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Revolutionary Perspectives 23

Gaza and Beyond: The Bitter Fruits of Capitalism, Nationalism and Imperialism Threaten All Humanity



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**COP28 and the Myth of
Green Capitalism**

**Capitalism's Economic
Foundations [Part Four]**

Lenin and Leninism

Revolutionary Perspectives

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The Challenges of 2024

As 2024 begins, the world seems a terrible place. Centre stage of course is the carnage in Gaza, where the brutal assault by HAMAS on Israel on 7 October 2023, and Israel's massive and pitiless retaliation, have left tens of thousands dead at time of writing, possibly at a ratio of 20:1 in terms of Palestinian to Israeli dead. More than 7,000 people are also reported 'missing', and 1.9 million 'displaced' in Gaza, with another 500,000 displaced in Israel. The toll rises every day as new horrors are reported.

It seems that Israel is intent on clearing the Gaza strip, and there have been discussions about permanently shifting the population of Gaza elsewhere in the world – in history, forced movements of populations have rarely ended well. The populations of Palestine and Israel are caught in a vicious trap, between the racist, reactionary ideology of the HAMAS militia and the racist, reactionary ideology of the Israeli state with its vastly superior war machine. Every atrocity feeds nationalism, by creating more enemies horrified and appalled at the savagery of the opposition, and using that horror to justify fresh horrors to be perpetrated on the wider population.

The first article in this issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives* establishes the historical context for the latest round of atrocities, the foundation of the Israeli state and the history of relations between the different communities in the region and how local and global powers have used different groups and states in their own imperialist interests.

The wider context of the war risks bringing Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Yemen into the conflict. Bomb and rocket attacks, shelling

and air strikes look likely to increase across the region. At the time of writing, in early January, news reports state that Hezbollah has fired 'hundreds' of rockets from Southern Lebanon. Until now, Hezbollah has been content to merely offer words of support but little actual military assistance to HAMAS. The two militia groups come from different branches of Islam, one allied and supported by Sunni groups in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, the other a Shi'ite militia supported by Iran. But both are opposed to Israel and Israel's main backer, the US. Meanwhile, the US and UK may become involved in the wider conflict, especially in Yemen where Houthi militias allied to Iran have taken control of the country, and used it as a base to attack Israel as well as international shipping in the Red Sea.

We have not been able to include everything relating to the spiralling chaos of imperialist tensions in this issue. We will be publishing further articles on this on our website, and we urge our readers to engage with our articles there.

War of course is not the only horror capitalism unleashes on the world. Environmental destruction does not let up in the face of war, it is likely to increase, and is itself one of the drivers of war, from the strategic drive to protect or secure oil reserves, to disputes over water supplies that look likely to only get worse, to the search for raw materials such as lithium. Meanwhile the world's 'leaders' are unable to agree even the mildest effective action to halt greenhouse gas emissions, as the farcical COP28 negotiations show. This annual jamboree is now openly a propaganda tool for the worldwide fossil fuel industry, with thousands of lobbyists from fossil fuel companies and national delegates

selected from state oil companies.

The COP spectacle is not a means to agree effective action to tackle climate change, it is precisely the opposite. Far from its stated aim of trying to limit the use of fossil fuels, states and companies use it as a trade fair to make deals to continue the ruinous exploitation of the planet's natural resources while allowing capitalism to claim to be trying to solve the problems it has created in its rapacious drive for endless profit. There is no solution to this as long as capitalism exists; 'green capitalism' is an illusion, because capitalism cannot do other than plunder natural resources and reduce populations to misery in its search for profit. Our second article looks at the COP28 conference and its immediate results, as well as looking into the science behind the headlines and the perspectives for the world if we cannot change the course on which we are embarked.

Capitalism is a system that produces crises – economic crises that become political crises that become environmental or military or humanitarian crises, that provide further fuel for the economic crises. For more than 50 years, since the downturn after the post-war boom – itself built on the vast destruction and suffering of the Second World War and its aftermath in the increasing hostility of the Cold War – and the decision of the US to end the post-war economic consensus with the ending of the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1971, world capitalism has been unable to offer a long-term solution to the problem of its own profitability. The inability to restore profit has led to half a century of economic crises, quick fixes, new starts and increasing economic devastation, in the midst of society which is technologically capable of providing a decent standard of living for everyone on the planet. In the fourth part of our series 'The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence' we look at developments in

capitalism between the end of the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1971 and the end of the Soviet Bloc in 1991, which saw the end of the Keynesian consensus and the beginnings of 'globalisation' and "financialisation" as responses to the crisis.

The last article in this issue is historical, looking at the work and legacy of Lenin, on the centenary of his death. Though as Marxists we reject the notion that history is made by 'great men', that of course does not mean that there were not important figures living and working during important historical periods. A century ago the world was in ferment, with the newly-created Soviet Republic as a symbol of proletarian revolution. By 1924, when Lenin died, we can see that the world revolutionary wave had ebbed and the long night of the counter-revolution was beginning, including in the Soviet Union where it assumed the mantle of 'Marxism-Leninism'. We see the counter-revolution as having continued to this day. This was perhaps not so clear at the time, but with a century of hindsight we can place Lenin in his historical context and see more clearly his great contributions and his errors, as well as the distortions of his legacy by the inheritors of the counter-revolution.

For internationalists today, Lenin's greatest contribution was to see that the First World War was imperialist and could only be ended by "civil" i.e. class, war, and that the working class needed an international political organisation as a weapon in that class war. As we approach the abyss of yet another global conflict this remains the starting point for revolutionaries. No War But Class War to end all wars.

Gaza and Beyond: The Bitter Fruits of Capitalism, Nationalism and Imperialism Threaten All Humanity

As we lined up ... four girls were ordered to accompany them to carry water for the [fighters]... Instead they took them to our empty houses and raped them. About seventy of our men were blindfolded and shot to death, one after the other in front of us. They ... took their bodies and threw them on the cement covering the village's spring and dumped sand on them.¹

They killed some eighty ... The children were killed by smashing their skulls with clubs.²

7 October 2023? No, this other sickening incident took place in October 1948. The “fighters” were actually Jewish soldiers of the Haganah (“Defence”) organisation. These were not isolated or spontaneous incidents but part of the Zionist forces’ carefully thought out Plan Dalet (Plan D). Posed ever since by Israeli governments as a defensive measure to ensure the Zionist movement would get what the UN Partition of Palestine had promised them, it was actually a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villagers from their land. The Haganah was not the only Israeli force in operation that day. Alongside them operated the outright terrorist groups of Lehi (known by its opponents as the Stern Gang³) and the Irgun Zvai Leumi which would not accept that any sharing of the land could take place. It was the Irgun (encouraged by Haganah commanders) who had committed arguably the biggest atrocity of all, with the massacre of up to 254 villagers in Deir Yassin in April 1948. The fact that Deir Yassin was eighteen miles inside the territory that the UN had allotted to the existing inhabitants of the British mandate of Palestine gives the lie to any “defensive” intent behind Plan Dalet. News of this atrocity led many Palestinians to flee for their lives.

We are not recalling these details of the

Palestinian Nakba to justify the horrors of 7 October 2023 carried out by the Hamas-led forces. Blame-game propaganda is a weapon in all wars and is being milked to the limit by both Hamas (acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* or the “Islamic Resistance Movement”) and the Israeli state to justify their equally poisonous nationalist agendas. The aim is to get workers massacring each other in defence of the property of their masters. Both must be rejected, along with the system that has spawned them.

Immediate Roots of the Current Slaughter

The latest round in this century-old “asymmetrical conflict” opened with the astonishing and unprecedented Hamas breakout from the confinement of the Gaza enclave. This led to the indiscriminate and inhuman butchery of up to 1,200 people (not all Jewish, even Arab Israelis who tried to talk to the fighters were gunned down) with a further 240 (from 40 different nationalities) taken hostage. It was still the greatest loss of Jewish life on a single day since the Holocaust.

In reply, in less than three months of fighting, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) has killed more than 22,000 Palestinians, some few thousand of whom are actual fighters

but 45% are children⁴. This too is a new record in horror for the Palestinian people. The level of destruction seen in Gaza has not been equalled in any urban setting since the Second World War. Israel has dropped nearly as many bombs on the Gaza Strip (which is about the same area as the Isle of Wight) in one week as the US-led coalition dropped on the entire territory of Afghanistan in one year. Several military sources indicate that the explosive equivalent is already greater than two nuclear bombs of the size that levelled Hiroshima (which had an area nearly three times bigger than the whole of Gaza). The IDF have made no pretence that there is any “precision” bombing (as the US and its allies tried to claim in Iraq in 2003). 2,000 pound bombs simply knock apartment blocks down like ninepins even when they are not directly hit. Along with the blockade of essential supplies it has created a humanitarian disaster for over 2 million people, who are repeatedly told by the IDF to move to this or that safe place, the last an area not much more than 3 square miles – and even that is not safe. They already face lack of heating, starvation and disease, in a situation where nearly all medical facilities have been depleted, and a particularly wet winter is adding to the misery.

The ferocity of the Israeli response could have been foreseen by anyone who has been paying even minimal attention over the last few years. Indeed in May 2021 the Internationalist Communist Tendency put out a statement on the last bout of fighting between Hamas and Israel. Under a subheading of “Déjà Vu” we wrote:

We have been here before. Precisely three times before, since Hamas seized control of Gaza 15 years ago. The pattern is always the same. Israel makes yet another move to create “facts

on the ground” such as the planned eviction of Palestinians from parts of East Jerusalem. Then Hamas fires off all the home made rockets it has been stockpiling and, as long as they do, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) responds with all the weapons in its arsenal (except its unacknowledged nuclear one, of course). The US vetoes any condemnation of Israel in the UN Security Council as the rest of the “leaders of the world” airily call for “peace”.

The results also follow the same pattern. The number of Palestinians killed is always vastly disproportionate to the number of Israelis killed⁵.

However, despite the familiarities, this time is different. The 7 October 2023 attack by Hamas may have been due to the same grievances as in 2021 but it has occurred in an entirely different domestic, and in a much more dangerous international, context.

So what pushed Hamas into the massive and, for the people of Gaza, ruinous provocation of 7 October? There is obviously some truth in the official Hamas statement that the attack was planned as retaliation for the assaults on Palestinians at the al-Aqsa mosque, in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The equally provocative right-wing government, headed by Netanyahu, had given free hand to the convicted racist, Itamar Ben Gvir, and even created a special paramilitary National Guard to allow this Minister for Security to terrorise the Palestinians in those territories. Additionally, the Abraham Accords, through which the US had leveraged Arab states like the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco to sign agreements with Israel, further weakened the Palestinian position on the international stage. In the weeks before the Hamas assault, Saudi Arabia was also negotiating a treaty with Israel. “Hamas

spokesperson Ibrahim Hamad also told Al Jazeera TV ... that the attack was “absolutely a message” to Muslim countries seeking normalization with Israel.⁶ Hamas did not react when the earlier Abraham Accords were struck but the Saudis were believed to be demanding the revival of one of the proposals in the 1993 Oslo Accords;

... focusing on the so-called Area C, which constitutes 60 percent of the West Bank and is where most of Israel’s settlements are located. There are credible reports of various proposals made by the Palestinian Authority, the United States, and Saudi Arabia arguing that Israel should agree to transfer a significant portion of Area C to Palestinian control as part an agreement between Riyadh and Jerusalem to normalize relations.⁷

Such “normalisation” was not what Hamas wanted, as it would have given more power to the Palestinian Authority, and thus its secular rival, Fatah. Perhaps this was the “message” Ibrahim Hamad meant to deliver to the Saudis?

But there was a third possible motive. Hamas’ support in the Gaza Strip had been in decline, and the population were not just blaming their worsening social conditions on the Israeli and Egyptian blockade of the territory. A poll by Arab Barometer published in *Foreign Affairs*⁸, the *New York Times* and the Italian left-reformist paper *Il Manifesto*, showed that 62% of the population of Gaza did not support Hamas. Most would also settle for a two-state solution, which Hamas founding Covenant⁹ of 1988 rejects. We don’t need to rely only on opinion polls either. As Amnesty International reported in 2022:

In the Gaza Strip, a general climate of repression, following a brutal crackdown

*on peaceful protests against the rising costs of living in 2019, effectively deterred dissent, often leading to self-censorship*¹⁰.

Things are no better today. Unemployment now stands at 60% (a massive increase from only 2 years ago when it was 40%). In this situation repression is not enough. The standard ploy of all nationalists is to provoke the enemy into a reciprocal atrocity¹¹ in order to consolidate support against “the other” and, just as importantly, silence internal dissent. As another recent poll in late November/early December by Khalil Shikaki shows, it has largely worked, at least for now. In the West Bank support for Hamas has surged from 12% to 44% whilst it is up from 38% to 42% in Gaza since the Israeli bombing began.¹²

Deep political division is also apparent in Israel. For all of 2023 there have been massive demonstrations against the new ultra-right wing coalition’s attempts to carry out judicial reforms which would make the Supreme Court virtually a rubber stamp for the Knesset. Many demonstrators and opposition politicians know that the legal reforms are just a precursor to further expand the settlements in the West Bank, and even to expel all Palestinians from Israel’s recognised borders. Netanyahu has a personal interest in undermining the courts to avoid being tried for corruption, but his ultra-right wing allies from the religious orthodox and settler movement parties (there are now 750,000 such settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank) hold to a mirror image of Hamas’ aim – they really want the removal of all Palestinians from the territory of the former British mandate colony. Jewish settlements have been condemned by successive UN resolutions for half a century but, with US complicity, they can be ignored, and the settlements continue to be established in occupied territory. They are all part of a long

standing Zionist project of creating “facts on the ground” intended to make any future Palestinian state impossible. In this Hamas has been Zionist nationalism’s “useful idiot”, since they too oppose any other solution than extinction of the state of Israel. Just as in the war in Ukraine, there is no room for any compromise.

It is well known that Hamas was encouraged by successive Israeli governments to emerge as an Islamist alternative to the Fatah movement which dominated, then and now, the so-called Palestinian Authority. Israeli officials have confirmed it.

In 2009, Avner Cohen, a former Israeli religious affairs official who worked in Gaza for over 20 years, told The Wall Street Journal, quote, “Hamas, to my great regret, is Israel’s creation.” Another former Israeli official, Brigadier General Yitzhak Segev, said he was given a budget to help finance Islamist movements in Gaza to counter Yasser Arafat and his Fatah movement. Another former Israeli military official, David Hacham, said, quote, “When I look back at the chain of events, I think we made a mistake. But at the time, nobody thought about the possible results.”¹³

The day after the Hamas attack many Israeli observers were not slow to point the finger of blame:

Most of the time, Israeli policy was to treat the Palestinian Authority as a burden and Hamas as an asset. Far-right Knesset Member, Bezalel Smotrich, now the finance minister in the hardline government and leader of the Religious Zionism party, said so himself in 2015.

According to various reports, Netanyahu made a similar point at a Likud faction

meeting in early 2019, when he was quoted as saying that those who oppose a Palestinian state should support the transfer of funds to Gaza, because maintaining the separation between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza would prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state¹⁴

Such open cynicism by Israeli leaders means we also have to ask why Hamas were allowed, not only to get over the border, but penetrate so far into Israeli territory, and spend so much time wandering around, killing at will, on that Saturday morning of 7 October. After all, the Israeli secret services are regarded as the most effective in the world. They have an unparalleled record of success, and have infiltrated, at one time or another, all the Palestinian organisations. How was it then, that almost exactly on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, and once again on the Sabbath during a Jewish religious holiday (Sukkot), they did not expect some action? Why were the warnings from the Egyptian secret services ignored? Why were the (female) soldiers who visually monitored the Gaza border, and reported training sessions where Hamas fighters practised bringing down the border fence ignored? The official responses have been unconvincing (you don’t need to send the entire IDF to the West Bank to deal with unarmed Palestinians, especially when the trouble there is caused by armed Jewish settlers), and this has fuelled the horrible suspicion that the Israeli government allowed an incursion to happen to give them the rationale to eliminate Hamas once and for all.

According to the *New York Times* (2 December 2023) the Israeli intelligence and military services had obtained a Hamas document a year before the attack. It detailed an assault that would overwhelm fortifications around the Gaza Strip, take over Israeli cities and target key military bases.

The approximately 40-page document, which the Israeli authorities code-named “Jericho Wall,” outlined, point by point, exactly the kind of devastating invasion that led to the deaths of about 1,200 people ... But Israeli military and intelligence officials dismissed the plan as aspirational, considering it too difficult for Hamas to carry out.¹⁵

This may also be true. Netanyahu originally tweeted a criticism of the intelligence services on the day of the attack but then deleted it. The only other comment came from Ronen Bar, the head of Shin Bet. He immediately admitted responsibility, with the blindingly banal statement that ‘unfortunately we were unable to generate a sufficient warning that would allow the Hamas attack to be thwarted’, but he quickly added: ‘There will be time for investigations. Now we are fighting.’

One reason for any alleged complacency can be found in the failure of Hamas’ attempts to cross the Gaza border in 2021 despite deploying some of the same weaponry and devices, like drones, that were used on 7 October. This seems to have given the IDF the sense that there could be no repeat for many years. The Israeli reporter Haviv Rettig Gur summed it up at the time:

Hamas was just forced to spend 11 days watching as Israel systematically disrupted its tactical innovations and demolished hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of its military infrastructure. The group has spent a decade building major new warfighting capabilities meant to challenge Israel on new and unexpected fronts. All proved ineffective or outright useless¹⁶.

In addition scores of mid to high ranking Hamas officers were killed in 2021 (and their names listed by the IDF) indicating

that Israeli military intelligence still operated inside Gaza, despite the withdrawal of settlements there 16 years earlier. Netanyahu boasted about this repeatedly, constantly extolling the extent of Israel’s (undoubted) military superiority in technology¹⁷. With this in mind it seems that there was too much reliance on surveillance technology. On 7 October Hamas skilfully targeted this first, alongside the communications system, so that calls for assistance did not get through. In some cases it was 20 hours before some Israeli units arrived to aid those under attack.

Hamas leaders, on the other hand, seem to have learned from the defeat of 2021, and had gone in for some retro technology, using wired phones instead of cell phones deep in the tunnels below Gaza (according to the same *New York Times* report). Only top Hamas commanders knew the details of the plan which was only relayed to the other groups¹⁸ participating in the attack at the last moment. In this way it is alleged they were able to keep their plans secret until 7 October.

Historians might not have to wait the usual 30 years to get the full truth this time, since the splits at the top of the Israeli government are plain for all to see. It was only last March that Ben Gvir called for the sacking of Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, for calling for a suspension of the judicial reform. For the settler right and ultra-religious leaders, Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, this was a betrayal since it is part of their strategy for colonisation of all of the land of Israel. For a few days Netanyahu looked like sacking Gallant, but massive demonstrations in his favour forced an about turn. Whatever the truth, the fact is that the Hamas attack has not only helped to keep the squabbling ultra-right wing coalition together, it has also brought about a sort of national unity and paved the way for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from Gaza. It has also led to the

formation of a national unity government of sorts, as well as a five man War Cabinet, which includes opposition leaders, but excludes the far right. Netanyahu made a deal to freeze the judicial reforms “for the duration” in return for this “national unity”. And Netanyahu has told Israelis that the war will be a long one (for him personally, the longer the better).

For now, that national unity also goes beyond horse trading amongst the politicians. The now traditional Saturday night mass demonstration against the Netanyahu government’s planned judicial reform was called off immediately on 7 October. Some of its organising groups, who had previously refused the draft, called on their supporters to sign up for the coming war. War, as ever, has thus boosted the national consensus, leaving little or no room for dissenters on either side. For example, previously “moderate” radio talk show hosts like Ben Caspit have refused to watch videos of dead children in Gaza tweeting instead “They earned their hell honestly. I have not an ounce of sympathy”¹⁹. The atrocities committed by the nationalist fanatics on both sides lead to this kind of deranged mentality.

One place where a few brave Israelis have shown dissent in support of Palestinians is on the West Bank, mainly via the work of the NGO, Yesh Din (“There is Law”). They monitor illegal settlements there and incidents of violence against Palestinian villagers which have been increasing throughout 2023 and were clearly a factor in the Hamas attack. After a month of the Israeli assault on Gaza;

Israel’s Yesh Din rights group said Friday that there had been over 172 incidents of settler violence and harassment against Palestinians in at least 84 Palestinian towns and communities in the West Bank since Hamas’s savage and murderous assault

*on Israel on October 7, which sparked a war with the terror group.*²⁰

No one has even been questioned, let alone arrested, for these crimes. Teenagers from settlements can descend on Palestinian villages with sticks to knock the olives from their trees in order to destroy the villagers’ livelihoods. If the villagers try to stop them, either the settlers fire on them (Ben Gvir handed out 10,000 assault rifles to settlers in the days following 7 October), or the army moves in to arrest ... the Palestinians, or members of Yesh Din. It is quite clear that the aim is, as ever, to make life unbearable for Palestinians on the West Bank. Adding that to the continuing destruction of Gaza a second or third Nakba is in the making. But to get a real perspective on what is happening we have to understand that the war for the Middle East is part of a much wider struggle.

Capitalism and Nationalism

Nationalism, and the nation-state, arose with capitalism when “the political revolution (of the bourgeoisie) overthrew ... feudal power and turned state affairs into affairs of the people”²¹. With its slogan of “liberty, fraternity and equality” the bourgeoisie claimed to be the embodiment of the people, even if property ownership meant that some were “more equal than others”. Liberty meant freedom from feudal limits on trade and growth of production and “laissez-faire” became the doctrine of the rising entrepreneurial class. The state was no longer that of an absolute monarch to whom “subjects” owed their loyalty but it was also the embodiment of the “nation”. The concept of the “nation-state” was the perfect integument for capitalist accumulation.

Declarations that “all men are created

equal” may have been empty rhetoric for African slaves or indigenous peoples, not to mention the new exploited class of the proletariat, but for Jews, who had been forced to migrate from one place to the next in the sixteen centuries since the failure of their last attempt to restore Jewish independence in Palestine in 137 AD, it sounded like a real step forward. Instead, many of the religious persecutions²² and expulsions they had been subjected to were now supplanted by a new religious toleration. The emancipation of the Jews enabled them to own land, enter the civil service (although some had to change their religion to do so), and serve as officers in the national armed forces. This in itself aroused resentment amongst those who, in these new national states, considered they were, as they say nowadays, “taking our jobs”. Although the majority of Jews remained poor, sometimes only finding work in sweatshops owned by their co-religionists, these were obscured by the few who morphed from moneylenders (since the Catholic Church prohibited Christians from “usury”) to leading financial capitalists in Europe. This also aroused even more envy, so that when the world capitalist economy experienced its first real financial (as opposed to the many previous industrial crises) crisis (1866-73), the thin veneer of toleration came off.

Capitalist Imperialism

The two decades that followed the crisis of 1873 dramatically changed the nature of capitalism. The further concentration of capital had not only created a world economy, it took capitalism into a new stage of development. Individual firms now gave way to new joint stock companies and then cartels, whilst banking or finance capital began to dominate each state’s process of accumulation. Competition went from those between

individual capitalists in the domestic market to that of competition between national state champions on the world market. “Laissez-faire” and free trade were amongst the victims, as defence of the national economy gradually led to trade wars via the increase in protective tariffs²³. The state everywhere was drawn into defence of the national economy, and not just the national territory, which led to a new form of imperialism.

The leading capitalist states in this period were competing to secure for themselves the cheapest sources of raw materials, cheap labour and captive markets. Eventually this rivalry led to the carve up of the planet into colonies, which were not only intended to give a boost to each national economy, but also to deny such a territory to its rivals. In reality the “Scramble for Africa” and other such ventures turned out to be less profitable than their supporters thought (as the faux frais of colonialism was a rising military budget). No matter. The point was that our imperialists **expected** to make a profit one day.

This new economic impulse also had other superstructural effects leading to a change in the nature of nationalism. No longer was this the epoch of “equality” and “fraternity” (however much of a con that had been) but of the assertion of the need for the predominantly white states to civilise the world. The idea of racial superiority had never been far from capitalist discourse since the Enlightenment, but now it really started to make itself felt. From Kipling’s “taking up the White Man’s Burden” to the pseudo-scientific social Darwinism that lay behind it, national identity was forged more and more on the assertion of racial differences.

This was most marked in newly formed nation-states like Germany where forging national identity after unification gradually became synonymous for some with “racial purity”. It became easy to blame the

“alien presence” of the Jews for any problem. It was in Germany too that the racial term “anti-semitism” was now popularised rather than the religious “anti-Judaism”²⁴. Social Darwinists turned this into a struggle for existence between races, with Nordic Aryan Germans seen as the *Übermensch*. All this was bundled together in the anti-semitic and racist nonsense of Wagner’s son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain in the 1890s, but by then the new wave of anti-semitism was visible right across Europe.

In the Russian Empire, pogroms in Warsaw, Kherson and Kiev in 1881, following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (wrongly blamed on Jews) opened up three decades of officially sanctioned murders of Jews. This led to mass emigration, sometimes to other parts of Europe, but mainly to the USA.

In the corrupt French Third Republic the anti-semitic background to the Dreyfus Affair brought another response. It convinced Theodore Herzl, a prominent Austrian journalist, himself agnostic and “assimilated”, to respond to this rising tide of anti-semitic nationalism with a Jewish nationalism: Zionism. In his book *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question* (1896) he called for Palestine to become a home for Jews. Zionism thus arose in the colonial period of mainly European imperialism; a period in which there was an assumption that the rest of the world was almost empty or that the inhabitants were so “backward” that they could either be ignored or simply colonised for their own good. Zionism was also marked by this characteristic. Herzl wrote that a Jewish homeland in the Middle East would also benefit European interests; “*we should there form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism*”²⁵. However, in its early years Zionism’s main

appeal was to the most impoverished and persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe (sometimes in the form of “labour Zionism”). Had Zionism remained confined only to Central and Eastern Europe it would have struggled to make any headway.

By this time capitalist imperialist powers pretty much dominated the globe. It was a far cry from when Marx and Engels had earlier supported the formation of some (but not all) bourgeois nation-states. They had done so since they saw that the spread of capitalism in these independent states would lay the material basis for socialism by leading to the formation of a larger working class majority. However, by the end of the nineteenth century conditions had changed. Any new nation-state which did emerge would only be able to do so as a client of one or more of the imperialist competitors for world domination. The Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (whose most articulate advocate was Rosa Luxemburg) was the first to recognise this. Looking at the weakness of their “own” bourgeoisie they very quickly saw that it was so dependent on the world economy that it would always be subservient to one or other of the dominating powers. They thus concluded that the era of progressive bourgeois national struggles was over. Instead every national struggle would become a plaything in the imperialist strategy of the dominant powers. The working class no longer had an interest in supporting any national movement. Marx’s slogan from the *Communist Manifesto* that “*workers have no country, you cannot take from them what they do not have*”, had become fact.

Living in the Jewish diaspora of the capitalist world, the supporters of Zionism already had an insight that they would need the help of the Great Powers. Herzl had based his appeal on it without much success. When he died in 1904, the President of the English

Zionist Federation, Chaim Weizmann, realised that the revival of Zionist hopes depended on the support of the largest empire on the planet. During the First World War, the British (and French) were already cheating Arab nationalists, by falsely promising them their own states in return for their help in the defeat of the Ottoman Empire²⁶. Instead of a secret (and as the Arabs found out, worthless) promise, Weizmann lobbied to persuade the British Cabinet to make **public** their support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He did not have to lobby too hard. These British imperialists believed there were advantages in the long term to be gained from a Jewish state in the Middle East and, more immediately, were under the mistaken belief it would help bring the USA into the war against Germany (unaware it seems that US Jews were, on the whole, not keen Zionists). Issued in the name of the Foreign Secretary, the Balfour Declaration promised the impossible – a “national home for the Jewish people” where “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine ...”. In reality Balfour’s arrogant racist assumption was clear;

... Zionism, be it right or be it wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs. in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who inhabit that ancient land²⁷.

However when the British took Jerusalem in 1917 it looked more likely that an Arab state would be formed in Palestine after the war. Even Weizmann, who headed a Zionist commission there straight after, was “surprised by how non-Jewish Jerusalem and Palestine had become²⁸”, and soon returned to Britain.

If Weizmann was disappointed in 1918, the Arabs called 1920 (when the terms of the Treaty of Sevres became known) *âm an nakba* (“year of catastrophe”). There was burning resentment against it across the Arab world when it was clear that the mandates (in reality, colonies) given to France and Britain meant that the Arabs had been cheated. In Palestine the arrival of the “distinctly Zionist”²⁹ Sir Herbert Samuel as British High Commissioner gave an early indication of how the Balfour Declaration would be implemented.

British imperialist rule in Palestine was characterised by gradual Jewish immigration, and divisions amongst the more powerful Palestinian families. Initially Jews largely bought land from absentee landlords or followers (and relatives) of the Mayor of Jerusalem, Raghib al-Nashashibi³⁰. The fellahin (landless labourers, agricultural workers and peasants) were then evicted, mainly to the shanties surrounding Jaffa and Haifa. The Jewish migrants built a state within the state, with their economic organisation, the Histadrut (which was both a trade union and entrepreneur) and a paramilitary force, the Haganah. The latter was supposed to be secret but was tolerated by the British administration. Arab rage only increased when it became clear what Jewish immigration implied. When it dramatically increased³¹ after the rise of the Nazis, violence broke out. An Arab general strike in 1936 did more harm to Arabs than the already self-sufficient Jewish community, but it forced the British to face up to the contradiction of the Balfour Declaration. The Peel Commission drew up the first plan for partition (the first “two-state solution”) in 1937. This proposed to give the Arab-majority Galilee to the Zionists, which only inflamed the conflict into an all out revolt which peaked in 1938.

The military defeat of the Arab Revolt

in 1939 cost the lives of 5,000 Palestinians and left their leaders more divided than ever. Some like the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem came to recognise, as the Zionists had done earlier, that no national movement could win in the imperialist epoch without support of a major power and, with the British so clearly favouring the Zionists, solicited the aid of Nazi Germany. Hitler was ready to help³² but his obsession with defeating the USSR first, meant that materially he had little to offer. The Grand Mufti fled to Berlin from where he broadcast Nazi propaganda to the Middle East. Not only did he back a loser here, but the Nazis' greatest and most perverse contribution to the post-war Middle East was the Holocaust – the case for Zionism was enormously strengthened, to the point where the Arab population were all but ignored. The Zionist lie of “a land without people, for a people without land” played well in the West³³.

However, this is to anticipate. The Arab Revolt had rattled the British so to try to buy calm, they flip flopped yet again. On the eve of the Second World War a new British white paper proposed restricting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the next 5 years and to restrict or ban further land sales. The question of the ultimate status of an independent Palestine was put off to the post-war future.

The Zionists were outraged, but the winds of imperialism blew against the Palestinians in other ways during the Second World War. The British trained and armed Haganah elite units to attack the Vichy puppet regime in Syria, and the Zionists managed to establish their own munitions industry in Palestine. These factors gave the Zionist cause a military edge in the coming fight for land. At the same time British imperial decline was further manifest in its continuing contradictory policies on the ground. The British refusal to open its borders to Jewish

migrants, even after the full horrors of the Holocaust – itself the perfect demonstration of where nationalist and racist fanaticism ends – only led to a terror campaign by the Irgun and Lehi after 1945. They blew up the King David Hotel, which housed the British administration, and murdered British soldiers and diplomats. As in India, where British policy of “divide and rule” between Muslims and Hindus led to communal riots and the division of the country, a bankrupt British Government decided to cut and run without worrying too much about the consequences. The Palestine mandate was handed over to the United Nations. At the same time, a new generation of Zionist leaders, made more determined by the experience of the Holocaust, and headed by David Ben Gurion, realised that they should now transfer their attention from the declining colonial powers to the new imperialism of the United States. President Truman, under pressure from the Zionist lobby in an election year, rewarded them by calling immediately for the admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine, opening the final chapter in the catastrophe that was about to engulf Palestine.

National Liberation and Imperialist Domination

The 1947 United Nations partition plan demonstrated that not even the capitalists believed any more in the supposed “right of nations to self-determination”. Jews still only made up about a third of the population (and were in minority everywhere, except in a district of Jaffa) but were allocated 56% of the territory. This included the entire south where there were no Jewish people, but the Zionists had demanded it for access to the Red Sea. And standing behind them, then as now, was the United States.

In reality, neither Arabs nor Jews

accepted the partition. The reasons for Arab rejection were obvious enough. For extreme Zionists, like the Irgun leader and future Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin, *“the partition agreement is invalid. It will not bind the Jewish people. Jerusalem was and will for ever be our capital. Eretz Israel³⁴ will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And for ever”*.³⁵

In fact, Begin was only articulating what has always been “project Israel” right down to today. Other Jewish leaders in 1948 were more coy about what they aimed for. They saw acceptance of the partition as just one more stepping stone towards the same aim. The crucial factor in 1948 was, not the clarity of the Zionist goal, but the fact that, as ever in the saga of national liberation struggles, it was who supported you that counted. Israel could count on the support of the two greatest powers to emerge victorious from the Second World. The wartime alliance of the USSR and USA had already collapsed, and the Cold War had already started (with the US announcement of its policy of “containing communism” in 1947). The USA had already stitched up an oil deal with Saudi Arabia³⁶ but saw Israel as a solid bridgehead of the West to defend its interests in a Middle East where other national states were now emerging and the future was unpredictable.

In the USSR, Stalin at first saw Zionism as an embodiment of a “national liberation movement” which would be “anti-imperialist” (i.e. would support the USSR). The Irgun had used weapons supplied by the USSR against the British and, in 1948, it was the first state to recognise the State of Israel, centred on Jerusalem (the USA hastily following suit). Even in 1953 the USSR was still supporting Israel against Egyptian attempts to close the Suez Canal to its ships. However, the USSR was soon forced to recognise that in economic terms it could not

compete with the USA, which, once it found it could not establish an anti-Soviet alliance amongst the Arab states, was increasingly bankrolling Israel.

In the early years of the Cold War Israel could not have survived economically without the financial support coming from the USA (which accounted for something like 80% of its revenue). The Suez Affair of 1956 demonstrated that Israel still had to listen to the US government. When Egypt’s Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, the old colonial powers, Britain and France, attempted to wrest back control by concocting a plan with Israel to invade Gaza and the Sinai. For the colonial powers the strategic value of the canal (through which much of the world’s oil flowed) was the motive, but the Israelis hoped to gain more territory and restore access to the port of Eilat. It put the USA in an awkward position, especially when the USSR (now under Khrushchev) threatened to fire rockets at the invading force (there was even talk of nuclear weapons being used). Eisenhower was well aware that the US’ previous support for Israel had harmed its interests in the Middle East, and yet the cause of Israel was popular (then and now) amongst Americans (especially evangelical Christians)³⁷. He, however, put the wider imperialist interests of the US first, and sought to balance support for Israel with the search for allies in the wider Middle East. The invasion of the Suez had led to a run on the pound sterling so the British went to the International Monetary Fund for support. As it was largely controlled by the USA, Eisenhower refused to support the request and this forced Britain and France to capitulate. A UN ceasefire was organised and an isolated Israel was told to withdraw from Sinai.

A decade later and the situation had changed. The post-war boom was coming to an end, and the USA was embroiled in

the Vietnam War whilst the influence of the USSR in the Arab world was rising. The USSR had already (via Czechoslovakia) been selling arms to Egypt in 1956 but the ties between Moscow and Cairo intensified. Nasser turned his back on the USA when they refused to finance the Aswan High Dam project (the US wisely doubted Egypt could pay for it) so the USSR stepped in. When Nasser forged a defence agreement with Israel's Arab neighbours (Jordan, Syria and Iraq) in May 1967 it looked like Israel was facing a war on three fronts. On 5 June, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack on Egypt, destroying its air force in two and half hours. It easily then dealt with the invasions from Syria and Jordan and the war was over in six days. It left Israel in possession of the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank of the Jordan, and Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. Six years later Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, launched the Yom Kippur War which, via the Camp David Accords of 1978, restored the Sinai to Egypt and established the current territorial status quo.

From this point on the USA became the arbiter of what is laughably known as the "peace process" to the exclusion of all other powers. The USSR lacked the capital to counter US influence economically and exercised influence only by supplying weapons to any anti-US and anti-Israeli Arab government. The decline, and then collapse, of the USSR by 1991 forced the Palestinians to negotiate from a position of even greater weakness. With no counterweight to the USA to assist them, Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), was forced to conclude the Oslo Accords, in which the PLO for the first time recognised the State of Israel's right to exist in return for only vague promises about a future Palestinian state. Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister had pulled off a master stroke

which the Palestinian petty bourgeoisie, who are the natural constituency of the newly formed Hamas, rejected. But for the extreme Zionists even acknowledging the existence of the Palestinians was too much. Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish right wing religious zealot (of the kind now in the Israeli government) claiming to be acting on "the orders of God" in 1995.

Talk of a "peace process" was already hollow then, but everything that has happened since has only confirmed it as a sham. Article Thirteen of the Hamas Covenant explicitly rejects it: "*initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences, are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement*"³⁸. Meanwhile, the Zionist project has never intended to share Eretz Israel with anyone as the current war has made all too clear. The carpet bombing of Gaza with its threat of ethnic cleansing has been justified by several Israeli leaders. From the start, the ex-boss of the Israeli National Security Council has welcomed an epidemic in Gaza as an aid to victory³⁹ and has argued that "*creating a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza is a necessary means to achieve the goal ... Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist*". Current Israeli President Isaac Herzog justifies Israel's collective punishment by claiming that "*it's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true this rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved ...*"⁴⁰, whilst the odious Netanyahu has turned to scripture for an analogy in the Jewish destruction of the city of Amalek:

*... attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys*⁴¹.

If this is not the language of genocide

then we really are in Wonderland.

On the Road to World War Three?

The above only confirms that what is going on in Gaza is not only different in scale, but is taking place in an international context that is far more dangerous than at any time since the Second World War. Two years ago we highlighted this in our article “Ukraine and Taiwan: Flashpoints in an Uncertain Imperialist World”⁴². Written a couple of months before the actual Russian invasion of Ukraine, it argued that the global capitalist system was entering a new phase where the problems of the global economy were reducing any possibility of negotiated settlements of any issue between the world’s leading powers.

Economically, half a century after the cycle of capital accumulation went into decline (aka the end of the “post-war boom”) the system has been kept afloat by a combination of the super-exploitation of the proletariat of the “Global South” (which is mainly in the global East), and state support for financial capital via deregulation and incentives to invest in the national territory. This has resulted in massive speculation which has been accompanied by cuts in wages, pensions and social services. Financialisation has created a world where the gap between the mega-rich minority and most of the rest of humanity has grown a lot faster than the GDP of any national economy. Such contradictions are bringing world capitalism closer to collapse. Even wealthy states like the USA, Japan and half of Europe are living on debt. Growth is painfully slow, profit rates are falling and the problems of valorising capital for productive investment are increasing. The so-called “BRICS” are doing no better, with China now faced by the same kind of crisis of financial speculation (mainly on housing

as was the case in the US subprime bubble of 2007-8) as the “older” leading economies, whilst once rich countries, like Argentina, are in financial meltdown. Internationally speculation is increasing at uncontainable levels, and now stands at 13 times world GDP by volume. Meanwhile global debt in January 2023 “hit a record \$300 trillion, or 349% leverage on gross domestic product”⁴³ and continues to increase. The system is now in visible decline.

The consequences are well-known. Wages as a share of GDP have been in decline for decades (since 1979 in the UK) and those jobs that are on offer are increasingly short term, inadequately paid and precarious. But even this hike in exploitation has not been enough to revive the accumulation process. Economic stagnation means that humanity is entering a vortex powered by many connected threads.

The global economic crisis is creating social meltdown in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia. This is fuelling waves of migration across the world to the already cash-strapped “richer” countries. Migrants arriving in countries with increasingly limited economic opportunities are perceived as a burden (unlike in the past when they were needed). The perception is that they put more pressure on housing, and the social services accessed by the poorest of the working class. It is a ripe brew of resentment which can be exploited by nationalist politicians. As we have shown here in Israel and Gaza, fear of the “other” is a powerful poison to administer to any population, and has been exploited by the ultra-nationalist right across the globe.

Add to this the environmental disaster that capitalist production at any cost has wrought on the planet and we have a world increasingly on fire in both the climatological and political senses. In the Sahel region, rising temperatures have brought about the slow creep of the Sahara desert ever further south

for decades. This has brought pastoralists into conflict with tillers of the soil, a conflict exploited from Burkina Faso through Niger, Chad, Mali, the Central African Republic to Sudan by both imperialist powers, and the wannabe imperialist jihadists.

And these are not the only conflicts. The global economic crisis is driving more and more states to meltdown or turn to attacking their neighbours. The list is a long one but the most noticeable are in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Syria and Myanmar. In other places conflicts may be on hold (Serbia-Kosovo, Armenia-Azerbaijan, for example) but never end or simply morph from one atrocious episode to another. As in Israel-Palestine, the long arms of the major imperialist powers are never far away.

And as we have maintained for over two years, the global context has changed. The war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine shows that the crisis has now heightened imperialist rivalries to a level not seen really since before the Second World War. As in the war in Gaza, there is no possible compromise position and war, like the First and Second World Wars, is now a total one engulfing the entire society, silencing the voices of dissent whilst obliterating the economy and citizenry. The stakes are now too high. For Russia, NATO encirclement has proceeded inexorably since the collapse of the Soviet Union, whilst for the USA, the war in Ukraine has been very useful in bringing its lukewarm allies into line in the coming confrontation with their real global rival in China. In the run up to the Ukraine war, the USA had been gradually creating an informal alliance of the powers they had brought in economic sanctions against Iran, Russia and China. These were also acts of war which had the result of consolidating the cooperation between the three Eurasian powers. Today this also plays into the current

crisis in the Middle East.

For the USA, Israeli policy in Gaza is a major problem, but having given the Israeli ruling class a blank cheque for six decades or more, they cannot now do *a volte face*. Given its ignominious retreat from Afghanistan in 2021, the US had to support its strongest ally in the Middle East. The US has thus now become a prisoner of its own client power. To avoid a wider conflict and deter others like Hezbollah and Iran from reacting to the attack on Gaza, the US immediately sent two of its eleven aircraft carrier fleets to the Eastern Mediterranean. It was also quick to send weaponry to Israel to support its attack on Gaza and, as ever, it has vetoed all attempts in the United Nations to bring about a cease-fire. However it is well aware that the longer the collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza, and the killing of so many children goes on, the greater likelihood it will spark a wider conflict across the region and beyond. Hence Biden and Blinken's increasingly public calls for Israel to rein in the terror campaign. These calls have fallen on deaf ears with the consequence that the situation is deteriorating.

In Iraq, where the US has 2,500 troops to guard against a resurgence of ISIS, the pro-Iranian militia Kata'ib Hezbollah have already targeted their base in Erbil with drones, and the US have retaliated by bombing three of their bases⁴⁴.

More dramatically, the Houthis – the de facto government of Yemen after nearly 10 years of civil war – have demanded an end to the massacre in Gaza, supported by Iran with the approval of Russia and China. Using drones, they have attacked shipping in order to blockade the entrance to the Red Sea and, therefore, access to the Suez Canal, through which 15% of the world's oil and 20% of its foodstuffs and other goods pass. This is a direct challenge to the US domination of the

world's shipping lanes. The Houthis have thus forced the US to deploy yet another carrier fleet to the Red Sea in order to try to keep this vital route open. If it does not succeed then the global economy will be faced with another inflationary shock which will exacerbate social tensions in the West.

On Israel's northern border with Lebanon, the Iranian proxy Hezbollah, a far more formidable military force than Hamas, has so far been more circumspect in its support for the people of Gaza. This is not so much due to the presence of the US fleets off the Lebanese coast as the difficult economic situation in Lebanon itself. There have been exchanges of rocket and tank fire across the border and many Lebanese villagers in the South have had to flee yet again, but that is as far as it has gone. This is largely due to the extreme weakness of the Lebanese economy which is still suffering the effects of years of corruption and mismanagement which the massive explosion in the port of Beirut only exacerbated⁴⁵. All the ruling factions have been discredited. Another Israeli invasion provoked by Hezbollah might be repelled, but only at enormous cost not only materially for the long-suffering Lebanese, but also politically for Hezbollah itself. In addition in 2022, the Lebanese government (of which Hezbollah is a part) signed an agreement with Israel for the joint exploitation of the offshore gas fields of Karish and Qana. Lebanon needs the gas and the revenue. This explains why the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, has only given limited verbal support to Hamas, and has only asked Arab countries like Libya to cut Israel's oil, but not gas, supply (in which Israel is not only self-sufficient but exports to Egypt and Tunisia). The interests of trade, it seems, come before the interests of solidarity, but that is just one of the many contradictions of imperialist policy.

The same contradictions are playing out in the war in Ukraine. The struggle for Ukraine may have its origins in strategic considerations but one of its consequences has been a shift in the energy trade. Europe's seven decades of reliance on Russian gas cannot be replaced by the USA's liquefied natural gas (if you can call gas from fracking "natural") which is raising gas prices across the continent, and thus adding to inflation. In oil terms, with Nord Stream 1 blown up and Nord Stream 2 blocked, the majority of European countries have had to move towards other suppliers. US oil now accounts for 18% of Europe's supplies, but, closer to home, supplies are increasing from North and Central Africa as well as Azerbaijan, in addition to increases from traditional suppliers like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Cheaper Russian oil has now increasingly gone to China and India as well as other countries in the global South (who also reject the sanctions regime of NATO and the West as illegal). Even Saudi Arabia has signed energy agreements with China, in defiance of its old alliance with the USA and was already demanding more concessions over its potential signing of the Abraham Accords before 7 October.

The repercussions of the current wars thus remain incredibly complex. The changed geography of the energy supply chain will have, and is having, enormous consequences for the whole world in terms of the threat to living standards, and environmental disaster due to climate change. And there is still further potential for conflict in the growing trade wars over the new technologies and the raw materials they require such as rare earths, and other minerals like cobalt. The unresolved issue of Taiwan, source of many of the world's microchips, beckons as the next theatre of war – and this directly between the world's economic super-powers, the US and

China, who regularly test each other's military readiness in the area.

While the international bourgeoisie write the script for an increasingly generalised imperialist conflict, which they all hope will revitalise their economy at the expense of their rivals, the consequences of the death agony of their system is suffered above all by the world's workers. Over-exploited in times of peace, massacred in times of war, the working class alone offers the only path to the end of the nightmare. However, under the false flags of nationalism, millions of workers are currently killing each other in the name of interests that are not theirs. Only an international working class political organisation, independent of any support for imperialist powers, and their nationalist lackeys, can lead the way out of this capitalist black hole. As our sister organisation, *Battaglia Comunista*, wrote recently:

It's time to reverse the terms of the

Notes

1. Nafez Nazzal, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee in 1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut 1978)
2. A letter from November 1948 by a MAPAM soldier (Israeli social democratic party whose heirs later supported a two state solution). Both sources here quoted in David Gilmour, *Dispossessed – the Ordeal of the Palestinians* (Sphere Books, 1980), p. 68
3. Lehi (in full “Lohamei Herut Israel Lehi”, Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) was a split from Irgun Zvai Leumi in 1940 to seek an alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, as it regarded Britain as the main obstacle to a Jewish state. After the Second World War ended it took on a pro-Stalinist direction identifying with the “National Bolshevism” of 1923 and aiming at a totalitarian state. Unsurprisingly, given this bizarre political history, it failed badly in the first Israeli elections. However one of its leaders, Yitzhak Shamir, became a Likud Prime Minister of Israel in 1983, in succession to the

question. If we have to die for something, it might as well be the interests of the proletariat and not those of the class enemy, of nationalism and the imperialist propensity for war. The international proletariat is a single class, with common interests, which are certainly not those of mutual annihilation. The only thing that we have to destroy is bourgeois society, and its capitalist structure, and the wars which represent its way of surviving its own contradictions by having armies of wage slaves fight them.

The time has come to break our chains. NO TO WAR, YES TO CLASS WAR. No to the barbarity of capitalism in crisis, yes to the social alternative that destroys the first link of that chain, the one that binds us to the perfidious, unequal relationship between capital and labour¹⁶.

Jock

30 December 2023

- former Irgun terrorist, Menachim Begin. See S. Sofer. *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 253–254. Shamir's defence of the murders his group undertook could be a perfect justification for the dispossessed terrorism of the Palestinians today. It can be found in Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle: The Struggle between British, Jews, and the Arabs, 1935–48* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979), p. 278.
4. <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-12-17/ty-article-opinion/premium/in-israel-20-000-gazans-are-responsible-for-their-own-deaths-ive-never-been-so-ashamed/>
 5. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-05-20/neither-israel-nor-palestine-no-war-but-the-class-war>
 6. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2023/1010/In-Gaza-a-different-view-of-the-Hamas-raid-on-Israel>
 7. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/13/oslo-accords-1993-anniversary-israel-palestine-peace-process-lessons/>

8. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/what-palestinians-really-think-hamas> “Arab Barometer’s survey of the West Bank and Gaza, conducted in partnership with the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy, provides a snapshot of the views of ordinary citizens on the eve of the latest conflict.”

9. Although in 2017 Hamas issued another Document of General Principles and Policies which includes the contradictory statement that: “Hamas believes that no part of the land of Palestine shall be compromised or conceded, irrespective of the causes, the circumstances and the pressures and no matter how long the occupation lasts. **Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea.** However, without compromising its rejection of the Zionist entity and without relinquishing any Palestinian rights, Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital **along the lines of the 4th of June 1967**, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, **to be a formula of national consensus.**” <https://palwatch.org/storage/documents/hamas%20new%20policy%20document%20010517.pdf> The passages in bold highlighted by us.

10. [https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/palestine-state-of/report-palestine-state-of/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/palestine-state-of-report-palestine-state-of/)

11. For an exploration of this tactic (including in Northern Ireland) see <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-10-12/the-descent-from-fantasy-to-reality-in-the-arab-israeli-conflict>

12. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-palestinians-opinion-poll-wartime-views-a0baade915619cd070b5393844bc4514> There have been no elections in Palestine territories since 2006 which allows IDF commanders to assert that 90% of Palestinians support Hamas to justify the collective punishment of the Palestinians. This poll like all previous polls show a surge in support for Hamas every time the Israelis carry out such actions, but even in these conditions, Hamas never achieve majority support. The most popular potential leader

of the Palestinians is a Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti who has been serving several life terms in prison for 2 decades for his alleged role in Palestinian attacks during the first “intifada”. With 90% wanting the old, corrupt and pro-American president of the Palestinian Authority to go, it is not difficult to see why the Israelis have wanted to keep Barghouti out of circulation. Since we began this article a new poll after 2 months of Israeli bombardment suggest that 80% of Gazans now support the attack of 7 October – further confirmation of the thesis that one atrocity begets another.

13. Amy Goodman, https://www.democracynow.org/2023/10/20/divide_and_rule_how_israel_helped

14. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/for-years-netanyahu-propped-up-hamas-now-its-blown-up-in-our-faces/>

15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/30/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-attack-intelligence.html>

16. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-forever-war-against-israel-has-a-glitch-and-it-isnt-iron-dome/>

17. See, for example, the article by Yossi Melman in *Ha’aretz* on 21 May 2023 *Netanyahu Boasts But Israel’s Latest Gaza Operation Changed Nothing.*

18. At least five other militias joined the attack on 7 October, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67480680>

19. <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-12-17/ty-article-opinion/premium/in-israel-20-000-gazans-are-responsible-for-their-own-deaths-ive-never-been-so-ashamed/0000018c-73e6-d798-adac-f7ef3c550000>

20. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/amid-shin-bet-warnings-ben-gvir-said-to-dismiss-deadly-settler-violence-as-graffiti/>

21. K. Marx, *On the Jewish Question* in D. MacLellan (ed), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* OUP, 1977 p.55)

22. Although religion was often the cover for pure greed as in the massacre of York’s Jews in 1190. For a simple account see: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/cliffords-tower-york/history-and-stories/massacre-of-the-jews/>

23. For an expansion on the economic

background see: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-02-28/capitalism-s-economic-foundations-part-ii>

24. By the journalist and politician Wilhelm Marr in 1879. The semitic languages all have Middle Eastern roots and include Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, Hebrew, Syriac, and most ironically of all today, Arabic.

25. Quoted in Maxime Rodinson *Israel and the Arabs* (Penguin, 1968) p.14

26. The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1915 between the colonial powers Britain and France planned to divide up the Ottoman provinces after the war. The British had originally suggested that Jerusalem and the Holy places be administered by an international body but in the Treaty of Sevres (1920) which dismembered the Ottoman Empire they were “given a mandate” over the whole of Palestine plus Transjordan (and ruled in Iraq) whilst France received the mandates for Lebanon and Syria. The Agreement nearly fell apart when the Bolsheviks published its terms after the October Revolution in 1917. The British and French told Sherif Hussain of the Hejaz (who styled himself King of the Arabs) that the document was only a discarded draft.

27. Quoted in Peter Mansfield *A History of the Middle East* (Second edition Penguin 2003) pp.164-5

28. Mansfield p.164

29. Rodinson p.26

30. The rivalry between the two noble families of al-Nashashibi and the al-Husseini were to be major source of the weakness for Arab nationalism in Palestine. The Nashashibis were not only prepared to look for an accommodation with the British and the Zionists (to the point of accepting money from Weizmann’s Jewish Agency to turn a blind eye to illegal Jewish immigration) whilst the Husseinis were opposed to the British mandate and Jewish immigration. The British made one of their sons the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem to buy their support, but after the failure of Arab Revolt (1936-9) he took himself off to Nazi Germany.

31. Over 130,000 Jews arrived from Germany in 1933-5 alone. In 1930 the number had been 4-5,000. See Mansfield p.205, Gilmour, p. 51

32. “*The Arab Movement in the Middle East is our natural ally against England... I have decided therefore to encourage developments in the Middle East by supporting Iraq*”. A. Bullock *Hitler – A Study in Tyranny* (Penguin 1962) p. 639. In fact, as Bullock points out, this statement was by way of an excuse to his Generals. Rommel and Raedal who had pointed out it would have been a lot easier and strategically more significant to attack the British in 1941 when they were weak and neither the USSR nor the USA had entered the war. Bullock calls it one of Hitler’s “supreme blunders”.

33. In drafting this piece we recalled how teams of Israeli propagandists were allowed to tour British schools in the 1960s enticing older students to spend their summer holidays in kibbutzim as “socialist” pioneers of “making the desert bloom”. Until the Six Day War we had no idea the Palestinians existed. The propaganda teams were still touring in the 1990s but with the Israeli Labour Party no longer in power the message was stripped of the idealist appeal of the kibbutz.

34. *Eretz Israel* translates as the “land of Israel” but it is a religious concept which has only the vaguest of geographic boundaries.

35. Menachem Begin, *The Revolt* (W.H.Allen, 1951) p.335

36. For details see *Revolutionary Perspectives 5* (Third Series) *Oil and the Shifting Sands of Imperialism*, <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-02-05/oil-and-the-shifting-sands-of-imperialism>

37. The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee is today one of the most powerful foreign affairs lobbying groups in Washington and financially supports politicians in both parties (although Republican politicians get the majority of its funding) but it takes second place as a donor for the Zionist lobby to the Christians United for Israel.

38. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp

39. <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-11-23/ty-article-opinion/premium/giora-eilands-monstrous-gaza-proposal-is-evil-in-plain-sight/0000018b-f84b-d473-afb-f9eb09af0000>

40. Both quotes cited by Conor Gearty in “Short

Cuts”, *London Review of Books* 30 November 2023.

41. Also quoted by Gearty but for a fuller and more chilling investigation see: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/11/benjamin-netanyahu-amalek-israel-palestine-gaza-saul-samuel-old-testament/>

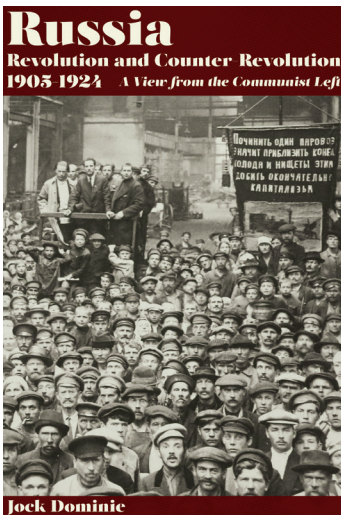
42. See: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-02-06/ukraine-and-taiwan-flash-points-in-an-uncertain-imperialist-world>

43. <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/featured/special-editorial/look-forward/>

[global-debt-leverage-is-a-great-reset-coming](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67819124)
44. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67819124>

45. See: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-08-20/the-lebanon-disaster-a-metaphor-for-modern-capitalism>

46. *Some Reflections on the War in Gaza and Beyond*: <https://www.leftcom.org/it/articles/2023-12-27/alcune-riflessioni-sulla-guerra-di-palestina-e-dintorni>. Translation by the CWO. The last half dozen paragraphs of this article are based on this.



Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1905-1924

A View from the Communist Left

The “socialism” that eventually emerged from the 1917 Russian Revolution had nothing in common with the vision of Marx. This history explains how a genuine workers’ movement from below degenerated into a new form of state capitalism. Its legacy remains the discovery of workers councils (soviets) as the basis for a new social organisation, alongside the need for a revolutionary programme to politically unite the class, against all the distortions of the various defenders of the existing order

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COP28 and the Myth of Green Capitalism

Global heating – the product of capitalism

The 28th climate change summit known as Conference of the Parties (COP28) was held in December 2023 and was even more of a farce than any of the previous 27 conferences. While the world is now undeniably facing a catastrophic climate crisis, which if unchecked will lead to the collapse of civilisation or even extinction of *Homo sapiens*, our leaders have made clear that they are not prepared to do anything serious about this if such action threatens the profitability or the accumulation of capital. Previously the major capitalist corporations, particularly the fossil fuel companies, have spent billions of dollars on think tanks trying to claim the science of global heating was a gigantic fraud, and more billions on lobbying groups to prevent politicians limiting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to ensure business carried on as usual. Now, when the science has become incontestable to all but the flat-earth brigade, a new strategy has been devised, that of green capitalism. At its fundamental level it amounts to accepting the science which many governments and companies spent years denying, and instead using the climate crisis to open up new fields of profit, accumulation, and speculation, while, at the same time, spreading a halo of green over what amounts to the continued normal operation of the capitalist system. In what follows, we intend to examine the massive emerging operations of green capitalism which have sprung up. However, before that we wish to briefly examine the scientific evidence which has been published and which our rulers once again chose to ignore at COP28.

A brief update on the main scientific facts

GHGs released by human activity are preventing the earth radiating energy into space causing an energy imbalance. The trapping of energy by human activity is known as radiative forcing. Table 1 shows how this effect has increased about 70% between 2005 and 2019 according to the UN International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) in its update of its report AR6.

Table 1¹

Year	Anthropogenic Radiative Forcing (watts/m ²)
2005	1.6
2013	2.29
2019	2.72

More energy is being absorbed from the sun than can be released by radiation. The result is that the earth must warm to reach a higher temperature, at which it can emit more energy and so regain an energy balance. The UN predicts that even with all the voluntary commitments made at COP26 this will require a rise in temperature of between 2 and 5°C above average temperatures in the 19th century. So much for the famous limit of 1.5°C the world was pledged to meet at the 2nd conference (the Paris Agreement) and which COP28 pretended was still possible. The amount of energy being absorbed by the world every day is enormous. To put it in perspective it is equivalent to 80 times the amount of energy humanity uses every day. Another little known fact is that over 90% of this energy is going into the oceans, heating the seas and the poles.² The global

temperature increase is highly uneven so at present land-based temperature rises are shielded from the amount of energy being absorbed.

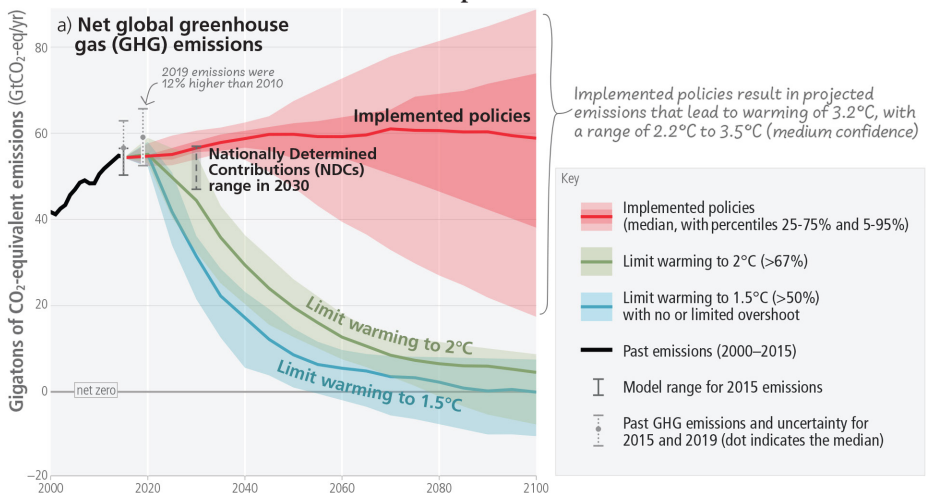
Graph 1 shows the IPCC’s calculation of the amount of GHGs currently being released and the future releases, based on the current commitments, together with the reductions which must be made if the world is to achieve 1.5°C or even 2°C warming. It is absolutely clear that there is no way, with the present measures, that these limited temperature increases can be achieved. This is because these measures are all based on the primary condition: that capitalist production and accumulation will continue unaffected.

The International Energy Association (IEA) categorically stated, in 2021, that the time for new oil and gas developments was over. If average temperature rise is to be kept to 1.5°C, then world leaders must not develop new oil, gas, or coal beyond existing fields. Of course, this would reduce profitability of large sectors of the capitalist economy and was quite unacceptable. While the US and the Europeans, as usual, talked up their general commitment to sticking

to the 1.5°C threshold, they quietly ignored the IEA warnings. The US, for example, has increased its gas production to 11.4bn cubic feet per day and its oil production to 13.2 million barrels per day, both now the largest globally⁴. The UK has licensed drilling in new oil fields in the North Sea and opened a new coal mine. Our rulers always find an excuse for why they do the opposite of what they preach; the latest explanation is that oil and gas production must be increased because of Russia’s war in Ukraine. However, the fact is that governments worldwide have continued to massively subsidise fossil fuels year in and year out. The IMF, for example, calculated that the subsidies offered by governments to fossil fuel companies now amounted to \$1.3 trillion annually!⁵ The famous US Inflation Reduction Act, by contrast, directs \$400bn of grants to clean energy over 10 years, or an average of \$40bn annually.⁶ The IEA calculates \$5tn needs to be spent on clean energy annually every year up to 2030⁷ if the Paris goals are to be met.

It is obvious the commitment to phase out fossil fuels is not serious and exists only on paper and as voluntary resolutions.

Graph 1³



Approximately half of the total carbon emissions at present in the atmosphere have been emitted in the last 30 years⁸; that means they have been emitted since the establishment of the IPCC and the COP process. GHG emissions are now 6% higher than they were at the Paris COP of 2015 and in 2023 will set a new record. So much for the commitment of our leaders to save the planet!

The IPCC report of 2022 ends with the words:

The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal ... any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action ... will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future.

We have so far had nothing but delay and inaction and there is no reason to think this is about to change.

COP

COP28 was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which is the eighth largest oil and gas producer in the world, and the COP chairman, Sultan Al Jaber, is the chief executive of the national oil company (ADNOC). Before the conference, documents were leaked showing that Al Jaber was planning to use the conference to make oil and gas deals with various countries such as Mozambique, Canada, Australia, Colombia and others. Al Jaber also claimed that there was no science indicating a phase-out of fossil fuels was required to reach the Paris Agreement of limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5°C. The conference, even more than the previous ones, has degenerated into a massive trade show with companies and countries having pavilions to negotiate deals. There were 85,000 registered delegates at the

conference and it should come as no surprise to learn that 2,400 of them were representing oil, gas, and coal companies.

What all the COPs since the 2015 Paris conference have shown is the impossibility of voluntary limits halting GHG emissions. The agreement at the end of the latest COP, which was praised to the skies by our leaders, is yet another voluntary agreement. The delegate countries and 50 major oil companies committed to voluntarily phase out fossil fuels sometime in the undefined future. Though there was, of course, no commitment to produce less oil and gas. Instead there was a commitment by 50 oil producers to end flaring of methane from their plants and to eliminate methane leaks, both by 2030. This was voluntary and, according to scientists, the 50 companies are responsible for only a third of GHG emissions. The other so-called major achievement was the pledge by 120 countries to triple installed capacity of renewable energy by 2030, creating an installed capacity of 11,000 gigawatts. This is something experts consider extremely unlikely to be achieved. The final word on these pledges given by the IEA was that even if all the voluntary pledges were fulfilled, the emissions reduction would only amount to 30% of the reduction required to achieve the Paris commitment of 1.5°C.⁹ The UN has calculated that the present regime of GHG emission puts the world on track for a temperature rise of 2.9°C, a temperature rise likely to trigger tipping points leading to environmental catastrophe.

The peripheral countries are looking for grants to decarbonise their economies but these, as we consider below, are not forthcoming or, where they are, they are often loans with interest rates above the current international levels. African and Latin American countries argued that exploiting their oil and gas wealth is critical to economic

development. Alex Rafalowicz, director of the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty Initiative, expressed their frustration:

Those most responsible for the climate crisis did not bring finance, technology, or actions to start phasing out fossil fuels...¹⁰

The EU carbon trading market made its own indirect comment to the outcome of the conference by reducing the cost of emitting a tonne of CO₂ from €71 to €66¹¹ indicating they were not expecting any significant change to the cost of emissions and that they viewed the outcome of the COP as a green light to carry on polluting.

The myth of green capitalism

Green capitalism is actually a contradiction in terms. This is because capitalism requires continual accumulation of capital, requiring in turn the continual exploiting and depleting of nature's resources. Infinite appropriation of nature resulting from capitalist production relations is demanded of a finite planet which necessarily leads to catastrophe whether capitalism is 'green' or not. Today, according to "The World Counts" we need 1.8 planets to provide the resources for our annual consumption and to absorb our waste. By 2030 it will be 2 planets.¹² While the destruction of the planet and global heating are no longer denied by the main intellectual forces in capitalist society, the predominant view is that a green capitalism can reverse the calamitous path we are hurtling along. Underpinning this is the naïve belief in the effectiveness of the market, which we are told, with proper inputs will solve the climate crisis. William Nordhaus, the economist famous for his 1991 paper on global warming, said in his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for

economics in 2018, "*There is no alternative to the market.*"

A similar understanding lies behind the UK government's 2006 Stern Review on the "Economics of Climate Change". This characterised climate change as "*extreme market failure*" because the costs of emissions were not reflected in monetary costs. Cost of externalities, he argued, need to be internalised via the price mechanism. Once correctly priced, the market will solve the climate crisis.

Of course, the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, which showed how hopelessly inefficient the market is at solving problems, made no difference to the conclusions of capitalism's economic Nobel Prize winners. This simply shows, as Marx pointed out, how the ruling ideas in society are nothing more than the ruling economic and social relations reflected in thought. Today the mainstream of capitalist thought still holds to the view that the climate crisis can be solved by giving free rein to the market by pricing in the so-called externalities through turning them into monetary commodities. The idea that technological improvements such as electric vehicles, heat pumps, carbon capture, and renewable energy, combined with carbon pricing, emission offsets, and so on will eventually solve the climate crisis informs the COP conferences. It follows from this that the first commandment of green capitalism is to preserve the prevalent social and economic relations as they exist in capitalist society today, while the second commandment is to open up new fields for the accumulation of capital.

"Green capitalism" is already under challenge as in Adrienne Buller's *The Value of a Whale*, published in 2022. The book has the sub-title of "*The illusions of green capitalism*" and is a good demolition of its predominant myths. Buller appears to be influenced by the US Monthly Review School

and the “metabolic rift” theory developed by writers such as John Bellamy Foster and Kohei Saito, whose recent book *Capital in the Anthropocene* we reviewed on our website,¹³ though she also refers to writers who criticise this school. Buller’s book, however, comes to no conclusion as to what should be done, though it implies that an alternative world with common human ownership, providing for general human welfare is needed. This, she concludes, would likely spell the end of capitalism. Such a world sounds like a communist world. We can say it would definitely spell the end of capitalism and further, that such a world can only be constructed after social revolution has destroyed capitalism. Buller’s book, however, deals with none of this but does provide a detailed exposure of the dominant myths which the acolytes of green capitalism hold so close to their hearts.

Nature and the whale

The attempt by the IMF to commodify the whale and, after putting a price on it, to urge investment in whales and eventually include it in investment funds, provides a dismal metaphor for the whole myth of green capitalism. The IMF’s price, \$2 million per whale, was calculated on the amount of carbon dioxide the whale sequesters in its life, priced at the emissions price for carbon, and the amount of paying tourism a whale attracts. The IMF then worked out the total carbon the entire whale population could sequester if allowed to return to pre-whaling numbers, and found this to be 1.7 billion tonnes per year. The next step was to carry out a cost-benefit analysis proving people should invest in funds for preserving whales. The cardinal premise behind all of this is that nature should be given a price, and carbon given a price, and these things should be brought to the market. Funds for investment

should then be created and traded, allowing futures and derivatives to be created leading to a field for speculation and hedging.

The ridiculous nature of all this is that it totally ignores the rest of the biosphere in which whales, and of course humans, live. This is illustrated by the fact that many of the whales washed up on our coasts are deafened by marine engines and sonar and are so filled with heavy metals and other toxins, which we continually pour into the ocean, that they have to be disposed of in toxic waste disposal plants. The real-life sequence to this parable was that an actual whale Buller was watching, which sequestered carbon and attracted tourism, was subsequently killed by a ship’s propeller while being watched by tourists. For Buller, the whale stands as the sentinel of green capitalism, pointing to the destructive path we are following.

Though temperature and weather patterns are the most obvious effects of global heating, there are inescapable links between carbon emissions and the biosphere as the allegory of the whale shows. The ecological crisis, though less visible, is also critical. The Stockholm Resilience Centre claims that 6 out of 9 “planetary boundaries”, or processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system, have been crossed.¹⁴ Crossing boundaries increases the risk of generating large-scale abrupt or irreversible environmental changes. Together the boundaries mark a critical threshold for increasing risks to people and the ecosystems we are part of; they permit the earth to remain in the Holocene interglacial state which it has been in for the last 10,000 years. The boundaries are interrelated processes within the complex biophysical Earth system. This means that a global focus on climate change alone is not sufficient for increased sustainability. Instead, understanding the interplay of boundaries, especially climate, and loss

of biodiversity, is key in science and practice. Alterations in the biosphere are leading to massively increased rates of extinctions not only of animals but also of plants and insects which we depend on for food pollination. If we continue to cross these boundaries the world is likely to enter, or has already entered, a new geological period which scientists have named the “Anthropocene” defined by human impact. However it must be noted that mankind is a part of nature and that for almost the entire history of *Homo sapiens* mankind has lived in a sustainable relationship with nature. It is only under the period where capitalist social relations dominate the planet, that human activity takes on such a destructive dimension leading to the present collapse of the environment, a collapse on a scale which can be classified as geological, and which the term “Anthropocene” encompasses. The development of this new epoch is likely to result in a new period of mass extinctions possibly including *Homo sapiens*.

Any catalogue of the environment destruction which directly affects these planetary boundaries, and which continues year in and year out despite all the pious COP resolutions, makes dismal reading. One instance is the destruction of forests which are critical carbon sinks. In 2019, 36 million acres of forest was cut down – an area greater than that of England – and in 2020, despite the pandemic, destruction increased by a further 50%. Oil companies publish pathways to 1.5°C which require forest offsets equivalent to the size of Brazil and which are quite impossible to achieve. Another example of a project so dear to the green capitalist fraternity is the conversion of transport to electric vehicles. The IEA envisages 230 million electric vehicles on the roads by 2030 - with no consideration for the amount of GHGs produced and the destruction of the biosphere that the mining and refining of

lithium, nickel, cobalt, cadmium, copper, and other minerals for batteries will create. Extraction of all minerals is increasing steadily and a measure of this is that; between 2002 and 2015 there was 53% increase in mineral extraction which means that 33% of all mineral extraction since 1900 took place in this period.

Replacing car ownership, not reducing it, increases the necessary energy production. Like everything else in green capitalism this sees the solution as putting prices on nature and leaving it to market forces to solve the destruction of the biosphere. A team of researchers worked out that the total value of the biosphere was \$33tn in 1996. A more recent survey by the World Economic Forum concluded that 50% of global GDP is highly or moderately dependent on nature which increased the value of the world’s ecosystems to \$44tn! As Buller says, pricing complicated and interconnected ecosystems is nonsense and cannot possibly solve the ecological crisis. Of course, the bourgeoisie do not accept this and they are attempting to hypothetically parcel up nature into assets and create funds to mobilise capital, allow trading, speculation, derivatives, and so forth in these funds. The funds are generally known as Ethical, Social and Governance (ESG) funds and have become extremely large.

ESG Funds

These funds are allowing financial capital to amass ownership and control of green capitalism. In 2020 more than \$1tn was invested in them¹⁵, and the asset managers of these funds are shaping how capitalism responds to the climate crisis. The giant asset management company Black Rock has emerged as a leading financial force in green capitalism. Another example is the French banking giant BNP Paribas which

has launched an ecosystem restoration fund. ESG funds open up areas of nature for trade. The fundamental idea behind the ESG is that governance of common goods in nature should be handed over to private capital and become a field of speculation. These funds appear to be reducing the financial impact of the climate crisis on capital values, but not on anything else. The scale of these funds is large but apparently they represent mainly relocation of existing capital rather than new capital. The question which must be asked is, where does the surplus value, which provides the dividends these funds pay, come from? Preserving whales or protecting forests does not create new value. Clearly the value these funds mobilise is syphoned off from the productive economy, probably via carbon tax, payment for carbon offsets, etc. However this, like financialisation in general, must represent a drain on the profitability of capitalism as a whole though, of course, the financial capitalists gain.

Carbon tax

The carbon tax is a fundamental element of green capitalism. It attempts to put a monetary value and a tax on each tonne of carbon emissions, and was one of the earliest attempts to use the capitalist market to control the climate crisis. It has so far completely failed to do this. A flat tax which all consumers pay has been tried in various countries but not been successful. A consequence of this sort of taxation is that it penalises the working class who pay a larger proportion of their income on energy than the bourgeoisie, and so leads to even greater inequality. The other system adopted by the EU in 2008 was a cap and tax scheme. Industries or services are given an allowance and taxed for emissions above the allowance. The cap was set by government and excess carbon dioxide taxed at a rate

set by the government. The unused allowances allowed by the cap can be traded on a carbon market or cancelled out by buying offsets. The scheme allowed the capitalist class to set the cap and the rate of tax. The scheme turned into a fiasco with large emitters having too favourable a cap and trading it. It is estimated large emitters made €50bn profit from trading their allowances since the scheme was started, meaning that, instead of the polluter paying, the polluter profits¹⁶. The current average price per tonne is between \$40 and \$80 but in 2020 according to the IMF the average price was \$2/tonne. Such low prices reduce any incentive to save CO₂ emissions. Some scientists estimate the price needs to be set at \$14300 per tonne to achieve 1.5°C, which is itself an indication that the pricing system will never be effective. Carbon pricing reflects the desire of large capital to maintain their profits and to continue to accumulate. BP, Shell, Exxon and the American Petroleum Institute have all published statements on the need for a carbon price. That the top global polluters have now reversed their previous policy of preventing this, which they pursued over a five year period, shows that they now understand it will be ineffective. As with the biosphere, establishing rights to pollute that can be bought, sold, and converted into financial assets opens up new fields of speculation.

The offset market created by carbon trading is fundamentally a way of avoiding cutting emissions; however, it has grown enormously. It was apparently worth \$1bn in 2021! Offsets allow avoidance of decarbonisation by allowing polluters to offset their pollution by buying stands of forests, peat bogs and similar carbon sinks. The market is largely unregulated and allows such things as NOT cutting down forests, or only clearing fire breaks to prevent forests being burned, to be treated as tradable offsets! As could

be expected, an industry of brokers trading offsets to polluters has sprung up, taking a handsome cut of the price for the offsets from the countries having the forests or other sinks. Offsets like this allowed Total, for example, to claim a \$17 million shipment of gas was carbon neutral. In general, however what these offsets result in is enclosure of land in countries in the global south, mono-species plantations being established, and displacement of local communities.

Funds to fight climate crisis

At the COP conferences for a number of years, the rich nations have pledged to provide \$100bn in funding to help the poorer nations' transition to green energy and to decarbonise their economies. This was presented by the leading countries of the global north as charity. But the figure of \$100bn was never achieved and the funds provided were not charity. In 2021, \$80bn was gathered but the IMF calculated that 80% of these funds were loans and 40% of these loans were at above the market rate of interest. In effect this represented a transfer of value from the poor nations to the rich. This is part of a general transfer of wealth from peripheral nations to the capitalist core nations via debt, cheap labour power and trade between capitals of higher organic composition with those of lower. Exports from the peripheral countries such as agricultural products, raw materials, and minerals remain low-cost as labour power is cheap and environmental costs are not included. According to UNCTAD, between 2000 and 2018 \$440bn per year flowed from just 16 low income countries to wealthy northern economies¹⁷. The returns which poor countries can make on new assets are substantially lower than the liabilities they owe through debt repayment. Since the 1980s the IMF has imposed structural

adjustment programmes as conditions for its loans which include liberating capital flows, privatising public assets and deregulation. The effect is to open up these countries to northern capital and the COP funds are basically a continuation of this process.

No capitalist solution

Neither the climate crisis nor the resulting ecological crisis will be solved as long as capitalism is the global system of production. The fundamental reason for this is that the system does not produce for human needs; it produces for profit, and this necessarily requires continual accumulation of capital. This, in turn translates into the need for continual growth, which entails growth in energy consumption producing carbon emissions, environmental destruction, and consumption of resources which the planet is unable to replenish. This is a recipe for environmental collapse and is leading to a new period of mass extinction. Significant sections of the capitalist class now understand this but are simply unable to change course as the COP conferences confirm. They are, in fact, trapped in the logic of a system they do not control! Their latest counter measure is to trumpet the virtues of green capitalism as the panacea that will save the planet. However, green capitalism is still capitalism and therefore just a continuation of all these problems, though its cheerleaders try to camouflage this and disguise the fundamentals of what is going on. We have shown how the basic premise of green capitalism is to preserve capitalist relations and to create a new field for capital accumulation by enabling capital to take control of the climate crisis. This is producing an increased polarisation of wealth allowing the central capitalist countries to syphon more value from the peripheral countries, but is not

addressing the basic problems. It is clear this strategy cannot continue without leading to social collapse. Though capitalist production, profits and accumulation may continue, even if large parts of the world become unsuitable for life, a point will be reached at which the present level of civilisation cannot exist. At this point, however, it will be too late to reverse the collapse.

Only a higher system of production, producing for human needs, can reverse the catastrophic course we are following. How can this be constructed? Capitalist society is a class-divided society and the capitalist class, who hold power, will not give up their wealth and privileges without fighting to the death. The overthrow of capitalism requires social revolution. The only force able to overthrow capitalism and build a new world is the working class. Its position as the class which produces all the value on which the entire capitalist system depends gives it the leverage to overturn the whole system. Its situation as a collective producer class enables it to form a socialised global community producing for human need. It enables it to abolish wage labour, countries, and money and construct a genuine communist world¹⁸. This is the precondition for dealing with the

Notes

1. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/figures/chapter-7/figure-7-6>
2. See: Chris Rapley (1637) *Five Times Faster: Rethinking the Science, Economics, and Diplomacy of Climate Change* - YouTube
3. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf
4. Reported in *Financial Times* 5/12/2023
5. *Financial Times* 3/12/2023
6. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/the-inflation-reduction-act-heres-whats-in-it>
7. <https://www.irena.org/News/pressreleases/2023/Mar/Investment-Needs-of-USD-35-trillion-by-2030-for-Successful-Energy-Transition#:~:text=Around%20USD%201%20trillion%20of,in%20>

climate crisis. We need to attack the issue on a global basis, drawing up global plans for eliminating GHGs, eliminating waste production, and implementing technical solutions to the massive problems we face. For the global working class to overthrow the present system it needs to become conscious of what needs to be done and how to achieve this. For this an international revolutionary political organisation is required. The urgent task of the present is to construct such a political organisation.

As we wrote in RP 19:

*The efforts of those fighting global warming will inevitably fail as long as capitalism remains the global system of production. Hence, the only effective fight against the climate crisis is the fight to build a genuine communist society and a political organisation to assist in the overthrow of the present system. This is what the Internationalist Communist Tendency is fighting to do and it is the only way through which we have a hope of reversing the horrendous damage capitalism is inflicting on planet earth.*¹⁹

CP

a%20more%20equitable%20way.

8. Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, *CO₂ and Greenhouse gas emissions*. Quoted A. Buller in *The Value of a Whale* P 188
9. *Financial Times* 19/12/2023
10. <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/cop28-final>
11. *Financial Times* 16/12/2023
12. <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/state-of-the-planet/overuse-of-resources-on-earth>
13. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-07-25/degrowth-and-marxism-a-critique>
14. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html> The 6 are: biochemical flows, both nitrogen and phosphorus; fresh water change; land system change; biosphere integrity; climate change,

including carbon dioxide concentration and radiative forcing; and novel entities.

15. A. Buller *The value of a whale* P 152

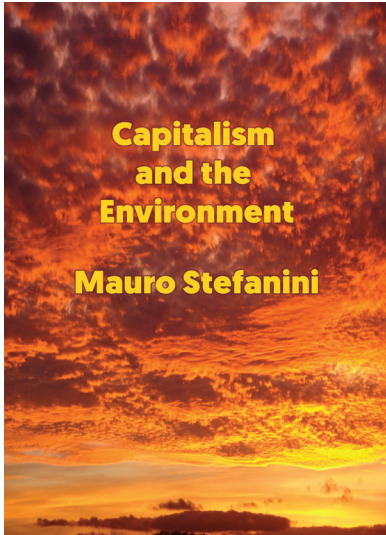
16. A. Buller *The value of a whale* P 60

17. UNCTAD 9/12/2019 Quoted A. Buller *The value of a whale* P 199

18. This has nothing whatsoever to do with

the system of state capitalism which existed in Russia which retained wage labour, money and exploitation and was a type of capitalism controlled by the state.

19. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-10-27/global-warming-ippc-report-ar6-writing-a-death-warrant>



Capitalism and the Environment New Edition

... the central nub is that a system based on alienated labour, devoted to growth (increased profits) and subject to periodic crises which exacerbate the drive to cut costs whatever the human or environmental price, cannot find an effective way of combating global warming. In short, these articles are as relevant today as when they were first written. They remain relevant because they provide a framework and give body to our argument that only when capitalist relations of production are eliminated, when money is a thing of the past and a world-wide human community produces for need instead of commodities for profit, can the environmental problems which capital daily exacerbates be seriously tackled

Our late comrade Mauro Stefanini was one of the first to recognise the dangers of global warming and all the more immediate consequences of the environmental devastation created by modern capitalism. He eventually put these into articles published originally in 1994. We have translated and reprinted them here in a new edition which also includes a list of our main publications on this issue up to 2021.

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Capitalism's Economic Foundations (Part IV)

From the commanding heights* of the state to globalisation

The growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradictions, crises, spasms. The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone, and to give room to a higher state of social production.

Karl Marx, Grundrisse**

In the 20th century world, imperialist war was the outcome of capitalism's cyclical crisis writ large, the means by which "a great portion of capital" (Marx later in the same passage) was annihilated, thus providing the basis for a renewed round of accumulation. Yet there is a marked contrast between the inter-war years and the post-Second World War years when both the upturn (the boom) and, especially, the downturn of the cycle (since the collapse of Bretton Woods) have been much more prolonged. This is due in no small part to international capital having learnt from history to fear a return to the trade wars and autarchic policies of the Thirties which led to the Second World War.

First, a reminder of the significance of the agreement brokered by JM Keynes and Harry Dexter White at Bretton Woods in 1944. Above all, it was confirmation that the United States had ousted Britain as the world's top imperialist power, a position it aimed to maintain by obliging all signatories to link their currencies to the dollar, thus making the US currency the unit of international trade outside of the Russian bloc (Comecon). As an assurance to the rest of the world that its currency was reliable, the United States offered a system of exchange rates based on the direct convertibility of the US dollar to gold the price of which was fixed at \$35 an ounce.

Despite this apparently indomitable position in the world economy, a position secured by military might, the prime export position of the United States was quickly challenged, notably by its recent wartime enemies, as first West Germany, then Japan recovered and eventually South Korea, jumping from a largely agrarian society, rose to be one of the world's top economic powers.

The West German boom began in 1950. With a new stabilised currency, a "modern stock of capital" and a skilled workforce reinforced by migration from the East, the industrial growth rate was 25.0% in 1950 and 18.1% in 1951. By 1960 industrial production had risen to two-and-a-half times the level of 1950 and far beyond any level reached by the Nazis during the 1930s in all of Germany.¹ In 1951, as the Cold War materialised, the United States encouraged consolidation of West Germany into its 'Western bloc' by promoting the creation of the European Iron and Steel Community (forerunner of the EEC and then the EU), thus encouraging exports and continued industrial expansion. Indeed, the Cold War proved a major stimulus to West German economic growth:

(Exports were) initially centered on the high value trade of armaments, as shown by the export of weapons from the FRG to NATO members. This fell within the "policy of strength" held between the

US and Adenauer as a way to 'roll back the frontiers of the Soviet Empire'. This exporting of armaments was further aided by the Korean War in 1950 and as such, these high value exports help account for the value of exports between 1950-1960 growing from 10%-19% of gross domestic product, which represents a much greater amount of money entering the domestic circular flow of money.²

A number of factors greatly aided Japan's economic resurgence during the 1950s and '60s, not least the complete destruction of the country's industrial base by the war. This meant that Japan's new factories, using the latest technology, were often more efficient than their competitors. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 created a huge demand for Japanese goods and the state began pursuing strong export policies which spurred employment, in turn promoting an expanding domestic market. Growing demand overseas for Japanese goods led to annual trade surpluses, which became constant by the late 1960s.

As for South Korea itself, the devastation of civil war (or rather, imperialist proxy war) and the subsequent loss of productive infrastructure and raw materials allowed first US and then Japanese capital investment to create the foundations of a technologically advanced capitalist economy. Under the aegis of military rule, labour intensive, 'light' industries (textiles, footwear) were the basis of the state-sponsored export oriented economy which grew in the 1960s. (In the 1970s the focus would turn to capital intensive, heavy industries (steel, shipbuilding etc) equipped with the latest machinery and techniques, followed by electronics and vehicles in the 1980s.)

While it is true that in a world subject

to imperialism the strictly economic forces at play can be modified by political policies of the most powerful capital/states, the post-war economic growth of both West Germany and Japan cannot simply be attributed to Marshall Aid, and other extra-economic measures employed by the USA to secure its own interests. The devaluation of capital through the destruction of war enabled them to engage in a new round of accumulation with machinery and equipment at least as technically productive as that of the United States, but generally with a much lower wage bill.

As trade had picked up after the war and countries like West Germany and Japan began to account for a bigger share of international trade, demand for dollars outside the United States grew, as did financial wheeling and dealing on the Eurodollar market. By the early 1960s there were more dollars outside the USA than could be matched by the gold in Fort Knox. As inflation edged up towards the end of the 1960s those dollars were more and more converted to gold, increasingly not at the official rate of \$35 per ounce. The system was unsustainable. The impact of the falling rate of profit had asserted itself.

The United States was already running a growing budget deficit, largely due to expenditure on the Vietnam War. But in 1971 the US balance of trade showed negative for the first time since the war. In that year US President Nixon announced the "temporary" cancellation of this mainstay of the post Second World War agreement. The 'Nixon Shock' spelled the beginning of the end of the Bretton Woods economic frame for the world economy. By the time Nixon confirmed the permanent end to a fixed exchange rate with gold in 1973 the price of gold had reached \$100 per ounce. The equivalent price today (at the time of writing) is around \$2,034. Clearly there can be no going back.

Goodbye to All That

The de-linking of the dollar from gold allowed the US Treasury to 'print' dollars at will and was effectively a devaluation of the currency which rebounded on the price of commodities traded mainly in dollars on the world market, notably oil. This not only upped the cost of raw materials for competing Japanese and European (largely West German) manufacturers, it sparked continual price increases throughout the Western world for typical working class consumer goods. The prime architect of the 'Nixon shock' was treasury secretary John Connally whose infamous quip (at the G10 meeting in Rome) that the "dollar is our currency but your problem" had not prevented him from imposing a 10% tax on imports and a 90-day wage and price freeze for workers in the United States. Indeed the working class in the United States found themselves in the same boat as workers elsewhere in the world's 'advanced countries' and beyond.

The UK had emerged from the Second World War with heavy debts and in 1949 had already abandoned an unsustainable initial exchange rate in the Bretton Woods system. In 1967 the IMF had obliged a further devaluation in return for a £1.4bn loan. Yet the UK was still seeking to preserve privileges from its former empire and trying to maintain the ex-colonial 'sterling area' — mainly the Commonwealth.³ The floating of the dollar was the beginning of the end as overseas holders sold off sterling when the exchange rate against the dollar rose prohibitively.

In 1974 the oil producing states of OPEC opted to offset the declining value of exports priced in the now steadily depreciating dollar with their own price increases. Inflation rose worldwide. In the UK the Conservative government, under Edward Heath, imposed a three day working week as part of a battle

with coal miners who were demanding higher wages to compensate for inflation. As the economy headed into stagflation (a combination of recession, rising unemployment and high inflation) Labour won a narrow majority in a 'who rules Britain' election. In 1976 the newly elected Labour Party leader, James Callaghan famously announced a policy U-turn at the Labour Party conference:

We used to think you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour, that option no longer exists.⁴

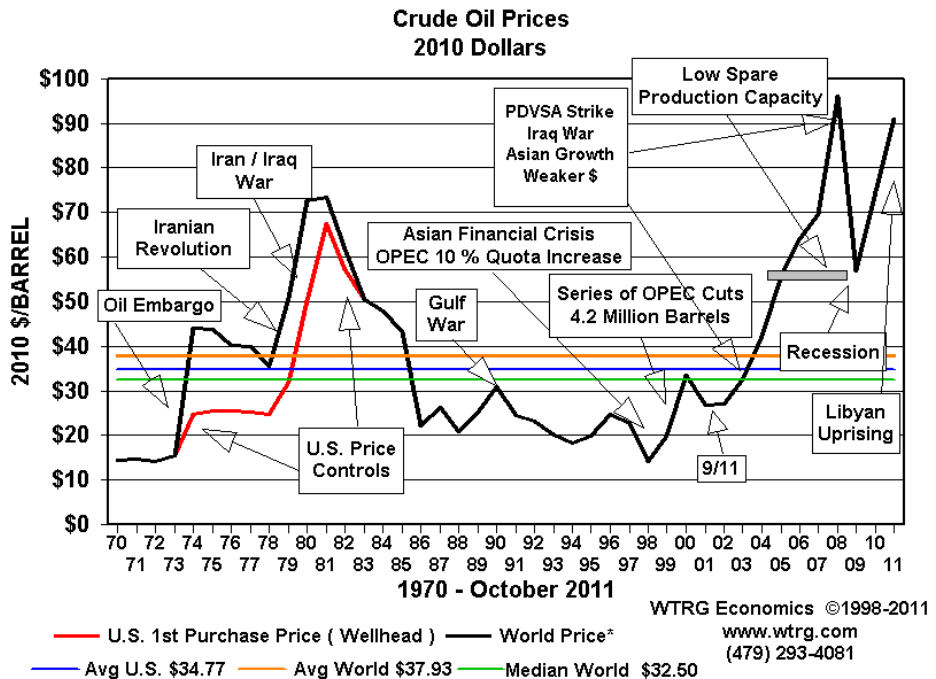
Thus, before the advent of 'Thatcherism', this signalled the beginning of the realisation that Keynesian deficit financing: the invention of money is no real solution to a problem that was deeper than the running up of a fiscal deficit. So it was that Dennis Healey, Chancellor of the Exchequer, found himself agreeing to the conditions for another IMF loan: \$3.9bn in return for £2.5bn cuts in government spending, tax increases and rises in interest rates. More fundamentally, between 1946 and the early 1950s much of the UK's heavy industries and public utilities had been nationalised without very much in the way of updating constant capital. (Arguably state ownership of industry was more about placating the working class into believing they were benefitting from something 'socialist' than a means to update plants and machinery or 'reskill' the workforce. By 1979, public sector employment had reached its highest level of 7.07 million, representing 28.1% of total employment.)⁵ Not only had the general rate of profit in the UK fallen steadily since 1945, in the birthplace of industrial capitalism it was now lower than most of its rivals.

Thus industrial restructuring in the UK, though not limited to 'de-nationalisation' during Thatcher governments, has involved the 'privatisation' of around 113 former state-owned industries and firms,⁶ allowing for either their subsequent break-up and outright closure or restructuring and take-over by finance capital in search of easy financial returns. Deficit financing — the essence of Keynesianism — used to prolong the life of enterprises that are either unprofitable or of very low profitability is in itself no solution to the crisis of profitability. In the long term this calls for the devaluation of constant capital and its restructuring on the basis of a higher concentration and centralisation of capital to revive the rate of profit — just as Marx explained follows every capitalist profitability crisis.

But as we have seen, it was the economic malaise of the richest, most powerful country

in the world, the United States, which had triggered global inflation and — despite the US treasury secretary's complacency — the dollar's devaluation had not only sharpened the crisis for its economic rivals, it provoked a post-war record rise in inflation for the US itself and a crisis of profitability which triggered massive shut downs and job losses, especially in the steel-making and manufacturing cities of the north-east which came to be known as the Rust Belt.

Already in the 1970s, US firms were beginning to relocate production to newly industrialised, cheap labour areas like South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Many displaced workers were obliged to seek work in lower paying service industries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in manufacturing industry peaked in the United States in 1979. The trend towards 'tertiarisation' of the domestic



economy had begun.

As for Western Europe and Japan, the end of the post-war boom and the subsequent crises of declining profitability and low 'growth' was generally attributed to a political decision of the Arab oil exporting countries to raise the price of crude oil, especially after the second 'oil crisis' in 1979.

Yet the fact is that the oil price rises were provoked by a United States which enjoyed the 'exorbitant privilege' of being the issuer of the currency required for most of global trade. While on the one hand there was the Rust Belt, on the other there was the possibility of financial benefits accruing from the recycling of petrodollars flowing from OPEC to the USA. Meanwhile, the major economic rivals of the USA in Japan, Germany and the OECD countries found themselves facing a general rise in the price of raw materials, and — at least until the mid-1980s — a higher price for oil than the United States. This, all in the general context of a 'reduced rate of return on capital', in other words, the crisis of the falling rate of profit. Domestic inflation rose, businesses were going bankrupt and many more insolvent firms escaped bankruptcy via state deficit financing. The problem of the falling rate of profit had to be addressed and a general pattern of economic 'restructuring' emerged on the basis of installing new technology (largely computerised electronic equipment) and introducing new working practices to improve the 'productivity and flexibility' of the reduced workforce.

Typically European states reduced their direct control of industries, allowing the possibility of injection of international finance capital and at the same time providing the opportunity for so-called cross-border mergers and acquisitions by domestic firms. Thus according to Bundesbank statistics, the role of the state in the West German economy declined from 52% to 46% of GDP between

1982 and 1990.

Typically also German growth never again reached the pre-crisis levels of the early years of the Federal Republic.

As for Japan, without an alternative domestic source of energy, the surge in the price of oil prompted the state, via MITI (Ministry for International Trade and Industry) to review its economic policies and in 1979 proposed a new 'Vision for Industrial Policy' whereby Japan, as a "technology-intensive nation",

would move from "an industrial pattern of "reaping" technologies developed in the seedbeds of the West, to a pattern of "sowing and cultivating" that displays greater creativity. ...With the century of catch-up modernisation at an end, from the 1980s onwards we will enter a new and unexplored phase.⁷

This is the context of the USA's next move on the international stage.

The Plaza Accord

While the United States had set out to use the 'exorbitant privilege' it enjoyed, by virtue of the dollar being the predominant currency of international trade and finance, a decade on from the abrogation of Bretton Woods, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, found himself dealing with an unexpected consequence: the massive appreciation of the dollar. Various explained by pundits as the result of Volcker's tight monetary policy in the face of President Reagan's fiscal profligacy or simply the consequence of an influx of petrodollars from OPEC states searching for a place to park their oil bonanzas⁸, from the beginning of 1980 to its peak in March 1985, the dollar appreciated by over 47.9% against the famous basket

of currencies. The strong dollar put pressure on the US manufacturing industry because it made imported goods relatively cheap and provoked a protectionist campaign by many major companies from Caterpillar to IBM and Motorola who lobbied Congress to step in and impose protectionist trade barriers. Thus, the US avoided outright protectionism and instead came up with the Plaza Accord.

The Accord, between the United States, Japan, West Germany, France and the UK, aimed to push down the US dollar. The US pledged to reduce its federal deficit while the other parties were to boost domestic demand through policies such as tax cuts. All parties agreed to directly intervene in currency markets to “correct current account imbalances”, i.e. to sell off dollars. The immediate upshot was a dramatic increase in the yen and Deutschmark against the dollar which in turn depreciated by as much as 25.8% in the following two years.

Although the Accord significantly reduced the US trade deficit with Germany and the rest of Europe it did not have the same impact on the trade deficit with Japan, and the US continued to press for ‘structural revision’ to Japan’s ‘unfair’ economic policies of state support for new industries and erecting import barriers to preserve declining industries. As for Japan, ever since the mid-1980s it has faced a declining share of global trade:

a fact often attributed to the loss of competitive edge as a result of the re-evaluation of the yen in 1985. What this simplistic cause overlooks is the rise of competing national capitals ready to install the latest technology, move into electronics and vehicle manufacturing to exploit a plentiful supply of much cheaper labour power — notably, by the mid-Eighties, South Korea, itself a major recipient of Japanese foreign investment.

As for the Plaza Accord, this has gone down as the “high watermark” of international coordination of economic policy. It was followed two years later by the Louvre Accord aimed at halting the dollar’s decline! More generally the Plaza Accord gave way to the variously tagged G7, G20 and so on group which meets annually to coordinate increasingly vacuous economic policies in a global capitalist world — a world in which neither China nor the former Soviet empire can hide behind non-convertible currencies.

In 2001 China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and confirmed its place in capitalism’s global economy. Despite all the ideological mystifications, the modern history of China has never been anything other than capitalist and its post-war economic odyssey only confirms this.

Even before the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, the creation of Special Economic Zones at the beginning of the



decade had opened the door to foreign capital investment confirming the capitalist nature of the economy. Thus,

In little more than 20 years, from 1978 to 1999, there has been an inflow of about a third of the total foreign investment of the entire world in the celestial empire, amounting to an annual rate of \$40bn.⁹

As for the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries, despite staying out of Bretton Woods and attempting to rely on the internal exchange of goods (oil and gas from Russia in return for manufactured products) the global crisis impacted first the Warsaw Pact countries with more economic ties with the wider world economy. Poland in particular suffered from inflation which provoked massive working class struggle in the 1970s and 80s. In the

Notes

* The term ‘commanding heights’, once familiar in Labour Party and other left capitalist circles, was first coined by Lenin in some notes he made in 1922 where he was working out how to explain that, despite the NEP conceding a certain role for private capital, “all commanding heights in the sphere of production” remained in the hands of the state. The nature of the state, of course, not being dealt. See Lenin, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1971, Moscow, Volume 36, pp 585-587.

** The quotation is from the *Grundrisse*, p.750, Pelican Marx library, Penguin Books 1973

1. Economic Revival of West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, Cameron Payne, Aug 7 2011, <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/07/economic-revival-of-west-germany-in-the-1950s-and-1960s/>

2. *ibid*

3. The sterling area countries kept most of their reserves with the Bank of England and, in return, had access to London financial markets. In 1979 Britain removed all its exchange controls

event, despite its superior scientific and technological advances in space, the USSR became bogged down in its own inertia by its inability to reequip manufacturing with new technology, partly because the USA deliberately placed embargoes on the export of new technology to Russia. This isolation from the rest of the world economy, plus the complete fiction of official statistics issued by a corrupt nomenklatura more concerned with feathering their own dachas than the health of the wider economy, eventually morphed into the Russia of competing billionaire oligarchs we know today. In 2012 that Russia joined the WTO.

Since then, for the first time since before the First World War, capitalism has been running free reign throughout the globe. In the next part of this series we will be examining the consequences of this ‘fully global’ globalisation.

and the sterling area effectively ceased to exist.

4. This quotation is so ubiquitous, it is easily found on the internet. Here, for example, it is part of book review (on Labour orators!) <https://academic.oup.com/manchester-scholarship-online/book/13722>

5. Between 1979 and 1998, what the ONS calls the “contribution of public corporations to public sector employment” decreased from 27.7% to 7.1%. Yet, this by no means signals the end of the state as employer of labour power. The latest ONS figures (December 2023) show public employees today = 17.8% of the workforce.

6. See WIKIPEDIA’s list of ‘Former nationalised industries of the United Kingdom’, as at 15.6.21.

7. https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2021/1116_001.html

8. Itself not an entirely spontaneous move: the OPEC states had been ‘persuaded’ to park their dollars in the United States in return for a promise of regional military protection.

9. China: Economic Giant with Feet of Clay in *Internationalist Communist* no.22

Lenin and Leninism

“During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the “consolation” of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it. Today, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the labor movement concur in this doctoring of Marxism. They omit, obscure, or distort the revolutionary side of this theory, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie.”

Lenin, The State and Revolution, 1917

It has now been 100 years since Lenin's body was embalmed and put on public display in Moscow, a grotesque gesture from a “red” bourgeoisie which went hand in hand with the systematic distortion of Lenin's real contribution to the socialist movement. Times have changed and the Russian state no longer considers Lenin to be its “founding father”, instead holding him personally responsible for the disintegration of its Empire, while in many countries of the former Eastern Bloc statues of Lenin are being taken down as part of “de-communisation”. As such, the centenary of Lenin's death will hardly be a blip in the grand scheme of things.

However, in today's world of crisis and war, the idea of “communism” seems more popular than it has been for decades, particularly among the young generations. So for those who see the need for a world beyond capitalism, this equivocal anniversary is an occasion to revisit the man whose name became inescapably wrapped up with the idea of “communism”.

Lenin, collective organiser

In 1870, Lenin was born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov to what today would be described as an upwardly mobile family. His father

came from a serf background but went to study at university and became a teacher. His mother, though also qualified as a teacher, spent much of her time raising children. Lenin had seven siblings, two of whom died while still in infancy. Despite the liberal conservative persuasion of their parents, five of the children became actively involved in the socialist movement. The eldest son, Aleksandr Ulyanov, joined Narodnaya Volya while at university – he was arrested, accused of plotting an assassination, and executed by the Tsarist authorities in 1887. Whether or not this was the direct motivation for Lenin's initial interest in socialism, over the following two years he was rummaging through local libraries for radical books, finding his way to the works of Nikolay Chernyshevsky and eventually Karl Marx's Capital, soon himself coming into contact with Narodnik and Marxist study circles.

At the time the socialist movement in Russia consisted of a politically heterogeneous network of revolutionary cells and study circles spread out across the Empire. Lenin was particularly drawn towards the Marxist ideas of the group Emancipation of Labour animated by, among others, Georgi Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich. Lenin founded his own League of Struggle

for the Emancipation of the Working Class in 1895, and was soon arrested. In prison and in exile he studied the economic question in order to refute the appeal of Narodnik ideas within the socialist movement (which would continue to linger on with the creation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, or SRs). He arrived at the following conclusions:

- capitalist social relations had now taken hold within Russia;
- the working class, and not the more numerous peasantry, would become the leading force of the future revolution;
- this revolution would combine both socialist (fight against the capitalist class aimed at destroying the class system) and democratic (fight against absolutism aimed at winning political liberty) tasks;
- revolutionaries scattered all over Russia had to come together into a single united party in order to face up to the tasks ahead.

Lenin was not alone in pushing for unification of the socialist movement and in 1898 the First Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was held in Minsk. However, due to police repression and internal squabbles, the new RSDLP existed mainly in name only. Lenin's denunciations of revisionism and economism, his attempts to make Iskra a central party organ, the publication of *What Is To Be Done?* in 1902, must all be understood in this context. At the time, Lenin insisted on a highly centralised organisation of professional revolutionaries in order to establish a politically and organisationally coherent party able to intervene in the rising class movement in Russia. In the course of his struggle to create this party, Lenin would fall out with some of his hitherto allies and, at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, two party factions – Bolsheviks and

Mensheviks – emerged over the seemingly trivial definition of what constitutes a party member. Behind this however there were real political differences, which became manifest in the revolution of 1905.

Lenin, revolutionary internationalist

The events of 1905 began innocuously enough – a peaceful demonstration of workers and peasants, led by the Orthodox priest turned police spy Father Gapon, intended to hand in a petition to the Tsar. Instead they were met with rifle fire. The massacre that ensued captured the popular imagination across the Russian Empire, triggering protests, strikes, insurrections, and of course the creation of workers' councils (soviets). 1905 was a trial by fire for any organisations endeavouring to become the voice of the working class.

Lenin was in exile when the revolution of 1905 broke out, though he followed the events closely, whilst simultaneously studying the revolutions of 1789, 1848 and 1871 for insight. He sent advice to his Bolshevik comrades who, on the streets and factories of the Russian Empire, called for the extension of the strike, for workers to arm themselves, for soldiers to turn on their government. After the proclamation of the October Manifesto by the Tsar – which promised the establishment of the Duma (parliament) as well as freedom of speech and association – Lenin came back to Russia. He now recognised the party had to open up to newly emerging working class elements, and he fought to transform it on the basis of democratic centralism, making sure all higher-standing bodies were elected, accountable and subject to recall. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were still technically part of the same party, but the elections to the Duma began to

reveal the depth of the schism. While the Bolsheviks were calling for an uprising and the setting up of a “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”, leading Mensheviks like Plekhanov and Pavel Axelrod were now suggesting a parliamentary alliance with the progressive elements of the bourgeoisie (like those in the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Kadets).

In this period of revolutionary fervour, the Bolsheviks established themselves as a dynamic organisation and by 1907 had over 40,000 members, the majority of them workers. Lenin noted that the tactics formulated in his infamous pamphlet of 1902, though they set the foundation for political and organisational coherence, were now outdated. The period of the counter-revolution, unleashed by the Tsar as he reversed all the liberal reforms, also posed new problems. Mass arrests truncated the RSDLP, contributing to further factionalism. Lenin was forced into exile again, where he engaged in polemics over party organisation (against Axelrod and the Menshevik liquidators), Marxist orthodoxy (against Alexander Bogdanov and influence of Machism among the Bolsheviks), and the right of nations to self-determination (against Rosa Luxemburg and her followers in the Polish, German and Russian parties).

The gradual revival of the working class movement in Russia was disrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. Lenin's focus now shifted onto the international stage – he sought to understand the reasons for the collapse and betrayal of the Second International, and to explain the nature of capitalist imperialism. At the conferences in Zimmerwald and Kienthal, he emerged as a key figure of the internationalist opposition to war, fighting for the regroupment of revolutionaries in a Third International. The outbreak of the February Revolution allowed

him to return to Russia and confirmed his perspectives.

Lenin arrived at the conclusion that the soviets, which were once again springing up across the Russian Empire, could allow for the seizure of power by the working class, and by linking up with revolutions in the more advanced West, socialism could be put on the agenda. His calls for an uprising were initially resisted by some in the party, but enthusiastically taken up by the Bolshevik grassroots. The Bolsheviks were swelling in numbers, now a party of some 200,000, agitating for “all power to the soviets”, and gradually becoming a leading political force within the movement. The outbreak of the October Revolution signalled the beginning of a revolutionary wave across the world.

Lenin, head of government

After tumultuous proceedings, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets approved the transfer of power to itself, elected a new Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) and tasked it with the creation of a Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom). Lenin was chosen as the chairman of this new body. The Bolsheviks reorganised themselves into the Russian Communist Party and began preparations for the creation of a Third International. In the first six months after October, the soviet principle was extended across Russia, and workers and peasants began to upend the system of exploitation and oppression. There was no blueprint to follow – the Paris Commune, the closest historical precedent, lasted only 72 days before it was brutally suppressed. However, initial revolutionary enthusiasm could not hide objective reality. The Russia that workers inherited was beset with famine and epidemic, its economy in tatters following years of war and revolution. Not only that, in the absence of

successful revolutions elsewhere, imperialist intervention was now on the horizon.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 was the first significant retreat. As Lenin argued, the advance of German troops, just weeks away from walking into Petrograd, left little choice but to sign it. Nevertheless, the decision led to widespread opposition within the party, and caused a fallout with the Left SRs (who, in support of soviet power, had only split from their mother party after soviet power was adopted by the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets). The Left SRs withdrew from the Sovnarkom and staged an uprising aimed at restarting the war with Germany. Lenin's pamphlet *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* was a turning point in his thinking – faced with such a dire situation, the task was now to “manoeuvre, retreat, wait, build slowly, ruthlessly tighten up, rigorously discipline, smash laxity”. In August 1918, after speaking at a factory meeting, Lenin was shot by a supporter of the recently dissolved Constituent Assembly. With Lenin apparently near death, the Sovnarkom decided to meet White Terror with Red Terror.

The hope that peace with Germany would provide a “breathing space” until the isolation of the Russian Revolution would be broken by revolutions elsewhere turned out to be short-lived. The revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion, Allied intervention in the North, the conquests of the White armies of Kolchak, Wrangel and Denikin, all spelled a long and bloody civil war. By 1920 the main internal threats to soviet power were defeated, briefly creating hopes for a new period of “peaceful construction”, only for the Polish and Ukrainian offensive to trigger yet another war. In those years, Soviet Russia adopted a siege mentality – the Red Army became a mass of conscripts led by former Tsarist officials, rival political tendencies were suppressed by the Cheka, one-man

management was introduced in industry and grain requisitioning was enforced in the countryside. Meanwhile, the new Third International was becoming increasingly dominated by the interests of Russian diplomacy. In response to the failure of revolutions outside Russia, it began to make overtures to social democracy in the West and nationalist movements in the East.

Within the party, various oppositions were emerging, expressing concerns about the direction being taken (the journal *Kommunist*, Group of Democratic Centralism, the Military Opposition, the Workers' Opposition, the Workers' Group). In response, Lenin stressed that revolutionaries must learn not only how to advance, but also how to retreat. Though he tried to take on board some of their suggestions, he opposed these groups. But he also opposed some of the excesses of the party leadership (e.g. Trotsky on the militarisation of labour, and Stalin on Georgia). Ultimately, and against great odds, the existence of Soviet Russia was secured, but at a great cost – the gradual loss of its soviet character. Conditions of war and repression undermined workers' democracy. Local soviets failed to meet and when they did, it was mainly to rubber stamp decisions from above. The Sovnarkom, instead of a body which drew its authority from the soviets, became a power over the soviets. The Kronstadt uprising in 1921 was a symptom of this development. Its tragic suppression was followed by the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which Lenin saw as another necessary retreat. Opening up the war economy to market forces was supposed to address the economic dislocation produced by years of turmoil and help rebuild a working class base.

In Lenin's final writings there is a sense of dismay at the lack of progress that the revolution was making and the inadequacy of

the institutions it had created. He proposed various administrative reforms to draw more workers into the running of the system as the alternative to bureaucratic rot. But, having suffered two strokes in 1922, Lenin was paralysed. Under intense supervision amounting to house arrest at the hands of the state apparatus he was now questioning, he could do no more than dictate his final wishes to a secretary. A third stroke in March 1923 put an end to his active political life, and on 21 January 1924 he fell into a coma and passed away.

Leninism

Lenin's biography, only summarised here, paints a complex picture: riding the revolutionary wave, he could not but fall with it when it came crashing down. The manner in which he fell, and what he as an individual could have done differently, will be a point of contention for as long as the Russian Revolution remains a subject of interest. However, that is just half the story. Once soviet power had been transformed into a party-state, an accomplished fact by the time Lenin was on his deathbed, the struggle over who would lead it had commenced.

If previously the term "Leninism" was used colloquially, there was now a scramble to make it into an official ideology, with competing interpretations emerging in pamphlets like Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* (1924) and Zinoviev's *Introduction to the Study of Leninism* (1925). Already in March 1923, a Lenin Institute, directed by Kamenev, was formed with the aim of promoting "Leninism" within and outside the party. Through the so-called "Lenin Levy", the triumvirate of Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev flooded the party with around half a million inexperienced members, easier to manipulate in their factional struggle against Trotsky. In 1924 the Fifth Congress of the

Third International took place – the first that Lenin was completely absent from. It called for the "Bolshevization" of the parties of the Third International in the spirit of "Marxism-Leninism", against "right wing dangers" and "ultra-left deviations". Regarding the likes of Trotsky, Luxemburg, Amadeo Bordiga, Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek, the *Theses on the Bolshevization of the Communist Parties* (1925) stated: "The closer these political leaders stand to Leninism, the more dangerous are their views in those respects in which they do not coincide with Leninism". In 1926 a Lenin School was set up in Moscow, to teach party cadres from around the world in the art of "Bolshevization".

"Bolshevization ... means the final ideological victory of Marxism-Leninism (or in other words Marxism in the period of imperialism and the epoch of the proletarian revolution) ... Lenin's death must give as great an impulse to the propaganda of the theory of Marxism-Leninism in all sections of the Communist International, as it has done in the Russian Communist Party"

Theses Of The Fifth Comintern Congress On The Propaganda Activities of the CI and its Sections, July 1924

Through manoeuvres and expulsions, the parties of the Third International were transformed into loyal mouthpieces of Moscow. In 1928, Stalin came out on top in the power struggle and his theory of "socialism in one country" became state policy with the introduction of the five-year plans. He delivered his coup de grâce in the 1930s, by physically exterminating his political enemies and even former allies in the Great Purge, many old Bolsheviks among them. The ideology of "Marxism-Leninism" was exported around the world through propaganda and military

force, finding particular resonance in underdeveloped regions (chief among them China) where state control, collectivisation and industrialisation could serve as means of rapid capitalist development. Following Stalin's death in 1953, the ruling class in Moscow attempted to exonerate itself with official "de-Stalinization" and a "return to Leninism", though in places like China and Albania this was denounced as "revisionism". Either way, the official narrative in both the East and the West has ever since maintained that the various "people's republics" and so-called "socialist states" were, in one way or another, Lenin's legacy. This interpretation is the one thing which unites not only liberals and conservatives, Stalinists and Maoists, but also many anarchists and councilists.

There are however some tendencies which have always stressed a distinction between the Russia of Lenin and the Russia of Stalin. The most famous is that of the exiled Trotsky and his followers, who nevertheless saw in Stalinism only a Thermidorian reaction and not yet the counter-revolution. The less known, but more critical, is that of our predecessors in the Italian Communist Left.

Our "Leninism" and theirs

Our tendency has often been accused of being either too "Leninist" or not "Leninist" enough. Today we tend not to use the label – it creates more confusion than clarity. The compromises which Lenin defended in the context of the isolation of the revolution are the ones most eagerly appealed to in the name of "Leninism", both by Lenin's detractors and his epigones. The latter confuse the fact that compromise may be enforced by objective reality, with a political programme that takes compromise as its starting point. Our predecessors, having just founded the Internationalist Communist Party in the

midst of the Second World War, as class struggle was reviving in the factories in Northern Italy, saw it differently:

the Lenin who fascinates us the most and stimulates our thinking is not Lenin the tactician – an important figure nonetheless – who at the helm of the first proletarian state skilfully manoeuvred between the pitfalls of a bourgeois world, a ferocious enemy, in the expectation of a new revolutionary wave which he foresaw approaching. Nor is he the Lenin of the NEP, the Lenin of compromise with the still surviving forces of Russian capitalism, an ingenious and very dangerous expedient that he always considered a painful retreat, a halt in the march of the revolution. Lenin, our Lenin, the Lenin of today's situation, is that of the April Theses and the October insurrection. And it is at this moment in his life as a theoretician, politician and leader that we like to remember him, twenty years after his death.

***Lenin Oggi, Prometeo,
1 February 1944***

"Our" Lenin can be summed up in three points, which also indicate where we critically build upon his experience.

- The Party: Lenin insisted on the need for a political organisation to provide a lead in the class struggle. The Bolsheviks have often been portrayed as a homogeneous, dogmatic party, but this is Stalinist myth. It was an organisation which evolved over time, always responding to changing circumstances.
- The Soviets: Already in 1905 Lenin speculated that both the party and the soviets would fulfil a necessary role in the upcoming revolution. He developed this

notion further in 1917. Lenin, at his best, understood that what made Soviet Russia a “workers’ state” was the existence of this soviet power.

- Internationalism: Lenin understood the international implications of a socialist revolution, and fought against chauvinist, nationalist, and social-patriotic tendencies within the workers’ movement. He was clear that capitalism had entered a new imperialist epoch, and that imperialist war can only be opposed through the revolutionary class struggle for socialism.

Lenin became an influential party leader, but was, at the end of the day, a party member like any other. He faced criticisms, sometimes found himself in the minority, and had to struggle to get his views across. Gavril Miasnikov, a young militant who joined the Bolsheviks in 1906, described the life of the party from its inception up until 1921 in the following words:

The Bolsheviks were not afraid of criticism, or of counter-criticism, or their consequences. Down with all icons! There is no prohibition of criticism in the congresses, conferences, local or central committees. On the contrary! The Bolsheviks had the courage to protect the exercise of a comprehensive right of minorities to publish texts directed against the party’s institutions, and thus sought to fortify the struggle, to keep it free and clear of all charlatanry, all gossip and all scandal, to situate it at the level that is in conformance with a struggle of convictions. ... Between 1905 and 1917, this Bolshevik practice passed through the crucible of three revolutions. The internal structure of the party was strictly bound to the living forces of the revolution, and this led to the greatest and most glorious

victories that the world has ever seen.

Miasnikov, *The Latest Deception*, 1930

The premise of October was always the relatively quick extension of the revolution outside Russia’s borders. An economically backward revolutionary bastion could do little more than provide inspiration for the working class elsewhere:

Soviet power is a new type of state without a bureaucracy, without police, without a regular army ... In Russia this has scarcely begun and has begun badly. ... We must show the European workers exactly what we have set about, how we have set about it, how it is to be understood; that will bring them face to face with the question of how socialism is to be achieved. They must see for themselves—the Russians have started on something worth doing; if they are setting about it badly we must do it better. ... we are confident that the European workers will be able to help once they have entered on that path. They will do what we are doing, but do it better, and the centre of gravity will shift from the formal point of view to the concrete conditions.

Lenin, *Report on the Review of the Programme and on Changing the Name of the Party*, 8 March 1918

The tragedy of the Russian Revolution was that this help never arrived. In these circumstances, the Russian Communist Party, the Third International, and Soviet Russia itself, increasingly began to adopt policies of an emergency and stop-gap nature.

The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can

contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle. ... In this sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labour in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in this sense, the future everywhere belongs to "Bolshevism".

Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, 1918*

The seeds of the degeneration of the revolutionary process were there from the very beginning. By March 1918 the Bolsheviks were the only party represented in the Sovnarkom, and over the next few years established increasing dominance over the VTsIK (sometimes through the gerrymandering of elections), while local soviets hollowed out. In effect, the Bolsheviks became the only governing party and increasingly the distinction between the party and the state disappeared. By 1922 Lenin recognised that the party machinery had to be separated from the government machinery, but the remedies he suggested never became reality, and were too little too late anyway – only a revival of soviet power could have turned things around, but that itself would have required a revival of the revolutionary wave. New ideological justifications were being contrived to explain the situation (Lenin was now arguing

the dictatorship of the proletariat could not be exercised through the whole of the class, but only by its vanguard, i.e. the party; Trotsky later came to the conclusion that it was nationalised property which made Soviet Russia a “workers’ state”). Meanwhile, party democracy had suffered considerably during the period of the civil war, though even the introduction of the ban on factions in March 1921 did not immediately kill it off. Over the next couple years however the Politburo and the Party Secretariat had become powers unto themselves, undermining the authority of the Party Congress and even its Central Committee. This created a situation in which power was essentially centralised in the hands of Stalin and his clique.

In light of this, we insist that the international of the future cannot be a government-in-waiting. It is the working class at large which builds the new society through the collective organs of power – such as workers’ councils – that it creates in the course of its struggle. The international has to be a guide for the wider movement, and in this sense aims to gain a hearing and exert influence within the collective organs of power, but it cannot substitute itself for those bodies or dissolve itself in them, like the Bolsheviks did. Doing so would mean tying its fate to the revolutionary bastion, and ceasing to be a revolutionary reference point for the global movement if the revolutionary bastion succumbed to capitalist forces.

Another point of contention that holds much significance today is Lenin’s defence of the right to national self-determination. This has often been interpreted as support for national self-determination in the abstract. However, he opposed national self-determination in cases where he deemed it to serve reactionary aims, and posed the question in the following terms:

The Social-Democrats of the oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrasemongering, sheer hypocrisy. On the other hand, the Social-Democrats of the oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations; otherwise these Social-Democrats will involuntarily become the allies of their own national bourgeoisie.

Lenin, *The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, 1915

The second condition is often forgotten by many so-called “Leninists” who, taking up the idea of “united” and “popular” fronts from the degenerating Third International, see no problem in alliances with the national bourgeoisie. For our part, since Lenin’s time we have seen how every national war gets inevitably intertwined with imperialist competition. If Lenin argued that national wars were still possible in the imperialist epoch, even though he knew they could also be transformed into imperialist wars, the development of capitalism has proven Luxemburg and her comrades right:

Some Further Reading:

1. *Reminiscences of Lenin* (1933) by Nadezhda Krupskaya
2. *Moscow Under Lenin* (1953) by Alfred Rosmer
3. *Leninism Under Lenin* (1973) by Marcel Liebman
4. *Lenin’s Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions* (1983) by Neil Harding
5. *Stalin and Stalinism* (<https://www.leftcom.org/>

In this era of unfettered imperialism, there can no longer be national wars. National interests serve only as a method of deceiving the working masses in order to make them useful to their mortal enemy, imperialism. ... The small nations, whose ruling classes are appendages and accessories of their class comrades in the large nations, are only pawns in the imperialist game played by the great powers. They too, like the working masses, are being misused as tools during the war, and will be sacrificed to capitalist interests after the war.

Luxemburg, *Either Or*, 1916

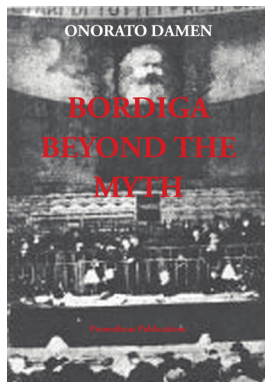
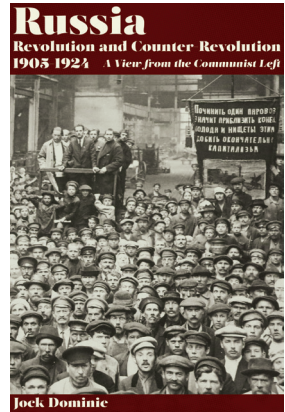
As we always repeat, the Russian Revolution is not a model to copy, but a lesson to learn from. The party-state it eventually gave birth to has left a legacy from which the working class movement has not recovered to this day. And, in the face of the counter-revolution, few of its participants preserved their integrity unscathed, Lenin included. But at a time when we yet again face a deadly drive to war, on a planet made sick by the interests of profit, the best legacy that Lenin could bequeath today would be for future generations to “do it better” as he once hoped workers and revolutionaries outside Russia would.

**Dyjbas
December 2023**

6. *Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists* (<https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2000-10-01/trotsky-and-trotskyism>)
7. *Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution, 1905-1924 - A View from the Communist Left* (<https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-09-09/russia-revolution-and-counter-revolution-1905-1924-a-view-from-the-communist>)

Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1905-1924
A View from the Communist Left £12

The “socialism” that eventually emerged from the 1917 Russian Revolution had nothing in common with the vision of Marx. This history explains how a genuine workers’ movement from below degenerated into a new form of state capitalism. Its legacy remains the discovery of workers councils (soviets) as the basis for a new social organisation, alongside the need for a revolutionary programme to politically unite the class, against all the distortions of the various defenders of the existing order



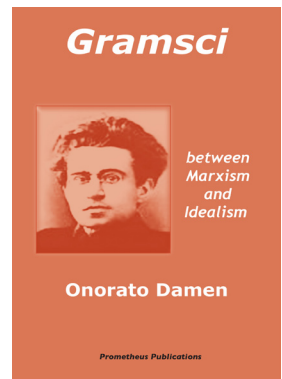
Bordiga Beyond the Myth

£5

Amadeo Bordiga led the fight to form the Communist Party of Italy as a “section of the Third International” in 1921. No sooner was this achieved than he found himself leading the fight of the Communist Left in Italy against the same International’s abandonment of revolutionary politics. Arrested and imprisoned whilst awaiting trial in 1923, Bordiga opted to stand aside from the party’s leadership in Italy allowing free reign for Comintern manoeuvres to introduce a ‘centrist’ leadership under Gramsci. Even so, as Fascism took hold the Communist Left—in both exile and fascist gaols— did not disappear. Bordiga however did. He retreated from political activity for almost 2 decades. The significance of this volume is that it demonstrates that the “Italian Left” was not just Bordiga but a living movement that has responded to the reality of the class war throughout its history.

Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism £7.50

Antonio Gramsci was to become the tool of the Comintern in manoeuvring the Communist Party of Italy out of the hands of the revolutionaries who had founded it. His tragic death in Fascist custody has made him a martyr to many of the reformist left. Damen’s considerations on Gramsci’s shortcomings as an analytical and practical Marxist are an antidote to that. This volume also contains the Platform of the Committee of Intesa (Alliance) of 1925 which Gramsci had condemned.



The Internationalist Communist Tendency

UK: The Communist Workers' Organisation produces *Revolutionary Perspectives* (a six monthly magazine) and *Aurora* (an agitational paper)
BM CWO, London WC1N 3XX

Italy: Il Partito Comunista Internazionalista produces *Battaglia Comunista* (a monthly paper) and *Prometeo* (a quarterly theoretical journal)
CP 1753, 20101, Milano, Italy

USA: The Internationalist Workers Group
IWG, P.O. Box 14485, Madison, WI 53708

Germany: Gruppe Internationalistischer KommunistInnen produces *Socialismus oder Barbarei* and *Germinal*
de@leftcom.org

France: *Bilan&Perspectives*
produces a journal of the same name
Michel Olivier, 7 rue Paul Escudier 75009 Paris

Canada: Klasbatalo
produces *Mutiny/Mutinerie*, a broadsheet in English and French
www.facebook.com/Klasbatalocollective klasbatalocollective@gmail.com

Our Books

Bordiga Beyond the Myth £5
New reduced price as these final remaining copies contain a small errata slip on p.73

Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism £7.50

Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1905-1924 £12
The Russian Revolution remains a landmark event in history. For the bourgeois historians, the October Revolution is thought to be a tragedy that set back the achievements of the "democratic" February Revolution, and allowed the Bolsheviks to wreak havoc on their citizens and the world. For the Stalinists, the events of 1917 paved the way for the birth of the USSR, which they point to as a prototypical example of "socialism in one country". In reality, the February and October Revolutions were both part of the same proletarian revolution

About the Communist Workers' Organisation

The Communist Workers' Organisation is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency which was inspired by the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista). Formed during the Second World War in 1943, the PCInt. condemned both sides as imperialist. Its roots go back to the Italian Communist Left which had fought the degeneration of the Communist International and the Stalinisation imposed on all its member parties. Today there are ICT affiliates in several countries.

We are internationalists. We believe that the interests of the exploited are the same all over the world, and that communism cannot be achieved in one country, a myth peddled by Stalinism. Stalinism was never communism but a particular form of capitalism, state capitalism. After 1917 the economic blockade of the Soviet Union and the failure of the world revolution in the West meant that the revolution was transformed into its opposite, eventually becoming an imperialist bloc that would collapse after only seventy years. We are opposed to all (Trotskyists, Maoists) claims that state capitalism in whatever form is socialism.

We aim to be a political reference point for the working class, first of all for those who are tired of the unions, all unions. This does not mean giving up on the fight to defend immediate interests (wages, hours, work rates, etc.). But the unions are now a tool to control the class struggle and manage the labour force on behalf of capital. Today, any 'self-organised struggle', has to go outside of

and against the unions. However, rank and file unions are a blunt instrument for workers. Even when they win a particular battle if they settle into a permanent existence they must accept the legal and economic framework imposed by the state. Any attempt to maintain a permanent body to defend workers' immediate economic interests will fail.

The only permanent body the working class can establish today is the political organisation, which is not only possible but essential. The starting point for this must be recognising that the general interest of the class lies in getting rid of capitalism. This is only possible through a revolution, i.e. the overthrow of the existing state and establishment of a new form of political power by the proletariat. The road to revolution does not mean the futile attempt to win control of the existing state via elections to parliaments or local governments which are means for the capitalist class to exercise its rule. History has shown us that the forum of our "democracy", the bodies of power of the revolution, will be the workers' councils, (or soviets) – mass meetings in which delegates will be entrusted with specific mandates and will be recallable at any time. But these potentially revolutionary organisations will be undermined by capitalist forces from within if they do not have a clear programme aimed at the abolition of exploitation and, therefore, the elimination of classes, for a society of "freely associated producers" who work together to directly meet human needs.

The programme is not the creation of any single theorist or one organisation. It is the

outcome of the key lessons learned from past and present struggles and as such defines the practical way forward for the working class as a whole. Without a clear political compass the working class movement will be prey to all kinds of capitalist tricks and illusions. Thus political clarification and reorganisation today are vital for a revolutionary party to come into being which is in a position to win over the working class to the revolutionary programme. This is not a party of government that would replace the class and its class-wide organs of power, but a party of agitation and political guidance on the basis of that programme.

We are for the party, but we are not that party or its only embryo. Our task is to participate in its construction, trying to link immediate demands to the historical programme; communism.

Join us! Support the Internationalist Communist Tendency

Free Bulletin of the Communist Workers Organisation Affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency No 61 Autumn/Winter 2022 Donations Welcome

AURORA



Capitalist Crisis: Survival of the Richest

Months of soaring inflation and falling wages are the latest effects of the crisis inherent in the capitalist system. The ruling class stands on our backs and working conditions are just one more attempt to make us pay the price of their exploitation...

Workers Getting the Worst of a Bad Deal

The rise in the price of food, fuel and other items has been steady and unrelenting. In the 12 months leading up to September 2022 food has increased by 24.4% - the highest price paid with every single month seeing a new increase in the same period. The cost of fuel has risen by 20.1%, while transport costs rose by 18.9%. Water, energy and housing related costs rose by 20.7% - although 'housing' can usually be taken as an amount to be paid and received only on some weeks when according to the landlord...



A Crisis with a History

The so-called 'cost of living crisis' is not new. In every generation, the ruling class and its state apparatus has created a crisis deepened in the making through technological advances, but over since the 1970s we have been in downward spiral, with whole sectors of production and jobs dismantled and wages as a percentage of GDP dropping. From the 1980s onwards, the ruling class has been able to exploit the crisis to its advantage...

The effects of the 'cost of living crisis' are not limited to the working class. The ruling class is also suffering from the effects of the crisis, but they are able to exploit their position to survive and even thrive.

Class Struggle is Back on the Agenda

The capitalist class is realising that the workers in the North, like workers in a food plant in Barns, all look restless into their own hands and did not wait for guidance through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the North than in any other region in the UK...

Workers Can Push Their Own Alternative

As the capitalist class is realising that the workers in the North, like workers in a food plant in Barns, all look restless into their own hands and did not wait for guidance through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the North than in any other region in the UK...

that can level the playing field and act against the interests of the workers (such as we saw during the Queen's funeral, our hunger and strikes without even consulting the membership). The workers still need to be able to influence the government, and to be able to influence the government to act in a way that is in the interests of the workers...

As the capitalist class is realising that the workers in the North, like workers in a food plant in Barns, all look restless into their own hands and did not wait for guidance through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the North than in any other region in the UK...

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- The Platform of the Internationalist Communist Tendency** £1
Revised English version (including postage in UK)
- For Communism** £3
An Introduction to the Politics of the CWO
- Class Consciousness and Revolutionary Organisation** £4
“Consciousness” is one of the most important issues for the working class and for revolutionaries. Our approach is unashamedly historical and attempts to draw out the real experience of the working class in its struggles of the last two centuries.
- Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists** £3
How Trotsky, who made an enormous contribution to revolutionary practice, ended up giving his name to a movement which returned to the counter-revolutionary errors of Social Democracy.
- Stalin and Stalinism** £1
The lie that the former USSR was “really existing socialism” remains a potent weapon against the working class. Here we examine the origins of the regime that came out of the defeat of the October Revolution as well as the motivations of Stalinism.
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- Capitalism and the Environment (by Mauro Stefanini)** £2
Translated from Prometeo these show that our late comrade was ahead of his time in analysing the unsustainability of capitalist production.
- Spain 1934-39: From Working Class Struggle to Imperialist War** £3
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- Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925** £3
The start of the Italian Left’s fight against Stalinism as Fascism increased its grip.
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Analysis of class relations in the period after the fall of apartheid thrown into relief by the strike wave which followed the Marikana massacres.
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