

Labour Affairs

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Making Sense of the Ukraine Conflict

What is happening in Ukraine? The British government and its media outlets would have us believe that the hostilities that began on the 24th February were an unprovoked aggression launched by Russia for the purposes of territorial expansion. No evidence is offered for this claim.

The reality is different. The Ukrainian army concentrated on the borders of the rebel Donetsk and Lugansk republics with a view to overrunning them after 8 years of conflict which have seen the death of some 13,000 civilians in these republics. These events and the projected assault on them by the Ukrainian armed forces are the basis of the claim of Russia's president that Ukraine is practising genocide against the populations of these republics. Unfortunately our press, radio, television and government sources ignore this inconvenient truth.

Furthermore, 8 years after the violent coup against the legitimate government of Ukraine, its armed forces have been integrated into Nato command structure and use Nato doctrine, equipment and surveillance and communications equipment. Ukrainian troops train with Nato troops. *De facto* Ukraine is a member of NATO. In assessing these facts there are two points that need to be accounted for.

First the fledgling republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. The populations are largely Russian. After the 2014 coup in Kiev they and other Russian speaking populations in Ukraine felt themselves to no longer be safe in the state in which they were located. They feared not just discrimination, but also destruction of livelihoods and even death. The state whose function it was to protect them not only was failing to do this

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Rishi Sunak's Financial Statement

Early on in his dismal Financial Statement Rishi Sunak said:

"At a time when the OBR has said that our fiscal headroom could be "wiped out by relatively small changes to the economic outlook," it is right that the central fiscal judgement I am making today is to meet our fiscal rules with a margin of safety. The OBR has not accounted for the full impacts of the war in Ukraine, and we should be prepared for the economy and public finances to worsen, potentially significantly."

Because of the current high rate of inflation the government will be receiving more in taxes than was previously expected. This unexpected extra revenue could, within Sunak's economic framework, allow the government to engage in some extra spending without increasing the fiscal deficit. When Sunak refers to 'fiscal headroom', he is referring to this small windfall in tax receipts. Sunak could use it to subsidise energy costs. But Sunak has decided not to spend the windfall so that the government will be in a good financial position to deal with the next crisis.

There are two problems with Sunak's 'central fiscal judgement'. Firstly, it is completely false to state that the 'public finances could worsen, potentially significantly'. The UK is a currency issuing state. It is not financially constrained. The pandemic proved this. During the pandemic Sunak made some £400 billion in furlough payments. He instructed the BoE, via supply orders in parliament, to mark up the bank accounts of all those entitled to payment – close to 20% of the workforce. The Debt Management Office (DMO), as a matter of course, issued government bonds equal to the difference between government

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but was actively attacking them. In Crimea, which Ukraine claims as its own, they have cut off the water supply to those they deem their own citizens. Liberals who revere John Locke and the 2nd *Treatise of Government* but think that the populations of Donetsk and Lugansk are unjustified in their actions, would do well to revisit sections of that work, in particular 225:

“Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient Laws, and all the slips of humane frailty will be born by the People, without mutiny or murmur. But if a long train of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the People, and they cannot but feel, what they lie under, and see, whither they are going; ‘tis not to be wonder’d, that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavour to put the rule into such hands, which may secure to them the ends for which Government was at first erected; and without which, ancient Names, and specious Forms, are so far from being better, that they are much worse, than the state of Nature, or pure Anarchy; the inconveniencies being all as great and as near, but the remedy farther off and more difficult.”

If this is good enough for the aristocracy and gentry of 17th Century England why is it not good enough for the contemporary populations of these regions misgoverned by Kiev?

If this were all that there is to the dispute between Russia and Ukraine, then one would expect nothing more than a pre-emptive

war to defend these states and to restore them to their proper administrative borders. However, there is a further complication. Ukraine is a *de facto* member of NATO with designs on becoming a *de jure* one as well. NATO is hostile to Russia and would like to destabilise and dismember the Russian state. See the report commissioned for the US government by the RAND corporation for more on this:

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10014.html

The north eastern border of Ukraine is approximately 200 miles from Moscow, a trifle for a supersonic ballistic missile, difficult to detect and intercept in the few minutes of its flight. Russia might reasonably assume that this outcome of an entry of Ukraine into NATO would be unacceptable, hence the ultimatum given to NATO in late 2021 which was ignored, with consequences that we can now see. States, if they are able, will take steps to ensure that regions that threaten their security will be invaded or made neutral. In the words of the British imperialist and statesman Lord Curzon:

“Beyond those walls... extends a glaxis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our friends; but if rival and unfriendly influences creep up to it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene, because a danger would thereby grow up that might one day menace our security... He would be a short-sighted commander who merely manned his ramparts... and did not look beyond; and the whole of our policy...

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has been directed towards maintaining our influence, and to preventing the expansion of hostile agencies on this area..."

Curzon was referring to the northern boundaries of India, then a British imperial possession and arguably not a vital British interest. He did not live in a world in which hypersonic missiles existed. Ukraine is on Russia's doorstep and instruments for the destruction of Moscow within a few minutes of launch could be placed there. Western commentators need to revisit their own doctrines and make the mental effort to see the world from the point of view of Russia in order to understand what is going on in Ukraine. So far there has been a lamentable failure to do so which may yet have undesirable consequences for Europe and its populations.

So what should happen? Labour Affairs will refrain from speculation about the military outcome of the Russian operation. A few things are, however, clear. The war represents a failure of Russian statecraft, even if an unavoidable one, given the malevolence of NATO. A preferred Russian solution would have been a collective security treaty which could most easily have been secured by Russian joining NATO, thus guaranteeing itself from attack by NATO powers. It is difficult to see why the informal overtures to join NATO were rejected by that organisation since they would have secured Europe and Eurasia for all the countries within that vast region. The suspicion must be that the US, which dominates NATO, did not want another power to impede its domination of its European subordinates. Another, even more uncomfortable suspicion is that the long-term goal of the US, under the auspices of NATO, is to undermine and eventually attack

Russia with the help of its NATO subordinates.

Failing a collective security arrangement, the neutrality of Ukraine would have been an acceptable option for Russia. This was proposed in late 2021 and in effect rejected by NATO with no serious attempt to consider Russian proposals. There were also further provocations such as the well-founded suspicion that the US was conducting biological warfare experiments near Russia's borders or Ukraine's stated desire to acquire nuclear weapons, which was not rejected by NATO, not to mention the build-up of Ukrainian forces on the borders of Donetsk and Lugansk in preparation for a campaign to retake those regions. Since neutrality did not seem to be an option it seems that the Russian state decided to exert military pressure on Ukraine to declare neutrality as well as to secure the Donetsk and Lugansk republics. Ukrainian neutrality is a major war aim for Russia and a secure neutrality, properly observed and policed would probably satisfy Russia. However, if the US continues to manipulate affairs in Ukraine so that peace negotiations are impossible or even so that the country collapses into anarchy, it may be that Russia will try to set up further independent republics

in Russophone areas, for example along the Black Sea, an area of strategic importance for the Russians. They do not wish to occupy Ukraine in whole or in part, realising what an economic and politically debilitating move that would be. The US would be delighted by such an outcome.

It is difficult to see why Britain and the EU states have gone along with a policy of such hostility towards Russia. They stand to lose their own economic well-being in an energy and resources crunch resulting from the sanctions which they themselves are imposing on Russia and to increase their dependency on energy from the US. One can see why US interests would greatly benefit from the dependency of Europe and the overstretching of Russia but there cannot be anything in this policy for the working population of Europe. The sooner they wake up to what is being done in their name the better.

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spending and tax receipts. Most of these bonds were bought by the BoE which simply expanded its balance sheet by creating the money that the government needed to pay for furlough.

If there was another pandemic in 2023, the government could do exactly the same. The fact that it has increased national debt by £400 billion in 2020-2-22 in no way limits its ability to increase it in the future. A currency creating state is not financially constrained. It is resource constrained. Despite having limitless money Sunak could not, at the start of the pandemic, get his hands on PPE.

The second problem with Sunak's claim that the government is financially constrained is that the Labour Party shares that belief. In her September 2021 conference speech some 6 months ago Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves stated

"Labour won't be making promises we can't keep or commitments we can't pay for. That is why we would put in place fiscal rules that will bind the next Labour government to ensure we always spend wisely and keep debt under control, so that we have the means to transform schools, hospitals and communities, and pay for investment in the new industries and jobs that our country desperately needs."

However, in her response to Sunak's Financial Statement, Reeves took the decision to present a more nuanced expression of that view in the context of the need to support public services:

"Growth is essential for funding our public services, keeping taxes under control and keeping a handle on

public finances too. That is why Labour has announced a tough set of fiscal rules to get our debt and our deficit down. The truth is that, because of the Government's failure to get the economy growing, the Chancellor has had to put up taxes on families and businesses a staggering 15 times."

While continuing to pay lip service to her irrelevant fiscal rules, Reeves has realised it is more politically sensible today to concentrate on the significant drop in peoples living standards caused by the current inflation. Reeves has proposed that the government subsidises energy costs by a windfall tax on energy companies. Which is fair enough. The huge increase in profits being earned by the oil companies has nothing to do with their business acumen and is entirely due to the hostilities in Ukraine and the monopoly powers of OPEC. But Reeves's suggestion that Labour will avoid fiscal deficit problems by increasing economic growth, so that the funds to finance its support for public services will come from the increased taxes that will flow from that economic growth, is disingenuous at best and will lock Labour into the same economic framework as Sunak. If the growth does not happen, the poor will suffer what they must.

Sunak's Financial Statement was an announcement of austerity for the poorest members of society – those dependent on universal credit and state pensions. Sunak claims that it is necessary that their standard of living drop so that the state is better placed to fight the next crisis.

Reeves should have directly challenged Sunak's statement that austerity was necessary to ensure that the government was in a strong position to meet any future crisis. She should have pointed out that a currency creating government is not financially constrained and will always be able to spend whatever it thinks it is worth spending. Despite her protestations that she would have protected the poorest in society, since she is locked into the same false economic framework as Sunak, there is every reason to be sceptical that she would have behaved differently to Sunak had she been in power.

Sunak's statement was greeted, fairly universally, as the dismal statement that it was. Perhaps Johnson will use that fact to finally get rid of his chancellor who is determined to oppose his levelling up agenda without which he will lose his majority in Parliament in 2024. He would be wise to do so.

Books, in all their variety, offer the human intellect the means whereby civilisation may be carried triumphantly forward.

Churchill

Black writers, of whatever quality, who step outside the pale of what black writers are supposed to write about, or who black writers are supposed to be, are condemned to silences in black literary circles that are as total and as destructive as any imposed by racism.

Audre Lorde

At Blenheim I took two very important decisions: to be born and to marry. I am content with the decision I took on both occasions.

Churchill

Any clever person can make plans for winning a war if he has no responsibility for carrying them out.

Churchill

Listening to Italy

by Orecchiette

MOSCOPOLI (or Moscow-gate)

Marco Travaglio, Editor of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, a newspaper to the left of *la Repubblica*, commenced his editorial on Putin by taking a slogan from a pacifist demo that happened in March. “*Né con Putin, Né con Nato*” Not with Putin nor with NATO. “*I have always condemned Vladimir Putin’s regime, ever since Silvio Berlusconi went to flatter him and say that he was “a gift from God.”*”

The European Right has made many connections with Russia. Matteo Salvini, *The Lega* leader, is Italy’s very prominent supporter of Russia. He is a man of visual symbols and at one point, until the Pope expressed his disapproval, he frequently brandished a crucifix. In the past Salvini has been seen wearing two versions of T-shirts expressing his enthusiasm for Putin. However, following the Ukraine invasion one bit back. Salvini tried to make a face-saving visit to Poland. When he arrived at Przemyśl, the Mayor, Wojciech Bakun, waved one of the shirts in utter condemnation. Salvini’s trip had been made to express his pacifism, but, said *La Repubblica*, “*he transformed himself into a mockery*”. (09/03/22)

Matteo Salvini and his *La Lega*, plus some members of *M5S* (*Five Star Movement*), have long made supportive contact with Putin and his Party, *United Russia*. In April 2019 Claudio Gatti wrote in *La Repubblica* that Moscow had actually listed the ways that this “*long flirt*” could help promote Russian interests in Italy. They included actions to discredit events or people who opposed the external political strategies of Russia; the encouragement of visits by politicians and influential people to Putin or his senior party members; the condemnation of anti-Russian sanctions; the promotion within regional, national and European circles of favourable comment about the annexation of the Crimea

The Lega at large supported what can only be called Russian demands

with comments such as: “*Russia has many friends in Italy, more than you imagined*” (Senator Segio Divina) or “*admiration for the independence (of Crimea), is a theme dear to The Lega’s heart ... Russia is not a rogue state*”. (MP Claudio Borghi)

One of these friends was Gianluca Savoini, now infamous for this so-called *Moscopolis* affair. Savoini has always had extreme right and fascist political beliefs and writes for the far-right *L’Indipendente*. He was a spokesperson for Matteo Salvini when the latter started in politics. He later went on to found the Lombardy-Russia Association. *Buzzfeed* and *L’Espresso* (2019) broke the story that Savoini and others had met with members of Putin’s *United Russia* Party to discuss inducements to be given in return for their Italian help. A photo of one meeting at Moscow’s Metropole Hotel clearly shows him there. At first Salvini denied that he knew Savoini and the saga is highly discreditable. In short, a deal was cooked up to sell oil at a discount to *Eni*, the Italian energy company. The 58m Euro difference in price would then slide quietly to *La Lega* in time to help their 2019 Euro election funds. The Russians would also receive a cut at some point. Savoini is currently under investigation for international corruption.

There is an undercurrent of anti-NATO feeling in Italy, certainly manifesting itself in *The Lega* but also in *M5S*. Parliament is currently (end March) debating the continuation of and a possible rise in defence spending, currently 2% of *Pil* (GDP). Ex-Premier Giuseppe Conte, who is running for election as *M5S* President, recently said that he supported funding to rapidly increase green energy production rather than defence spending. This pointedly states his opposing position to the previous *M5S* leader Luigi Di Maio, who supports Draghi’s continuation or increase of defence spending. Conte and Di Maio now have an antagonistic relationship which is splitting the Movement.

The sending of arms to Ukraine was also considered during these defence debates. Vito Petrocelli, No 3 in *M5S* and Head of the External Commission spoke strongly about his opposition and how sending arms would make Italy a “*co-belligerent*”. He was criticised loudly during and after his speech. He said, as a dig at NATO, his stand was not out of support for Putin, but an act of pacifism, unlike the NATO blue helmets who had looked the other way during the massacre at Srebrenica. A contradictory position if there ever was one. It must be said that Petrocelli is particularly close to Sergey Razov the Russian Ambassador – more of him later.

Ukraine’s Prime Minister Vladimir Zelensky spoke to the Italian Parliament and Salvini asked his parliamentarians to be present. Not all complied and among them was Lega’s extreme nationalist Simone Pillon. In context, *Lega Nord*, *The Lega*’s previous incarnation, had pressed for independence for the North of Italy. Reading Pillon’s Wikipedia Italian entry gives the senses a shock because first there is a Wiki-warning and what follows is written in the Lombard dialect, rather than Italian.

Yet more – On 25 March 2022 *La Stampa* ran an article: “*IF KILLING THE TYRANT IS THE ONLY OPTION*”. Journalist Domenico Quirico considered whether it would be a good thing morally and practically to kill Putin. He was a little ambiguous in his reasoning and didn’t directly advocate a killing. He said that killing a “*dictator*” was no different to the practice of “*terrorism*” and possibly could be a “*an effective trigger to a worse chaos*”.

The Russian Ambassador, Sergey Razov, was obviously outraged and said that he would be suing the paper: “*Needless to say, this goes against the rules of journalism and*

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OSCE and the Indivisibility of Security

By David Morrison

The [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE) has [57 participating states](#) in Europe, Asia and North America.

At a conference in Istanbul in November 1999, the OSCE adopted a [Charter for European Security](#), Paragraph 8 of which prescribed the basic principles on which security for participating states was to be based. It stated:

“Each participating State has an equal right to security. We reaffirm the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve. Each State also has the right to neutrality. Each participating State will respect the rights of all others in these regards. They will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States.”

The final sentence is very important: according to the Charter, signatory States are free to change their security arrangements, including by joining a military alliance, but only if such a change does not undermine the security of other signatory States. In this, the Charter lays down the principle of the indivisibility of

security.

This important principle was restated in another OSCE declaration adopted in Astana in December 2010. This was called the [Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community](#). In Paragraph 3, it says

“The security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others. Each participating State has an equal right to security. We reaffirm the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve. Each State also has the right to neutrality. Each participating State will respect the rights of all others in these regards. They will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States.”

Russia has argued that, in expanding NATO eastwards to the borders of Russia (contrary to the promises made at the end of the Cold War), the West has undermined Russian security and breached the principle of the indivisibility of security set out in these OSCE declarations. And further eastward expansion is on the books –

the [NATO website](#) says that it has been “agreed that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO in future”.

In an [interview](#) with Russian media on 28 February 2022, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov argued that the West had consistently ignored the principle of the indivisibility of security set out in these OSCE declarations:

“In 2010 in Astana, and before that in 1999 in Istanbul, all presidents and prime ministers from the OSCE countries signed a package that contained interrelated principles to ensure the indivisibility of security. The West “ripped out” just one slogan from this package: each country has the right to choose its allies and military alliances.

“But in that package this right comes with a condition and an obligation on each country, to which the Westerners subscribed: not to strengthen their security at the expense of the security of others. With its mantra that the NATO open door policy is sacred and no one can say “no” to Ukraine joining the Alliance and that it’s up to Ukraine to decide, the West is, deliberately and openly, refusing even to acknowledge the second part of the commitments.

“Moreover, when Josep Borrell, Antony Blinken and many other colleagues of ours talk about the importance of sticking to agreed-upon principles in the context of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, none of them ever mentions the Istanbul Declaration or the Astana Declaration. They mention the Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, in which there is no obligation not to strengthen one’s own security at the expense of others. Russia insisted on including this commitment in subsequent OSCE documents.”

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morality.” Mario Calabresi, *La Stampa*’s Editor, put out a video saying that: “we love freedom and will continue to defend it despite all the threats and intimidation.”

There is obviously more to come on the *La Stampa* story. Also on the votes for defence spending, which could cause the Italian Government to fall. Plus, will Giuseppe Conte be elected as President of *M5S*? He is the only candidate but must receive more than 50.1% of the members’ support. Both Mario Draghi and Conte continue to carry the highest level of support as the country’s leaders, followed by *Fratelli d’Italia*’s Giorgia Meloni. Polls differ numerically but these are consistent ratings. *The Foundation for Subsidiarity* think tank, *Il sussidario*, rates Matteo Salvini’s position as “a flop.”

It seems that Italy could be condemned for these liaisons and corrupt practices, until reference is made to similar happenings in other European countries. Obviously, the UK should look critically and openly at its own Russian involvements.

Finally: a last thought: 86 year old Silvio Berlusconi recently had a curious, informal (ie: not legal) wedding to his girlfriend. Speculation is that she is pregnant. Is this another of Berlusconi’s *gifts from God*?

The P&O scandal

By Lord John Hendy

It's the hobbling of trade union power that's permitted P&O's actions

After 42 years of anti-union legislation, we urgently need a restoration of the freedom of unions to defend their members, argues **Lord John Hendy QC**

THE piece in the Star on Saturday by my colleague Professor Keith Ewing outlined some of the shortcomings of the law and its failures to protect the 800 P&O staff dismissed in favour of cheaper crew.

It appears that an offer said to exceed the value of statutory claims has been made to the workforce with a limited time to accept.

If the deals are accepted, we may never know what arguments P&O might have raised to defend claims of discrimination on grounds of nationality if it is true that P&O has selected for dismissal only those seafarers who are resident in the UK on UK contracts with the company, the overwhelming majority of whom are likely to be UK nationals.

Likewise, we will be left wondering if P&O would have fought the inevitable claims for unfair dismissal.

Such claims would appear to be irresistible given the manner of communicating the news to the workforce, the apparent breach of union consultative procedures under the collective agreements (presumably incorporated into the contracts of employment), the lack of individual consultation, and a "legitimate expectation" of both collective and individual consultation in such a situation, and the breach of the TUPE regulations.

But the compensation payable is limited and P&O may well have

offered to pay the maximum to each seafarer.

It is not known if the government will pursue a prosecution for failure by the company to notify the Secretary of State of collective redundancies, though the fine would be modest. As Prof Ewing pointed out, all this has, no doubt, been factored in by P&O which will have cynically calculated the cost of disposing of its workforce in such a grotesque manner, a cost which it proposes to make good by exploiting new crew on worse terms and conditions. Some have suggested that the government might amend the law, for example by increasing the maximum "protective awards."

No doubt that would help. But it won't deter employers who have calculated the cost of breaking the law and are prepared to pay it in the expectation of future profit. So much for the rule of law.

It is true, however, that the real problem here is the law. The fact is that 42 years of anti-union legislation have neutered the capacity of unions to defend their members.

The single most important law reform here is not increasing penalties for mass sackings without consultation but the restoration of the right to take solidarity action.

P&O ships need dockers, tug-boat crew, pilots, refuse disposal teams, revictualling suppliers and so on. These workers and their unions share the common outrage at what has happened. But, in this country, they are legally prohibited from taking industrial action in support of the seafarers. (Solidarity abroad may not be so constrained.)

Furthermore, the crippling balloting and notice provisions

required before industrial action prevents unions from organising spontaneous industrial action in the face of dismissal without notice, dismissal by ambush.

Unlike many other European countries, the raft of anti-union legislation which began in 1980 (and continued last week with a new levy on trade unions) has also abolished virtually all the mechanisms which would have given some teeth to collective agreements, particularly at industry-wide level.

No doubt the unions' legal teams will push every legal button they can. But what we really need is the restoration of the freedom of unions to defend their members.

That means the legislation guaranteeing the legal space, protected from injunctions and damages claims, in which to organise industrial action.

That is the only legal way to rebalance power at the workplace and give workers the leverage to resist tactics like those of P&O and to fight back against the all-out attack on the wages and conditions of the working class which is now being waged.

<https://www.ier.org.uk/comments/its-the-hobbling-of-trade-union-power-thats-permitted-pos-actions/>

Lord John Hendy QC is chair of the Institute of Employment Rights, vice-president of the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom and president of the International Centre for Trade Union Rights.

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

- NATO as ‘They Who Must Be Obeyed’?
- MICE – a Team of Rivals
- Down and Out in the G7
- P&O: Britannia Losing the Waves
- Slavery: a World Heritage
- Iran and Subversion
- Snippets
 - Hollywood as Foe?
 - Alternative East Asia
 - The World Burns?

NATO as ‘They Who Must Be Obeyed’?

We have just seen a naked display of power by the leaders of the richest nations. One they made when the United Nations was slow to serve US wishes. Just as it was over Iraq.

“Nato, the G7 and the EU are all holding meetings, in a display of unity rarely seen by the West.”¹

They are a rich minority in the world. Maybe 39% of the world’s GDP, 15% of its land area and 10% of its population.²

An average income of more than \$43,000: the global average is under \$13,000.

But ordinary people in the G7 also suffer, thanks to pro-capitalist policies begun by Reagan and Thatcher. The rich get a much bigger share than they did from 1950 to 1980.

And they never delivered faster economic growth.³ Japan’s economic miracle was blighted. China, with a harshly authoritarian version of Keynesianism, goes from strength to strength.

The bitterly anti-socialist world view of the New Right almost collapsed after the half-forgotten economic crisis of 1987.⁴ The immediate fix was a return to ‘social capitalism’. The Mixed Economy: borrowing ideas of state spending and welfare from socialism. The ideas that won the Cold War, when 1920s values were despised.

The Soviet Union never had a gifted reformer like Deng in China. Deng successfully ended China’s own Cold War without silly denunciations of Mao. Khrushchev and then Gorbachev talked as if they were going to change everything, but failed.

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60849917>

2 [https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/groups/Group-of-7-countries-\(G7\)](https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/groups/Group-of-7-countries-(G7))

3 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/the-mixed-economy-won-the-cold-war/>

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Monday_\(1987\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Monday_(1987))

The Soviet collapse gave new confidence to the bitterly anti-socialist New Right. And they spread poverty and war.

Rather than let Yugoslavia into the European Union as a unified moderate-socialist state, the rival nationalities were encouraged to fight each other.

Serbs were defined as villains.

When it counted, in World War Two, Serbs were mostly anti-Nazi. Many Croats were pro-Nazi. They killed Serbs, Gypsies, and Jews in their own independent extermination camps. But somehow the Western media believed that Serbs were the new Nazis.

It worked in Yugoslavia, so why not try it in Ukraine?

The First Orange Revolution was in 2004, and was a flop. The electorate in 2010 preferred its target, Viktor Yanukovich. He was illegally removed by riots in Kiev in 2014, with a large visible role by Neo-Nazis.⁵

The elected regional government of Crimea seceded. They asked to be annexed by Russia, and were accepted.

Two regional governments in the ethnic-Russian Donetsk sought a referendum on separation. The regular army was reluctant to attack them, so Neo-Nazis were used.

Anti-Russian Ukrainians have an attitude that is sadly common all over the world. *Our territory is sacred and eternal*. We cannot give up one inch of it, regardless of who happens to be living there. This despite Lenin and Khrushchev having added regions that were mixed, and maybe more Russian than Ukrainian.

It was done to keep Ukraine attached to Moscow. But now these arbitrary choices are treated as sacred and eternal.

Neo-Nazis also had the sense not to be anti-Jewish while at war with Russia. They could carry on when the non-seceding Ukrainians elected a Jew – though I assume they did not vote for him.

Zelensky and the Nazis and many others share a hostility to those Ukrainians who also feel Russian. Such dissenters were pressured to conform to anti-Russian values. This has been seldom mentioned in mainstream Western media: and sadly, only by the traditionalist right.⁶

A NATO guarantee of Ukrainian neutrality would have made it safe. Likewise for Poland and the Baltic states. The West was warned in 1997 that a NATO march to the east could provoke conflict with Russia. Armen Martirosyan, the Ambassador of Armenia, recently reminded everyone

5 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/46-globalisation/ukraine-kievs-five-day-war-machine/>

6 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-10581335/PETER-HITCHENS-saw-coming-Thats-wont-join-carnival-hypocrisy.html>

of this.⁷

Did experienced politicians with the advice of thousands of experts and spies really miss that?

As I see it, the developing crisis was no accident. It fed into the selfish interests of the millionaire elites who dominate the USA and Western Europe.

People who thought they could get away with anything.

By 2008, bitterly anti-socialist feeling had got a grip on most ordinary people. They let the rich be bailed out when their greedy speculation caused a crisis. Accepted austerity for themselves, and blamed the wrong people.

The crusade against Russia is not in the interests of ordinary people in the G7 countries.

They should remember what Brooker T. Washington said about the racism of the US South.

"You can't hold a man down without staying down with him."⁸

But sadly, poor whites in the US south stuck with a vision of themselves as part of a Superior White Race.

They stay down.

We in Britain and the rest of the G7 are being just as foolish.

See more in my blogs about the G7 and its failures.⁹ And why Putin was right to call the Soviet collapse a Geopolitical Disaster.¹⁰

MICE – a Team of Rivals

Team of Rivals is a much-praised 2005 book about the USA's Civil War.

Or should we say 'First Civil War'? Trump supporters are wondering.

The book tells how Abraham Lincoln united in his cabinet everyone who agreed with suppressing the Confederate's bid for secession.

Kept unity with many Northerners

⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/fbf-c34eb-d722-43af-b160-63d5cd9604f5> (pay site)

⁸ <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/12/08/hold/>

⁹ <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Ukraine-the-G7-as-They-Who-Must-Be-Obeded>

¹⁰ <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Ukraine-the-Soviet-Fall-was-a-Geopolitical-Disaster>

who had accepted slavery for the South. Who had tried to save unity by making Kansas an additional slave state.¹¹

A very different Team of Rivals is emerging in reaction to the G7's anti-Russian crusade. A loose grouping I'll call **MICE. Middle-East, India, China, Everyone else discontented with the G7's dominance.**

The first three have very different values. But none of them expect to change either of the others.

The Middle East is offended by India's treatment of its Muslim minority – but perhaps less than they should be. They get along with China. Beijing's suppression of separatists and Islamic extremists in Xinjiang is fine: they themselves are just as harsh with such people.

They are likely targets if the USA / G7 alignment ever forces obedience on Russia and China.

Most are regimes that don't really accept citizenship: their subjects are expected to obey the ruling family. For now, the West pretends not to notice.

Citizenship was being painfully created by the Muslim autocrats that the West took such trouble to destroy. They were imposing a Napoleonic version of the modern world, just as Ataturk managed in Turkey.

Iraq pretends to have a parliamentary democracy. It is a continuous communal quarrel, not a modern nation. It is a failed state.

India and China share the modern idea of citizenship. India keeps a copy of British politics, but hard-line Hindu culture is winning. The sort of thing the West has denounced as 'undemocratic' elsewhere, even if it does happen to win a majority of the voters.

Democracy means 'rule by the people'. But for liberals, it has come to mean 'directly electing a few hundred individuals, all of them left free to join the elite, if they were not already part of it'.

Often they fail even to govern. Or find it easier to tell one community among the voters that they have been treated badly and merit more.

¹¹ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/52-usa/both-sides-were-racist-in-the-us-civil-war/>

As well as this, they are commanded to match current Western fashions.

In global politics, India and China are sometimes rivals. But when Japan suggested that India was risking its place in the anti-China 'Quod' by not denouncing Russia, Australia hastened to reassure India.

A recent high-level meeting between senior Chinese and Indian officials confirms their soft line against Russia.¹²

Turkey plays its own game. They previously blamed the USA for a failed coup against their current President.

Western leaders are confident that anyone cut off from them, must in the long run face ruin.

Not everyone agrees.

Down and Out in the G7

Would we have had the latest nasty Tory budget if Labour were led by a genuine heir of Corbyn?

The Labour Party was created to defend ordinary people. Nice governmental jobs for MPs should count for less.

They should not be defenders of globalisation. Nor be among those who whine about its weakening.

Myself, I am amused by the great diversity of whines:

"The future of the world economy is deglobalization

"If you are a globalist — someone who believes humanity can best thrive with the abundant flow of goods, ideas and people across international borders — it has been a dark decade. And getting darker.

"Driving the news: The list of affronts to a vision of liberal internationalism keeps getting longer. Xi and Putin. Brexit and Trump. Bolsonaro and Erdoğan and Orbán. Pandemic-closed borders, and now war in Eastern Europe."¹³

Pay no attention to how most of the benefits mysteriously end up with the rich?

Accept without question that any culture that perishes under globalisation must deserve to perish?

¹² <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1256836.shtml>

¹³ <https://news.yahoo.com/future-world-economy-deglobalization-161549777.html>

Be extremely surprised when such people choose to fight back?

I myself regret a lot of what anti-globalists sometimes cherish. But I know who made the big errors:

- 1) the New Right with their dominance from the 1980s.
- 2) Liberals who accepted this abuse in the 1990s.

The liberal-left *Guardian* allows complaints, but not a blunt rejection of New Right economics:

“Under-30s pay the highest price for the UK’s cost-of-living crisis

“The group is bearing the brunt of Covid, inflation and student debt”¹⁴

Because a system that ran successfully in the 1950s and 1960s was rejected rather than repaired when it ran into trouble in the 1970s? Apparently not.

“In the 70s, ‘stagflation’ – low growth coupled with high inflation – put an end to three decades of rising living standards. Now, it comes on top of a lost decade. Real wages are no higher than in 2008, when the financial crisis hit. Millions of households were already struggling to make ends meet. It does not take much to tip them into the red.”¹⁵

The Thatcher / Reagan decision to give more power to the capitalists was a huge error.

The economic troubles of the 1970s led to loss of faith in a system that had run successfully since the end of World War Two.

The Soviet alternative had ceased to be attractive from the 1960s, when the West changed and Moscow prevented change.

Fascism seemed dead: unable to gain much despite massive non-white immigration and rising unemployment.

Fascists in Ukraine are useful front-line troops for the G7.

Have they thought that there might be blow-back when that war ends, however it ends? Just as there was with Islamic Extremists used against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

P&O: Britannia Losing the Waves

P&O, the *Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company*. Aptly described by the Wikipedia as ‘a former British shipping and logistics company’.¹⁶

A heritage of the British empire, long in decline.

In the latest scandal, Britons have been discarded. Other European workers still have their jobs.

“P&O retained staff employed under Dutch and French contracts because these countries’ employment law protections were stronger than those of the UK, said Procter at the RMT.

“The company’s action exposed the weakness of the UK’s labour market enforcement regime, given ‘a situation where you have very large, well-resourced employers that make decisions to deliberately flout the law’.”¹⁷

The Tories weakened protection for workers. Labour under Blair accepted this.

“Why did P&O not fear political blowback over mass sackings?...

“What should concern ministers is that P&O appears not to have worried about political blowback. Why did it think it could get away with it? And what could — and should — ministers have done to stop something like this from happening in the first place?...

“This is a government that has pinned its vision for post-Brexit Britain on becoming a high skill, high wage economy. If a major employer wants to cut hundreds of precisely those kind of jobs and bus-in lower paid agency workers with more precarious employment, it should know it risked severe repercussions.”¹⁸

A sensible explanation is that the talk was never serious. And de-skilling continues:

“Unions warn of job losses if rail firms close ticket offices”.¹⁹

Slavery: a World Heritage

“Prince William expresses

16 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%26O>

17 <https://www.ft.com/content/707d708a-bf0d-494fb54a-ffd754152bca> (pay site)

18 <https://www.ft.com/content/0aacbf00-0958-40bd-985e-0c69d0db1446> (pay site)

19 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60729901>

‘profound sorrow’ over slavery in Jamaica speech”.²⁰

Which is overdue. But also not a simple matter of White Guilt.

Slavery was a crime by the whole of humanity. Probably starting when humans started growing crops and staying in one place. It is also found among modern hunter-gatherers, but not always.

For many centuries, African kings sold neighbours and even their own people as slaves to the much richer Islamic world. The occasional ruling queens were no better.

Europeans in sailing ships were just another market – though selling guns did make matters worse.

Back in Europe’s Dark Ages – not so dark outside of Europe – our ruling class was just as bad. Christian Europeans sold other Christian Europeans to whoever paid well. There was a 12th century complaint about selling English slaves from Bristol to Ireland.²¹ But most would have gone to the much richer Islamic world. And within Europe, the norm was a milder form of slavery that was renamed ‘serfdom’ in the 19th century. They said slaves at the time, as with Richard II putting down the Peasants Rebellion.

Race-based slavery was worse, because the slaves were mostly not allowed to better themselves. It was a result of more democratic attitudes in European society: the poorer people had to be persuaded they were part of a privileged White Race. That they should help keep the non-white population in subjection.

Slavery based on cash crops was also terrible, because it often made economic sense to work slaves to death. A majority of slaves went to the West Indies, and most perished without descendants. African slaves in what became the US South were relatively lucky, they were mostly kept alive and encouraged to breed. But marriages and families were mostly not recognised or respected.

Tobacco exhausted the land, so more labour was needed for new

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/mon-ey/2022/mar/21/under-30s-pay-the-highest-price-for-the-uks-cost-of-living-crisis>

15 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/18/cost-of-living-crisis-big-business-economy-prices-wages>

20 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60856763>

21 <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/before-2018/isolated-labour-affairs-pages-before-2015/slavery-in-the-british-empire/>

lands in the west. The desire for western expansions to slavery led to the US Civil War.

‘Woke’ culture seems to skip over such complexities. Their proper task in rooting out White Racism would be done better with a more accurate account of history.

Iran and Subversion

Now that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is safely home, I feel free to ask if Iran had a case.

She said she was just on holiday, which may well be true.

But Boris Johnson said that she was ‘*simply teaching people journalism*’.²² Didn’t he know that Iran saw this as ‘*propaganda against the regime*’? And criminal under their laws?

I’ve always believed that Reagan acted the bumbling idiot because he knew it gained him the votes of the unintelligent. Clever liberals never could oppose him effectively.

Governments do sometimes sacrifice innocents, to protect those they value more.

Some Britons were certainly out to subvert Iran, and any other country that dared assert its own values:

“BBC Media Action... “The charity was founded in 1999 and grew out of earlier BBC initiatives, including a charity called ‘Marshall Plan of the Mind’. This was set up to encourage ‘high standards of journalism’ in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1990s...

“In 2011 there was controversy in America over the American government’s discussion of funding the BBC World Service Trust to combat censorship in China and censorship in Iran using anti-jamming technology.”²³

*

Snippets

Hollywood as Foe?

“Younger Chinese more likely to hold unfavourable view of US ... “Researchers say that those born after 1990 are more likely to express negative views compared

with previous generations.”²⁴

The article blames Trump. But Hollywood is mostly hostile to Trump, and also losing:

“China Has Turned Its Back on Hollywood. What Does That Mean for ‘Uncharted’ and Other New Movies?

“The Chinese government, which has absolute control over which movies play in its theaters (and when they debut), has recently been ultra-selective about the non-Chinese films it allows to screen in the country’s tens of thousands of venues...

“As of late, the select movies that China’s censors have approved ultimately failed to connect at the box office.

“That was the case with the latest James Bond sequel ‘No Time to Die,’ which made \$64 million in China, and director Denis Villeneuve’s ‘Dune’ remake, which earned \$39 million in China — far less than their studios would have hoped when they were greenlit years ago. ‘Death on the Nile’ continued that trend, debuting to a paltry \$5.9 million over the weekend.”²⁵

I also noticed a shortage of anyone who looked East Asian in the latest *Dune*. Some excellent black characters, which is an advance. Re-watching the inferior 1984 version, I saw what I had missed before – almost everyone fits what racists call the White Race. ‘Fremen’ do not look remotely like Arabs.

The Jackson films of Tolkien were all white, except some of the masked villains.

I wrote last month about the howl some people make about the Amazon Tolkien series being diverse. Now expanded as a blog.²⁶

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Alternative East Asia

“‘Devastated’: gender equality hopes on hold as ‘anti-feminist’ voted South Korea’s president...

“Yoon has blamed the country’s low birthrate on feminism. He has

²⁴ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3170714/younger-chinese-more-likely-to-hold-unfavourable-view-us-says>

²⁵ <https://variety.com/2022/film/news/china-hollywood-uncharted-1235186627/>

²⁶ <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Tolkien-Race-and-an-Amazon-Blessing>

called for the abolishment of the gender equality ministry, which he says focuses too much on women’s rights and is no longer necessary. He has promised to enhance punishments for false accusations of sexual violence, a step campaigners say will deter even more women from coming forward.

“An exit poll showed only 34% of women in their 20s marked Yoon on their ballot paper, compared with 59% of men in their 20s, and 53% of those in their 30s.”²⁷

And it is part of the Free World, in the G7 view.

*

The World Burns?

“Wildfires likely to increase by a third by 2050, warns UN

“The report said governments were putting their money in the wrong place by focusing on the work of emergency services when preventing fires would be a more effective approach.”²⁸

“Extreme wildfires are set to become more frequent, increasing by around 50% by the end of this century, according to a new UN report...

“There’s an elevated risk in the Arctic and other regions previously unaffected by fires.

“The scientists define extreme fires as extraordinary conflagrations that occur roughly once in a hundred years.”²⁹

If you get two or three ‘rare’ events per decade, you need to worry.

“U.S. fires four times larger, three times more frequent since 2000.”³⁰

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Old newsnotes at the magazine websites. I also write regular blogs - <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams>

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/south-korea-gender-equality-anti-feminist-president-yoon-suk-yeol>

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/23/climate-crisis-driving-increase-in-wildfires-across-globe-says-report-aoc>

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-60483431>

³⁰ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220316145723.htm>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/nov/06/boris-johnson-mistake-could-harm-case-for-nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-say-family>

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Media_Action

The Persecution of Julian Assange

A review of Nils Melzer: *The Trial of Julian Assange*, Verso Books, 2022. Part Two.

By Peter Brooke.

Assange Leaves The Embassy

Assange entered the Ecuadorian embassy fit and healthy, a man at the top of his immensely difficult, immensely courageous game. Prior to 2012, following the list of his honours given in his Wikipedia entry, he had won the *Economist* New Media award (2008), the Amnesty International UK New Media Award (2009), in 2010 he was *Time* Person the Year and *Le Monde* Readers' Choice Award for Person of the Year, in 2011 he won the Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal, the Walkley Award (the 'pinnacle of achievement for any Australian journalist') and the Martha Gelhorn Prize for Journalism.

When he left the embassy, however, on the 11th April 2019, the then *Guardian* journalist, Suzanne Moore, felt able to write, in the *New Statesman*:

'O frabjous day! We are all bored out of our minds with Brexit when a demented gnome is pulled out of the Ecuadorian embassy by the secret police of the deep state. Or "the Met", as normal people call them.'

Labour MP Jess Philips commented in the *Daily Mirror*:

'Finally Julian Assange, everyone's least favourite squatter, has been kicked out of the Ecuadorian embassy and into custody on charges of skipping bail after accusations of sexual violence in Sweden.'

The BBC informed its viewers on *News at Ten* that Assange 'took refuge originally to avoid extradition to Sweden over

charges of sexual assault.' *Newsnight* began its report: 'Out of his hiding place and under arrest.'¹ A *Guardian* editorial conceded that he 'has shone a light on things that should never have been hidden' (the *Guardian* of course had done rather well out of the affair) but continued sternly: 'When he first entered the Ecuadorian embassy he was trying to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations of rape and molestation. That was wrong.'

Of course the very moment Assange left the embassy the US unveiled its sealed indictment and demanded his extradition so the *Guardian* knew - even if they hadn't read the revelations in the leaked Stratfor emails - that Assange's anxiety about extradition to the US was far from unjustified.

Everything was done to make Assange look sordid and ridiculous. The *Daily Mail* (12-13 April 2019) was allowed into the embassy to post a story:

'Assange inside his fetid lair: Revealed, the full squalid horror that drove embassy staff to finally kick him out.'²

Subheadings:

• *Photo of Julian Assange's "dirty protests" have been revealed*

• *He left soiled underpants in the*

¹ This account of media reaction is taken from the Media Lens accounts from April 2019: <https://www.medialens.org/2019/assange-arrest-part-1-so-now-hes-our-property/> and <http://medialens.org/index.php/alerts/alert-archive/2019/901-assange-arrest-part-2-definite-creep-probable-rapist.html>

² <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6917341/Assange-inside-fetid-lair-squalid-horror-drove-embassy-staff-finally-kick-out.html>

toilet in the Ecuadorian embassy in a fit of rage

• *On other occasions he left excrement smeared across the wall and ignored warnings not to leave half-eaten meals in the kitchen*

To back this up there was one photograph of some dirty dishes in a sink. And a picture of a very clean looking toilet. As Melzer comments (p. 207):

'Mysteriously, in Assange's meetings with doctors, lawyers, visitors, his surveillance always seems to have worked flawlessly, yet the same sophisticated technology has failed to capture any of the misconduct he is accused of. No photographs or audio/video footage of the alleged soccer games, none of the alleged torture of his cat, none of the alleged smearing of toilet walls with excrement. Nevertheless, these allegations are relentlessly repeated and obediently disseminated by the press until they have taken root in the minds of the public. As a result, when people hear the name 'Assange', they no longer think of the war crimes and corruption he exposed, but only of the tragicomic loser they can treat with pity, ridicule or disdain.'

Melzer however misses a subtlety in the reporting, The excrement on the walls incident is attributed to the Rafael Correa period, before the heavy surveillance began. Of course at that time Melzer tells us (p. 198) 'the former consul [Fidel Narvaez] found it remarkable that, overall, the co-existence of

the embassy staff with Assange had been marked by friendliness and mutual respect for five years.' But *'There was a brief exception in October 2016, when the Ecuadorian government temporarily suspended Assange's access to the internet during the Presidential election, in order to mitigate the political tensions caused by the DNC leaks.'* This refers to the leak of some 19,252 emails and 8,034 attachments from the Democratic National Convention, the governing body of the US Democratic Party, which revealed machinations favouring the nomination of Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders. Accusations that the emails had been obtained from Russian hackers and that they had contributed to the election of Donald Trump were to do Assange and Wikileaks a great deal of harm among supposedly 'liberal' opinion.

Melzer finally met with Assange in Belmarsh prison on the 9th May:

'Clean-shaven, his white hair neatly trimmed, he bore no resemblance to the man who had been dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy a few weeks earlier. Then Assange had looked unkempt, pale and much older, with long, matted hair and a messy beard. The pictures had gone around the world. What the public had not been told, however, was that Assange's squalid appearance had been deliberately staged by the Ecuadorian authorities to make him look repulsive and bizarre in the media. According to Assange, three months before his arrest, his shaving kit had been taken away by the embassy's security personnel - one of countless small reprisals with which they obstructed his daily struggle for a dignified existence.' (p. 58)

While as a UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Melzer would naturally expect his

conclusions and recommendations to be ignored, he was used to being treated in the various countries he investigated with at least formal respect. In the Assange case he was unable to speak to the senior politicians concerned and when he visited Belmarsh, the governor was absent, and when he went to the chief nurse's office *'to have a copy of Assange's medical records printed out ... and to get the prison doctor's opinion on various aspects of his health'* he found that *'not a single prison doctor was said to be present all day. In a high-security prison with almost 1,000 inmates. At the time of an officially announced visit by a UN expert and his medical team.'*

He had announced his visit in advance and that he would be holding a press conference. He thought there would be media interest *'including the BBC, Sky News, the Guardian and the Times'* but found that there was only one journalist present. *'He worked for Ruptly, a news agency affiliated with Russia's state-run RT television network.'* (pp. 61-2)

Melzer submitted his formal report to the British government on 27th May and to the Ecuadorian, Swedish and United States governments on the 28th. He released a press statement on 31st May. In a chapter entitled 'Government denial of reality' he describes the responses he received to his formal letters of complaint. He sums them up with the well-known phrase of Hannah Arendt - *'banality of evil.'*

On 26th June he released the article *Demasking the Torture of Julian Assange*, the article which, as mentioned in my previous article, was refused publication by the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Financial Times*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Australian*, the *Canberra Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*,

Thomson Reuters Foundation, and *Newsweek*. It was at this point that what I have called the Swedish project - aiming to establish that the offence of which Assange was accused was very serious and required to be punished - jumped up to bite him.

Sweden Strikes Again

According to Melzer's article:

'Surely, I thought, Assange must be a rapist! But what I found is that he has never been charged with a sexual offence. True, soon after the United States had encouraged allies to find reasons to prosecute Assange, Swedish prosecution informed the tabloid press that he was suspected of having raped two women. Strangely, however, the women themselves never claimed to have been raped, nor did they intend to report a criminal offence. Go figure. Moreover, the forensic examination of a condom submitted as evidence, supposedly worn and torn during intercourse with Assange, revealed no DNA whatsoever — neither his, nor hers, nor anybody else's. Go figure again. One woman even texted that she only wanted Assange to take an HIV test, but that the police were "keen on getting their hands on him". Go figure, once more. Ever since, both Sweden and Britain have done everything to prevent Assange from confronting these allegations without simultaneously having to expose himself to US extradition and, thus, to a show-trial followed by life in jail. His last refuge had been the Ecuadorian Embassy.'³

In response *'more than 300 human rights lawyers and law professors from numerous countries'*⁴ published an open

³ <https://medium.com/@njmelzer/demasking-the-torture-of-julian-assange-b252ffdc768>

⁴ Dietmar Pieper; 'Serious allegations Alleged Assange victim criticizes UN torture experts', *Der Spiegel*, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/>

later, dated 1st July 2019, accusing his argument of being *'both legally absurd and harmful in relation to sexual violence.'* Melzer replied the following day⁵ and subsequently received a 'dossier' from Anna Ardin calling for his resignation.

Unfortunately I haven't been able to get hold either of the Open Letter or Ardin's dossier and am relying on a short and I think pretty inadequate article in *Der Spiegel* and on Melzer's reply to the Open Letter. According to the *Spiegel* account of the dossier:

'So he blames the victims, writes the woman; it is "a classic patriarchal technique to define the conditions for how 'a real rape victim' should behave". She also accuses the lawyer of slandering her personally and of having partly spread untruths about the investigation, for example about Assange's willingness to testify about the incidents. This is "completely unacceptable, shocking and a reason to end his work at the UN.'

Melzer touches on this only very lightly in the book (p. 265):

'Particularly in the early stages of my investigation I was criticised by many who genuinely feared for the hard-fought gains of the women's rights movement. I was censured by long-time colleagues, lost a research assistant, and received letters of protest from women's rights organisations, lawyers, academics, and even one of the two Swedish women. I did my best to address these legitimate concerns, to clarify my position and to resolve misunderstandings. Most importantly, I made unequivocally clear that my criticism was in no way directed against the women

or their rights and integrity, nor against the description of the alleged conduct as serious sexual offences, but solely against the authorities and their deliberate abuse of a legal process for the purposes of political persecution. In fact, I considered A. and S. to be victims of state instrumentalisation just as much as Assange himself.'

In fact, however, in the passage I've quoted above, he trashes the case that 'A' was trying to bring quite severely and in his reply to the Open Letter, he says: *'While I agree with the prosecution that AA's allegations, if proven to be true, could amount to sexual assault other than rape, the fact that she submitted as evidence a condom, supposedly worn and torn during intercourse with Assange, which carried no DNA of either Assange or AA, seriously undermines her credibility.'* He continues in the book to refer to her as 'A', even though, in January 2021, unmentioned by Melzer, she had published her own account of the affair - *In the shadow of Julian Assange* - under her own name. It was published in Swedish (Melzer, although himself Swiss, reads Swedish) and so far as I know it hasn't been translated.

According to an account, sympathetic to her, in the *Daily Beast*: *'She readily admits to fancying the budding celebrity and even offering him her spare bedroom [most of the accounts I've seen say it was a one-room flat with only one bed, though there has been mention of a mattress on the floor - PB], and writes that she had considered sleeping with him, in part out of revenge on an ex-boyfriend. She recalled thinking at the time, "It might be a pretty fun thing, and no big deal to 'score' with Julian Assange."*' The article continues:

"Julian is in many ways a fantastic person," she told a top Swedish

talk show while promoting her book over the weekend. "But the Julian who took part in the party is totally different from the one who humiliated and abused me the previous evening."

The *Daily Beast* article is headlined *'I'm not a CIA agent. I'm a sexual abuse victim.'* Under the circumstances the suspicion that Ardin was working for the US government comes naturally, the more so when we learn that in 2006 she visited Miami and Havana on a research project for Uppsala University investigating the role Cuban dissidents might play in the overthrow of Fidel Castro.⁶ The US government wanted Assange's reputation to be trashed and that's exactly what Anna Ardin managed to do - very successfully. Nonetheless I think her animus against Assange was sincere and personal. Quoting the *Daily Beast* again: *"Julian is definitely not a monster"* she writes, *"but he crossed my boundaries."* Boundaries obviously much more important than the release of 750,000 documents which included records about the deaths of nearly 20,000 people.

None of that reflects very favourably on a woman who is a deacon, ordained in 2019, in the Swedish 'Equemenia Church' (formed in 2011 from a union of the Swedish Baptist Society, Methodist Church in Sweden and Swedish Mission Church) and author of a treatise - *Political and prophetic diakonia* - in which she declares that 'she wants to see a church that stands on the side of the oppressed.'⁷

There is, however, possibly, a

⁶ See e.g., Tim Elfrink: 'Anna Ardin, Swede Accusing WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange of Assault, Probably Didn't Work For the CIA In Miami', *Miami New Times*, 20th December, 2010, <https://www.miami-newtimes.com/news/anna-ardin-swede-accusing-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange-of-assault-probably-didnt-work-for-the-cia-in-miami-6524400>

⁷ Swedish Wikipedia articles on the Equemenia church and Anna Ardin.

julian-assange-opfer-von-wikileaks-gruender-kritisiert-uno-folterexperten-nils-melzer-a-5d1882b7-945f-42fd-a7a0-ec3012dd886b
⁵ Nils Melzer: *Dismantling the Swedish 'rape' narrative against Julian Assange*, <https://medium.com/@njmelzer/response-to-open-letter-of-1-july-2019-7222083dafc8>

serious issue at stake in all this which I think Melzer may have missed. According to the account by Geoffrey Robinson: *'Sweden has three classes of rape: extreme, serious and minor. Assange was charged with "minor rape" - a contradiction in terms, but that is what the Swedes actually call the allegation against him. It amounted to having consensual sex without a condom, the use of which had been an implied condition of the consent.'*⁸ The allegation against Assange falls into a grey area in which the sex was certainly consensual but something happened which one of the partners didn't like. The more serious accusation concerned a woman whose name is all over the internet but still, so far as I know, supposed to be legally protected so I will call her SW. This was that Assange had entered her not wearing a condom when she was half asleep. She had gone to the police not to accuse him of rape but because after a testy exchange on the telephone (Assange was in the middle of delicate business in the wake of the release of the Afghan logs) she wanted to be sure that he would be examined for any possibility of AIDS (in all the accounts I've read of these much commented events I've never actually found if he did have such an examination). The policewoman who received it, a friend of Anna Ardin's as it happens, recorded it against her will as an accusation of rape.

Anna Ardin had had difficulty persuading Assange to wear a condom. When she heard SW's story and found a torn condom in her room she suspected that the same thing might have happened to her. The torn condom in the end proved to be useless as evidence since it didn't carry any trace of his DNA, but she still brought

three charges of what might be called bullying behaviour on his part. The statute of limitations on these ran out in 2015 so by the time Melzer appeared on the scene, Ardin was theoretically out of it. But she, unlike SW, was ideologically motivated.

The first Swedish prosecutor to examine SW's case - Eva Finné - declared that there was no case to answer. But there were still the three lesser accusations brought by Ardin. Assange presented himself for interrogation to the Swedish police on 30th August. According to Melzer (p. 151):

'Now that Assange had denied the allegations made against him, and since no investigative measures could realistically prove those allegations beyond reasonable doubt, the time has come for the Swedish Prosecution Authority to also close the case of A. - due to lack of evidence and based on the presumption of innocence.'

But that, it seems to me, was, from the Swedish feminist point of view, the point at issue. Famously, cases of sexual misconduct are very difficult to prosecute. There is rarely anything that could be presented as evidence (a torn condom for example). It is the word of the person who claims to be a victim against the person they say is a perpetrator. But if there is a 'presumption of innocence' then the advantage is always with the 'perpetrator'.

Professor Marcello Ferrada de Noli, however, tells us, in his book *Sweden vs Assange* (p. 173):⁹

'I found the following "guidelines" contained in a verdict by Stockholm's Court of Appeal regarding a rape trial. The passage summarizes the praxis used by the Swedish courts for, on subjective grounds, taking the

side of the women accusers. Or in other words, what is in principle regarded as "sufficient" in the Swedish courts for sentencing a man to jail in such trials: basically the woman's version

"Criteria for judgement: "In the absence of direct witness testimony or forensic/technical evidence, however a thoroughly credible testimony on the part of the accuser, in conjunction with what is otherwise presented before the court, can be sufficient for a conviction." [19]

And in "what otherwise is presented before the court" it includes at the highest degree the eventual "expert testimony", e.g. psychiatric assessments of the accuser, performed also in Sweden by radical-feminist gynaecologists which otherwise have publicly declared they fight in their (public service) jobs for an increase of rape-convictions.'

De Noli himself is very hostile to this as a criterion for judgment and he writes interestingly on the rise and influence of feminism and in particular of its theological dimension. Those of us whose memories go back that far will think of Sweden and Denmark in the 1960s as the very citadels of free love and promiscuous sex. There is an interesting book, once, apparently, available on Kindle, but I haven't been able to get hold of a copy, called *A Brief history of Swedish sex: how the nation that gave us free love redefined rape and declared war on Julian Assange* by Oscar Swartz. De Noli tells the story, with a particular emphasis on the coming together of the Social Democratic Party and a particularly virulent anti-male variety of feminism willing to argue its case on theological grounds. In a sense one can see in Ardin's willingness to have casual sex with someone she doesn't know, together with her sense of outrage when the casual sex goes wrong (an occupational

8 Geoffrey Robertson: *Rather his own man - in court with tyrants, tarts and troublemakers*, Penguin Random House, 2018, p. 348.

9 Marcello Ferrada de Noli: *Sweden vs Assange, human rights issues*, Sweden, Libertarian Books, 2014. The book is available as a PDF on the internet - <https://fer-radanoli.wordpress.com/wikileaks-assange/>

hazard, I would have thought) a combination of the two images of Sweden - sexually free and sexually repressive.

But the problem - presumption of innocence vs credibility of the accuser as primary criterion in the absence of hard evidence - is a real one. Melzer may be wrong to imply, as he does throughout, that participation in the US conspiracy against Assange was the only motive for the strange behaviour of the Swedish prosecutor, Marianne Ny.

The Extradition Process

In fact we now come to a brief moment in which the Swedish project appeared to cut across the US project.

When Assange took refuge in the embassy in June 2012 there was no shortage of people telling him that his fear of extradition to the US was nonsense. Quoting from Lord's account (ch.14) *'Two days after he had entered the embassy the Washington Post editorial board wrote that the US extradition concerns of Assange, "the Australian hacker" were just "fantasy"'*. The Australian Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, referring to the rumours of a Grand Jury, declared *'there's not the remotest evidence that that's the case.'* A *Guardian* editorial insisted that *'Miss A and Miss Ware at the heart of this story'* and there was *'no serious evidence that Washington plans to start [extradition] proceedings.'* The *Guardian's* vendetta against Assange is a story in itself, too complicated to go into it here. *'In August 2012'* - the month when Ecuador granted him asylum, Lord tells us (ch.9): *'Reuters falsely reported that the USA had "no current case" against Assange, and State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland dismissed his extradition concerns as "wild assertions" - "He is*

clearly trying to deflect attention away from the real issue" Nuland said.'

But of course the very day Assange was manhandled (video of the event shows at least nine burly men pretending they were having difficulty doing it) out of the embassy the indictment was unsealed and extradition demanded. As Melzer puts it (p. 214):

'For years Assange has feared the United States would demand his extradition as soon as he was to set foot outside the embassy - and for years he has been ridiculed as paranoid and unreasonable for it. But on the day of his expulsion from the embassy, Assange's worst nightmare comes true; the US unseals its secret indictment against him and formally requests his extradition from the United Kingdom.'

At the same time:

'Assange's personal belongings, including professional documents and computers, remain in the Ecuadorian embassy. They are not handed over to his lawyers or to his family or to the British authorities, but straight to the United States.'

Melzer elaborates on what Assange could expect once he landed up in the US, giving a list of death threats interestingly different from the one I gave, quoting from the Wikileaks website, in the previous article, as well as describing what was done to whistleblower and former CIA agent, John Kiriakou who revealed CIA torture methods, including waterboarding (he got 45 years) and to Bradley - now Chelsea - Manning (a story that is part and parcel of the Assange story but I haven't been able to pursue it here). He describes the 'Special Administrative Measures' likely to be imposed on him.

The sealed indictment revealed to the world at the moment of

Assange's arrest on 11th April 2019 seemed, at first sight, surprisingly modest. Assange was charged with 'conspiracy to commit computer intrusion' on the basis of an exchange of emails between Manning and a representative of Wikileaks who might have been Assange, in which they discuss a password that would have enabled Manning to access anonymously material he was able to access under his own name on the basis of his security clearance. Manning, incidentally, had been released by Obama on the last day of his presidency as a way of massaging his reputation, but was back in prison because she refused to testify against Assange. Anyone who feels inclined to mock transsexuals should keep it in mind that this particular transsexual is one of the outstanding heroes - or heroines - of the age.

The maximum penalty for this 'crime' would have been five years. As Melzer comments, however (p. 69), it was pretty obvious that

'the United States wanted to avoid officially charging Assange with espionage, at least for the time being. Espionage being the classic example of a political offence, any such charge would have blocked Assange's extradition under Article 4 of the Anglo-American Extradition of 2003, which expressly prohibits extraditions for political offences.'

Once they had him in the US, land of the free, however, they could do what they liked with him.

It was at this point, however, that the Swedes became a nuisance.

The allegations made by Anna Ardin had, as we have seen, run out of time under the Statute of Limitations in 2015, but the case of SW still had 15 months to run, to August 2020. Under

pressure from the Swedish Supreme Court, Marianne Ny had finally, in November 2016, agreed that Assange could be interviewed in the embassy and submit his witness statement.¹⁰ But she had then continued to procrastinate, neither issuing an indictment nor closing the case. The Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure specifies (Melzer p. 191) that

‘Upon the conclusion of the preliminary investigation decision on whether to institute a prosecution shall be issued ... When there is no longer reason for pursuing the investigation, it shall be discontinued.’

On those grounds the Supreme Court was threatening to take the case out of her hands.

‘On 19th May 2017, Prosecutor Ny chooses the only option that allows her to circumvent these safeguards of the law and to continue to perpetuate the rape suspect narrative against Assange without the required evidence. She “discontinues” the preliminary investigation into the alleged rape of S, but claims that its proper conclusion is rendered impossible because Assange remains under the protection of the Ecuadorian embassy ... ‘ She claims that “to continue with legal proceedings would require Julian Assange’s appearance in court”, thereby implying that his absence is the only reason for not proceeding with a formal indictment and trial.’

Melzer explains that this is totally spurious: *‘the decision to formally charge a suspect never depends on his physical presence but on the strength of the evidence against him.’* He goes on to describe the petty vindictiveness by which, only a few days before announcing this decision and bowing out of the scene, she refused Assange’s request to be allowed, with all necessary safeguards, to be present at the birth of his son (by his partner Stella Morris who had been visiting him in the embassy).

Once the Swedish case had been withdrawn - with the ‘rape’ allegation still hanging over him - all that was left was the violation of the bail. The whole responsibility now lay with

the British government.

Marianne Ny had retired by the time Assange was bundled out of the embassy, but on 13th May 2019, the Deputy Director of Public Prosecution, Eva-Marie Persson, suddenly revived the ‘preliminary investigation’ - a preliminary investigation that had now lasted ten years. So there were now two competing extradition requests, and since the Swedish request predated the US request it could have been given priority. Indeed this was demanded by a petition co-ordinated by Labour’s Stella Creasey and supported by 70 MPs. But as the journalist Jonathan Cook commented the petition amounted to a legitimisation of the US extradition request:

‘This is no longer about an illegitimate US extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.’¹¹

But in the event the question didn’t arise:

‘It took the United States just ten days to put their heavy foot down. On 23rd May 2019 ... the US Department of Justice transmitted its first “superseding indictment”, extending their list of charges by seventeen additional counts under the Espionage Act of 1917. From now on the US case against Assange was no longer some failed attempt to decode a password hash, but plainly and blatantly about espionage - the classic textbook example of a political offence. ... For each count Assange now faced an additional sentence of up to ten years in prison, resulting in a possible prison sentence of up to 175 years. The disparity with the Swedish maximum sentence of four years was now so great, and the US claim to priority had been so unequivocally stated, that a possible Swedish extradition request would have to come second.’ (Melzer, p. 84)

As a result, by the time the actual ‘show trial’, as Melzer calls it, opened on 24th February 2020, the US extradition request was open to the objection that the offences were

¹¹ Medialens account.

political in nature, though they were still mixed up with the very dubious accusations of hacking. This article is already long, and I don’t feel I’ve got the energy to detail the succession of outrages that occurred under the supervision of Judge Vanessa Baraitser. They are given in Melzer’s book and also in the day by day detailed reports posted on his blog by Craig Murray, who actually describes moments when even the prosecution is shocked by her behaviour. But Baraitser’s judgment¹², given on 4th January 2021, is a masterpiece of the deep apparently ineradicable cynicism of the British judicial system.

The defence argued that the accusations made against Assange were political in nature and were therefore excluded under Article 4 of the Extradition Treaty signed with the US. The prosecution argued that the political exemption was not mentioned in the Act of Parliament under which the treaty was passed into British law, and it is British law, not the treaty, that counts. Baraitser in her judgment, predictably following her whole conduct of the trial, accepted the whole prosecution case. But then, quite unpredictably, she refused the US extradition request and ordered that Assange be allowed to go free. ‘Julian Assange Imminent Freedom’ was the heading of Craig Murray’s jubilant report of the judgement.¹³ She justified this on the grounds of Assange’s mental health - that if he was sent to the US there was a very high probability that he would commit suicide. He had indeed told Melzer (p. 67) *‘that he would not be extradited to the United States alive.’*

Needless to say Assange was not allowed to go free because the US immediately and predictably launched an appeal, and Baraitser immediately and predictably refused bail. So how can we account for her refusing the extradition request? Following Melzer’s account (pp. 320-1), in accepting the whole of the prosecution case,

¹² All 132 pages of it - <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/USA-v-Assange-judgment-040121.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2021/01/julian-assange-imminent-freedom/>

¹⁰ It is available at <https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2016/12/julian-assanges-defence-statement/>

'Judge Baraitser laid the legal foundation for the prosecution of anyone, anywhere in the world who dared to expose the dirty secrets of the government concerned, and for depriving defendants of the right to justify their actions based on the public interest. In effect she had set a legal precedent amounting to introducing an absolute duty of silence on classified evidence for state sponsored crimes.'

Had the defence been able to launch an appeal, however,

'the case would be examined by a more experienced and authoritative panel of judges whose decision would be difficult to predict. In order to avoid a full legal review of her judgment by the High Court, Judge Baraitser had to forestall an appeal by Assange's legal team.'

Instead, then of an Assange appeal against a judgement in favour of extradition,

'it would be up to the US government, and not Assange, to lodge an appeal and, therefore, to select the legal questions that would be reviewed by the High Court ... In this scenario, the British High Court would not have to examine any of Assange's legal objections regarding the political nature of the prosecution, the prohibition of extraditions for political offences, freedom of speech or the systematic abuse of process throughout this case.'

The only point at issue, then, was whether or not the United States can give assurances that their treatment of Assange would not be such as to cause him to commit suicide. Meanwhile, attention is focussed on Assange's mental instability, just as the failure of the Swedish prosecutors to bring charges before the time available for all the accusations against him ran out leaves him still under the suspicion of sexual misconduct. And of course he remains in the closest thing the UK has to a Supermax prison.

Melzer continues the story (p. 326):

'On August 2021, High Court Justices Timothy Holroyde and Judith Farley upheld an appeal by the US government against Justice Swift's decision of 5th July [Swift had upheld only three out the five grounds for the US appeal] and

granted the United States permission to appeal Baraitser's ruling on all five grounds including challenging the evidence on Assange's mental health and suicide risk. The main appeals hearing was held on 27th and 28th October 2021 before Chief Justice Ian Duncan Burnett, the most senior judge in England and Wales and, again, Justice Holroyde ... By and large, the judge asked questions of clarification and, at the end of the second day, concluded the hearing without announcing a date for the rendering of their judgment.'

The High Court on 24th January ruled that there was a point of law to be considered and referred it to the Supreme Court. On 14th March the Supreme Court ruled that there wasn't a point of law to be considered. In summarising where we are now, I can't do better than to quote the account by Craig Murray:¹⁴

'In saying there is no arguable point of law, the Supreme Court is accepting that diplomatic assurances are not tested and are to be taken at face value – which has been a major point of controversy in recent jurisprudence. It is now settled that we will send someone back to Saudi Arabia if the Saudis give us a piece of paper promising not to chop their head off ...

'So the extradition now goes to Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, to decide whether to extradite. The defence has four weeks to make representations to Patel, which she must hear ...

'Assuming Patel does authorise extradition, the matter returns to the original magistrate's court and to Judge Baraitser for execution. That is where this process takes a remarkable twist.

'The appeals process that has just concluded was the appeal initiated by the United States government, against Baraitser's original ruling that the combination of Julian's health and the conditions he would face in US jails, meant that he could not be extradited. The United States government succeeded in this appeal at the High Court. Julian then tried to appeal against that High

¹⁴ Craig Murray: Assange extradition: on to the next hurdle, 15th March, 2022, <https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2022/03/assange-extradition-on-to-the-next-hurdle/>

Court verdict to the Supreme Court, and was refused permission.

'But Julian himself has not yet appealed to the High Court, and he can do so, once the matter has been sent back to Baraitser by Patel. His appeal will be against those grounds on which Baraitser initially found in favour of the United States. These are principally:

- the misuse of the extradition treaty which specifically prohibits political extradition;
- the breach of the UNCHR Article 10 right of freedom of speech;
- the misuse of the US Espionage Act
- the use of tainted, paid evidence from a convicted fraudster who has since publicly admitted his evidence was false [a detail of the story I haven't discussed - PB]
- the lack of foundation to the hacking charge

'None of these points have yet been considered by the High Court. It seems a remarkably strange procedure that having been through the appeals process once, the whole thing starts again after Priti Patel has made her decision, but that is the crazy game of snake and ladders the law puts us through. It is fine for the political establishment, of course, because it enables them to keep Julian locked up under maximum security in Belmarsh ...

'On the brighter side, it means that finally, in a senior court, the arguments that will really matter will be heard. I have always felt ambivalent about arguments based on Julian's health, when there is so much more at stake, and I have never personally reported the health issues out of respect for his privacy. But now the High Court will have to consider whether it really wishes to extradite a journalist for publishing evidence of systematic war crimes by the state requesting his extradition.

'Now that will be worth reporting.'

Italian Airport Workers Stop Arms Shipment to Ukraine Under Guise of “Humanitarian Aid” Carry Out Protest

We strongly denounce this genuine forgery, which cynically uses “humanitarian” cover to continue fueling the war in Ukraine

Italian, workers discovered that weapons were being shipped to Ukraine under the pretence of sending “humanitarian aid” and have refused to hand them over. Their example should serve as a model for all workers on how to take action against the war.

The war in Ukraine is creating an arms race with constant sabre-rattling in the U.S. and Europe. Countries are massively ramping up their own military budgets, many more still are sending weapons to Ukraine. According to the [Unione Sindacale di Base \(USB\)](#), workers at Galileo Galilei Airport in Pisa, Italy discovered boxes full of “weapons of all kinds, ammunition and explosives.” They had previously been informed that the delivery contained humanitarian goods such as food and medicine. The airport workers then refused to send the weapons to Ukraine via Poland.

[USB reports](#) that the chairman of Tuscany airports, Mario Carrai, has since assured that there will be no more arms shipments through Pisa airport. However, USB continues to call on workers to block all arms shipments. Next Saturday, USB is organizing a demonstration at Galileo Galilei Airport with the slogan “From Tuscany: Bridges of Peace instead of Flights of War.”

<https://labourheartlands.com/italian-airport-workers-stop-arms-shipment-to-ukraine-under-guise-of-humanitarian-aid-carry-out-protest/>

<https://labourheartlands.com>

WHEN JOURNALESE BECAME WORLD NEWS

Let me ask you a question:

The ground is still squishy where a million lie in Iraq,
the soft bones gone of a quarter million babes
under five through sanctions, dried flesh still on the
Guantanamo torture racks.

Blood and tears in equal measure still torments Afghanistan.
Gaddafi’s adopted toddler daughter dead in a British
air-strike, he himself knife-raped to death, the hollow,
echoing laugh of an also-ran Clinton, Madeline Albright
says the under-five deaths were worth it,
Television cameras welcomes back British pilots, with
their wives and children, at an airbase... ?

Let me interrupt you there.

I’m not finished.

You call that a question?

Here’s another question: What’s special about the Ukrainian civilian?

You’re accusing me of favouring the blue-eyed blond-haired.

I’m accusing you of wanting more of them under the rubble.
A long war can bog down Russia, ending its development.

Turn this recording off.. !

Lastly, why can’t I hear or read a different point of view?

Erase this interview right now!

You’re running a propaganda campaign.

Erase now, I said?

Once propaganda starts it becomes a plague.

Remember what happened to Solomon Grundy?

Who?

He died in the Great Plague of London in 1665.

Then he’s cancelled, erased!

Born on Monday

Joined the mercenaries on Tuesday.

Reached Ukraine on Wednesday

Got wounded with the Azov Brigade on Thursday

Festered on Friday

Died on Saturday

Liz Truss lays him a Whitehall wreath on Sunday.

That was the end of Solomon Grundy.

Wilson John Haire. 21st March, 2022.

NATO, Ukraine and the Labour Party

By Michael Murray

(1) Introduction "Time to get your mind right on NATO, boy!"

(2) Stop The War fights back

(3) Jack F Matlock: "I was there: NATO and the origins of the Ukraine crisis"

(4) George L Kennan: Another who was there.

(5) NATO: "To keep Russians out, Americans in and Germans down"

(1) Introduction "Time to get your mind right on NATO, boy"

Keir Starmer was quoted in the 28 February, 2022, Huffington Post as threatening: "Any member who attacked the organisation (ie NATO) would have their Labour Party membership scrapped."

A Labour Party spokesperson was quoted as having said: "With Keir Starmer's leadership there will never be any confusion about whose side Labour is on - Britain, NATO, freedom and democracy - and every Labour MP now understands that."

The implications for Labour MPs, members - and Jeremy Corbyn, in particular - as well as Stop The War, which had come in for a vicious Starmer attack, were discussed in last month's LA as was the relationship of NATO to the Military Industrial Complex and the emergence of post-Cold-War neo-con politics. (Link: "On the Edge in Ukraine," Labour Affairs, March 2022).

In this issue, we take a closer look at NATO in the light of events in and around Ukraine, and the official Labour stance on it - mostly through the eyes of two leading US State Department career diplomats, both former Ambassadors to the Soviet Union - George Kennan and Jack Matlock - both acknowledged Russian experts. The first, Kennan, was one of the chief architects of the US foreign policy thinking that created NATO, and lived to regret what it became in the hands of the post-Cold-War neo-cons and greedy armament industry.

(2) Stop The War fights back

While condemning the Russian incursion into Ukraine in late February

the "Stop The War" coalition (STW) issued a statement which included apportioning a large part of the blame to NATO for the Ukraine crisis.

"We refute the idea that NATO is a defensive alliance," it read, "and believe its record in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia and Libya over the last generation, not to mention the US-British attack on Iraq clearly proves otherwise."

And, more, pointedly:

"NATO should call a halt to its eastern expansion and commit to a new security deal for Europe which meets the needs of all states and peoples."

That led to unprecedented action being taken against Labour MPs and threats issued to Labour members by Labour's leadership, and a full frontal attack on STW, as reported here last month.

Since then, STW has issued a number of rebuttals, including one that reminded the Labour Party of two relevant facts:

STW was right about the Afghan war and occupation. It was right about the Iraq invasion. It was right about the regime change war against Libya. And: "In all these conflicts we correctly anticipated the disasters that would ensue when the Labour Leader of the day was urging war."

"Doubtless for that reason, when Labour members were surveyed in early 2020 as to which campaigning organisations they most supported, STW was a runaway leader." Perhaps, STW concedes, that position "will have eroded somewhat under pressure of Keir Starmer's unending war on the party he leads, but it remains a potent trend within the Party."

"Opposition to war, nuclear weapons and, to a lesser extent, NATO, have been part of Labour's political culture for generations," STW also pointed out.

"But now," it continued, "they appear a menace to the politically vacuous, instinctively illiberal policeman moonlighting as Leader of the Opposition. A man who holds NATO above the NHS as a Labour 'achievement'."

Fighting talk from a pacifist movement.

Labour has returned to the bleakest days of the Cold War, writes Andrew Murray, STW leading light, when dissent on international matters was

crushed and excluded. It ought to be offering a practical programme for de-escalation beyond the essential Russian withdrawal, lest - as he is not far out in suggesting - "this crisis threatens a still more terrible conflagration." (LINK: Andrew Murray, Menace to Democracy: Starmer's sordid campaign against the anti-war movement, "STW website, 9 March, 2022).

(3) Jack F Matlock: "I was there: NATO and the origins of the Ukraine crisis"

Writing on the eve of the Russian incursion into Ukraine, Jack F. Matlock, career diplomat and Soviet affairs expert who was US Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the critical years 1987 to 1991 and participated in the negotiations that ended the Cold War, felt obliged to put the record straight on exactly what happened at that historic juncture. In an article entitled "I was there: NATO and the origins of the Ukraine crisis" he poses, then addresses, three questions:

(1) Was the current Ukrainian crisis avoidable?

(2) Was it predictable?

(3) Most provocatively - and apposite: Was this crisis wilfully precipitated?

To (1): was it avoidable? Unequivocally, he answers "Yes."

"Despite the prevalent belief held by both the Washington(DC) foreign policy establishment and most of the Russian public, the US did not support, much less cause the breakup of the Soviet Union. We supported the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania," and, he points out: one of the last acts of the Soviet parliament was to legalise their claims to independence.

"Putin has never threatened to re-absorb the Baltic countries or to claim any of their territories, though he has criticised some that denied ethnic Russians the full rights of citizenship, a principle that the EU is pledged to enforce."

"Since Putin's demand is an assurance that NATO will take no further members, and specifically not Ukraine or Georgia, obviously there would have been no basis for the present crisis if there had been no expansion of the alliance following the end of the Cold War, or if the expansion had occurred in harmony with building a

security structure in Europe that included Russia.”

To (2): was it predictable? His answer: “Absolutely.”

He goes on to describe NATO expansion as the most profound strategic blunder made since the end of the Cold War. When, in 1997, the question of adding more NATO members came up he was asked to testify before a Senate Foreign Relations Committee to which, *inter alia*, he said the following:

“Far from improving the security of the US, its allies and the nations that wish to enter the Alliance, it could well encourage a chain of events that could produce the most serious threat to this nation since the Soviet Union collapsed.”

He also spoke about the existential threat to life on earth posed by the combined stock of nuclear weapons.

“The plan to increase the membership of NATO fails to take account of the real international situation following the end of the Cold War and proceeds in accord with a logic that only made sense during the Cold War”...

“If NATO is to be the principal instrument for unifying the continent, then logically the only way it can do so is by expanding to include all European countries. But this does not appear to be the aim of the administration, and even if it is, the way to reach it is not by admitting new members piecemeal.”

There follows a longer comment on the issue of whether there was an express NATO commitment to not encroaching on the former Soviet ‘sphere of influence’.

“President Bush also assured Gorbachev during their meeting in Malta, December 1989, that if the countries of Eastern Europe were allowed to choose their future orientation by democratic processes, the US would not “take advantage” of that process. (Obviously, bringing countries into NATO that were then in the Warsaw Pact would be ‘taking advantage.’)

“The following year, Gorbachev was assured, though not in a formal treaty, that if a unified Germany was allowed to remain in NATO there would be no movement of NATO jurisdiction to the East, “not one inch.”

Lastly (3) Was the crisis precipitated?

“Alas, the policies pursued by Presidents George W Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden have all contributed to bringing us to this point.

“Adding countries in Eastern Europe continued during the G W Bush administration but that was not the only

thing that stimulated Russian objection. At the same time, the US began withdrawing from the arms control treaties that had tempered, for a time, an irrational and dangerous arms race and were the foundation agreements for ending the Cold War.

“The most significant was the decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which had been the cornerstone treaty for the series of agreements that halted for a time the nuclear arms race. (Link: Jack F Matlock, Jr, ACURA VIEWPOINT: “Today’s Crisis over Ukraine,” 14 February, 2022 : ACURA = American Committee for Us-Russia Accord) My emphasis in Bold: MM.) (Link: YouTube: Democracy Now! “Ex-US Ambassador to USSR: Ukraine Crisis comes directly from Post-Cold War Push to Expand NATO”)

(4) George Kennan: Another who was there.

On 2 May, 1998, after the US Senate ratified NATO expansion, against the advice of Jack Matlock discussed above, Thomas L Friedman of The New York Times made a call to George Kennan for his view on that decision.

Kennan is considered the architect of the US “containment” of the Soviet Union. Like Matlock, he was a State Department lifer, Russia expert and, also like Matlock, US Ambassador to the Soviet Union for a time.

Kennan called NATO expansion a “tragic mistake ... for which there was no reason whatsoever.”

“Our differences in the Cold War,” he told Friedman, “were with the Soviet Communist regime. And now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that Soviet regime. And Russia’s democracy far advanced, if not farther, as any of these countries we’ve signed up to defend from Russia.” (my emphasis. MM)

(May I, a perplexed foot soldier, ask, in parenthesis: How do those who participate in the unparalleled current alienation and demonisation of the whole people - its diaspora, and, even its dead generations - square it with the historical veracity of the point made by Kennan in the highlighted paragraph above? The cognitive dissonance engendered by “manufactured consent” seems to be the only answer. And it is a depressing comment on our body politic.)

And, with the outcome of the war in the Ukraine still the subject of speculation, we’ll end this piece with George

Kennan’s most prescient observation:

“Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then (the NATO expanders) will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are - but this is just wrong.” (my emphasis in bold” MM)

(LINK: (Thomas L Friedman, “This is Putin’s War. But America and NATO aren’t innocent Bystanders”, NYT, 21 February, 2022) (LINK; YouTube: ‘Why is Ukraine the West’s Fault?’ Featuring John Mearsheimer, University of Chicago)

(4) NATO: “To keep Russians out, Americans in and Germans down.”

Friedman ended the NYT account of the Kennan interview with: “And that is EXACTLY what happened.” (NYT capitals)

Perhaps we should too - but that would put us at odds with Labour’s official line and we’d risk being “scrapped.”

So, we’ll end on another note: a more appropriate final thought on what has gone before.

Discussion of the purpose of NATO, as its *modus operandi*, including flooding eastern Europe with billions of dollars of “defensive” weaponry, which “won’t go away,” when the Ukraine conflict ends has come under some criticism. And this frequently throws up the unattributed line: “NATO was conceived to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down.”

Fact-checking for this article found the author was none other than NATO’s First General Secretary, Lord Hastings Ismay.

He’d have to be British, with that trademark Palmerstonian calculus. And Churchill-sponsored, as indeed, the record shows, he was.

Is Lord Ismay’s pithy quote as relevant now as then? Think Nord stream 2.

And how does it square with what official Labour would have us believe about NATO, Labour’s part in its conception and current reincarnation - and that version of history to be mandatory?

In an organisation that purports to be ‘democratic socialist’?

And on pain of expulsion?

Russia's Objectives in Ukraine — Reality and Media Myths

By Eamon Dyas

A Letter to the Editor, 30 March 2022

Pentagon Press Secretary:

"Up until recently, we had still assessed that their [Russia] plan was to occupy and annex Ukraine" - 29 March 2022.

That's been the baseline of the US/NATO narrative from the start. It was necessary to construct it in order to project Russian intentions into an area where Kiev's irresponsible behaviour and the US/NATO encouragement of it could not be properly judged by the public.

Russia was intent on invading Ukraine with the simple purpose of annexing it. No other explanation has been given any room in the media's narrative and therefore no alternative explanation of Russia's actions is possible.

The media's narrative has been sustained despite the multiple times that Russia had stated its objectives do not include either the occupation or annexation of the country. Its objectives are related to its concerns about Ukraine's relationship with NATO - concerns that were arrogantly dismissed by US/NATO in the build-up to the incursion.

The media's narrative has been sustained even though it would have been impossible for the 150,000 Russian troops to have temporarily taken over, let alone occupy the whole of Ukraine.

The narrative was sustained even though the predicted Russian invasion did not take place in December - the time when all US/NATO military opinion was predicting it would happen as that was the point at which the West's reliance on Russian energy supplies was at its height and before the flood of NATO armaments into the country had taken place.

The narrative was sustained even though the Russian incursion was not initiated by any blitzkrieg or "Shock and Awe" operation similar to what the US/U.K. did in Iraq where the objective was indeed to occupy the

country.

It was sustained even though Russia did not utilise its airpower to anything approaching what would be required by a full-scale invasion.

It was sustained even though Russia avoided critically damaging Ukraine's railway infrastructure.

Then, rather than admit that all the evidence was pointing to a different and far more limited Russian objective, the US/NATO narrative was twisted and contorted into an explanation of the evidence in a way that defied all logic.

Questions were asked from the outset about Russia's failure to initiate the necessary Blitzkrieg / Shock and Awe strategy. But answers to that question were only treated with any validity if they could be shoe-horned into the, by now, established narrative. The absence of a Russian blitzkrieg was because of a failure of Russian military machinery or a failure to establish supply lines.

How such failures could be consistent with the fact that the Russian troops were on Ukraine's borders for months presumably in preparation for an invasion and yet failed to put in place reliable machinery and adequate lines of supply was never explained or indeed never asked by our journalists and media.

Similar questions were raised by the failure of Russia to engage anything like its full airpower in this "invasion". But again the answers could only be ones that could be shoe-horned into the existing narrative. It was because of the efficiency of the mobile anti-aircraft systems that NATO had supplied Ukraine before the invasion. How such mobile anti-aircraft systems had the range to reach and shoot down Russian aircraft which had the capacity of hitting a "beyond the horizon" target was never explained. While such anti-aircraft systems can

be effective in curtailing enemy air activity in certain scenarios they are not capable of seriously diminishing the air strategy of a determined first rate military power with all the capacity and technology available to the Russian Air Force.

Then, after taking weeks to move its columns of tanks to the outskirts of Kiev, the Russians stopped without mounting any serious assault on the city - something that would be required if the objective was to occupy and annex the country - the only explanation that was deemed acceptable was again the shoe-horn one. It was because of a failure of Russian generalship, a failure of Russian troop morale, and of course the heroic efforts of the Ukrainian army.

These are all explanations that might explain the frustration of a full-blown effort by an enemy to take Kiev. They are all explanations that would be valid if there was evidence that such was the Russian objective. But as it happens there is no such evidence. We were never provided with any estimate of the numbers of troops that Russia had "thrown at" Kiev in its effort to take the city. We knew that tanks were in the outskirts but these tanks quickly assumed the strategy associated with a static "digging in" (it was admitted that they fanned out in the surrounding woodland) rather than adopting formations that would indicate providing cover for a troop assault. And where was all the necessary artillery and air support? By everyone's admission relatively few shells have "rained down" on Kiev.

The truth is that there was never anything like the number of Russian troops outside Kiev that would be necessary to take the city for the simple reason that it had never been

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A Transitory Inflation?

Martin Seale

The price of many of the goods that the typical consumer buys is higher than it was a year ago. Is this inflation? The last time we had inflation in the UK was in the 70s and 80s. But is what happened then similar to what is happening now?

In the early 70s there were dramatic increases in the prices of oil and gas. These increases meant that the real incomes of the working class would fall. The working classes refused to accept this drop in their real incomes. They demanded and were strong enough to get increases in wages that protected their real wages. The profits of employers fell. They were, however, also unwilling to accept this drop in profits and so increased the prices at which they sold their products.

Workers perceived these price increases as another reduction of their real wages and demanded further wage increases. Britain became involved in a wage-price spiral with increasing inflation as workers and employers fought over how the reduction in incomes triggered by the initial increase in energy prices would be distributed between workers and capitalists.

The inflationary spiral was caused by the struggle over distribution and not by the initial increase in the price of energy. The latter caused a change in the price level which turned inflationary because the participants in the distributional struggle were both strong.

In 2022, in post pandemic Britain, there has also been an increase in prices, particularly energy prices. Is this increase in prices transitory or the start

of an inflation like that experienced in the 1970s and 1980s? That remains to be seen but the evidence so far suggests that it is more likely to be transitory.

It is transitory because the increase in prices is largely caused by supply problems created by the pandemic and, now, the war in Ukraine. During the pandemic consumers switched from buying services to buying tangible products. Demand for products went up at a time when maintaining production at pre-pandemic levels was difficult because of sick workers and a disruption in shipping goods from various parts of the world. But as this situation eases prices of many goods should revert to pre-pandemic levels.

The decision by the Bank of England to increase interest rates is probably not helpful. It is true that it will reduce the willingness of people to borrow to finance consumption. But the main problems that need to be dealt are supply problems. An increased interest rate will actually hinder attempts by businesses to rectify these supply problems.

Could the inflation that is currently transitory become more permanent? That's unlikely. To become permanent, workers would have to fight to protect

their real wages. Some of the more powerful groups of workers may engage in such a fight. But the vast majority will not feel that they are in a position to engage with the owners of capital on how the drop in living standards caused by inflation should be shared between Labour and Capital.

It is unlikely, therefore, that there will be a return to the wage-price spiral inflation that was experienced in the 1970s when workers felt they were strong enough to launch struggles to protect their real standard of living. In the 70s and 80s in Britain over 50% of the workforce were unionised. Today only some 10% are unionised. There are a number of reasons why union membership has declined. Anti-trade union legislation has made it difficult for unions to organise. The nature of work has also changed from large scale manufacturing plants to small scale service industry employment.

Whatever the reason, the drop in union membership means that workers are in a weak position to defend their standards of living in the face of price increases. We fully expect that workers will suffer a fall in their living standards until supply problems caused by the pandemic and war in Ukraine are resolved.

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The only distinct thing he did in the Foreign Office was try to prevent the imposition of a Jewish colonial regime on the Palestinian people. He had the naïve idea that the war against Hitler had been fought to prevent such things being done in the world. If he was still around today, Sir Keir would be obliged to withdraw the Whip from him as an anti-Semite.

Bevin tried to fight a war in British-occupied Palestine that would have been an actual war of defence against Zionist insurrection. He was willing to contest the issue militarily with the Jewish terrorist forces—who tried to assassinate him.

He was opposed in this attempt by his second in command, Richard Crossman, who was of the opinion that Britain, by Imperial action, should have cleared Palestine of Arabs so that the Jews would not have had to do that dirty work themselves.

Crossman also held that all Gentiles were anti-Semitic by nature, and all they could do about it was make a confession of guilt. He would have been at ease with Sir Keir.

For as long as NATO and the Warsaw Pact confronted each other in a routine manner, we saw no point in making protests about it. That was the order of things after the War launched against Germany by Britain and France in 1939, which got completely out of hand until Germany and its allies invaded Russia and were destroyed by it.

The character of NATO changed completely around 1990 when the Warsaw Pact broke up and NATO continued and expanded. As a military alliance without an enemy, it then became a mere instrument of the United States bid for world dominance.

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a Russian objective to do so. And the taking of Kiev had never been an objective because the occupation and annexation of Ukraine has never been the objective of the limited Russian incursion.

That the evidence points to this fact and that the behaviour of Russian forces since they crossed the border in February is consistent with that fact has not stopped the unquestioning media from adding an undeserved credence to the ongoing U.S./NATO narrative that looks flimsier by the day.

Ernest Bevin Founder of NATO

By Brendan Clifford

At Prime Minister's Questions 9th March 2022 John Healey, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, said:

"It was Labour's post-war Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, who was the principal architect of NATO and in particular of its article 5 commitment to collective defence. Today is the anniversary of Bevin's birth in 1881, so today let President Putin be in no doubt that our commitment to article 5 is absolute. Let him not mistake NATO's restraint for any lack of resolve."

Britain used to have a War Ministry. It now has a Defence Ministry. It is a change of name of the same thing. War is dissembled as defence, even if it is conducted half a world away. As defence it is defence of conquests or of spheres of influence.

The *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* was founded as a military alliance against Russia in 1949. It was a defensive organisation against Russian power. Russia wasn't attacking anybody in the North Atlantic. It was not attacking anybody anywhere. It was in occupation of many states in Eastern Europe. It did not occupy them as a result of conquering them. It defended itself against a European invasion and, as a result, found itself in occupation of the regions which had taken part in the attack on it.

The European states which attacked it were Fascist. They were no less European for that. Nobody had made them Fascist but themselves. And they showed few signs of a will to discard the Fascism which they had adopted. It was broken by the power of the State they had invaded.

A great many of them experienced the destruction of the Fascist order as conquest and subjugation, rather than as liberation. Fascism would have continued in them, as it did in Spain and Portugal, if it had not been destroyed by the external power which it had attacked.

The problem against which NATO was organised in 1949 was the survival of Russia against the European assault on it. In order to

survive, Russian power had to fight its way into the heart of Europe. And, having barely survived the European assault in 1941-2, it arrived in Berlin in 1945 and scotched the Nazi system, it did not then withdraw to 1939 borders and leave the countries that had attacked it to their own devices. That is not the way things are done in the modern world.

Europe west of Berlin to the Pyrenees was occupied by the American and British Armies. But these armies arrived late on the battlefield, and they knew that they had arrived at all only because the main forces of Germany and its Allies had been stopped by the Russians and were being driven back.

Russia, by surviving the European assault, had made itself the strongest military power in the world. If it had failed to do so, Europe would have remained Fascist. That was the crude fact of the situation, and it was experienced as disturbing.

Churchill wanted to launch war against Russia in July 1945, but his military advisers persuaded him that it would be suicidal madness, as well as ideologically bewildering in view of the fact that Russia had just defeated the German Power which had been depicted as the enemy of all civilisation.

Churchill lost the 1945 Election. Ernest Bevin the great Trade Union boss, who had built up working class power and had been the Minister for Labour in Churchill's National Government during the War, was shunted into the Foreign Office—where he could be nothing but an Imperialist.

Bevin took part in the forming of NATO as a military alliance against the accomplished fact of Russian military power achieved by victory in the War and not by any act of military aggression after the War.

Six years later Russia organised the states within its sphere of influence into a defensive alliance against NATO: the *Warsaw Pact*.

The group which publishes this magazine was formed in the mid-

1960s. By then the divisions of the world, caused by the fact that it was Russia that had defeated Nazi Germany, had fallen into a routine stand-off between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It seemed reasonable to treat the two bodies as defensive alliances against each other.

What we were interested in was the form of working class power developed by Bevin between the Wars and while he was Minister for Labour under Churchill. It was a kind of power that was rejected by the Communist Party as class-collaborationist and Imperialist—which it was. If it was to be functional, it could be nothing else under British conditions. Capitalism in Britain was not something distinct and identifiable which could be overthrown by a *coup d'état*, as was done in Russia in 1917. It was the general medium in which life was lived, and the tribute of Empire was essential to it.

Bevin built up areas of working class power and negotiated terms with capitalist management, knowing the business condition of the enterprise as well as the management did. That was his way of being socialist in an economy that was comprehensively capitalist. The alternative way of being socialist was to be rhetorical about it, as the Parliamentary critics of Bevin were: Foot, Bevan, etc.

Bevin also hoped to establish property rights for workers related to occupation, but he was marginalised to the Foreign Office when he might have tackled the problem of giving structure to that idea.

It hung around for a while under Harold Wilson but was categorically abolished by Tony Blair. He told workers that they should no longer expect a *job for life*. They were to look to the future as flotsam in free markets.

Anybody might have done the dirty work of Foreign Affairs as well as Bevin did. Nobody else could take his place in home affairs.

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