

The Plebs News

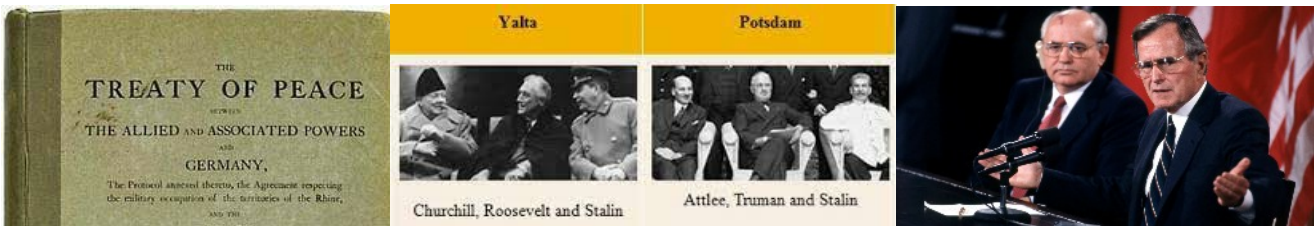


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War in Europe: Economic Lessons from the past, fears for the future



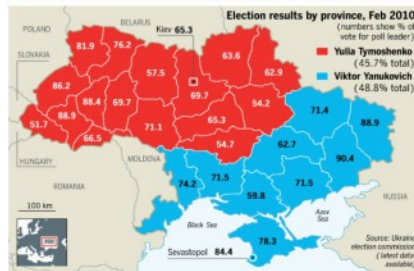
War has begun in Europe again and already has become a conflagration that should make us fear for the future. The fog of war and the management of information means that day to day comment of events is difficult but we can hope that peace will come quickly and we can contemplate lessons from the past that may lessen fears in the future. The three major confrontations of the twentieth century, World War 1 and 2 and the Cold War ended with strong positions of power for the victors and how that power was used set the course for the future.

John Maynard Keynes played a role in the ending of the two world wars, first in a minor role that led to his resignation and the second where the effort of the negotiations helped towards his death. The economic settlement was key to the events that followed and if they had been different might have made for better times. Keynes was so appalled by the reparations and the pain inflicted on the Germans in the Treaty of Versailles that he predicted the inevitability more war. He resigned and in his *The Economic Consequences of Peace* he foretold that it would not last twenty years. If he had been heeded the rise of fascism and the next great war could have been avoided.

Keynes involvement when World War II ended in 1945, the attitude of the victorious powers was different. The Tehran (1943), Bretton Woods (1944), Yalta, Potsdam, and San Francisco (1945) conferences served as an institutional framework for the new order that emerged in the postwar period. The beginning of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union did not shake the central structures, even though the socialist countries organized an economic system apart from the West.

When looking at the policy of the US and Europe at the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the posture of the victors, again resembled Versailles. The imposition of “economic shock therapy” and the Washington consensus saw Russian GDP fall by 50%, life expectancy reduced to below 60 and monopoly assets fall into the hands of a newly emerged oligarchy. This oligarchy robbed the State of assets and capital producing instability ripe for the rise of “strong man” politics.

A country divided **Maidan 2014 : Revolution or Coup and the Seeds of War**



The 2010 election saw the Ukrainian population split with the West voting for Yulia Tymochenko and the East voting for Victor Yanukovich but with Yanukovich as a narrow victor. With the East looking towards Russia and the West looking to the Eu the failure of Yanukovich to ratify a deal with the EU and to look to strengthen ties with Russia saw huge demonstrations in the capital Kiev bringing down the Government. Donetsk and Luhansk formed separatist movements for independence and the scene was set for strife including Russian occupation of Crimea and a seven year civil war in the East with external meddling from outside forces East and West.

Totalitarian tendencies in post-Maidan Ukraine

Turning Ukraine Into Another Afghanistan Would Be a Disastrous Idea

The Economic Consequences of the Peace John Maynard Keynes Macmillan (2019)

Ann Pettifor



Germany's weak economy caused poverty after the First World War, as John Maynard Keynes predicted.



The Treaty of Versailles led the world to recession not only for the losers but for the world, the Crash of 1929, the Hungry Years and the rise of fascism.

In December 1919, John Maynard Keynes published a blistering attack on the Treaty of Versailles, signed in June that year. The treaty's terms helped to end the First World War. Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* revealed how they would also pave the way to the Second.

Keynes, then at the start of his career in economics, had attended the Paris Peace Conference, where the treaty was drafted, as an adviser to the British government. He left in protest. His hastily penned book was, and remains, a publishing phenomenon. Just a year later, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* had been translated into 12 languages, and 100,000 copies sold worldwide. By the 1930s, Keynes had become one of the most influential economists in history. His book has never been out of print.

No wonder. This is a bold, eloquent work unafraid of the long view. It contributed to the economic stability of the mid-twentieth century. And in a world still grappling with the socio-economic and environmental costs of globalization, Keynes's critiques — not least of the era's international financial system, the gold standard — remain powerfully germane.

Keynes censures the disregard of world leaders for the “starving and disintegrating” people of war-torn Europe. “The future life of Europe was not their concern; its means of livelihood was not their anxiety,” he wrote. Keynes, however, was concerned for Europe's future. His book's significance lies in his revolutionary plan for financing recovery not just in Europe, but across the world.

Keynes called for a new international economic order to replace the gold standard, which had held from the 1870s until the start of the war. That system had led to a form of globalization that benefited the wealthy, but impoverished the majority and ultimately destabilized both the financial and political systems. Keynes's plan (the Scheme for the Rehabilitation of European Credit and for Financing Relief and Reconstruction) is outlined briefly in a single chapter of the book.

The phenomenal power of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* is thus very much down to the prescience and originality of Keynes's economic commentary, statistical analysis and radical monetary theory. But character assassination is also part of the mix. The bitterness so evident on the page stems in part from US president Woodrow Wilson's airy dismissal of Keynes's proposals at the conference. The deliberations at Versailles had also inflamed Keynes's animosity towards the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, and French premier Georges Clemenceau. Keynes wrote of Clemenceau, for instance, that he was “dry in soul and empty of hope”. Inclined to judge people by their hands and fingernails, Keynes several times hinted darkly that throughout the negotiations, Clemenceau's “grey-gloved hands” were “never uncovered”. These personal attacks give the book a vindictive tone, which some say he came to regret.

Prescient outlook

For a book published 100 years ago, the contemporary resonance is unsettling. Keynes writes: “England still stands outside Europe. Europe’s voiceless tremors do not reach her ... But Europe is solid with herself.” In another passage, he notes that the “principle of accumulation based on inequality was a vital part of the pre-war order of society”. And in an era innocent of Amazon and containerized shipping, Keynes wrote that wealthy Londoners could order by telephone “the various products of the whole earth” and expect “their early delivery” to their doorstep. The globalized pre-First World War economy was the template for the modern one.

Driven as it was by the international financial sector, the consequences of this economic system were predictable: rising inequality, economic instability, political volatility and war. Thus, a bankrupt Germany and its allies (the Central Powers) — all heavily indebted sovereign governments — were to endure increasingly frequent economic crises after 1919. Their creditors, the victorious Allied Powers, made no effort towards a sound and just resolution of these crises.

Keynes’s analysis of these catastrophic collapses, and his ‘remedies’, provide salutary lessons. Given the scale of current threats, it is instructive to examine the principles behind his scheme, which, despite rejection at Versailles, was to have such a tremendous impact.

Government bonds

The international financial framework Keynes proposed would be governed by public, not private, authority. The idea was revolutionary in that it overturned the existing system of economies, backed by gold and effectively governed by bankers, financiers and other actors in private financial markets. Keynes’s system would permit Germany to issue a bond of up to about £1 billion (US\$1.2 billion) in today’s values, to be guaranteed by Allied governments and used to raise finance for reparations, reconstruction and economic recovery. In time, the German and other Allied-backed bonds could be purchased by other governments and used as a new form of international currency — supported by sound Allied economies and managed by independent public authority.

Lloyd George and his treasury endorsed Keynes’s scheme at Versailles. Wilson’s rejection came in a forthright letter, as historian Eric Rauchway recounted in *The Money Makers* (2015). Wilson’s fear was that the United States — with the most robust economy — might be left to foot the bill for global recovery. And Keynes, in pleading his case at Versailles, had noted that that might have to happen. But the United States could afford to pay, he argued: it had not incurred foreign debts to finance the war. Indeed, it had profited immensely, thanks to Wall Street’s financing of belligerents, and the country’s export of munitions to warring Europeans. Furthermore, if the US economy was to remain buoyant, Keynes reasoned, it was crucial for US goods to find export markets, and for Europeans to be able to pay for them.

Wilson did not author his letter of rejection, Rauchway revealed. It was drafted by an adviser — Thomas W. Lamont, a partner in New York City banking firm J. P. Morgan and Co. The letter stresses “the desirability of post-war lending going through the usual private channels”: Wall Street. Lamont trashed Keynes’s proposal because it prioritized Allied-backed bonds over private bank bonds. J. P. Morgan had massively expanded foreign lending to governments during the war. Now, it could not risk repayment of those bonds being deferred, or subordinated to the repayment of sovereign bonds.

Because of Keynes’s defeat, the gold standard — representing private financial governance of markets in debt, exchange rates and interest rates — was restored. The consequences were as Keynes had predicted: periodic economic failures, political insurgencies and another war. World leaders opted for what Keynes called a “Carthaginian Peace”, designed to crush the Central Powers. It turned out to be a devastating Pyrrhic victory.

Golden age

Keynes’s scheme had a significant afterlife, however. In 1933, the newly elected US president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, resurrected it. On the night of his inauguration, Roosevelt began dismantling the gold standard as applied to the US economy, precipitating the collapse of the system worldwide. By acting on Keynes’s ideas

through his New Deal reforms and programmes, the president freed his administration to invest in the economy, end the crisis of unemployment and tackle the ecological crisis of the day: the severe droughts of the Dust Bowl, afflicting states from Nebraska to Texas.

The Second World War interrupted progress. Near its end, in 1944, Roosevelt convened the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to regulate the post-war financial order. He invited Keynes, and barred bankers from attending. Keynes's scheme was, in part, revived and adopted at Bretton Woods. His big idea — for an International Clearing Union independent of any one powerful state — was defeated. But his ideas did lead to the establishment of the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later part of the World Bank). The years that followed (from 1945 to the early 1970s) became, for economists of all orientations, a golden age.

Despite the adoption of some of Keynes's radical monetary theory and policies at Bretton Woods, by the 1960s private financial interests were chipping away at them. Gradually, financial deregulation, privatization and globalization were restored. Today, we are witnessing the aftershocks: massive inflations of credit, debt deflations and periodic crises such as the meltdown of 2008. The expansion of credit has fuelled consumption and production worldwide, which in turn drives up greenhouse-gas emissions.

As in 1919, the world endures extraordinary levels of inequality, insecurity and volatility. Globalization has encouraged political insurgencies worldwide and fostered a growth model posing threats to the survival of Earth's life-support systems.

Fortunately, Keynes's classic study and monetary theories, and the resolute efforts of Roosevelt's New Deal, have survived. They are embodied in the Green New Deal. The US policy platform, proposed this year by Democrats in Congress, is as global in scope as Keynes's scheme and similarly aims to bring society through crisis. This time around, that crisis is the greatest security threat ever to face humanity: Earth-systems breakdown. <https://www.facebook.com/stopthewarcoalition/videos/518449116417396>



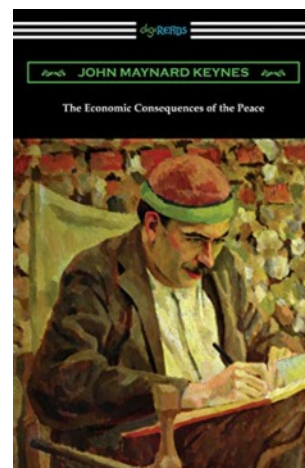
John Maynard Keynes (centre) at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944.

We have had to perform at one and the same time the tasks appropriate to the economist, to the financier, to the politician, to the journalist, to the propagandist, to the lawyer, to the statesman—even, I think, to the prophet and to the soothsayer

John Maynard Keynes

How Bretton Woods reshaped the world

Born and raised in Cambridge, England to highly successful, intelligent parents John and Florence Keynes, he attended Eton and King's College, Cambridge where he joined the intellectual group called "The Apostles" with the likes of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Bertrand Russell. In 1919, after attending the Paris Peace Conference as economic advisor to Prime Minister Lloyd George, Keynes resigned from a prominent position in the Treasury and published "The Economic Consequences of the Peace", a stinging indictment of the Versailles Treaty. Keynes expressed his opposition to the political practices that were taking place, and the work gained him instant notoriety. The impact of this, and other, works on economic theory and policy led to what is now termed the "Keynesian Revolution" of the twentieth century, and helped shape modern macroeconomics.



Chicago Boys Crash the Russian Economy with Shock Therapy

An introduction to strong man politics and opportunism



Boris Yeltsin was elected President of Russia in June, 1991 – the first direct presidential election in Russian history. In October, Yeltsin announced that Russia would proceed with market-oriented reforms. From Russia's parliament, Yeltsin received one year of special powers for the purpose of remaking Russia's economy. Members of parliament felt close to Yeltsin, remembering his having stood atop a tank in Moscow.

Yeltsin's reforms were to be described as similar to Poland's reforms, known as "shock therapy." In Russia there was a sudden privatization of 225,000 or so state-owned businesses, a sudden release of price and currency controls, withdrawal of state subsidies, and trade liberalization. Yeltsin had assembled a team of economists devoted to free-market economics. They were admirers of the US economist Milton Friedman and referred to in Moscow as the "Chicago Boys."

In his book, *Superpower Illusions*, the US ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock, writes that shock therapy "ignored the fact that there was no legitimate capital in the country" – in other words, holders of investments in wealth. Matlock describes the result: "Communist Party officials, senior military and KGB officer, and other privileged insiders join the criminals who had been running a black market steal what they could, as fast as they could." (Matlock, p. 111)

The Soviet Union was sailing into free enterprise without people who had a lot of experience with decision-making in a free market economy. Almost no Soviet employees or managers had such experience. Also, laws that fit a free enterprise system were not in place. It was to be described as like building a house with no plumbing.

It has been written that gradual approach might have been better. Matlock describes this as "first freeing up trade and small business, with generous loans available to entrepreneurs as well as arrest and prosecution of the criminals who preyed on small businesses. Heavy industry, rail and air transport, and communications could have remained temporarily under state ownership, as corporations required to compete with state-owned corporations." (Matlock, p. 111)

In her book *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein writes of the effect of the shock doctrine's disconnection with public opinion – that lack of democracy resulting from Yeltsin's dictatorial powers. Klein writes.

Like the Polish supporters of Solidarity, 67 percent of Russians told pollsters in 1992 they believed workers' cooperatives were the most equitable way to privatize the assets of the Communist state, and 79 percent said they considered maintaining full employment to be a core function of government. (Klein, p. 224)

Yeltsin promised difficulty for approximately six months but that then recovery would come and Russia would become a great economic power – the fourth largest in the world. According to Klein, "After only one

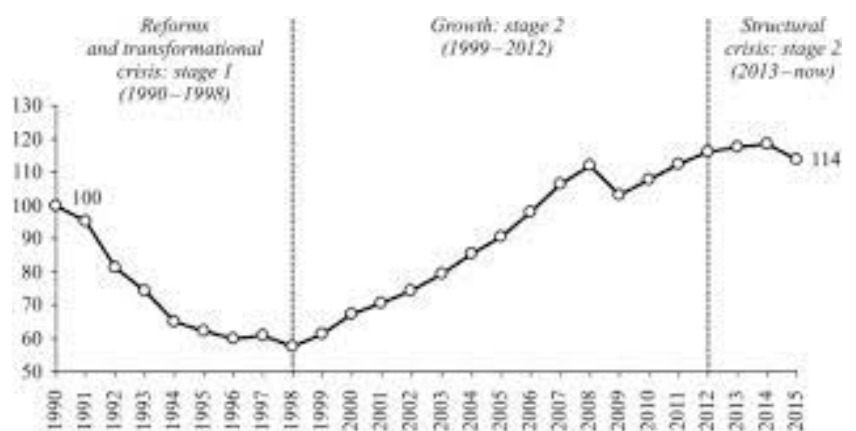
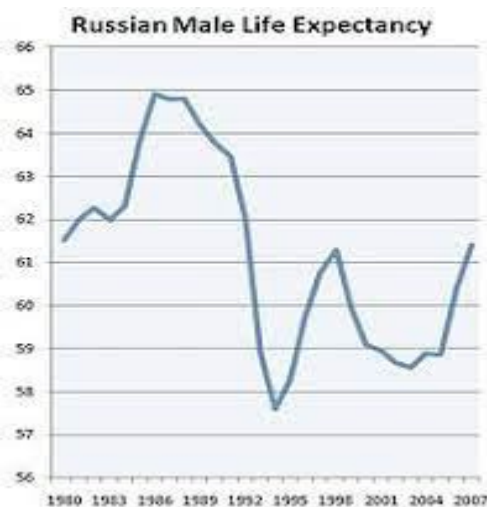
year, shock therapy had taken a devastating toll. Inflation had reduced the value of Russia's currency. "[M]illions of middle-class Russians had lost their life savings ... abrupt cuts to subsidies meant millions of workers had not been paid in months. The average Russian consumed 40 percent less in 1992 than in 1991 (Klein, pages 224-25). The government moved to control inflation through austerity. To fight inflation, interest rates were raised and massive cuts in state welfare spending were made. By mid-1993 from 39 to 49 percent of the population was living in poverty. Buying dried up, and by the mid-1990s the economy was depressed. In 1998, Russia's economy suffered more with a financial crash triggered by the financial crisis that began in Asia in 1997. According to statistics by Russia's government, the economic decline in terms of Gross Domestic Product was more severe than that suffered by the in the United States in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

According to Wikipedia, alcohol-related deaths in Russia increased 60 percent in the 1990s, and deaths from infectious and parasitic diseases increased 100 percent, "mainly because medicines were no longer affordable to the poor."

Taking middle ground and caution had not been the way of the Marxist-Leninists in power in the Soviet Union. Moderation had been the way of those Social Democrats that Lenin had despised, and it had not been the way of Russia's new emotionally inclined leader, Boris Yeltsin.

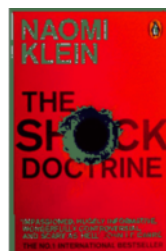
There were political consequences, including a rise in hostility toward Yeltsin. On 13 August 1993 a complaint in the newspaper Izvestiya read, "The President issues decrees as if there were no Supreme Soviet, and the Supreme Soviet suspends decrees as if there were no President." On September 21, Yeltsin announced in a televised address that by decree he was disbanding the Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies, and he declared his intent to rule by decree until the election of the new parliament and a referendum on a new constitution. That night, the Supreme Soviet declared Yeltsin removed from presidency, because he had breached the constitution. Anti-Yeltsin demonstrators hit the streets, protesting living conditions. Yeltsin secured the support of Russia's army and ministry of interior forces, and in a massive show of force in early October Yeltsin called up tanks that shelled Russia's parliament building. The Supreme Soviet was dissolved.

In December 1993, elections to a new parliament, the State Duma, were held. Candidates associated with Yeltsin's economic policies suffered. The anti-Yeltsin vote is said to have split between supporters of the Communist Party and Russia's ultra-nationalists, but there must have been at least a few people of measure between these opposing positions. At the same time there was a referendum on the new constitution. The referendum won and expanded the powers of Russia's chief of state, President Yeltsin, who remained in power and won the right to appoint the members of the government, to dismiss the prime minister and, in some cases, to dissolve the Duma.



To Help Ukraine, Cancel Its Foreign Debt

Ukraine's public debt has ballooned over years of war, with European authorities and the IMF offering loans in return for pro-business "reforms."



In an introduction to the concept of "disaster capitalism," the award-winning author of No Logo offers a revealing exposé of how the global "free market" has exploited crises, violence, and shock over the past three decades to promote radical privatization that benefits large corporations and powerful interest groups.



What Cuban missile crisis teaches us about Ukraine

Commentators on the current Ukraine crisis have sometimes compared it to the Cuban missile crisis. This is a good comparison — and not only because they both involve a dangerous U.S.-Russia confrontation capable of leading to a nuclear war.

During the 1962 Cuban crisis, the situation was remarkably similar to that in today's Eastern Europe, although the great power roles were reversed.

In 1962, the Soviet Union had encroached on the U.S. government's self-defined sphere of influence by installing medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba, a nation only 90 miles from U.S. shores. The Cuban government had requested the missiles as a deterrent to a U.S. invasion — an invasion that seemed quite possible given the long history of U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs, as well as the 1961 U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion.

From the U.S. government's standpoint, the fact the Cuban government had the right to make its own security decisions and that the Soviet government was simply copying U.S. policy in Turkey was of much less significance than its assumption that there could be no compromise when it came to the traditional U.S. sphere of influence in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Eventually, the intense crisis was resolved. Kennedy and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed the U.S.S.R. would remove the missiles from Cuba, while Kennedy pledged not to invade Cuba and to remove the U.S. missiles from Turkey.

Unfortunately, the world public came away with a misunderstanding of how the U.S.-Soviet confrontation had been brought to a peaceful conclusion. The reason was that the U.S. missile removal from Turkey was kept secret. Thus, it appeared that Kennedy — who had taken a hard line publicly — had won a significant Cold War victory over Khrushchev.

The popular misunderstanding was encapsulated in Secretary of State Dean Rusk's comment that the two men had stood "eyeball to eyeball," and Khrushchev "blinked."

What really happened, however — as we now know, thanks to later revelations by Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara — is that Kennedy and Khrushchev recognized — to their mutual dismay — that their two nuclear-armed nations had arrived at an incredibly dangerous impasse, and were sliding toward nuclear war. As a result, they did some top secret bargaining that de-escalated the situation.

Instead of stationing missiles on the borders of both nations, they simply got rid of them. Instead of warring over the status of Cuba, the U.S. government gave up any idea of invasion.

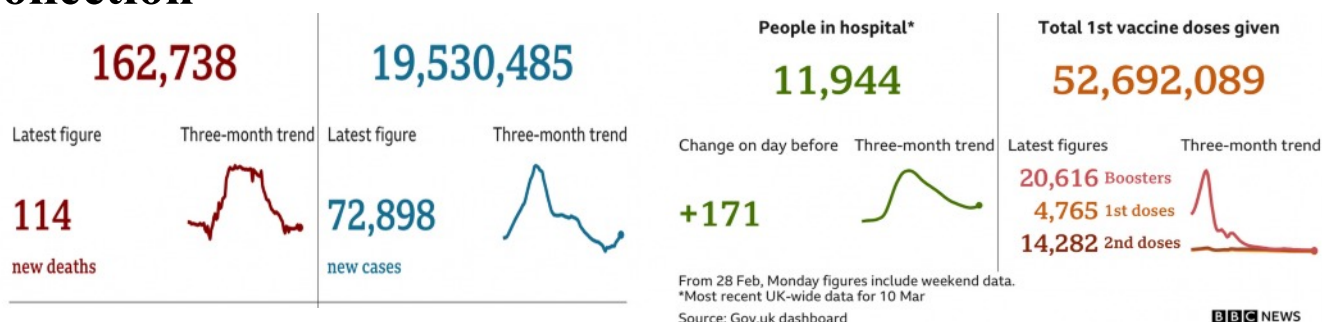
The next year, in an appropriate follow-up, Kennedy and Khrushchev signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the world's first nuclear arms control agreement.

At the End of World War 3

At the end of World War 3, amid the lightning and thunder
Those left alive, as long as they live, will wonder
Was there something that could have been done
Before nuclear winter blocked out the sun
After the Earth that we once knew was blown asunder
At the end of World War 3, as the few left alive
Survey the rubble remaining, wondering how long they'll survive
Too late to question the story
Of expansion or conquest or glory
No time to rewind from the date Armageddon arrived
At the end of World War 3, any pundits who may still be found
Will have heated debates about how the end came around
Was it the Black Sea blockade
When the rush for the end times was made
Or the breaking of promises promised after the wall came down
At the end of World War 3, as people look for clean water to drink
As they're dreaming of the days when they had a kitchen sink
Wishing they could try again
To talk to belligerent men
Back when the world was only teetering on the brink
At the end of World War 3, with billions dead or dying
It won't matter who was right, or who was lying
When civilization has ended
Once the last warhead descended
Only then will there be no one left denying
At the end of World War 3, once most everyone has the same thought
Is this what imperial intransigence wrought
Life under occupation
Or the end of creation
Decisions that decades of lost opportunities brought
At the end of World War 3

David Rovics

And the Covid Shambles Continues: Infections and re-infections continue to rise as restrictions lifted. Global deaths may be triple those reported Lancet Research shows. Govt. Axe data collection



Scientists at home and abroad criticise decision to cancel widely admired infection-surveillance projects including React-1 and Zoe

If anything about the UK's response to Covid-19 was world-beating, it was our surveillance system. From the World Health Organization to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), public health teams around the world have praised the UK's infection-tracking capability, and used our data to plan their own pandemic measures. Despite this health ministers have cancelled future funding for the React-1 study and other research projects. The decision has been met with dismay among leading scientists and researchers worldwide, who have questioned the UK's ability to respond to future Covid threats.

About 100,000 people do PCR tests each month as part of Imperial College London's React-1 study.

Covid-19: Global death toll may be three times higher than official records, study suggests

More than three times as many people may have died worldwide as a result of the covid-19 pandemic than official statistics suggest, according to the first peer reviewed study of global excess deaths.¹

The research, published in the Lancet, estimates there were 18.2 million excess deaths globally between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 whereas the official death toll was 5.9 million.

The researchers said the mortality impact from the covid-19 pandemic has been "more devastating" than the situation documented by official statistics which provide only a "partial picture" of the true burden of mortality. Evidence from initial studies suggest a significant proportion of excess deaths are a direct result of covid-19, the authors said, but more research is needed.

All cause mortality reports were collected for 74 countries and territories and 266 states or provinces through searches of government websites, the World Mortality Database, Human Mortality Database, and European Statistical Office.

At a country level, excess mortality was highest in Bolivia (734.9 per 100 000), Bulgaria (647.3), and Eswatini (634.9). In Russia there were an estimated 1.1 million excess deaths; a rate of 374.6 deaths per 100 000 population. The US also had an estimated 1.1 million excess deaths with a rate of 179.3 per 100 000 population. An estimated 792 000 excess deaths occurred in Brazil; a rate of 186.9 per 100 000. Because of its large population, India with its estimated 4.1 million excess deaths, accounted for an estimated 22% of the global total deaths.

The UK had an estimated excess mortality rate of 126.8 per 100 000, which was lower than Spain (186.7), Italy (227), and Belgium (146.6) and closer to that of France (124) and Germany (120.5). Some countries were estimated to have had fewer deaths than expected including Iceland (48 fewer deaths per 100 000), Australia (38 fewer deaths per 100 000), and Singapore (16 fewer deaths per 100 000).

Media of interest and Labour on the Streets



Wealth, influence and the global elite

The Sassoons were one of the great commercial dynasties of the 19th century: ‘the Rothschilds of the East’. In *Global Merchants* the historian Joseph Sassoon charts how his ancestors – Jewish refugee exiles from Ottoman Baghdad – built a vast enterprise of trade and influence across the world. He tells Tom Sutcliffe how their meteoric rise and ultimate fall mirrored the British imperial project.

Peter Flannery once famously said of *Our Friends in the North*, "I've always said it's just a posh soap opera - but it's a posh soap opera with something to say." And now he has rewritten his multi-award winning and highly acclaimed television series as an audio drama for BBC Radio 4.



Ambitious in scale and scope, the drama chronicles the lives of four friends over three decades beginning in the 1960s. The series tackles corporate, political and police corruption in the 1960s, the rise and fall of the Soho porn empires in the 1970s, the nouveau riche and the Miners' Strike of the 1980s and the rise of New Labour in the 1990s. Some of the stories are directly based on the real-life controversies involving T. Dan Smith and John Poulson in Newcastle during the 60s and 70s.



Pay Freezes

Labour shortages and the cost of living are leading the news for the first time in years. There are predictions that the biggest pay squeeze in decades is imminent. So in this new three-part series for BBC Radio 4, documentary-maker Phil Tinline traces the ups and downs of the politics of pay in Britain since 1945. How did we get here? And what can our history tell us about where we might now be heading?



Alison Norris for Broomhill and Sharrow Vale

Proud to be speaking up for my dedicated midwifery colleagues at the NHS SOS demo today. In 2017 the NHS was the best health service in the world, and one of the most cost effective. Never believe the lie that we can't afford it!

#NHS #RCM #MarchWithMidwives

Ukraine demo outside Sheffield Town Hall 🇺🇦 "Putin out! Freedom in!"

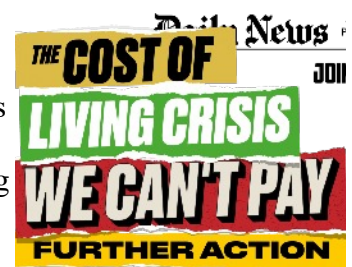


Two demonstrations on consecutive Sundays saw protesters call for the end of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and for a negotiated peace settlement to end all bloodshed in the country.



Peoples Assembly Cost of Living Crisis

Trade unionists and supporters rallied in Sheffield as part of the campaign around the “cost of living crisis” and the beginning of a series of events telling the Government that workers will not pay for their crisis.



From Sheffield to Saltley Gates: Why Solidarity is Still Important

To the eternal credit of the workers in Birmingham, they joined the miners on 10 February 1972.

These workers were not merely supporting a struggle on their own behalf: they were supporting their brothers and sisters in a struggle.



Since 1979 the law has failed to protect workers from exploitation and hardship. Now is the time to allow workers to protect themselves through solidarity. Repeal the anti-trade union laws!



There is not much fun in getting old but one of the advantages is that history and current affairs become one and the same and help to bring context to new events and old. Fifty years ago the Saltley Gates dispute seemed like just another part of the evening's news programmes and newspaper headlines and it is probably now, fifty years later, that its significance can be truly recognized. In the Labour movement we very often celebrate defeats as a means of advancing the cause just a little but the memory of Saltley Gates is the opportunity to celebrate not only a victory of that time but also a lesson for us now and in the future. The miners and workers defeated a Tory government but also laid the foundations for the battle of the 1984-5 miners strike in which the working class failed to learn the lesson of solidarity demonstrated on that Birmingham picket line.

The slogan of "an injury to one is an injury to all" is relevant and educational today in supporting current disputes because today's attacks from employers, if lost, means that tomorrow will be the day when they come for you and your workmates. Two disputes in Sheffield reflect not only current employment disputes but also historical elements of the employment relationship that we hoped had disappeared. The Stuart couriers dispute, now in its 10th week centres around what we call the "gig" economy and "modern" employment practices of casualisation, bogus self employment and low pay. Far from modern these conditions were the founding fights of our movement in the 19th century which we now see seeping back into the labour market. It is also spreading into areas that were previously seen as "safe and secure" occupations. The UCU dispute is around pensions but also involves the same frustrations of the Stuart drivers as new entrants to university teaching find the work casualised and exploitative. On pensions, the current dispute is around deteriorating pension provision in the occupational pension scheme for academics. But for many workers their occupational pension schemes disappeared many years ago under the Thatcher and regimes of the 90's and 00's. The Finance Act 1986 legislated for the closing of occupational defined benefits schemes in favour of defined contributions schemes swapping risk from the employer to the employee and the Stock Market. We have seen individual disputes around the changes but the opportunity for workers to join in solidarity disputes has weakened the labour movement immeasurably and shown that legislation can never replace worker solidarity in the fight.



50 Years Since the Battle of Saltley Gate

By Emily Ingram

At half-past five on Saturday 5 February 1972, Peter Clarney, a striking miner living in Barnsley, heard a knock at his door. He answered and was told to get a bag ready for six PM. When he asked where they were going, the response was vague: 'I don't know. But you'll know where you are when you get there.'

Throughout January 1972, Britain's news media predicted that the miners' wage dispute would cause little more than a 'marginal disruption' to fuel production and consumption. The Daily Mirror's Woodrow Wyatt famously stated that 'Rarely have strikers advanced to the barricades with less hope of success.'

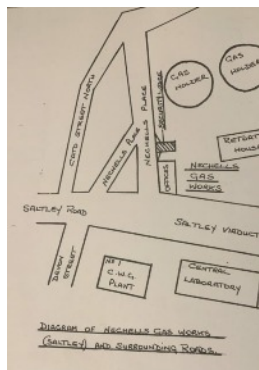
Both statements would be disproved by the second week of February. After collieries across the nation had been forced to close, strikers turned to strategic picketing of depots, dockyards, and power stations to prevent the transportation of fuel.

With its considerable stockpile of coke, Nechells Gas Works (which, contrary to popular belief, was only adjacent to Saltley) began to see dozens of lorries passing through its gates by January of 1972. This made it an ideal target, as Peter recalls in his written account of the strike.

'We arrived at the Star Club on Essex Street in Birmingham at approximately nine PM [on Saturday 5 February],' he writes. 'The Conservative press was bragging that this was the only depot left in the country that had upwards of 100,000 tons of stock, some of which had been there for over ten years.'

'It had been arranged that everyone had to meet at the Gas Works at eight AM the next morning.'

Placing themselves strategically on a small patch of land between three roads, the main goal of the picketers was to prevent the movement of lorries—or 'wagons'—in and out of Nechells.



'There were quite a few pickets there when we arrived and a large contingent of police. Wagons from all over the country began to arrive and the pickets converged onto the wagons... Branch officials spoke to the drivers and some turned around—only thirty got through with aid from the police.'

Picketing at Nechells had begun two days before Peter and his workmates had arrived, and was growing rapidly by the day. His notes detail the increasingly hands-on involvement of police from Birmingham and nearby Wolverhampton.

'The next day, more pickets had arrived from Staffordshire, Yorkshire, and the South Wales Coalfield, but the police had more reinforcements and outnumbered us.'

Pickets map from the blockade

'Throughout the day, numerous scuffles between police and pickets took place as they did their best to get the wagons into the plant. The police had plain clothes officers among the pickets who would pick individuals out—then uniformed snatch squads would go in for that individual, pull them out and give them a warning not to return or they would be lifted.'

'The gates closed at four PM that day and it was reported there were two arrests.'

After five days, increasing displays of solidarity indicated that the tide was beginning to turn.

'Tuesday 8 March 1972: West Midlands TGWU [Transport and General Workers Union] sent 600 hot pies, plus other branches of the TGWU sent boxes of apples and cigarettes to be shared out,' Peter writes. 'That afternoon we were joined by building workers from McAlpine and for the next three hours regardless of colour or creed, it was becoming a common fight for the working class.'

Pickets were also joined by TGWU drivers from Thorn Electricals, who would later be sacked for their

Pickets were also joined by TGWU drivers from Thorn Electricals, who would later be sacked for their involvement in the strike. Peter and his workmates were informed that the drivers were later reinstated, or else ‘all Birmingham would have been at a standstill’.

The battle, although drawing to a close, was not without casualties. On Wednesday 9 February, it was reported that a lorry drove ‘straight through the picket lines as the picket surged forward, resulting in a police inspector being run over and two pickets injured, all requiring hospital attention.’ The incident took place less than a week after the death of Doncaster miner Fred Matthews, who had been killed by a speeding lorry on a picket at Keadby Power Station near Scunthorpe.

Nethertheless, union official Arthur Scargill would address 800 shop stewards from various unions that evening, calling for every member to join the picket at Saltley the following day.

‘It was a make or break day I think,’ writes Peter. ‘At nine AM, a cheer went up—we went to see what was happening. Coming down the road were factory workers, their banners and placards flying. This is the most satisfying sight any trade unionist could wish to see, and a sight I will always remember.

‘Marching down to Saltley works, from three directions—it is estimated that there were 15,000 at Saltley that day.’

Fifty years on, the Battle of Saltley Gate remains a powerful testament to trade unionism and working class solidarity. The seven-day occupation saw miners were joined by thousands of workers, both male and female, from a huge range of industries—McAlpine, Wimpy, S.U. Carbaretters, Thorn Electrical and Radiators, and many more.

In the words of Arthur Scargill, who himself witnessed the closure of the gates at Netchells:

To the eternal credit of the workers in Birmingham, they joined the miners on 10 February 1972.

These workers were not merely supporting a struggle on their own behalf: they were supporting their brothers and sisters in a struggle, not against an employer, but against the state.

On that day, everything I believed in, as a trade unionist and as a socialist, crystallised.



The Battle of Saltley Gates song - GFTU Voice and Vision

CAMPAIGN FOR **TRADE UNION FREEDOM**



The Campaign For Trade Union Freedom was established in 2013 following a merger of the Liaison Committee For The Defence Of Trade Unions and the United Campaign To Repeal The Anti Trade Union Laws. The CTUF is a campaigning organisation fighting to defend and enhance trade unionism, oppose all anti-union laws as well as promoting and defending collective bargaining across UK, Europe and the World.

New Powers For Certification Officer Are An Attack On Trade Unions

On 1st April the so-called “trade union regulator” more formally known as the Certification Officer will assume the powers given to her by the Employment Act 2016 to impose financial levies on trade unions.

As a sop, employers’ associations as equivalent “social partners” are also included as being liable to pay the levy but they have successfully lobbied so that the major burden will fall on the unions. One suspects that they didn’t have to lobby too hard.

In case anyone was in any doubt about the political nature of this attack on the unions a quick look at the ranking of “offences” and the possible financial penalty payable shows just how ideological these new legal provisions are.

There are 6 “offences” listed as being classed as Level 1 that could attract a penalty of up to £10,000 for smaller unions with less than 100,000 members; for larger unions with more than 100,000 members a penalty of up to £20,000 is possible.

Four of these six in this category are in connection with a union’s political fund so nothing to do with “industrial relations” the usual reason proffered for a renewed attack on union rights:

- non-compliance with restrictions on political objects
- failure to comply with political resolutions rules
- failure to comply with political fund rules
- failure to provide political fund contribution information.

There are two further category of “offences” that would attract lesser penalties; Level 2 (1 “offence”) for smaller unions a maximum of £5,000 and a maximum of £10,000 for larger unions. Level 3 (4 “offences”) for smaller unions a maximum of £2,500 and a maximum of £5,000 for larger unions. Further, a maximum penalty of £1,000 is payable for any category of “offence” if it is held that the breach was the responsibility of an individual person.

In common with the anti-trade union legislation introduced by the Tories from 1980 onwards these new rules are unlikely to target any union leader much less shop stewards. Refusal to pay a “financial penalty order” will not lead to a general secretary being hauled in front of the courts; the money will be recoverable by the Certification Officer as an ordinary debt.

Alongside this opportunity to essentially fine a union the Certification Officer will also levy monies from the unions (and employers’ associations) in order to fund most of the working of her office.