making of an unequal international order dominated by capital.’

The book takes us right back to the first trade union organisation in the USA. Separatism started early: the AFL sent a representative to the founding of the Second International in 1889, which declared May 1st – May Day – to be International Workers’ Day. ‘The Federation soon distanced itself from May Day and its radical associations, instead

only observing Labor Day in the US on the first Monday of September.’

From the beginning there was a clash between proponents of militant worker action and supporters of ‘pure and simple’ unionism, Samuel Gompers, AFL president from its founding in 1886 to his death in 1924 (with the exception of one year), being a supporter of the latter. Shuhrke describes him as being ‘consistently preoccupied with achieving recognition for organised labor as the legitimate partner of business and government in the maintenance of the capitalist order.’ Gompers exhibited the anticommunism which characterised the AFL leadership during so much of the 20th century. ‘After Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, he opposed US recognition of the Soviet Union, calling the Bolsheviks “pirates” who had raised “the black flag over helpless Russia and declared war upon the established order about which the fabric of civilized life had been woven”. Writing shortly before his death in 1924, the longtime AFL president concluded that “the Soviets have demonstrated beyond question that Socialism is economically unsound, socially wrong, and industrially impossible.”’

### Splitting the international TU movement

Anti-Sovietism was the watchword too of George Meany. On April 5 1945, as the second highest ranking official of the AFL, he addressed a meeting of New York City’s Central Labor Council, two months after Yalta, and three weeks before the founding conference of the United Nations. ‘In international trade union circles, plans were in place to form a kind of United Nations for organized labor to bring together the national union centres of the Allied countries, particularly those of the Soviet Union, Britain, and United States.’ At the meeting, Meany said the AFL would boycott any organisation involving Soviet trade unions, likening the Soviet

government to the Nazis as “totalitarians”. By this time the AFL had already founded, in 1944, an organisation named the Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC). Meany went on to become the president of the AFL in 1951, the president of the merged AFL-CIO in 1955. He was, in fact, ‘the most powerful figure in the US labour movement from the early 1950s to the late 1970s’.

Jay Lovestone, another key figure in this sorry story, managed the FTUC’s day-to-day operations. Lovestone, Shuhrke says, ‘would come to be identified with the AFL’s Cold War foreign intrigues more than any other individual...at twenty years old he dropped out of law school and helped form the CPUSA (Communist Party of the USA) in 1919’, becoming the editor of its official newspaper. With the CPUSA ‘often operating underground in the 1920s...and roiled by constant infighting, Lovestone became adept at engaging in covert activities.’ He manoeuvred himself into becoming the CPUSA’s executive secretary in 1927. However, on a delegation to Moscow in 1929, he was stripped of his authority by Stalin himself. ‘Calling Lovestone “an adroit and talented factional wire puller”, Stalin said he doubted “very much at this stage that Comrade Lovestone can be a party leader”.’ Thereafter Lovestone and his supporters formed the CP (Opposition), better known as the ‘Lovestoneites’. Rival trade union leader Victor Reuther would later describe Lovestone as one of the “most Machiavellian union splitters ever to prey on the American labor movement”.

The book follows how Lovestone and others went about splitting the trade union movements of Western Europe in the post-war period. As Shuhrke says, ‘The US government...was determined to prevent Western Europe from being absorbed into the Soviet sphere of influence...thanks to the leading role they had played in the wartime antifascist resistance,

the communist parties of Western Europe were remarkably strong and popular.' There was 'growing unity between communist and non-communist national trade union centres, manifested in the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)'. Lovestone published an international newsletter, the Free Trade Union News, in multiple languages. The FTUC kept Force Ouvriere, deliberately set up as a competitor to the CGT, the French TUC, financially afloat. Lovestone's associate Brown would write to him, "Our work and our propaganda of the last two years in spite of all inadequacies have had their effect."

## The book deals also with the collusion of the US trade unions in the destruction of the socialist countries of Europe.

In 1949, 'top officials from the AFL, CIO, British TUC, Force Ouvrière and nearly 60 other non-communist trade union centres from 53 countries assembled in London for the Free World Labor Conference. At that meeting they founded the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as a direct competitor to the WFTU'. Just one indicator of the success of this move in splitting the trade union movement was that between 1949 and 1958 the French CGT lost half its membership.

### Guyana

The sections in the book on Latin America and the Caribbean highlight the activities of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). 'AIFLD was the brainchild of Joseph Beirne,

president of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and a member of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council...With funds from the US International Cooperation Administration, a descendant of the Marshall Plan's Economic Cooperation Administration, Beirne organised a three-month course on "free" trade unionism in 1959.' AIFLD developed its activities from there. Progressive Chief Minister of Guyana, Cheddi Jagan, was to accuse AIFLD in 1963 of training Guyanese unionists "to overthrow my government". A US-backed eleven-week general strike cost Guyana an estimated \$40 million. In the election the following year, the US and the British colonial administration colluded to ensure that, even though Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party (PPP) got the biggest vote, it would not be invited to form the government. Instead Jagan's opponent Forbes Burnham was invited to form a coalition government excluding the PPP. 'Under Burnham, the AIFLD graduates who had helped lead the 1963 strike attained high-ranking positions in Guyanese unions.'

### Poland

The book deals also with the collusion of the US trade unions in the destruction of the socialist countries of Europe. Strikes in the Gdansk Lenin shipyard in Poland began on August 14th, 1980. On August 20th the Executive Committee of the AFL-CIO declared the strike "a profoundly important development for human rights, free trade unionism, and democracy in the communist world". The strike ended on August 31st, when the Polish government agreed to the workers' demands. Over the next year, the AFL-CIO's newly created Polish Workers' Aid Fund provided Solidarnosc (Solidarity), the new 'trade union', with funding for, in the words of Tom Kahn, de facto organiser of the AFL-CIO's foreign affairs, "the dismantling, by non-nuclear means, of the Communist system".

Post-1989, these were the results: 'Taking advice from Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs [he has changed his tune in the meantime!], the Solidarnosc-led government implemented "shock therapy", transitioning from a socialist economy to a capitalist one practically overnight. State-run industries like mines, factories, and shipyards were quickly sold off to private firms resulting in mass layoffs. In exchange for embracing the "free market", the International Monetary Fund provided Poland with some debt relief and the White House promised \$1 billion in aid. Sachs predicted the rapid privatizations would lead to temporary pain in the Polish economy, followed by a robust recovery. 'But such a recovery never happened. In the years after shock therapy was introduced, unemployment in Poland soared to 20 per cent (higher for younger workers), poverty increased, and industrial output declined. Under capitalism, the standard of living for many working-class Poles became worse than it had been under communism.' Those were the years when highly-trained Polish building workers flooded the UK to work for low wages, in insecure conditions, poorly housed. Their loss was the UK building bosses' gain.

### US workers lose out

The collusion of the US labor leaders with US imperialism impacted the US working class as well. 'The US labor movement had already been in decline for at least two decades in the face of unchecked union busting, corporate restructuring and increased capital mobility. The 1980s had been especially bad, with union density falling from 21 percent to 16 percent while real wages stagnated and income inequality skyrocketed.'

As Jeff Schuhrke says in his conclusion, 'Organised labor around the world should be striving toward the creation of a truly united work-

ing-class movement, dependent on its own collective strength, and dedicated to replacing capitalism with socialism, and militarism with peace. While this may seem obvious, it historically has not been the official approach of the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions, which, at their worst, have assisted the US government around the world in dividing workers, suppressing democracy, waging unjust wars, and foiling progressive movements...A labor movement that places class-struggle and anti-imperialism ahead of deference to Washington's international designs will not come into being unless workers, both within and outside the AFL-CIO, build it themselves.'

With its detailed notes citing other works, and its excellent index, the book forms an important reference work, with many more specific examples in addition to those quoted in this review.

## From **The Socialist Correspondent** 10 years ago

Germany leads on Greek privatisation

The first sale of Greek public assets, to meet the terms of the bail-out programme, is about to go ahead with a German company set to take control of Greece's 14 regional airports.

...the EU has been intransigent in its approach to Greece. [German Finance Minister] Schauble stated, "Debt relief is not possible within the currency union. European treaties do not allow it." His argument cannot be faulted.

The problem lies in the constitution and treaties of the European Union and the Greek people are paying a heavy price.

Issue 24 Winter 2015

Alex Davidson

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## OH RASCAL CHILDREN OF GAZA

Oh rascal children of Gaza,  
you who constantly disturbed me with your screams under my window,  
you who filled every morning with rush and chaos,  
you who broke my vase and stole the lonely flower on my balcony,  
come back –  
and scream as you want  
and break all the vases,  
steal all the flowers,  
come back.  
Just come back...



**Khaled Juma** was born in Rafah in 1965. He is head of the cultural department of the Palestine News & Information Agency (WAFA). He has published nine poetry collections and has written many books for children. He also writes songs. This poem was written during the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in Operation Protective Edge and was first published on August 24th 2014.