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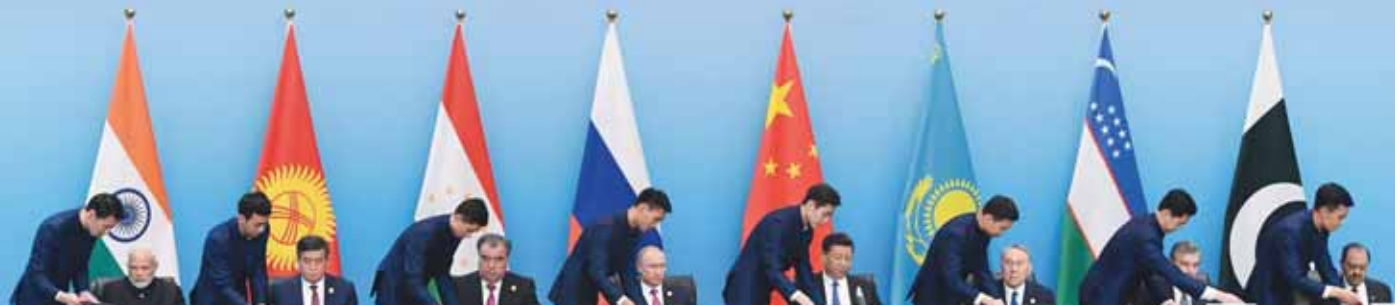
Australian Marxist Review – Journal of the Communist Party of Australia

#73 September 2022

\$5

## 上海合作组织成员国元首理事会会议 ЗАСЕДАНИЕ СОВЕТА ГЛАВ ГОСУДАРСТВ-ЧЛЕНОВ ШАНХАЙСКОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА

2018年6月9-10日 中国·青岛 9-10 ИЮНЯ 2018Г. ЦИНДАО КИТАЙ



- **Dialogue on Imperialism, Polarity, and the International System**
- **British Imperialism – A Threat to World Peace**
- **The Biden Administration’s Imperialist China Policy, and the Taiwan Issue**
- **Xinjiang and the Uyghur Question**
- **Australian Imperialism**
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The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi at the Signing Ceremony of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, in Qingdao, China on June 10, 2018. Photo: Prime Minister’s Office (GODL-India)

Western imperialist claims of being inclusive and “progressive” have been ever-present, while simultaneously it binds peoples and nations in chains of exploitation image: Norman B Leventhal Map Center – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

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ISSN: 2208-5238

Issue #73 – September 2022

# Editorial

The first half of the year 2022 has seen a series of major developments in the international system, most particularly in terms of the outbreak of war in the Ukraine and a further hardening of tensions between the declining United States of America and a rejuvenated People's Republic of China. These major developments and changes in the world system are symptomatic of irreversible shifts in that system. These shifts, which indicate a relative weakening of the position of the Western imperialist core in relation to the rest of the world, are of historic significance.

These changes will have implications for all countries. The development of highly antagonistic and competitive relationships between great powers opens the danger of a new major war between these powers. Such a war could see the use of nuclear weapons that would produce unprecedented devastation to human civilisations and the biosphere. At the same time, the weakening of the imperialists across the world is a welcome development that produces opportunities for advances in the global class struggle. These new developments and changes have significant implications for the work of communists in Australia. The emergence of the AUKUS pact with the UK and USA, in the context of which it was announced that Australia would acquire nuclear submarines, is part of assisting what amounts to a US-led effort to contain China, among other projects, at the expense of the living standards and safety of the Australian people.

The articles in this issue of the *Australian Marxist Review* have been selected to provide readers with a background to the major changes underway in the international system. They also contribute to a necessary discussion that seeks to make sense of these changes, which have led to new developments such as AUKUS. As the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Australia, the *AMR* is an important vehicle for the development of the ideas, arguments and positions needed to respond to these new circumstances and orient ourselves in the struggle.

To begin this discussion, the *AMR* editorial board has made a record of a dialogue among its members to introduce readers to ideas related to the emerging multi-polar world system, to make sense of the role of imperialism both in the recent past and present, and to think about the

potential implications of the transitions under way. This dialogue has been published as the first article in issue #73 of the *AMR*. The dialogue is not the final word on the subject, but rather a tentative start at making sense of and developing these concepts in the thinking of the CPA, and to encourage members of the CPA to consider these ideas and develop them in future articles for the *AMR*.

In February of 2022 the Communist Party of Australia hosted an online forum on opposing the drive to war on China and opposing the new AUKUS alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. This forum saw speakers from the Communist Party of Australia, the Communist Party of Britain and the Communist Party of the USA. The contributions presented at this forum by Kenny Coyle, Duncan McFarland and Roland Boer appear in this issue in written form.

**Kenny Coyle** is a journalist currently based in the Philippines. He is a member of the International Commission of the Communist Party of Britain and author of a number of party pamphlets on Asia and China specifically. Comrade Kenny contributed an article to the forum on the historical background and role of British imperial aggression against China.

**Duncan McFarland** is chair of the China-Vietnam subcommittee of the Peace and Solidarity Commission of the Communist Party of the United States of America. After his first visit to China on a solidarity tour in 1981, he became manager of the China-US delegations program, editor of the *US-China Review*, and from 2008-2017 co-ordinator of the China Discussion Group in the Marxist Education Centre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. McFarland's contribution assesses the Biden regime's efforts at destabilisation and explains how the USA is a major contributor to global problems. The article assists us in gaining a more informed and balanced view and urges us to become united and active in campaigning for peace.

**Roland Boer** is a member of the CPA and an editor of the *Australian Marxist Review*. He teaches at the School of Marxism at Dalian University of Technology, in Dalian City, China. His contribution deals with Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China.

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Relying on Chinese Marxist sources, the article presents factual information on the strategic and economic importance of Xinjiang, the promotion of preferential policies for minority nationalities (including an analysis of population growth in Xinjiang), and the Marxist approach to human rights and how these rights are protected and promoted in Xinjiang.

In order to provide some historical background to discussions of imperialism in the CPA, we republish the first of a series of earlier articles from the *AMR*. The article by **Alan Miller**, entitled “Australian Imperialism,” was published in the June issue of *AMR* in 1979. The editors have also provided an introduction to Miller’s article, situating its contribution in light of issues in Australia and the then Socialist Party of Australia. Alan Miller (died 2014) was a member of the CPA and SPA for almost 70 years. During this time, he served as Deputy General Secretary, member of the Central Committee and its Executive, editor of the *Guardian*, Secretary of the Party in Victoria and South Australia and published many insightful articles in the *AMR*.

**Graham Holton** is a member of the Brisbane branch of the CPA and regular contributor to *The Workers’ Weekly*

*Guardian*. His article carefully examines the post-Second World War effort to refound liberalism, in response to communism, Keynesianism, and social democracy in capitalist countries. The result was neoliberalism and a key factor of its ideological campaign was to claim private property as a “human right.” As a distinctive political and theoretical doctrine, neoliberalism promoted social, political and economic institutions with liberal rights in a free-market economy. Among these, private property became the key. Holton’s article closes by pointing out that – contrary to neoliberal misrepresentation – public ownership is more economically efficient and beneficial.

In closing, we encourage comrades to submit more articles to the *AMR*. These articles may be on the question of imperialism, spurred on by the contributions in this issue, or they may be on other questions that need to be addressed in our Party’s theoretical journal. Current planning sees the next two issues of the *AMR* devoted primarily to the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Socialist Party of Australia in 1971 (which reclaimed the name of the Communist Party of Australia in 1996) and the national question in Australia.

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Image: Soviet Artefacts – unsplash.com

# Dialogue on Imperialism, Polarity, and the International System

AMR Editorial Board

## Introduction

This dialogue between the members of the *AMR* editorial board was prompted by the significant and rapid changes taking place in the international system. Readers may remember that back in the 1990s, Western pundits proclaimed the “end of history.” The Soviet Union had collapsed, socialist countries in Eastern Europe experienced a series of counter-revolutions, and a “new world order” of capitalist economic and democratic systems would – the pundits confidently asserted – for the first time become global. As is the way with such statements, there were proved false. History has not come to an end. Instead, it has sped up, and we are now experiencing changes not seen in a century or more.

In these changing times, there is an increasing discussion in our Party, and internationally, on imperialism, polarity (uni-polar, bi-polar, multi-polar), and how we should understand the changes underway. In many respects, it is still too early to gain a full understanding of these questions, but we must begin the process. It goes without saying that we do so by deploying the Marxist-Leninist method, which does not give us ready-made answers, but provides the most comprehensive and insightful method for analysing concrete historical developments.

A few words on how the dialogue developed. Initially, the topic was raised in one of our editorial meetings, and we discussed it further at following meetings. By that time, we decided to continue the process in writing and email exchanges. Initial questions were framed, answers written, and the dialogue grew. The reader will find that we have somewhat different perspectives, but that is what one would expect. At the same time, we do so from the world outlook of Marxism-Leninism.

This discussion is the beginning of a process. We hope and expect that other comrades in our Party will make contributions to the *AMR* on a most important topic of our time. We know from first-hand experience that you have been thinking about and discussing these questions. We would like to see your thoughts in print. The *AMR* – our Party’s theoretical journal – is the place to do so.

## Part 1: Definitions

The metaphor of “polarity” is a common way of speaking about the international system. What is the meaning of “polarity” in international relations?

**CG:** To my understanding, “polarity” uses an analogy from physics where magnetic poles are connected by attractive magnetic forces to their opposite poles, and where poles of the same polarity repel each other. This analogy of poles illustrates connective relationships of alignment and forces between centres of expansive political power and influence, referred to as poles, within the international system based upon states. These poles in the modern world are composed of states with globally significant military, economic, and political power – thus, they are termed “great powers.” These great powers have an ability to independently pursue their interests globally. Great powers in their geopolitical interactions with each other and other lesser states cause other states to react to the forces between these great powers. These lesser states form relationships and alliances with these great powers based upon an assessment of their national interests and the political realities to which they are subject, and which reinforces one or more of these great powers in its competition against other great powers. Since the Russian Revolution in 1917 that created the Soviet Union these interactions of power between states have, while consisting of a “great game” between the bourgeois-ruled capitalist states seeking to redivide the world amongst themselves, seen the addition of a dynamic of global class struggle between the capitalist countries and the countries where the working class has risen to power and taken the socialist road towards communism.

**RB:** The metaphor of “poles” has also arisen from the study of planetary bodies – the first visible way for human science to understand the world (so Engels). Other terms have also been used, such as the three “worlds” – first (capitalist), second (socialist), and third (developing countries). The problem: guess who is the “first world”? There is also “world-systems theory,” which divides the world into core, semi-periphery, and periphery. The core has highly developed industries, while the semi-periphery and periphery supply raw material and cheap labour, and are forced to buy overpriced products from the core. “World-systems” theory has its problems: by now the “core” has largely ceased to innovate and tries to plunder

“semi-peripheral” countries that now outpace the “core” in terms of innovation and industrial production.

## Part 2: History

Staying with the “pole” metaphor, we can see global history since the Great October Revolution in terms of three phases: bi-polar (Cold War), uni-polar (1989-2008), and multi-polar (2008 until now).

What was the structure of the international system during the Cold War (1949-1991)?

**CG:** The Cold War has been described as having a bi-polar international configuration as the competition between the USSR and the USA completely dominated international politics. During the Cold War the world was split into capitalist and socialist camps, along with a non-aligned block of nations between them that sought cooperative relationships with both the capitalist and socialist worlds.

**RB:** We can date the beginning of the Cold War with Winston Churchill’s infamous “Iron Curtain” speech from 1946. Anyone who reads the speech can immediately see its deeply racist undertone, as Stalin noted in his response soon afterwards. Stalin points out that Churchill “sets out to unleash war with a race theory, asserting that only English-speaking nations are superior nations, who are called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world ... Mr Churchill, and his friends in Britain and the United States, present to the non-English nations something of an ultimatum: ‘Accept our rule voluntarily, and then all will be well, otherwise war is inevitable.’” Of course, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were not going to accept this ultimatum, but Stalin’s words were primarily directed at countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific, many of which were still engaged in anti-colonial struggles for liberation.

**DM:** What was described by some as three-world theory or by others as a bi-polar world was the creation of the aggression of the imperialists and the dominant role that the USA had played post WW2. Bi-polarisation was the Cold War strategy adopted by imperialists including Churchill with his Iron Curtain speech. This was preempted in the attempts by John Foster Dulles to reposition the USA and its Western allies for a new aggression against the Soviet Union and to roll back the national liberation struggle. The Soviet Union attempted to counter this aggressive strategy with support for the non-aligned movement and the development of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (the Warsaw Treaty, or “Pact” as the West liked to call it) to counter the aggressive NATO policy. Looking ahead, the multi-polar world can be seen as a continuation of support for the national independence movements and to counter the aggressive imperialist military blocks.

The bi-polar era saw a tremendous uplift in the class struggle and independence movements, but these were overshadowed by the nuclear weapons being developed by France, UK, and USA. This strategy was designed to subvert and weaken the Soviet Union. Further, the re-installing of Social-Democratic governments in Europe combined with anti-communist activity stalled the class struggle. There were also activities to subvert socialist countries from within. The strategy was to draw the Soviets into armed conflicts and create national tensions. It would have to be said that this strategy was not without its successes. They also tried to split the socialist camp. The most successful of these was to split Yugoslavia and China from the Soviet Union. The development of a Left tendency with nationalism in the movement also assisted.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can speak of a US-led uni-polar imperialist system. What were the key aspects of the US-led imperialist system?

**CG:** Following the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union from within in 1991 and until recently, the USA had a unique position of having no rivals able to frustrate its global designs or significantly restrain its various initiatives. This era was described as uni-polar. This uni-polar moment has now ended, and the international system is transitioning into a multi-polar system. It’s reasonable to argue that this transition began with the global financial crisis that emerged in the USA in 2008 and has since accelerated with the rise of China.

**RB:** In the heady days of the 1990s, the old colonial powers swaggered and claimed to have “won.” They began promoting “universal values,” such as “democracy and human rights.” Of course, they forgot that these values were Western liberal ones, which had originally been developed during the era of primitive accumulation through slavery. In other words, the “universal values” constituted a dictatorship of the small community of the free over those not worthy of freedom. The international dictator was, of course, the USA. It thought it was the only hegemon, laying waste to country after country, simply destroying them so as to extract valuable resources for next to nothing. The vast resources of the Russian Federation were pillaged. The treatment of countries was like the treatment of workers: reduce them to the lowest level and then exploit them as much as possible.

Looking back now, we can see that 1991 was actually the beginning of the end. The 50-year economic decline of Western capitalist countries had already begun in the 1970s. Economic stagnation, decline, and fragmentation has been coupled with similar processes in capitalist democracies. They euphoria of the 1990s concealed the hard facts on the ground. Western capitalist countries were gradually de-industrialised. For example, today only about 10 per cent of the total GDP of the USA is generated



by industrial production. What is left of US production can make only overpriced products of inferior quality, such as the Apple iPhone and the F-35 fighter jet (known as the “flying lemon”).

What defeats has the US led imperialist system experienced since 1991? Is there a trend in the outcomes experienced by the us led imperialist system.

**RB:** The US has not achieved its strategic aims through war for more than a century. In WW1 it came in late. In WW2, the western front was a sideshow. In the Pacific, the US faced only 25 per cent of Japan’s total forces and it struggled even then. In terms of notable defeats, we need to go back to the Korean War. While the US has been at war for 228 years of its 245 years of existence, it now no longer needs to “win” a war in the old sense, but simply destroy a place. Then it can be plundered for a while – think of Iraqi oil or the massive growth of opium production in Afghanistan for 20 years until 2021.

**CG:** During the “uni-polar moment” the USA was able to impose its will without any real constraints. It bombed Serbia and forced a change in its government and was able to organise “colour revolutions” that succeeded throughout central Asia and eastern Europe. It achieved its objectives in the first Gulf War. It was able to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and pursue regime change. But as it achieved each military operation it was not able to reckon with the consequences. Afghanistan and Iraq turned into humiliating and protracted quagmires that ended in failure. Libya was bombed and destroyed and became a failed state with endless civil war and open slave markets in spite of early optimism of a “democratic transformation.” A major defeat came with the failure to overthrow the Syrian Baath government and the significant defeat of its proxies in the Syrian civil war that also saw the re-emergence of Russia as a global power. It’s “colour revolutions” have repeatedly failed, most recently in Belarus, Hong Kong, and Kazakhstan. As time has moved on the US has become less powerful, and its ability to succeed has reduced. There is a clear trend of more defeats of greater severity for US Imperialism.

What is multi-polarity and when has it happened before?

**CG:** A multi-polar world consists of an international configuration of states where multiple great powers with competing interests interact with each other and shape the behaviour of other lesser states in such a way that, to prevent instability and war, a balance of power between great powers is required to stabilise the international system. Such a system has broadly existed at multiple points in world history. A multi-polar system is characterised by the number of great powers involved and the need for negotiated restraint between them to prevent destabilisation of the world system.

Whilst each configuration of the international system is different, there are commonalities between previous “multi-polar” configurations. Following the end of the Napoleonic wars and the signing of the treaty of Vienna in 1815 that established the European international system described in history as the “Concert of Europe,” a multi-polar system was established that sought to stabilise European geopolitics through a consensus between multiple great powers on the maintenance of a balance of power between them and respect of their claimed spheres of influence over lesser powers. This multi-polar system largely prevented major wars between European great powers from 1815 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

**RB:** It is important to understand the history behind what the Russians in particular – now followed by other countries – call a multi-polar world (a term and reality fiercely resisted in Western capitalist countries). To begin with, Marx and Engels saw anti-colonial struggles as a form of anti-capitalist struggle. It can be argued that for Marx and Engels anti-colonial struggles were a species of international class struggle. The Soviet Union highlighted this feature as a result of concrete practice. In the 1930s, clear policy was developed to support anti-colonial struggles, since these were in the “rear” of capitalist imperialism. Military, economic, logistical, educational, and other assistance was given directly to these struggles. By the first half of the twentieth century more and more colonised countries achieved liberation. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union proposed in the UN a declaration concerning the right to independence from colonialism. This was taken up by African and Asian states and, when the critical voting majority was achieved with new countries taking up membership, the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* was approved by the UN General Assembly on 14 December, 1960. At the same time, many formerly colonised countries had gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, for the Asian-African conference of 1955. Here the famous “Ten Points” stressed sovereignty, territorial integrity, mutual non-interference, world peace, and economic and cultural co-operation. This became the non-aligned movement, which included China and India. The concept and practice of a multi-polar world is the successor to this development, and it can be seen as a new stage of the anti-colonial struggle as countries seek to move out of the neo-imperialist stage.

**DM:** Yes I think that is right. One other aspect that is overlooked was the debate between the capitalist powers preceding the Second World War as to how to deal with socialism and the emerging liberation movements in colonised countries. At one stage under Chamberlain and King Edward, the British and other European capitalist powers were surrendering sections of Europe and some colonies to Germany on the belief that an invasion of

the Soviet Union and European states would defeat the workers' movement. This political difference broke into armed conflict in which France capitulated and the USA remained neutral. For example, Finland, Lithuania, Japan, Austria, and Spain were under the domination of fascist movements. Britain retreated from Europe and the conflict was moved into the colonial holdings. It was the international communist and workers' movement that acted as a brake on the capitulationists. The development of a national liberation movement throughout Europe and Asia in resistance to the occupations added a new element. In India, the independence struggle had to overcome British suppression and also to struggle against the attempts of the German and Japanese militarists to create false movements designed to substitute one imperialism for another – think of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, right-wing, nationalist, and paramilitary organisation) in India and Chiang Kai-Shek's Blue Shirts.

Are other configurations possible in the international system?

**CG:** The question of the configuration of the international system largely depends on the number of great powers present in the world, the class nature of the states involved, and the acuteness of the competition for power between them. If each "great power" with a capacity to pursue an independent agenda is a pole, then the configuration of the international system depends upon the number of "poles" present and the distribution of power between them.

**RB:** I would like to make two points. The first is more cultural and even philosophical. The few former colonisers that make up the "West" (about 15-18) have an inbuilt assumption of either-or: either I win or you win. It is also called zero-sum. Many parts of the world simply do not function in this way, and prefer "both-and," which may be put as "things that contradict each other also complement one another." This requires a setting aside of differences and focusing on common ground. The US-led imperialist system simply does not understand this approach.

In this light, a different configuration of the international system is a properly democratic one in international terms. Already in 1953 Zhou Enlai proposed the "five principles of peaceful coexistence," as in "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence."

**DM:** It was interesting to see that the policy of peaceful co-existence as espoused by Lenin to overcome the military interventions against the Russian revolution and develop a space for socialism to develop was adopted and improved in respect of China. The Imperialists sought to split the socialist world and had some success with Albania, Yugoslavia, and later with conflict that came about between China and the Soviet Union. The cooperation

of nations in defence of their sovereignty and economic development away from being dominated by imperialism is important. The struggle is still playing out and former colonial powers such as France and other Europeans are pursuing aggressive policies in Africa and the Pacific. The old colonial powers are seeking to impose dependence and underdevelopment of African and Pacific nations.

## Part 3: Specific Questions

### 3.1 Collapse of the Soviet Union

The principal contradiction in the world before the collapse of socialist countries in Europe was described as between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp. How has this changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the counter-revolutions in Eastern Europe?

**RB:** On the question of the Soviet Union, we need to adhere to a basic principle of dialectical materialism. The problems and collapse of the Soviet Union were primarily due to internal causes. For example, Chinese Marxist scholarship emphasises the internal breakdown of the CPSU, ideological disarray, lack of discipline and unity, and the rise of opportunists as the main cause. Other items include the inability to innovate in terms of economic reforms, and failure to update the preferential policies for minority nationalities. External causes contributed, especially pressure from capitalist countries, but these were not primary and could gain traction only because of internal disintegration. Chinese Communists have learnt many lessons from the Soviet Union's collapse – in terms of what to avoid and how to reform in light of the times.

As far as the principal contradiction is concerned, it seems to me that the principle contradiction is still between socialism and capitalism, and it will be for a long time to come. Despite the immense setbacks after 1989, socialism survived and is once again on the rise. It cannot be vanquished.

**CG:** Even with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the efforts to destroy the remaining five socialist countries have not ceased, and countries pursuing an independent path have been routinely maligned, attacked, and destroyed. At the same time, the success of China strengthens the position and options available for the development of socialist countries and the global south. It is worth questioning what fundamental contradictions may exist within the international system so we can assess if the conflict between capitalism and socialism remains fundamental. It's worth considering that the imperial powers headed by the USA are no longer able to rule in the old way. The ability for imperial powers to carve up and dominate the world has been based upon a monopoly held by the imperialist core in the strength of productive forces – being science, technology, and production capacity – which gave it a decisive

advantage. This monopoly in force facilitated the exploitation of the rest of the world by the imperialist core. This monopoly, which first came under threat during the Cold War, has now been decisively broken, even though the imperial powers still hold (eroding) relative advantages.

### 3.2 US imperialism and resistance

How has the USA tried to stifle the international struggle of the working class and struggles for national liberation? Did Soviet assistance, and mutual assistance from socialist countries, assist developing countries to move away from dependency on capitalist imperialist countries?

**CG:** The emergence of the USSR as a great power was accompanied by new people's democracies in eastern Europe and Asia following the Second World War. In the mid-1940s these developments produced a reaction from capitalist countries. To preserve capitalism globally and ward off the perceived danger of socialist revolution, the capitalist countries and empires united around the USA, the only remaining superpower through relevant alliance structures. These countries also altered the form of their imperial project in developing countries into a neo-colonial form with formal independence for previously colonised nations, but with de facto foreign domination by imperial interests. The USA is the bulwark of capitalism globally and has acted as the greatest opponent to progressive peoples fighting for independence, national sovereignty, and social and economic progress. It has continued to fulfil this function since the collapse of the USSR. The USA suppresses the international working-class struggle through a variety of means. The use of its intelligence agencies to organise coups against elected socialist and independently minded governments, murder activists, rig elections, and preserve the interests of its monopolies is well known. Less well recognised were the various economic and cultural forms of domination it used to defend the interests of capital globally.

**DM:** An outcome of the Second World War was the USA became the leading force as other imperialist powers were weakened. The restoration of a type of "Second International" produced a force within the working class that enabled imperialist subversion of class struggle and to buy off a layer of the class. There was an attempt within the working class to resist this split through the United Front strategy. But in the USA, the development of extreme anti-communism, coupled with ultra-left movements, weakened the working class movement and enabled the attacks on national independence to assume extreme anti-communist agendas. In this light, we should see the wars against Korea and Vietnam, and the Malaya and Borneo coups, along with military attacks in Latin America and interventions in the revolutionary civil war in China. Imperial powers like the UK and France no longer had the capacity to hold on without US political and military

support. There was also the support for Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as coups in countries as diverse as Iraq, Iran, and Indonesia. The USA assumed the resources and political assets developed in Nazi Germany and used these in its campaigns. The USA military and Intelligence budgets have escalated since the Second World War.

**RB:** We are talking here about the bi-polar era of the Cold War, during which the struggle between the capitalist and socialist camps was played out in developing countries. I would like to elaborate on an earlier point concerning the Soviet Union's support for anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. It was actually comrade Stalin who made the major breakthrough in a series of speeches and published texts from 1918 to 1927. The breakthrough: there is a direct connection between the national question within the Soviet Union and the question of liberating colonised countries. This breakthrough was both theoretical and practical, which can be summarised as follows:

First, the liberation of nationalities within a socialist country like the Soviet Union is necessarily connected with the liberation of the many peoples in the world suffering from colonial oppression. Communists were the first to make this connection.

Second, for too long socialists (of many types) had looked to Western imperialist countries for successful proletarian revolutions. Instead, they needed to look East, where the real revolutionary upsurge was happening. And by "the East" is meant China, India, Egypt, Morocco – in fact, all of the countries in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific that were still colonised.

Third, capitalist imperialism relies on colonies for food, fuel, raw materials for industry, cheap labour, and closed markets to sell their over-priced products. This is the "rear" (a military metaphor) of capitalist imperialism. It follows that Communists resolutely need to support anti-colonial struggles for national liberation.

Fourth, this meant that the Soviet Union, along with other socialist movements, should "support – resolutely and actively ... support – the national liberation movement of the oppressed and dependent peoples" (Stalin). This concrete reality meant a consistent flow of arms, technology, advice, education, so as to assist these anti-colonial movements, from the Chinese Revolution to liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere.

### 3.3 US dollar hegemony

After 1945, it became increasingly common to speak of "US dollar hegemony." How did the US dollar, as the global reserve currency, play out in terms of capitalist imperialism?

**RB:** I am persuaded by the argument that the resort to

the US dollar as a global reserve currency was a retreat. After the decline of the British Empire, the US attempted an empire with colonial possessions. This was an abysmal failure. In reply, it resorted to a financial empire, underpinned by the US dollar. This has led to one crisis after another, with ever more wild proposals to solve the crisis. These desperate measures included dispensing with the “gold standard,” petro-dollars, unlimited US debt (Reagan), “quantitative easing,” and so on. Trying to enforce the USD has required a perpetual state of war. But it has not worked. Since 2008-2009, the US dollar as a global currency has been in notable decline, so much so that less than 40 per cent of global transactions took place in USD already in 2019. In 2022, the USD became a toxic currency for many countries. It should be obvious that I am inclined towards the “paper tiger” position: the United States may be described as a failed empire.

**CG:** The financial hegemony of the US Dollar (USD) has been used as a means of financial domination of the rest of the world by the USA. A notable change in its functioning occurred with the abandonment of the gold standard in the 1970s. The mechanisms of USD hegemony have been well outlined by economists like Michael Hudson, and while there isn't space in this discussion to go into the full detail of how it works, its general features can be described. While the USD's status as the global reserve currency has enabled countries to easily trade goods and services through an intermediary with an agreed value, it also has given the US substantial imperial privileges. These include the unique ability of the USA to have near limitless military spending which it uses to maintain a global system of hundreds of US bases as well as its ability to inflict unilateral sanctions on countries it deems to be its enemies.

The USD's status as a global reserve currency ensures it is continually in demand by the world's nations to facilitate trade and government borrowing, particularly for the trade of oil which until very recently was priced and traded almost exclusively in USD. This means that the USA is continually able to print more of its currency without deflating its value, allowing it to avoid the hyper-inflation that would occur if any other country were to endlessly print more money. This spending uncoupled from the actual income of the US economy is used to maintain a hegemonic military power. Countries like Libya and Iraq that were destroyed by US military power during the uni-polar moment of the early 21st century often had announced an intention to sell oil in currencies other than the USD, which undermines the reserve status of the USD. The use of the USD in trade more broadly has devastating effects when the USA unilaterally imposes financial sanctions on its perceived enemies. The illegal blockade and embargo of Cuba following its socialist revolution can be maintained in the face of universal opposition from almost

every other nation on earth due to the ability of the US to cut off entities from world trade that seek to bypass these sanctions. USD sanctions have been over-relied upon by the USA, and this has constructed the incentive for countries like China and Russia to commence work to undercut the USD as a global reserve country by the mid-2010s. If the USD loses the position of global reserve currency then the US will not be able to maintain its enormous government debt, its endless spending on its military and wars, or unilaterally cut its enemies off from global trade. The costs of maintaining its imperial and hegemonic position will fully be borne by its people and its time as a global hegemon would end.

### 3.4 NATO

New blocks have been formed after the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (the Warsaw Treaty, or “Pact” as the West liked to call it) has ceased to exist, but NATO now has incorporated much of former Warsaw Treaty members in eastern Europe, extending to Nordic countries. What do you see as the role of NATO today, and why are Social Democrats so prominent in its leadership?

**RB:** Since the attack on Yugoslavia in 1999, which was without UN approval, NATO has become an overt aggressor that is guilty of war crimes. That said, NATO never had to confront an adversary equal or better. Think of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan. It is notable that since February 2022, NATO is confronting a real and better army, and will suffer its second major defeat after the debacle in Afghanistan.

**CG:** Alliances like NATO among the advanced capitalist countries are a means by which these countries organise for the collective defence of the capitalist system. In this defence of capitalism, they are also defending their unique privileges within this system. This explains why, even with the loss of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, NATO not only remained but expanded. Social democracy, since its betrayal of the working-class movement during the First World War by supporting the war, has been revealed as a tendency of a subsection of the working-class movement that defends the continuation of the capitalist system and seeks to win special privileges within capitalism. It is hardly surprising that social democrats would be prominent in an alliance like NATO that exists to defend capitalism.

### 3.5 AUKUS

Are the new AUKUS pact and the Quad different forms of internationalising alliances like NATO? What are the aims and objectives of these alliances?

**DM:** Given that Australia already has a defence pact with the USA in the form of ANZUS, the AUKUS alliance must be seen in terms of the new strategic relations developed

in Europe. The USA was keen for the UK to leave Europe and thus to assume some of its former colonial role in the Asia-Pacific region. The alliance must be seen as part of this strategic manoeuvre. The submarine deal was symptomatic of this as it was a “to hell with France.” It was an over-calculation as both the USA and Australia were forced to make concessions to the French. It would not be surprising to see a push for a French component to this alliance. Germany is already frozen out of the Pacific and Asia by previous conflicts, so tensions could increase amongst the European countries.

**CG:** The emergence of new alliances is a continuation of the expansion of NATO, which fundamentally aims to defend global capitalism. The expansion of NATO and the emergence of new alliance structures are an expression of the growing fear and unease developing in the ruling class about their ability to maintain their hegemonic position. Losing this hegemonic position would not only imperil their position of privilege, but it would also call into question the long-term survival of capitalism. AUKUS is fundamentally about cementing Australia’s position in this defence of global capitalism against a rising China. AUKUS does this specifically by increasing Australia’s dependency on the USA, integrating it more completely into its force projection structure, and closing off any potential for Australia to move in line with its economic interests in an independent direction.

**RB:** Neither AUKUS nor Quad includes countries in continental East Asia and southeast Asia. Most of these countries – Indonesia and Malaysia most strongly – have objected to both. Japan is regarded by many in East Asia as a highly westernised country that is occupied by the USA. India has its own agenda. A question in relation to the Anglo-supremacist AUKUS that needs to be asked here is why not South Korea or Japan for significant bases? The answer is that China now has area-denial capabilities for the western third of the Pacific, and Australia is currently outside that zone. Note that the flight time between Sydney and Beijing is 11 hours and 30 minutes – the same as London to Beijing.

### 3.6 A new bi-polarisation?

Is it the case that the USA has now begun to try to bi-polarise the world between itself and China? Will the USA be able to achieve this?

**RB:** It takes two to tango. China is simply not playing the game, since it does not follow a zero-sum approach. This is profoundly disconcerting and confusing for the USA and its hangers-on.

**DM:** Later leaders in the Soviet Union allowed themselves to be wedged into an arms race with the USA, and this contributed to the decline of the Soviet Union’s economy. Despite this, it was not inevitable that the Soviet Union

should have declined. It is important to strengthen the socialist forces in China and this has been done by rooting out corruption and strengthening the Party and its connections with the people. It is this that seems to enrage the USA and its supporters, who have hopes of some type of “colour counter-revolution” to spread to mainland China from Hong Kong or a terrorist movement from Tibet or the Uyghur Autonomous Region. Attempts to crash the Chinese economy have so far rebounded on the US stock market.

For some time now, the Communist Party of China has been resisting bi-polarisation with a series of Initiatives. Under this strategy, we have the BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and whole series of cooperation and trade agreements.

### 3.7 The Russian Special Operation in Ukraine

Was the outbreak of war in the Ukraine between the Russian Federation and the US-led system a phase change in the international system?

**DM:** The war has had a tremendous effect on the world and US economy. Military expenditure has never been sustainable except by the looting or destruction of peoples living standards. All wars lead to poverty among the people; only the arms dealers gain and the banks who finance them.

**RB:** It is interesting to note that countries across Africa, Asia (western and eastern), and Latin America, have not bought into the sanctions frenzy. The West is really isolated on this matter. The many countries who do not engage in sanctions recall very clearly the role of the Soviet Union in assisting them in anti-colonial struggles.

**CG:** The war in the Ukraine was a result of a long period of build-up of tensions and stresses in eastern Europe over the divergent interests of NATO countries led by the USA and the Russian Federation. It indicates that these tensions have reached the point that force and violence are the only tools left to solve the political problems that underline these tensions. It shows that the old way of managing the world that allowed the USA and NATO to unilaterally act without consequence no longer works. It particularly reveals that the “uni-polar moment” of exclusive US hegemony has been cast into the dustbin of history, replaced by a multi-polar world marked by great power competition. The war is a revelatory moment in that it shows how much has changed simply by the fact that it occurred at all. This is without discussing the very real and serious economic and trade disruptions that are being unleashed by this war. Briefly on these, the war is causing enormous disruptions into the prices of basic inputs into the global agricultural and industrial system. It has caused huge price rises in energy, fertilisers, grain, seed oils and many other

products that are the foundation of any modern industrial economic system. These prices are flowing through into many essential commodities like food and electricity. It has raised the spectre of a major famine occurring in the global south due to food price rises. The rise in prices of food, petrol and power are also occurring throughout the global north. These are dangerous circumstances for any stressed, fragile society with particularly acute internal contradictions. It can be expected that these changes will produce further unpredictable changes in the coming few years. As communists, we can only hope that communists internationally are able to use these coming crises to strengthen the position of the working class and where possible push for revolutionary transformations of society from capitalism to socialism.

### 3.8 BRI, BRICS, etc.

Should we campaign for Belt and Road Initiative and against a new bi-polarisation as part of our struggle for socialism?

**DM:** It is certainly important for our Party to speak up in support of Australia joining the Belt and Road initiative. It needs to be pointed out to the people of Australia that trade with China has been beneficial to them, and that a strategy of creating a war in Asia is one of creating a disaster. We need to be encouraging bilateral exchanges and opposing belligerent language. We need to counter the new form of racist “yellow peril” language that is being fostered by the main parties.

**RB:** The BRI should be seen as a major new stage in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. The primary beneficiaries are those countries that were assisted formerly by the Soviet Union: developing countries, formerly colonised countries. In this respect, China shares a deep experience with these countries, an experience that those in the West simply cannot comprehend.

### 3.9 An emerging multi-polar world

Is the emerging multi-polar world a world safe for socialist revolutions to occur and succeed?

**RB:** It may perhaps be seen as a transitional stage. It gives existing socialist countries room to move, consolidate, and further build their socialist systems. Historically, however, proletarian revolutions have occurred during times of great economic, social, and political upheaval. The emergence of a multi-polar world will by no means be smooth, with many bumps and crises on the way (as we see in Ukraine). It is too early to tell whether the increasing unrest in some countries in the world today, against the backdrop of growing economic crisis, provides pre-conditions for socialist revolution.

**CG:** The great advantage of a multi-polar world would be the reduced ability for all leading capitalist countries to agree on how to respond to future socialist revolutions, and the inability for a complete embargo to be imposed against these breakaway countries. It would have its own risks and dangers, but none that aren't already present today to socialist countries. When the Russian Revolution occurred 14 nations invaded the disintegrating Russian empire to defeat the revolution. They failed in this attempt. In the emerging multi-polar world such an intervention into a hypothetical revolution could be highly complicated and made less effective from without. It would not have been possible for the USA to easily intervene in the Middle East in the early 21st century if the Soviet Union had still existed. Even in recent years the growth of China and Russia has enabled more assistance to be given to Cuba despite the illegal US embargo. While this assistance isn't exactly comparable to that of the Soviet Union's, it is placing Cuba in a better position than what it was. This specific case is symptomatic of the broader trend in current prospects for socialism, being that the situation is improving for the working-class struggle to make new achievements worldwide, and this improving situation is a relatively new development.

AMR

# British Imperialism – A Threat to World Peace

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Britain's communists have made clear our opposition to the new stage of militarisation in the Asia-Pacific region and, above all, British imperialism's role within this campaign, directed against the People's Republic of China. Our party's last national congress stated that:

We oppose the attempts of the imperialist powers to enforce a new division of China and greater militarisation of the Asia Pacific region. In particular, we reject the British government's neo-colonialist attempts to continue to interfere in Hong Kong, which returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 after 150 years of anti-democratic British rule. We oppose the revival of the deliberately dangerous and provocative use of British naval forces in the South China Sea, which is an unmistakable echo of the very "gunboat diplomacy" that led to Britain's aggressive Opium Wars against China 180 years ago (CPB 2021).

It is easy to mock and ridicule the pretensions of British imperialism. The previous British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, epitomised the image of the blustering, buffoonish English public schoolboy dressed in a Union Jack waistcoat. This can be misleading. Despite Britain's exit from the European Union (Brexit), a move which it must be remembered was resisted by all the mainstream forces of the British ruling class (Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors, the then leadership of the Conservative Party, et al), the United Kingdom remains a significant and dangerous international force.

The US Cold Warrior Dean Acheson remarked as far back as 1962 that "Great Britain has lost an empire and failed to find a role," yet, although British imperialism is in absolute and relative decline, it still possesses key strengths that pose a threat to peace. While it is very much a junior partner of US imperialism, British capitalism remains a significant global actor. We will see how this is specifically related to the AUKUS Pact later, but we can identify several key features of British imperialism, which are often overlooked, including unfortunately by large sections of the British left.

## British Imperialism: Key Features

There are several areas where Britain remains a central component of the Western imperialist alliance.

### Conventional Military Power

The UK was a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), also of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (1954-1977). The UK has the fourth largest military budget in the world and the second largest network of overseas military bases.

According to recent research, in 2020 Britain's military had a permanent presence at "145 base sites in 42 countries or territories around the world ... There are sites in five countries circling China – in Singapore, Brunei, Australia, Nepal and Afghanistan," the report noted.

The Afghan airbase, "Camp Bastion," was the largest British military base built since WW2. It is now controlled by the Taliban. There are also bases in "Cyprus, in seven Arab countries, in Africa – Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Mali – and in tax havens such as Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. In Saudi Arabia there are 15 sites contributing to the Saudi-led war currently devastating Yemen."<sup>1</sup>

Britain's Royal Navy continues to play a provocative role in exercises and sail-bys in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait but its capacity for independent action is limited and is entirely dependent on co-operation and direction from the US Navy (BBC 2021).

### Nuclear Military Power

The UK government's *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, published in March 2021, included a commitment to increase the number of nuclear warheads in the UK's arsenal for the first time since the Cold War from 200 to 260 (itself a breach of the Non-Proliferation Treaty). The document also included a change-in-use posture – the government will consider using nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear threats, including "emerging technologies," which may mean a cyber-attack.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stopwar.org.uk/article/a-nation-in-retreat-britains-vast-network-of-military-bases-says-the-opposite/>

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has estimated that the plan to replace the fleet of four Trident submarines will cost at least £205 billion. This includes “renting” the US-made missiles and adding a new generation PWR3 nuclear reactor for power (probably the same one for the Australian submarines). These Trident reactors are to be built by Rolls-Royce in Derby.<sup>2</sup> Peace activists in Australia should be aware that the costings given by CND are very much on the conservative side. All previous nuclear military budgets over-run considerably. Estimates by the Australian military for the financial costs of the AUKUS should be treated with scepticism.

## Diplomatic Power

The UK is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, allowing it a veto on all substantive motions placed before the UNSC. Britain has rarely needed to use this power unilaterally since the USA generally votes alone. The last time the UK veto was exercised was over the US aggression against Panama (1989) and that vote was naturally in concert with the USA. Generally, the UK’s solo vote was used on issues relating to former or existing imperial possessions in Africa (South Africa, Namibia and “Southern Rhodesia” – today’s Zimbabwe) and Palestine/Middle East.<sup>3</sup>

## Intelligence and Espionage

The UK’s Secret Intelligence Service – also known as MI6 – remains one of the most effective spy operations in the West. According to its mission statement:

Our people work secretly around the world to make the UK safer and more prosperous. For over 100 years SIS has ensured the UK and our allies keep one step ahead of our adversaries. We are creative and determined – using cutting-edge technology and espionage. We have three core aims: stopping terrorism, disrupting the activity of hostile states, and giving the UK a cyber advantage. We work closely with MI5, GCHQ, HM Armed Forces, law enforcement and a range of other international partners.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Moore, head of MI6, said in his first public speech in 2021 that the agency’s main priorities were the “Big Four,” China, Russia, Iran and international terrorism. “Adapting to a world affected by the rise of China is the single greatest priority for MI6. We are deepening our understanding of China across the UK Intelligence community, and widening the options available to the government in managing the systemic challenges that it poses. This is

not just about being able to understand China and Chinese decision making. We need to be able to operate undetected as a secret intelligence agency everywhere within the worldwide surveillance web,” Moore said.

In advance of the formation of NATO, the UK intelligence services were already linked to those of the US through the 1946 British-US Communication Intelligence Agreement (UKUSA). This was eventually expanded to include Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The “Five Eyes” is therefore entirely Anglophone in origin and current membership. As recently declassified documents have shown, the alliance is not one of equals and the dominance of the US National Security Agency (NSA) is obvious.<sup>5</sup>

## Economic PowerReferences

The UK is a G7 member, the UK’s GDP in 2019 was USD \$2.7 trillion. It ranks in the top five world economies by nominal GDP and in the top ten by GDP calculated by PPP. The UK was a founding member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to the OECD website:

Like all the member countries, the government of the United Kingdom maintains a permanent delegation to the OECD, composed of an ambassador and diplomats. As a member of the Council, the United Kingdom’s ambassador, in consultation with his peers, agrees the programme of work which is described in the annual report and establishes the volume of the annual budget, contributions being assessed according to the relative size of each country’s economy. Members of the UK Delegation monitor the work of the OECD’s various committees as well as the activities of the International Transport Forum (ITF), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) and the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), of which the United Kingdom is a member.<sup>6</sup>

The City of London is home to one of the largest Stock Exchanges in the world with a market capitalisation exceeding USD \$4 trillion. However, the absolute decline of British capitalism on a global level can be measured by the fact that, according to the Fortune 500, only 22 British-based transnational corporations qualified for inclusion in 2021, compared with 40 in 2000.

## Propaganda Power

British imperialism recognised early on that it needed to fight an information war and used the global status of the English language to spread its influence. In 1932, it

2 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, <https://cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident>.

3 For UNSC vetoes, see <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>.

4 See [www.sis.gov.uk](http://www.sis.gov.uk).

5 See [www.lawfareblog.com/newly-disclosed-nsa-documents-shed-further-light-five-eyes-alliance](http://www.lawfareblog.com/newly-disclosed-nsa-documents-shed-further-light-five-eyes-alliance).

6 See [www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/united-kingdom-and-oecd.htm](http://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/united-kingdom-and-oecd.htm).



established the English-only BBC Empire Service, subsequently retitled the BBC Overseas Service (1939) and from 1965 known as the BBC World Service.

In addition to English, the BBC sought to set the propaganda agenda in other regions using local languages. The BBC World Service, which was established on the eve of WW2 made its first broadcast not in a European language, such as German, French, Italian or Spanish, as might be expected, but in Arabic. This was a response to fears that anti-colonial sentiment in the Middle East was undermining British influence. In the years after WW1, British Intelligence not only had its agents of influence in every corner of Fleet Street but it also directed some of the operations of respected and supposedly independent news sources, in particular Reuters (Faulconbridge 2020).

The BBC has always assiduously promoted the myth that it is an unbiased news source, unaffected by political pressure from British governments. In reality, its output domestically and especially internationally rarely deviates from the Westminster consensus. The World Service is still partially funded by the British Foreign Office. Television and radio broadcasting has been joined by a major effort to expand on digital platforms. In 2020 and 2021, the BBC announced that it had seen record audience figures with an average of 489 million adults every week. The BBC's international news services also reached record levels with 456 million adults using them each week. This includes audiences for World Service's 40 language services, World Service English, World News TV, BBC.com and BBC Media Action. The key role of the BBC in promoting British interests was openly acknowledged by Tim Davie, BBC Director-General, who said: "The fact that our audience has more than doubled in the last decade shows how trusted and increasingly valued BBC services are right around the world. It also highlights the important role we play for Britain on the global stage in carrying the UK's voice, democratic values and influence."<sup>7</sup>

## British Interference in Hong Kong

Britain took control of Hong Kong through a series of "unequal treaties" imposed on China after a succession of "Opium Wars" in the 19th century. For a century and a half, the colony was ruled by a British-appointed governor and local citizens had no say in his selection. Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty was negotiated in the early 1980s and the framework set out in the Sino-British Declaration of 1984. The declaration has subsequently been exhumed by UK diplomats and the media with the assertion that it somehow guarantees British rights and privi-

leges after 1 July, 1997. A simple reading of the document shows this is utterly false.

The declaration says under item 3: (2) "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be directly under the authority of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign and defence affairs which are the responsibilities of the Central People's Government."

The document clearly outlines that Chinese sovereignty is absolute and undivided and that the city's administration is under the ultimate jurisdiction of the Chinese central government with a high degree of autonomy (not independence) according to the "One Country, Two Systems" principle (Coyle 2022).

## The BN(O) Passport Issue

This section is taken from a briefing for the British anti-imperialist organisation Liberation.<sup>8</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents have a travel document called the British National (Overseas) passport (BNO). An estimated 3 million may be entitled to it. However, the Johnson government has attempted to use this travel document (it does not confer British citizenship or nationality on the holder) as a "fast track to citizenship." Some commentators (eg Simon Tisdall in *The Guardian*) have floated the idea of a "brain drain," whereby Hong Kong would haemorrhage its professional and business class.

Until 1983, Hong Kong citizens could settle fairly easily in the UK, depending on their personal situation, using the BNO's predecessor the British Dependent Territory Citizen passport. The BDTC status was shared by a number of UK controlled territories, such as the Isle of Man, Channel Islands and Hong Kong, with the latter by far the most populous.

However, the Thatcher government introduced a racist Immigration Bill in 1981, which took effect two years later. The Bill separated the predominantly white territories from the non-white territories, giving full citizenship to those living in the Isle of Man, Channel Islands, Gibraltar (and only after the Falklands/Malvinas War to Falkland islanders), excluding non-white territories and specifically Hong Kong's then two million plus BDTC passport holders.

The timing was not accidental. Talks about Hong Kong's future had begun in 1982 and the Thatcher government's hostility to non-white migrants – she had famously warned

7 See [www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2021/bbc-reaches-record-global-audience](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2021/bbc-reaches-record-global-audience).

8 See [liberationorg.co.uk/comment-analysis/a-new-cold-war-with-china-a-briefing](https://liberationorg.co.uk/comment-analysis/a-new-cold-war-with-china-a-briefing).

of Britain being “swamped” by Asian immigration – was a matter of public record.

Only after 2002, during the Blair years, was the BDTC status converted to effective full citizenship and right of abode. By this time of course, Hong Kong SAR was Chinese and the 1984 declaration had made clear that Britain would not extend BNO rights to Hong Kongers born or applying after 1997.

In a further racist move, the Thatcher government attempted to prevent Portugal from offering full Portuguese passports to the residents of Macau. The Tory government realised that when Portugal joined the then European Community (in 1986), Portuguese passport holders could enjoy the right to settle in other EC countries, including the UK.

By contrast in Macau, Hong Kong’s sister Special Administrative Region, its former colonial power Portugal behaved differently. Following the anti-fascist Carnation Revolution of 1974, Portuguese governments were keener to end colonial rule in Macau and the territory was soon designated as a “Chinese territory under temporary Portuguese administration.”

A Sino-Portuguese Declaration was signed in 1987, essentially along the same lines as the 1984 Sino-British Declaration on Hong Kong. However, Portugal offered full Portuguese citizenship to Macau residents born before 1981 and their descendants. Many took advantage of the passport but few were interested in moving to Portugal following 1999 as the economy boomed.

However, this move set alarm bells ringing in Whitehall in 1985. Portugal was to join the European Union in 1986 and Portuguese passport holders would be entitled to settle elsewhere within the EU.

Tory Home Secretary Douglas Hurd wrote a memorandum in October 1985 expressing his concerns to Cabinet colleagues: “having succeeded in avoiding large scale immigration from Hong Kong as a consequence of the negotiations ... we really should not drift into a position in which the unintended consequence of Portuguese accession is the potential immigration of large numbers from Macau.”

## Conclusion

Despite the acceleration of its post-war decline, British imperialism remains a second-tier power to be reckoned with. Its foreign and military policies are almost indistinguishable from that of Washington. Britain’s relations with China are at what must be considered an all-time low. Tensions between the two countries are avoidable and the potential for expanding trade, cultural and other forms of contacts is enormous. Unfortunately, given the direction of all the major parliamentary parties – Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrats and even the Scottish National Party – Britain seems set on confrontation rather than co-operation with China, a policy fraught with dangers.

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# The Biden Administration's Imperialist China Policy, and the Taiwan Issue

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I want to thank our host CP Australia, and also CP Britain and the other comrades who made this discussion possible.

I want to address the topic with three points: 1) what is the Biden administration's China policy after one year in office? 2) How effective is that policy? 3) The Taiwan issue.

## I. What is Biden's China Policy?

Biden's policy is essentially a doubling-down of the aggressive strategy of seeking global hegemony, which means a strong anti-China policy as its main perceived long-term rival and adversary, while given the Ukraine events, Russia may become a prime adversary in the shorter term.

The Trump administration launched the trade war, which hasn't worked very well. While some damage was done to Huawei mobile phones and Xinjiang cotton, China's basic economic and international trade position today continues to be overall strong.

Biden shifted to a (full spectrum) attack on human rights and an ideological and propaganda war, focused on false and extravagant claims about "genocide" of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Both administrations have tried to block China's acquisition of high technology, its access to computer chips and sales of 5G equipment. Both administrations have continued provocative displays of air-sea military power in the South China Sea, even with risk of conflict or war. Biden may leave himself an out if there is a change in approach as he articulates rhetoric upholding "one-China." However, he continues actions to support Taiwan independence, and says he is against a new cold war while actively pushing it.

How do we explain this basic continuity of US imperialist policy towards China? The weapons manufacturers and the military-industrial complex profit immensely when there is a fearsome enemy – thus acquiring expensive new weapons systems is a necessity. The colossal sums appropriated by the US Congress to the military machine mean big profits for Wall Street banks, and neocon analysts at

right-wing think tanks are pleased to identify China as the principal enemy.

We need to look at strategy towards China in a larger context. The "Biden Doctrine" depicts a historic, global struggle between democracy and autocracy for the defense of freedom and the future of the world. The US presumes to consider itself as the leader of the democracies, and also defines what is a democracy. The question for the US is, do you support us? There is no consideration as to whether any given country is actually democratic or not. This hypocrisy is obvious to the Global South.

Biden envisioned improving on Trump's go it alone approach to build a US-led "grand alliance" of the so-called democracies to defeat the "autocracies" in "fierce competition" to ensure a "free world" and stop China's growing malign influence. To this end, Biden hosted a Summit for Democracy in December, a Zoom conference attended by 111 countries, the "democracies." Of course, China and Russia were not invited. Biden hoped this meeting would boost forward a practical collaboration. However, there has been little follow through in action

## II. How Effective is the Biden Doctrine, on its Own Terms?

While not supported globally, it seems to be working well in the countries of the Anglosphere – US, UK, Australia and Canada. In the US, Biden has consolidated political support. Both Democratic and Republican parties are united in the anti-China policy. Congress passes huge military budgets and China-bashing legislation with overwhelming votes.

In civil society, liberal mainstream media outlets such as the *New York Times* and CNN lead the attack on human rights, with constant negative messaging night-and-day. US public opinion has shifted from positive on China ten years ago to two-thirds negative today. The way in which the US ruling class can shape public opinion through its control of the corporate mass media frightens me. Meanwhile, racist incidents of harassment and violence against Chinese and Asian Americans keep increasing.

Outside the US, AUKUS, the new military agreement among the US, Australia and the UK, will provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and enhanced military and technical cooperation among the three countries.

AUKUS is a major strategic military and political move by US imperialism to contain China's power in the region. It is also a bonanza for US weapons contractors. In the UK, the US pressured London to ban China's 5G technology and equipment, claiming it could be used for spying. All the Anglosphere countries including Canada embraced the propaganda line weaponising human rights.

But what if we step outside the Anglosphere? While the NATO countries are still subservient to the US militarily, the Biden Doctrine is not so popular even among allies and friends in the EU. For example, Germany wants good trade relations with China, its largest trading partner. Germans are skeptical that China is a direct military threat and along with France explored a more independent foreign policy in the Ukraine crisis. Biden's call for a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics did not catch fire; even close allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt sent delegations. Where is the alliance of democracies actually operative?

If we consider the Global South, we see that the majority of people and countries want cooperation on critical issues as the pandemic, climate change and preventing a major war. This is common sense. The majority of countries and people around the world reject a global framework of division and US-led fierce competition; it is not just nor in their self-interest. Most countries support the trend towards a multi-polar world and against hegemony. China's framework of win-win diplomacy and community for a shared future are much better suited for the increasingly multi-polar world.

US media continually portrays China as increasingly isolated internationally but that is not true especially in the Global South. For example, Iran and China are now implementing a 25-year cooperation agreement, Syria and Argentina recently joined the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2021 announced joint China-Africa production of 400 million doses of COVID vaccines with China providing 600 million more.

Thus, on a global scale, the Biden Doctrine is mostly not popular and not effective; it goes against the multi-polar trend of the times. So where does this leave us? Three more years of the imperialist Biden doctrine, which is bound to lead to constant tension and risk of conflict. That is not an appealing prospect, especially since there is little resistance in the US, either among progressive politicians or the peace/antiwar movement. Our job is to help build that resistance and the no cold war movement in the US and also internationally.

### III. Taiwan

I was asked to say something about the Taiwan issue. The US mainstream media will say that this is a difficult,

even intractable issue. Actually, it is easy to understand in principle. US aggression is 99 per cent the source of the problem and the path to resolving the problem is simply that the US has to actually implement the agreements it has already made, namely the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 and the joint statement upon establishing diplomatic relations of the USA and PRC in 1979.

To help understand the Chinese perspective today, recall a few basic facts of history. China was long a presence in the South China Sea and the Qing Dynasty gained control of Taiwan from the Dutch in the late 17th century. However, the Qing was defeated by Japan in the war of 1894-1895 and Japan annexed Taiwan into its growing empire. During World War II, as Japan was being defeated, the "big four" allied leaders (Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and Chiang Kai-Shek) met and considered the post war period in Asia. Taiwan would be returned to China by Japan, everyone agreed. When the United Nations was formed in 1945, China was a founding member of the Security Council and it was assumed that Taiwan was part of China. No one including the US ever thought otherwise.

But things began to change when the Chiang Kai-Shek led Guomindang progressively lost the Chinese civil war of 1946-1949, being defeated by the communist-led Red Army. The KMT fled to Taiwan island after being militarily defeated on the mainland. After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the US sent its Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan straits to protect Chiang Kai-Shek. Most observers believe that without US military backing of the KMT, the Red Army with local support would have eventually taken control of the island. China has never accepted the legitimacy of the US military intervention in the Chinese civil war. And it is this US intervention that created the different governments on the island and the mainland, and is the root of this problem.

To China, this is an important core issue partly because it deals with territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Ever since the Opium War in 1840 the Western colonial strategy was to break off bits of the empire, one by one, to weaken and overthrow the Beijing government. For example, the British occupied Hong Kong and had a concession in Shanghai. Germany and Japan had a concession in Shandong Province. Russia and Japan exerted control over northeast China or Manchuria and Britain tried to seize Tibet. Russia annexed considerable territory on China's northern borders and eyed Xinjiang. Japan launched a full-scale invasion and occupation, costing more than 20 million Chinese lives.

Once again today China sees foreign warships on its southern coasts, just like the British during the Opium War. Today's imperialist pressure on Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, has to be seen in this historical context. Both foreign minister Wang Yi and President

Xi Jinping in their speeches have made references to the “century of humiliation” when China was a victim of colonialism and imperialism. Those who want peace must repudiate the 1950 US military intervention.

### Fixing the Problem

Regarding the Taiwan issue, the solution is clear. All that needs to happen is for the US to actually fulfill the terms of the Shanghai Communiqué. The US simply has to do what it has committed to in writing. That is, cut back on military support for Taiwan, stop high level official visits, stick to established protocols, don't support Taiwan independence activities. Recognise in word and deed that the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government of China. Business, educational and cultural activities can proceed as usual.

Instead, Biden violates diplomatic agreements with China, such as by officially inviting to his inauguration the top Taiwanese envoy in the US. Sales of military equipment to Taipei have continued and the US has pushed for Taiwan's participation as an independent country in international bodies like the WHO. The US continues to display military force in the South China Sea, but China will not back down on the Taiwan question; this is one place where China will fight if pushed too far and there is risk of a shooting war. It is the responsibility of the US to change course and fulfill its obligations according to the agreements it has signed.

### Conclusion

Looking ahead, there are three more years of the Biden doctrine pressing US advantages in military and financial power and propaganda. Biden has shown he is willing to take risks on military confrontation, such as in the South China Sea or Ukraine. This is not an appealing prospect, particularly in the US, where we need a stronger peace and antiwar movement, which must be built broadly to be most effective, including working class and people of colour organizations.

Also, we should support the trend towards a multi-polar world. Build the no cold war movement and oppose a racist foreign policy in the communities, the media, the streets and in the bourgeois political institutions. Demand that the US president and Congress cut the military budget, close foreign bases and pull back troops from their forward positioning. Stop modernizing the US nuclear arsenal and initiate negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Cooperate with all countries on climate change and implement the China-US Glasgow agreement on global warming.

We urge that all the progressive people's movements and organizations to join in a broad popular front against war, US militarism, racism, and white supremacy, and offer an alternative agenda of economic development and global cooperation.

AMR

# Xinjiang and the Uyghur Question

Roland Boer

This contribution will deal with a topic that has been a feature in the “empire of lies” promoted by the small number of Western countries in the world in the last few years: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the People’s Republic of China. I will provide a Marxist framework, relying on Chinese Marxist analysis, of the situation in Xinjiang. The article has three main sections. The first presents some geographical and historical information concerning China’s population distribution and the strategically and economically important corridor from the populous eastern parts to what is now Xinjiang. The second part provides an account, via first-hand experience, of the preferential policies for minority nationalities in socialist countries such as China. The third part turns to the question of a Marxist approach to human rights and how these rights are protected and promoted in Xinjiang, as well as other areas in China.

## Concerning Geography

To begin with geography. In recent years, China has stepped onto the centre of the world stage. As the Russians point out, China is a giant; it may not yet see itself as a giant, but it is. As a result, China’s regions, provinces, and autonomous regions are starting to become known around the world, but much still needs to be learnt. Let us focus on the overall geographical situation in China.

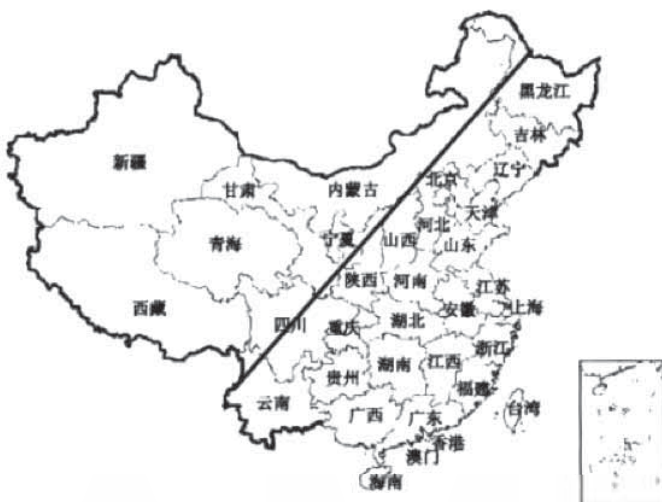


Diagram 1: Hu Huanyong Line (Hu 1935).

The map here is a copy of an original initially published in 1935. Notice the black line, which runs from Aihui (in

Heilongjiang province) in the northeast to Tengchong (in Yunnan province) in the southwest. For this reason, it is sometimes called the Aihui-Tengchong line. These days, it is more commonly known as the Hu Huanyong line, since this name refers to the geographer who first identified the line almost 90 years ago in an article entitled “Population Distribution in China – with Statistical Tables and Density Maps” (Hu 1935). It is from this article that I have drawn the map. What were Hu’s findings?

On the basis of a careful study of population data over the centuries, Hu Huanyong found that about 94 percent of the Chinese population has historically flourished south-east of the line from Aihui (Heihe) to Tengchong. Further, political power has historically been located in the same zone. But there is a problem: most of the mineral resources and headwaters of the major rivers are north-west of the line, where about six percent of the population lives. This vast northwestern area also contains border regions such as Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The outcome: from earlier forms of the state until today, there has been a resolute focus on the unification of diverse areas (Hao 2020, 125–28). Historically, with the rarest of exceptions the only wars that China has fought have concerned unifying the country and securing unstable borders. Further, the state has focused from time immemorial to redistributing resources from the sparsely populated regions to those of population density. Thus, the Chinese notions of harmony and stability, as well as the union of opposites, have always had a very concrete reference to the disparate regions of China.

Many are the studies of the Hu Huanyong line and its direct influence on policy decisions, but allow me to generate a map that uses the latest statistics from China’s National Bureau of Statistics. The material used here relates primarily to the census of 2020 (NBS 2021d; 2021c; 2021a; 2021b).

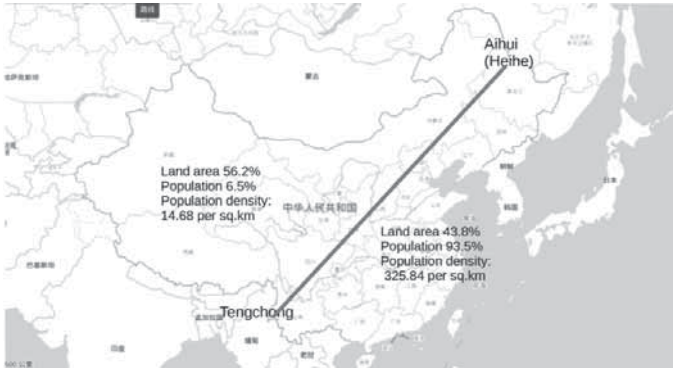


Diagram 2: Population Distribution in China.  
(author produced map)

There is another important geographical reality in China, which is known as the Hexi Corridor (Hexi zoulang).



Diagram 3: The Hexi Corridor.  
(author produced map)

The Hu Huanyong line is there, but it is the other line in which I am interested: the Hexi Corridor. This natural corridor is 1200 kilometres in length and – running between high plateaus, in Qinghai to the south and Inner Mongolia to the north – connects the eastern areas with what is now known as Xinjiang. The name “Hexi” simply means “West of the River,” the river in question being the Yellow River (*Huang He*). In our time, the province of Gansu marks – by and large – the route of the corridor. From a strategic and economic perspective, the Hexi Corridor is vitally important. Strategically, it has been a point of struggle for centuries and indeed millennia. A little over two millennia ago, the Western Han Dynasty managed to gain control in struggles with the Xiongnu and established the Western Regions Frontier Command; a millennium later it was the Tang Dynasty, who once again gained firm control of the whole route; but it was only in the middle of the eighteenth century – almost 300 years ago – that the Qing Dynasty was able to include Xinjiang fully within China. Economically, it was precisely the Hexi Corridor that provided the initial route through China for the ancient Silk Road. By the time the route reached Xinjiang, it took two paths, one in a southerly direction and the other in a northerly direction, before crossing into central Asia. It was along this route that Buddhism came into China,

that the people now known as the Hui Nationality came from many parts further West, and indeed the way that advanced Chinese ideas passed into Western Europe to spur the European Enlightenment. And, of course, it was the absolutely vital trade route across the whole of Eurasia – silks, for example, had already made their way into Europe at the time of Julius Caesar of ancient Rome (Gan 2019, 263–70). Needless to say, the Hexi Corridor today is a linchpin of the new Silk Road, or the Belt and Road Initiative.

By now the reader should be able to see why Xinjiang is so important for China. Not only is it the major region on China’s western border with a history of two millennia, but it also forms the end of the Hexi Corridor and the passage into Central Asia. Xinjiang has always been and will continue to be of utmost strategic, economic, and political importance.

## Preferential Policies for Minority Nationalities

To begin this section with a story: Not long after the Kunming Railway Station massacre of March 2014, I was teaching a class in Beijing. The massacre was perpetrated by about a dozen Uyghur terrorists, who killed 31 people with knives and injured more than 140 others (this was one of thousands of such incidents in China since the 1990s). In my class was a young Uyghur student. She and her sister are both from Xinjiang and were studying in Beijing. During a presentation to the class, she made an impassioned speech. “Islam is a religion of peace and non violence,” she said. “I am a Uyghur and am proud to be Chinese. In fact, the vast majority of Uyghur people see themselves as part of China and condemn the terrorists.” Why did she feel that she needed to make this point to the class?

At the time, many other people and nationalities in China distrusted the Uyghur, seeing them all as troublemakers and terrorists. I recall expressing a desire at the time to visit Xinjiang, and one of my colleagues said, “Don’t go there, the situation is dangerous.” The hard task for the local government in Xinjiang and the government in Beijing was to prevent this negative attitude to Uyghur people from spreading and cementing itself. In other words, there was a heavy focus on ensuring that all of the other nationalities respected Uyghur people and saw them as equally part of China.

## Historical Development of the Preferential Policies

To go further: a major feature of all socialist countries since the earliest days of the Soviet Union has been pref-

erential policies for minority nationalities.<sup>1</sup> These include high levels of autonomy in governance, economic support, fostering of minority languages, education, culture, and so on. We need to be careful here and avoid seeing the preferential policies for minority nationalities from a Western colonialist perspective. These policies are not simply promoted by a government for minorities who are outside the structures of power; instead, the policies arise from the fact that minorities are very much embodied in the structures of governance.

Let us consider the history and enactment of the preferential policies in China in a little more detail,<sup>2</sup> since they provide the framework for China's response to the terrorism, extremism, and separatism that had been found in Xinjiang since the 1990s. Historically, we can see minorities' policies emerging already in the 1930s, from the time of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet.<sup>3</sup> In light of earlier experience, Mao Zedong observed in the context of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance: "give the Meng, Hui, Zang, Miao, Yao, Yi, Fan, and all the other nationalities equal rights with the Han. Under the principle of joint resistance to Japan, they have the right to manage their own affairs, while at the same time uniting with the Han to establish a unified state" (Mao 1938, 506). By 1936, the first Yuhai Hui Autonomous Government was established in a mosque in Tongxin county in Ningxia province (Hao 2020, xv), and by 1941 the Mongolian and Hui autonomous regions were established within the Red Areas (Fang 2015, 53–54). After liberation in 1949, the "Common Program" emphasised equality and unity between all nationalities, and stressed the need to establish autonomous regions where nationalities are concentrated. Note article 53 of the Common Program: "All minority nationalities have the freedom to develop their spoken and written languages, to maintain or reform their customs and religious beliefs. The people's governments shall assist the people of the minority nationalities in developing the construction of their political, economic, cultural and educational institutions" (CPPCC 1949, art. 53; see also National People's Congress 2018, art. 4). Clearly, nationalities have been an integral part of the political structure from the beginning. However, the process of identifying nationalities required extensive research by teams across China during the 1950s (Ma 2012; Hao 2020, 80–86), with the result that 56 official *minzu*,<sup>4</sup> were recognised, including the majority Han and 55 other

groups, with the latter ranging in size from almost 20 million to a few thousand.

## Culture and Education

In what follows, I will focus on the four features of the nationalities policy mentioned in the "Common Program," although in this order: culture and education, politics, and economy. Throughout this overview, we need to remember that the implementation and refinement, and indeed revision where mistakes are made, of the policies is not a given, but rather a long term project that must negotiate many challenges (Hao 2020, 207–225). In terms of culture and education, local languages are fostered in media, literature, and in schools (Hao 2020, 179–184).<sup>5</sup> Local customs, rituals, festivals, and especially religions are not merely permitted but actively supported, with temples, churches, and mosques constructed and maintained with state funds. In many cases, the minorities are far more religious than the Han majority, since often cultural identity is connected with religion (for example, the primary identification of the Hui Nationality is Islam). Obviously, religions must operate within the laws of the land, and cannot be leveraged for treasonous activities. In schools, children have classes in their local language, alongside the obligatory classes in Mandarin that is needed for communication across China and for work. In regard to universities, there are *minzu* universities in all regions, and students are assisted – through quotas and extra points – for university entrance examinations (*gaokao*). These policies are well-established in China and minorities attest to their effectiveness. But they are not fixed and unchangeable, especially in light of the rapid pace of development in China. Ma Rong (2010) identifies a tension between "protecting the traditional culture" and "realising the modernisation" of minorities, especially in terms of the mobility of labour and participation in political, cultural, and economic life.

## Governance

The question of governance has two levels, the one local and the other country-wide. Locally, autonomous regions and prefectures number almost 160 in China, with significant autonomy in policy development. Minorities are also assured representation in the local level People's Political Consultative Conferences and can be elected to the local People's Congresses. At a country-wide level, all minority nationalities are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), along with delegates who may – through initial direct elections and then higher-level indirect elections – become delegates in the annual National People's Congress. If we include the fact that people from minority nationalities are also

1 The most comprehensive work in English on the Soviet Union's policies is by Terry Martin (2001), although it is more useful for the massive amount of archival information than the author's conclusions.

2 By far the best works in English on China's nationalities are by Mackerras (2003) and Hao (2020). In Chinese, the key study by Ma Rong (2007) set the agenda for a whole new level of research.

3 A complete collection documents relating to minority nationalities in the Red Areas during the long revolutionary struggle may be found in *Compilation of Documents on Nationality Issues: 1921–1949 (Minzu wenti wenxian huibian)*. See also the historical overview in Hao Shiyuan (2020, ix–xiv).

4 *Minzu* translates the Russian *natsional'nost*, with the meaning of nationality or nation. It is not the same as an "ethnic group," for which *zuqun* is used.

5 This process has not been without its problems. For example, smaller nationalities such as the Hezhe, Luoba, Bonan, and Dulong, do struggle at this level. With only a few thousand members and, in some cases, the absence of a written language, the language's survival is an open question.



members of the CPC, with the percentage growing to the point that it is almost equivalent to the percentage of minority nationalities among the population as a whole (8.14 percent), then it is clear that minority nationalities are structurally integral to the whole political system in China.

However, it is at the level of governance that a contradiction arises, between autonomy and unity. How does the significant emphasis on autonomous decision-making and policy development relate to the unified strength of the country as a whole? Western imperialist efforts to exploit the autonomy of minority nationalities' regions are by no means new. The focus on Xinjiang is only the latest wave of efforts that have at times included Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Taiwan island, Hong Kong SAR, and other regions. For example, soon after the Xinhai (Republican) revolution of 1911, the independence of Outer Mongolia was proclaimed; following many years of trying to dominate Tibet, in 1914 the British imperialists attempted to instigate the "independence of Tibet" in the Simla Accord of that year; the Japanese – who had already invaded and annexed Taiwan island in 1895 – invaded northeastern China in 1931 and established the puppet regime of "Manchukuo"; soon afterwards, Uyghur separatists founded the short-lived "East Turkestan Islamic State" in Xinjiang; in 1935 Japan hatched a conspiracy to found a "Mongolian State" in Inner Mongolia; and there were Japanese preparations for establishing "Huihuiguo" (a separate state for Hui people) in the Ningxia region (Hao 2020, 44–60). Zhou Enlai's observation of 1949 came out of this background, warning that the newly-liberated China should be on its guard: "Today the imperialists want to split Tibet, Taiwan and even Xinjiang; in this case, we hope that all nationalities do not listen to the provocation of imperialists" (Zhou 1949, 140).

What has been the response in China to such efforts? While a few scholars have suggested that political autonomy for minorities should be downplayed and the term "nation" reserved only for China as a whole (Ma 2007; 2011; see also Zhang and Wei 2018), others continue to emphasise a Marxist dialectical approach of diversity in unity: the greater the autonomy, the greater the unity; the more people's lives are improved through the preferential policies, the more do they see themselves as part of the whole (Fei 1989; Wang 2009; 2010; Wu and Hao 2017, 4).

## Economic Development

The final category of preferential policies concerns economic development, which not only reflects the Marxist emphasis on the economic base, but also leads to the analysis in the following section. As noted earlier, many of the minority nationalities in China live in remote border regions to the north-west of the Hu Huanyong Line, and as a result many of them have lagged behind in China's rapid

economic development. Many have been the programs over the years to develop local economies and improve basic living conditions, with significant funding from the central government for all manner of projects, favourable conditions for the establishment of local enterprises, and so on. Those from minority backgrounds have been provided with favourable opportunities for study and work. It was these types of policies to which the student in my class was alluding (mentioned above). At the time, she came from a relatively poor region of China – parts of Xinjiang were then still mired in absolute poverty. The preferential policies had given her and her sister an opportunity to study in Beijing.

At the same time, the policies up to about a decade ago had fallen short of the mark. Uneven and unbalanced development remained a significant problem. While development had improved the lives of hundreds of millions in the "cradle" of Chinese civilisation, south-east of the Hu Huanyong Line, in the sparsely populated border regions poverty was still a problem less than a decade ago. In short, despite all of the efforts at economic assistance to these areas – including Xinjiang – the results remained unsatisfactory (Jing 2006; Hao 2020, 128–139). Absolute poverty remained a major problem in remote and rural areas.

## Marxist Human Rights

The economic question brings us to human rights. Let me begin with a quotation: the "people of the various minority nationalities in Xinjiang have seen great progress in the protection of their human rights" (SCIO 2017, 2). Yes, there are many minority nationalities in Xinjiang – 13 with historical presence and more than 40 today. But what is meant by rights, specifically human rights? For those of us who have been brought up in one of the few Western countries in the world – all former colonisers – "human rights" automatically brings to mind freedom of expression, assembly, and movement. I will not spend any time on the very limited sense of these Western liberal human rights, save to note that it is based on private property (Marx and Engels 1846, 208, 361–63; 1848, 498, 504).

## The Marxist Tradition

There is, however, another tradition of human rights that arises from the Marxist tradition and is promoted vigorously in China. To explain: while the roots are anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic sovereignty (shared by all colonised countries), the core human right is the right to subsistence, to socioeconomic well-being, to common prosperity.

We can note key moments in the development of this approach, such as Engels's point that the purpose of socialism is to guarantee "the subsistence of the proletariat" (Engels 1847, 102), or Stalin's point that the core to all rights is

freedom from exploitation. Rights are meaningless if a person is “haunted by the fear of being tomorrow deprived of work, of home and of bread” (Stalin 1936, 169). Instead, socialism seeks a “prosperous and cultured life” for all (Stalin 1934, 365; Supreme Soviet 1936, art. 131). We can note the slogan from the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet of the late 1920s and early 1930s: ensure that people have a roof over their heads, food, clothes, and warmth in winter, and then they will become communists. Or Deng Xiaoping’s point that “poor socialism” is not socialism at all, since the purpose of socialism is to raise the socio-economic well-being of all as a preparation for communism (Deng 1979, 235; 1986, 174). Today, of course, this approach to human rights is embodied in the core policy of “common prosperity.” If you would like to know more, there are many resources in China on this approach to human rights. The two most comprehensive websites for human rights matters and research are from the China Society for Human Rights Studies ([www.humanrights.cn](http://www.humanrights.cn)), with an English version of the website ([www.chinahumanrights.org](http://www.chinahumanrights.org)). Further, there is a rapidly increasing amount of accurate information on China, from translations of detailed scientific studies on the history, theory, and practice of human rights in China (Sun 2014; Chang et al. 2020; Hao 2020).

In order to summarise what could be a much longer analysis (Boer 2022), the following image may be useful:

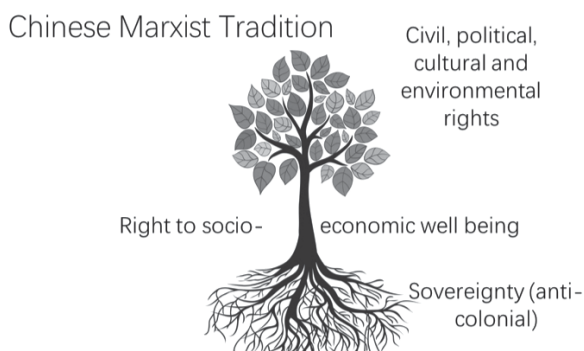


Diagram 4: The Marxist Approach to Human Rights

Thus, the roots of this approach to human rights is anti-colonial or anti-hegemonic sovereignty, since rights are meaningless if a country is subjected to imperialist colonisation. The trunk is – as I have discussed – socio-economic well-being, and it is from this core right that all other rights flow. A question remains: do citizens of a socialist country need to wait until they have all been lifted out of poverty and achieve at least moderate prosperity before the flowering of civil, political, cultural, and environmental rights? Of course not, but the process is a gradual one. As the socio-economic conditions improve for urban and rural workers, more substantive rights become materially possible. They grow over time, along with improving living conditions. Or, as Fang Ning puts it, from a Marxist perspective, human rights are historical rather than innate,

are granted by society rather than by nature, and are practical rather than ideal (Fang 2015, 107–11).

## Xinjiang and Human Rights

What has this Marxist approach to human rights got to do with Xinjiang? Precisely because Xinjiang has been and continues to be so strategically and economically important, it has been plagued by periodic difficulties. However, the 1990s were crucial. At that time, currents of Islamic radicalism began to be promoted in some parts of the population and there was a rise in terrorist incidents (Hao 2020, 154–56). Weapons, explosives, and militants began crossing the mountainous borders along drug routes from the west, usually funded by Western sources (Davis 2013, 102–3, 118). From the mid-1990s until five years ago, there had been thousands of terrorist incidents, mostly targeted at other Uyghur people (SCIO 2019).

Marxist analysis was deployed. To begin with, the immediate questions of safety, stability, and social harmony had to be addressed. A new governor with a reputation for getting things done was appointed to Xinjiang. The result: since 2017 there have been no terrorist incidents.

But how is this Marxist? Achieving social stability was a prerequisite for economic development. The analysis by many scholars and policy makers was that the root cause of the unrest and difficulties in Xinjiang was endemic poverty. Obviously, this is a direct application of the primary rights to economic well-being and development (SCIO 2021a, 4). With limited job opportunities, young people especially would be attracted to extremist views, and engage in separatist and terrorist activities. As a result of these conclusions, many angles were developed to improve the socioeconomic conditions (Hao 2020, 157–58). The quality of education was improved so as to enable young people to find jobs. This of course included ideological education in Marxism and religion – yes, some of the key teachers were Muslim imams. Job opportunities have also increased, with incomes rising at about 10 percent per year (SCIO 2021a, 12). Further, young CPC members volunteered to work in poor villages so as to develop targeted programs, in light of concrete conditions, so as to lift people out of poverty.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Xinjiang – where some of the most intractable poverty in China could be found – was finally declared free of poverty in all areas in late 2020 (Note that the Chinese definition of poverty and thus alleviation from poverty is more comprehensive than that of the World Bank). More than 2.7 million in some of the remotest regions of China had been lifted out of poverty.

This was, however, only the first step. Apart from putting in place measures to ensure that people do not fall back into poverty, the program now is to improve people’s lives

<sup>6</sup> For example, see the account of work in Aksu, Keping county, in Xinjiang, by Li Hui, Zhao Minghao, and Zhang Lu (2022).

much further. Measures in the more remote areas include targeted efforts to ensure employment – based on the right to work – for workers from poor families, people experiencing difficulties in finding work, and rural women. A comprehensive welfare system has also been developed in the last decade, so much so that Xinjiang took the lead in China in terms of retirement pensions, and medical, work-related injury, and unemployment insurance.

## Xinjiang's Population

It is also necessary to address here the topic of Xinjiang's population. Simply put, over the last 40 years the total population of Xinjiang has doubled. In 1978 there were 13.08 million residents; and by 2020 the population was 25.85 million. When we focus on minority nationalities, we see a comparable population growth, as this table of census data shows.

## Minority Nationalities' Population Growth in Xinjiang

| Census | Year | Minority Nationalities' Population | Increase from Previous Census | CAGR from Previous Census |
|--------|------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1st    | 1953 | 4,451,500                          | --                            | --                        |
| 2nd    | 1964 | 4,948,900                          | 497,400                       | 0.97%                     |
| 3rd    | 1982 | 7,797,500                          | 2,848,600                     | 2.56%                     |
| 4th    | 1990 | 9,461,500                          | 1,664,000                     | 2.45%                     |
| 5th    | 2000 | 10,969,600                         | 1,508,100                     | 1.49%                     |
| 6th    | 2010 | 12,985,900                         | 2,016,300                     | 1.70%                     |
| 7th    | 2020 | 14,932,200                         | 1,946,300                     | 1.41%                     |

CAGR refers to the Compound Annual Growth Rate

Diagram 5: Population Growth of Minority Nationalities in Xinjiang (SCIO 2021b, 5; see also NBS 2011).

From the first census after liberation to 2020, the population of minorities in Xinjiang has more than trebled; and from the beginning of the Reform and

Opening-Up, this population has doubled. Is the situation for the Uyghur any different? Not at all, for they too have doubled in number in the last 40 years.

## Uyghur Population Growth Between National Censuses

| Year of Census | Uyghur Population | Increase from Previous Census | CAGR from Previous Census |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1953           | 3,607,600         | --                            | --                        |
| 1964           | 3,991,600         | 384,000                       | 0.92%                     |
| 1982           | 5,955,900         | 1,964,300                     | 2.25%                     |
| 1990           | 7,191,800         | 1,235,900                     | 2.38%                     |
| 2000           | 8,345,600         | 1,153,800                     | 1.50%                     |
| 2010           | 10,001,300        | 1,655,700                     | 1.83%                     |
| 2020           | 11,624,300        | 1,623,000                     | 1.52%                     |

Diagram 6: Population Growth of the Uyghur Minority (SCIO 2021b, 8).

Statistics are important, but they can get us only so far. Analysis provides a more nuanced understanding, which points out that there have been three main periods of population growth: low growth, due to high birth and death rates; high growth, due to high birth and low death rates; low growth, due to low birth and death rates (SCIO 2021b, 9–14). The middle period of high growth was due to vastly improved medical care, and a rapidly increasing life expectancy from a low of 30 in 1949. It was also due to the fact that smaller nationalities such as the Uyghur were exempted from the recently abolished one-child policy (albeit with increased limits), and to the persistence

of traditional cultural and religious assumptions concerning women and childbirth. In this context, it was assumed that a woman would have on average six children. The more recent period – somewhat delayed in relation to the rest of the country (Li, Yang, and Jiang 2019) – of lower population growth is due to significant economic development (as noted), stricter regulation of limiting the number of children to three,<sup>7</sup> and extraordinary progress in education. In 1949, only 19.8 percent of children were receiving

7 Enacting this limit in rural areas had been a distinct problem, with traditional cultural assumptions concerning large families more than often prevailing over the policy limit of three per family.

education and only 10 percent were literate. Among these, no women were literate. Now, 98-100 percent of children receive education, and literacy is universal. Further, the vast improvement in public health has meant that women have access to a full range of health services, including prenatal and postnatal care, children's health, and family planning options. If we include the many employment opportunities for women, who now make up 47.43 percent of the workforce, it should be no surprise that young women are making clearer choices about their lives, and that they prefer smaller families. The future is focused on quality population growth, with a robust economy, a full range of educational and employment opportunities, and healthy children.

## The Belt and Road Initiative

In all of this, the most significant project is the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in neighbouring Kazakhstan in

2013 (Xi 2013). The BRI has many dimensions, but Xinjiang is a linchpin (Hao 2020, 158–64). Nearly all of the long-distance freight trains running across the Eurasian landmass – and there are thousands of these trains now – run through Xinjiang. Major oil and gas pipelines from central Asia run through Xinjiang. As a hub of the new Silk Road, Xinjiang's economy has been booming. While the figures for 2020 are a little lower due to the pandemic, for the last ten years, the economy in Xinjiang has grown at a rate of about 10 percent per year (SCIO 2021a, 12). I should add that the emphasis has been very much on high-quality and “green” development, especially since Xinjiang's economic boom has benefited from coming relatively late and has been able to avoid many of the pollution problems associated with development elsewhere in the country in the 1980s and 1990s (Aili and Li 2021; Gao Zhiliang and Li 2021; Gao Zhigang, Ding, and Yang 2022).

### Social and economic development in Xinjiang

#### 1. GDP, 2010-2020

(Billion yuan, 1 billion yuan = \$154 million)

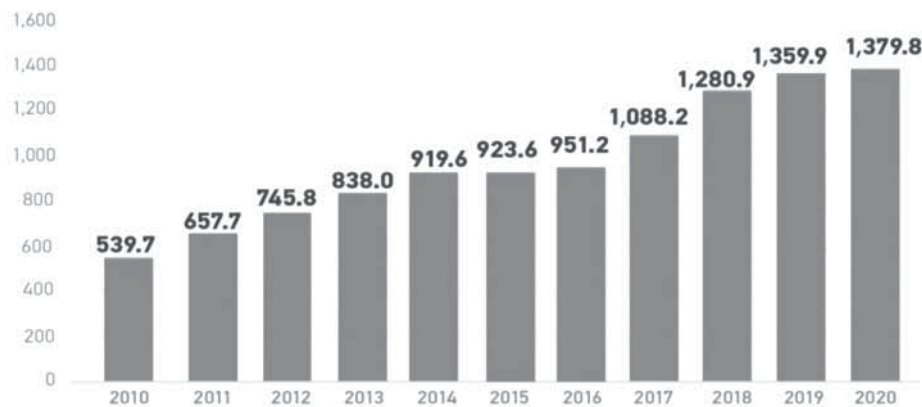


Diagram 7: Social and Economic Development in Xinjiang (Statistics Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region)

## Conclusion

A question remains: why have the declining and fragmenting Western imperialists given up on the Dalai Lama and made Xinjiang the flavour of the month, deploying the old anti-communist playbook of “atrocious propaganda”? By now the answer should be obvious. As a precondition to all human rights, Xinjiang is at last realising the core Marxist human right to socioeconomic well-being, or common prosperity (SCIO 2021a, 11). For Western imperialists this is intolerable. To be sure, Xinjiang's immense strategic, political, and economic importance are also reasons, but the core reason is Xinjiang's clear move towards common prosperity.

All of these developments have been the concern of Chinese research, with careful assessments of how to deal with this frenetic effort at Western discourse dominance

(Li X. 2019; Zheng 2021). There is a concern in these works that the influence of Chinese discourse has diminished somewhat as a result of Western efforts at atrocity propaganda. However, it is notable that Western efforts concerning Xinjiang have moved up – compared with earlier efforts – another notch or two. They are now based on pure fabrication, which is repeated ad nauseam, and is then enhanced once again. This extreme and frenetic level indicates that such an approach may well be running out of steam, as witnessed by the majority of countries and peoples in the world who are no longer persuaded or influenced by Western smears. In the case of Xinjiang, the most notable example is Muslim-majority countries, who understand the reality in Xinjiang and support China's efforts. Not so long ago, these Muslim-majority countries were the target and they are certainly not to be persuaded by the recent extremities of Western propaganda.

As a footnote, it is worth noting that in 2016, Sinopec announced the discovery of massive oil and gas fields in the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, with more discovered in 2020. This is one the largest reserves of oil and gas in Asia.

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# Australian Imperialism

Alan Miller

Originally Published in the *Australian Marxist Review* #1 (new series) June 1979

**Forward by *Australian Marxist Review* editorial board August 2022:**

The editorial board of the *AMR* has decided to reproduce an article by Alan Miller on Imperialism in the Australian context. The *AMR* editorial board will be republishing historic analyses and articles on a periodic basis to assist in the development of our working-class positions. Alan Miller was a leading theoretician in the Socialist Party of Australia, a Central Committee member, and former Victorian State Secretary as well education director of the Socialist Party of Australia.

The article “Australian Imperialism,” originally published in June of 1979 in the *AMR*, is being reprinted to make readers of the *AMR* aware of previous thinking on the question of Imperialism and how it relates to Australia in the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA), the present-day Communist Party of Australia (CPA). This article was written with its immediate context in mind by its author. In the 43 years since it was written there have been significant changes. It requires explanation to readers for the points it makes to be appreciated today.

At the time of this article’s production serious divisions had occurred in the communist movement and were a prominent feature of the working-class movement. These divisions had split the CPA and had meant there were three communist parties that were highly active, had leading roles in trade unions and social movements, and were seeking a leading role in the Australian working-class movement. These splits cannot be explored in the necessary depth here to explain them, but they will be outlined in this introduction to provide context to readers for this article.

The CPA-ML had split from the CPA in 1964 as a local part of the global Sino-Soviet split in the international Communist movement, with the CPA-ML adopting “Maoist” politics. The “old CPA” had by the late 60s abandoned Marxism-Leninism in favour of “Eurocommunism” that had in practice abandoned the revolutionary road towards socialism. The SPA was formed in 1971 by members of the now liquidated “old CPA.” The old CPA had abandoned the leading role of the working class in the transformation of society and Marxism-Leninism. These are indispensable to the founding and existence of the Communist Party.

The comrades who formed the SPA rejected the direction towards liquidation the old CPA was taking and formed the SPA to preserve the Marxist-Leninist and working-class party founded in 1920. Following the inevitable liquidation of the old CPA in 1991 the SPA reclaimed the name of the CPA in 1996 at its 8th congress.

This article was written in the recent aftermath of the SPA’s formation. It is a response to a debate among communists in Australia about the nature of Australia’s role in the international system. It sought from a Marxist-Leninist position to articulate a position on the role of the Australian monopoly Bourgeoisie and its positioning of Australia as an Imperialist power.

At the time of writing the CPA-ML was mechanically applying ideas developed during the Chinese revolution to find a basis for forming an alliance with and supporting the local “national” bourgeoisie against foreign imperialists. The old CPA was also arguing towards an accord with local capitalism, but from a different direction and was bringing forward documents that contained its views such as “Australia reconstructed.” Whilst it seems that differences existed between the positions of the CPA-ML and the old CPA, the reality was that they were both linked by a support, whether conscious or not, for Australian nationalism.

By denying the imperialist nature of Australian capitalism and not understanding the connections it has to Imperialism generally as a global chain of exploitation led to nationalist and opportunist errors in the thinking of these parties. This was a significant contribution towards their support for class-collaboration and the subordination of the working class to capital during the accords in the 1980s. This has weakened the working-class movement in Australia to this day.

The article whilst not directly referring to the views and positions of these organisations gives a measured response to their theoretical considerations. It was in this context that our party developed and maintained its opposition to the accord and to class collaboration. These two alternative trends to a Marxist-Leninist position led to positions that deny Australia as being an imperialist power. This played out with the old CPA undermining the working class through the accords and then liquidating, and the CPA-ML adopting more nationalist positions that led to them supporting the liberal Fraser government at the time. This demonstrates that these debates around theoretical concepts are not an empty academic exercise but have serious implications to the practical work of communists.

However, this article it must be emphasised should be

principally used by readers to positively build upon historic thinking around imperialism. This building of our position must aim to strengthen our ideas, arguments, and action today in opposition to imperialist aggression and war, and in support for building working-class unity and power. It should not be viewed as an invitation to further exemplify or reinforce divisions in the communist movement. In today's conditions with the formation of the AUKUS pact and heightening international tensions there is extensive room and pressing need for future works that explore and clarify Australia's role within the global imperialist system.

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**Alan Miller on *Australian Imperialism* June 1979:**

Ray Clarke's article "Lenin on imperialism" (*AMR* March 79) provides valuable material to show the correctness of the Socialist Party Program's statement that "Australia is herself a middle-sized imperialist power with considerable and growing overseas investment. It has a whole continent as its base."

According to Sydney stockbroker, William Tilley Hudson Evans and Co., Australian overseas investment will reach the \$1 billion mark towards the end of this year, and about 600 Australian companies have ventured abroad.

A recent study by a research team from the Macquarie University, entitled "Australian Enterprise Overseas," revealed that no less than 99 Australian public companies are multi-nationals.

Writing in the *Financial Review* of January 11, 1977, and using the Macquarie research as source material, Michael Southern revealed the recent growth of Australian overseas investment. In 1961 it was \$255 million, but by 1975 it was \$845 million. Of that figure, \$220 million was invested in New Zealand, \$232 million in Papua New Guinea and \$253 million in such countries as Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Africa, Fiji and Holland.

Southern, however, showed that the pattern of investment has changed, with a shift away from the traditional areas such as the UK, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand to the Pacific Basin countries and, in particular, Canada and the United States. He wrote:

The annual growth rates for investment in the UK were 11 per cent a year between 1961-1975, but in the last three of those years, 1972-75, it was an average of eight per cent ... The United States and Canada, by comparison, took 21 per cent of Australian capital outflow in 1973-74, and in the 1972-75 period the annual growth rate was 35 per cent a year.

The Macquarie University research says that Australia is poised for more rapid growth overseas in the next two decades. In certain areas of technology, Australia has sprung to world leadership because of local conditions, the study claims.

These statements certainly bear out the Socialist Party Program that "because of its advanced industry, food production and abundant natural power resources and the difficulties of its rivals, Australian imperialism holds the promise of becoming stronger."

The Macquarie document indicates that Australian concerns are particularly keen to keep absolute control over their foreign activities. It says:

Australian companies have generally preferred, and still prefer, 100 per cent ownership of foreign operations.

Almost exclusively, overseas operations have been tied to head office by rigid reporting systems and procedures. If anything, the trend is for this rigidity to become more widespread, with little indication of desire to change organisational structures to those obtained in modern multi-nationals.

BHP well illustrates the power of the Australian monopoly bourgeoisie. At the beginning of this year, BHP made Australian history when it became the first publicly listed company to be capitalised at more than \$2,000 million. BHP's last half yearly profit was \$160 million. (BHP uses a special system of accountancy which halves the actual profit). BHP and its direct subsidiaries have capital invested in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, United States and Indonesia.

Soviet academic, I. Lebedev, in his article "Australian Imperialism Yesterday and Today," published at the end of the sixties, pointed out that Australian capitalism entered the imperialist stage when it was comparatively young. At the beginning of the century Australian already had (for those times) large monopolies, Lebedev said. Michael Southern, in his 1977 *Financial Review* article, wrote that "Australians are not new to the multi-national business" and referred to the "move into Fiji by CSR in 1882 to protect the Australian company's sugar from a competitive threat in the then British colony."

Lebedev, wrote that "between the two world wars Australia remained to a high degree, economically dependent on Great Britain ... The Second World War proved a turning point in the development of Australian imperialism ... According to some estimates Australia's industrial progress in the war years equalled 15 to 20 years of peacetime development."

To my mind, there is no doubt that the Australian monopoly capitalists – the Australian imperialists – constitute the



real ruling class of this country. They, and their political representatives, the Fraser Government, act, above all, in their own economic and political interests. The whole state machinery is designed to serve the interests of the monopolists. Australia is, in fact, a good example of what Marxist-Leninist theory defines as state monopoly capitalism.

The growth of foreign capital economic penetration, accompanied by its consequent political and military influences, particularly by the US imperialists, could lead to the estimation that Australia was becoming merely a neo-colony and the monopoly class a mere puppet force for the US. The political conclusion could be made that the progressive forces in Australia should concentrate on the struggle against foreign capital and regard the fight against the Australian ruling class as secondary.

However, the increased foreign penetration, in my view, provides insufficient evidence to suggest that the Australian monopoly ruling class is, in any way, in danger of being dislodged from its position of economic, political and military power in this country or that it has ceased to act primarily in its own interests.

Australian and foreign multi-nationals carry out joint exploitation in this country. This activity is typical of the capitalist world today. Australia and foreign imperialists join in political struggle against the Soviet Union and socialism generally and enter into joint military arrangements to further that political struggle. The latter is associated with the main antagonistic contradiction between the capitalist and socialist world systems.

At the same time, there are secondary but antagonistic contradictions between imperialism, each one acting in its own interests. The fact that one imperialist power is stronger than the other suggests a greater ability to dominate the capitalist world and to put pressure on the weaker imperialist power, but it doesn't overcome contradictions between the two.

Even a smaller imperialism acts in its own interests. I suggest that the 1975 bloodless coup which toppled the Whitlam government was essentially an act by the Australian monopolists to strengthen their position by having their own direct political representatives form the central government. At the same time, it was associated with world imperialist interests, particularly the US, and, indeed, the CIA played a significant part in what took place. I also suggest that Australia's participation in the Vietnam war was not merely at the direction of the United States, but also because it served the interests of Australian imperialism in the area.

By its exploitation of Australia on behalf of its narrow class interests, the ruling class here acts against genuine national interests. In its links with foreign capital, Australian imperialism permits overseas imperialist interests to

penetrate this country and this also is opposed to the real national interests of Australia. Thus one can see the close relationship between the working class struggle against the Australian ruling class and the struggle for national independence.

In the Australian context, the Socialist Party must concentrate on the monopoly capitalist ruling class, on Australian imperialism. In that concentrated effort, the party also tackles foreign capital because of its very relationship with the Australian ruling class, a relationship which, despite the conflict of interests, is also associated with sharing the spoils of exploitation as well as the political and military "responsibilities" of anti-Sovietism and anti-communism. Indeed, concentration on Australian imperialism is part of the struggle against world imperialism, part of the struggle for world peace and world socialism. I am, of course, dealing here with our overall approach. I appreciate that there can be particular circumstances when there would be concentration on foreign capital. These circumstances could involve a particular threat from foreign capital which, from a working class viewpoint, would require the rallying of all available forces. Indeed, in the general political struggle, the party can well make use of contradictions which exist between Australian and foreign capital. However, extreme care needs to be taken against any drift to nationalism by presenting the whole Australian situation in terms of struggling mainly against foreign capital and seeking our own ruling class as "allies."

The Socialist Party Program is profoundly correct where it advances the concept of the working class struggle against monopoly capitalism in Australia, seeking allies even in non-monopoly capitalist circles, and going through the stage of anti-monopoly democracy to the socialist stage of the revolutionary transformation, beginning with working class power which uproots capitalism itself and builds the socialist economic system.

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## AUKUS STEALS FROM US! SAY NO TO AUKUS!



# Private Property Ownership as a Human Right Under Neoliberalism

Graham Holton

## Introduction: Private Property as a Human Right

The discourse on neoliberalism and its impact on Third World economies and societies has been well studied, but until recently little attention has been given to neoliberalism's claims of human rights, which are argued to be necessary for free market economies to function efficiently. Jessica Whyte argues in *The Morals of the Market* that from its beginning neoliberalism was a moral project which promoted human rights, and this "became the dominant ideology" following the demise of socialist politics. Whyte argues that neoliberalism holds a normative position that requires "a functioning competitive market" with "an adequate moral and legal foundation," built upon an institutional framework that makes people submit to the "Free Market" (Whyte 2019, 8). This is in contrast to socialism and social democracy, which neoliberals argue threaten productivity and market efficiency, "the moral foundations of the competitive market" (Lippmann 1938). These economic moral values have a long history.

Walter Lippmann's *The Good Society* sees the economic crisis of the 1930s, the Great Depression, as a moral crisis (Lippmann 1938). This appeal to the morals of the market grew after World War II. Although Whyte focuses more on Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman than James M. Buchanan (Whyte 2019, 31), these three economists shared political alliances and policies that demonstrate substantial overlap. They are considered central to understanding the most common themes of neoliberalism as a distinct and coherent philosophical doctrine.

In contrast was John Maynard Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (Keynes 1936), which offered a solution to recession – government spending. It was Keynes's theories that influenced the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944. The primary designers of the new system were Keynes, adviser to the British Treasury, and Harry Dexter White, the chief international economist at the Treasury Department. The agreement created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), US-backed organizations that would monitor countries pegging their currencies to the US dollar as the global currency, replacing the old gold standard. The Bretton Woods countries decided against giving the IMF the power of a

global central bank. Instead, they agreed to contribute to a fixed pool of national currencies and gold to be held by the IMF. The Agreement also saw the drive for full employment to avoid the political and social problems seen in the 1930s (Jones 2012).

Neoliberalism arose as a strong response to not only Keynesian macroeconomic policies, but also communism, social democracy and fascism, with Hayek targeting Fabian socialists in *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek 1944). Although these neoliberal economists supported modest taxation and some redistribution of wealth, within a welfare state that provides services to the poor, Hayek criticised the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for its protection of social and economic rights. He argued that no declaration of rights can guarantee a standard of material welfare, and instead saw the UDHR's purpose was to protect private property against seizure and guarantee the rights of the individual to own property. Private property covers the means of production – factories, mines, farms and businesses – and wealth – large estates, buildings and capital.

Whyte begins her analysis by looking at the origins of neoliberalism at the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947 by the Austrian economist Hayek, who argued that he "sought to re-found liberalism in opposition to the threat of socialist planning" (Cable 2021). Neoliberalism crafted the Society's approach to human rights in a language that mirrored the recent declaration of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). Hayek called for the "morals of the market" to provide "the impersonal results of the market process" (Whyte 2019, 12). The free market separated politics from economics, thereby "taming the state" (Whyte 2019, 29), with any redistribution of wealth as threatening the moral foundations of the capitalist economic and social system. "Liberty," according to Hayek, should be placed above democratic values: "A society that does not recognize that each individual has values of his own which he is entitled to follow can have no respect for the dignity of the individual and cannot really know freedom" (Hayek 1960). What matters for neoliberalism is the equality of everyone before the law. The preservation of liberty demands that limits be placed on the power of the state, that society must be ruled by private law and these laws must be out of the reach of democratic power.

Whyte argues that under the hegemonic power of neoliberalism, the market is not merely one social sphere amongst others, which needs to be sheltered against state intrusion,

but rather the universal law governing our social existence. Restraining political power and the enhancement of individual freedoms was necessary in powerful states that use military intervention to secure human rights by enforcing the morals of the market. Economic “shock treatment” was allowable as long as obedient individuals were protected from torture and the denial of free speech, thereby allowing neoliberalism to flourish (Whyte 2019, 33).

This paper examines the history of the argument for private property as a human right. By protecting the individual against specified harms, in opposition to structurally induced dangers, advocates of human rights reinforced the dichotomy being experienced at the political level. The neoliberals saw the promise of human rights in its constraining sovereign power and in restraining the politicisation of the national economy (Whyte 2019, 227).

## What Is Private Property?

In his 2002 essay *The Right to Private Property*, Tibor R Machan argues that the real justification for property rights is that it is a human right. “The institution of the right to private property is perhaps the single most important condition for a society in which freedom, including free trade, is to flourish” (Machan 2002, 2). This argument that property rights provided the foundations for human rights, has always been controversial, particularly with international treaties. Property rights were a clear battleground in the development of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). An analysis of the 1947 drafts of the Declaration found “a majority of the drafts refer to the right to property, either in positive language or by prohibiting unlawful expropriation” (Wilson 2015). With support from the Soviet Union, socialist countries and Panama, property was limited to “personal property”. In all human rights instruments personal property ownership is protected, either implicitly or explicitly. The right to own “private property” however was not included in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (19 December 1966), or the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (19 December 1966).

Property refers to legally protected claims to resources, such as land (private property) and possessions (personal property). For the capitalist system property rights do not just include ownership, they include the freedom to trade property, alter its use, or improve its value. Tibor Machan concludes his arguments for the right to own private property: “the existence and value of the right to private property is established beyond any reasonable doubt, despite how prominent academic opinion seems to stand against it.” (Machan 2002, 24).

This controversy centres upon who is deemed to have

property rights protected (people or corporations), the type of property protected (consumption or production) and the reasons for which property can be restricted (regulations, taxation, or nationalisation in the public interest). Property can be exchanged through contract law, and if property is violated, one could sue under tort law to protect it, where torts are civil wrongs done by one party to another that can be pursued in court. Private property accumulation gives individuals the power that can lead to inequality within a society. This propensity for inequality has been used to justify wealth redistribution. In Marxist social theory private property ownership is central to the system of class and social strata, especially the ownership of the means of production (Bottomore, Harris, Kiernan and Miliband 1994, 450).

The concept of private property underlies all property law, in which the state acts as facilitator, protector, and owner. In capitalist market economies, the state acts as a mediator to enforce private property laws. John Locke in *The Second Treatise of Government* (1690) proposes his theory of property rights. He identifies laws of nature that permit individuals to appropriate, and exercise control rights over land and other material resources (Locke 1980). Under this thesis of “The Natural Right of Property” there are two major points: (i) that people possess an original, non-acquired right not to be precluded from making extra-personal material their own; and (ii) that this right does take the form of a right that others abide by the rules of a (justifiable) practice of property (Mack 2010, 53 – 78).

In contrast, communism opposes private property ownership laws, advocating for full state ownership of private property: capital and the means of production. Karl Marx writes in *On the Jewish Question*: “the right of man to private property is ... the right to enjoy one’s property and to dispose of it at one’s discretion without regard to other men, independently of society, the right of self-interest” (Marx 1844, 163). Marx argues that in regards to private property, the abolition of bourgeois property would transform human existence for the better. “Without private property relations we would be able to share the production and consumption of goods equally. A system of social entitlement would replace the vagaries of the market thereby ending poverty and social and political inequality. We would abolish all inherited wealth and prevent the growth of a dominant caste” (Westmoreland 2019). Further, Marx and Engels argue:

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few. In this sense, the

theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property (Marx and Engels 1848, 498).

The goal of socialism is to increase personal property through the abolishment of private property ownership.

In Marxist literature, private property refers to a social relationship in which the property owner takes possession of anything that another person or group produces with that property. This exploitative arrangement of private property is perpetuated due to the structure of capitalist society. The key difference between the two economic systems of capitalism and communism is how each approaches private property ownership. Under capitalism, private ownership is a right, but under communism all private property rights are reserved for the state. The main legal bases for property rights are: the right of possession; the right of control; the right of exclusion; the right to derive income; and the right of disposition. Under socialist economies such as China, there are forms of private property laws.

Anarchism also opposes private property ownership, as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon argues in *What is Property?* (Proudhon 1840), that property is theft and leads to despotism. “Property ... violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism ... [and has] perfect identity with robbery” (Proudhon 1994, 251). Anarchists oppose capitalism because it is a source of coercive, hierarchical authority producing exploitation by the privileged elite creating inequality, in both wealth and power. Private property produces an authority structure within society, in which a few govern the many. This social relation of production is inherently authoritarian and perpetuates the capitalist class system. It was under these theoretical understandings that led to nationalisation of businesses in Russia. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, 304 enterprises were nationalised by May 15, 1918 (Miliutin 1929, 95-96).

The political support for nationalisation is not restricted to Marxists. Nationalisation is the process of taking privately-controlled companies, industries, or assets and putting them under the control of the state. Although such acts are usually associated with Third World Countries, the US has a long history of property seizure. During the Civil War the federal government nationalised Confederate trains and railroads under the Railways and Telegraph Act of 1862. In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson signed the Army Appropriations Act allowing the railroads to remain under federal control 21 months after a peace treaty was signed. That same year the “Trading with the Enemy Act” allowed the government to seize private property from German-affiliated individuals and companies to be sold off to pay for the war effort (Hanna 2019). More recently the US has technically nationalised companies, in which the government gained controlling interest. This includes

the Continental Illinois Bank and Trust in 1984, AIG in 2008 and General Motors in 2009. Following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the US airport security industry was nationalised under the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Nationalisations are often done for the public good, not just looting by the state, as was the case in Nazi Germany.

In the 1930s the Nazi Party confiscated and nationalised properties in Germany and then across Europe. The Nazi regime had no scruples in confiscating private property, as it was not considered a fundamental human right. In its national economic policy, it did not abstain from numerous regulations and interventions in the market, in order to capture wealth for the elite party members and to rearm the country (Feliciano 2001, 164-176). Peter Temin in “Soviet and Nazi Economic Planning in the 1930s” concluded that the “National Socialists were socialists in practice as well as in name” (Temin 1991, 573). Yet in the case of property ownership this was far from the case. Private property rights, as a rule, were not abolished during the Third Reich, which recognised private ownership of the means of production and generally rejected the widespread nationalisation of industry, compared with the Soviet Union. The Nazi regime also transferred public ownership to the private sector “to benefit the wealthiest sectors and enhance the economic position and political support of the elite” (Wills 2018). Germà Bel notes that “nationalisation was particularly important in the early 1930s in Germany. The state took over a large industrial concern, large commercial banks, and other minor firms” (Bel 2010, 34). This led to massive confiscation of property owned by the Jewish community and political opponents. Many Germans supported the Nazi rise to power in 1933 and rioted against Jewish businesses in 1938. Christoph Buchheim and Jonas Scherner looked at Nazi business dealings to show that Jewish property was stolen from its legal owners by various means, including being forced to sell at a loss, or simply being confiscated when the occupants were sent to camps (Buchheim and Scherner 2006, 25; Reimann 2011).

From these acts of seizure of property grew the concept of private property as a human right, within the definition of genocide. The Polish scholar and attorney, Raphael Lemkin, who first coined the word “Genocide,” writes in *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* that rather than “immediate destruction” genocide aimed at “the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (Lemkin 1944, 79). The objective of such a plan would be the disintegration of their political and social institutions. One of its key techniques was in the “economic field,” the seizure of property from one group by the state. As Lemkin does not clarify who constituted this “group” it could justifiably describe the assets of the bourgeoisie, whose assets were

nationalised by the USSR and Nazi Germany (Davis and Zannis 1973,184).

In 1947, US President Harry S Truman delivered a speech at Baylor University where he derided “regimented economies” and that the world should adopt the US system of private property ownership. On 28 March 1947, the Economic and Social Council passed Resolution 47 (IV), calling upon the secretary-general of the UN to draw up a draft convention on genocide. The secretariat’s draft convention defined “genocide” through its physical forms, including the confiscation of property and looting, as this inflicted on a group’s conditions of life, which calculated to bring about the groups’ physical destruction. Again, there is no strict definition of who constitutes a “group”.

The UDHR was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10th December 1948 (UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A). Article 17 enshrines the right to private property ownership as: “(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his or her property” (General Assembly 1948, 4). These human rights enshrined in the UDHR were used by neoliberalism to promote its own human rights: the protection of market freedoms against universal socio-economic and political rights.

## Neoliberalism and Private Property Ownership

Neoliberalism is a coherent and distinctive political and theoretical doctrine, in which social, political and economic institutions exist with liberal rights in a free-market economy. Limiting democracy and social welfare guaranteed the economic freedom to produce economic prosperity. These factors, argues Thomas Biebricher, would address “the noneconomic preconditions of functioning markets and the interactive effects between markets and their surroundings” (Biebricher 2018, 27).

Edward D Re, Professor at St John’s University School of Law, writes in the *Minnesota Law Review*: “The Mexican expropriations and the Soviet nationalisations may be regarded as the forerunners of many incidents of nationalisation of private property” (Re 1951, 323). Re concludes:

Just as international law recognizes the right of a nation to nationalise property and industry to effect social and economic changes, it also recognizes the inviolability of private property, the rights of foreign property-owners, and the right of States to intercede on behalf of their citizens to secure these rights (Re 1951, 342).

This provides the basis of the protection of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs).

The free-market economics of Austrian economists Ludwig von Mises (Mises 1962). and his student, Hayek, gave rise to neoliberalism, which was first articulated by Milton Friedman in his 1951 essay “Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects” (Friedman 1951, 89–93). Hayek, Friedman, George Stigler and Buchanan were all Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences winners (O’Driscoll Jr and Rizzo 2014).

Neoliberalism and human rights were not independent, but were moral and legal supports necessary for a free market to function. Neoliberalism is constructed upon a moral and institutional framework under submission to the free market order. These human rights preserved the market order and inherited social hierarchies against any political opposition. Friedman argued that neoliberalism depicts political arenas as a never-ceasing conflict, while the market has anti-political virtues based upon cooperation, individual liberty and institutionalised rights. It is the free markets’ virtues that separates politics from economics, thereby bringing about a taming of the state. Neoliberalism sees the state “beating into submission” anyone who threatens the free market order. Neoliberal human rights were constituted by the right to hold private property and to engage in foreign investment with limited controls over market order. These legal institutions severed the connection of political participation in a civil society (Vallier 2021).

The Chicago School of Economics’ neoclassical approach enlisted human rights to challenge socialism, social democracy, and state-planning and it regards human rights as the moral language of the competitive market. Hayek joined the Chicago School and introduced the Austrian School of economic thought. He argues that a competitive market requires a moral framework that encourages the pursuit of self-interest, individual and familial responsibility and submission to the impersonal market process creating a healthy market, under hegemonic conceptions of human rights. Public services to improve education, health and public infrastructure were acceptable (Hayek 1960).

Hayek assumed that the global competitive market was most effective if the role of the state was confined to defending market interests. Neoliberal human rights constituted the right to hold private property, engage in foreign investment, and limited state controls over the market. The international market had to have unimpeded access to cheap labour, raw materials and the guarantee of ownership of private property without fear of nationalisation. It is this underlying morality that neoliberalism identifies with the UDHR, the protection of the right to private property ownership, the means of production.

James Buchanan is best known for his public choice theory, co-authored with Gordon Tullock in *The Calculus*

of *Consent* (1962), for which he received the Nobel Prize in 1986. The key for constitutional order is that the individual “adopts the moral law as a general rule for behaviour” (Buchanan 1999, 314). Public policy cannot be considered solely in terms of distribution, but is a matter of setting the rules to create a pattern of exchange and distribution. Buchanan’s “public alternative” principle holds that when there is no resolution made by a selection of people, they create an erosion of democratic culture and turn towards populism and the crowding out of democratic practices. This dissemination of neoliberal techniques and rationalities creates a movement towards the constitutionalisation of democracy in conjunction with an attack on political establishments, elites and their alleged sense of entitlement (Biebricher. 2020, 37-60). Thomas Biebricher concludes from his analysis of Buchanan as follows. First, “On the institutional level, there is as a tendency towards the constitutionalisation of certain policy areas, especially with regard to economic issues broadly understood.” In bilateral trade treaties this may take the form of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Second, in political culture, it reasserts “the individual and its narrowly understood freedom from any kind of outside intrusion, including impediments that come with the coercive nature of laws passed by a majority of democratic representatives.” Third, a tax constitution, such as the balanced-budget amendment, “can help alleviate the pathologies of contemporary democracy” (Biebricher 2020, 53).

Neoliberalism advocates the privatisation of infrastructure, utilities, and social services by selling them to private investors, or transferring their management to the private sector. The IMF sees market-based frameworks as having primary claim over the social resources necessary to provide adequate food, education, housing, and health care (Mohan 2009, 1-9). The Washington Consensus, a broad set of free market economic ideas, supported by prominent economists and international organisations, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union and the USA, argues that to improve an ailing economy it is necessary to privatise para-statal corporations, reduce tariffs, open markets and reduce the rent-collecting capacities of state elites. Under market fundamentalism human well-being can best be advanced within an institutional framework characterised by free markets, a minimal state, free trade, the absence of economic regulation, and strong individual property rights. Hans-Hermann Hoppe argues that the right to private property is an indisputably valid, absolute principle of ethics (Hoppe 2010). Neoliberal doctrine thereby seeks to reduce the role of the state on which human rights are dependent for protection and implementation.

## Conclusion

The privatisation of the public sector, in which the ownership of private property is taken from public and placed in

private hands, has been one of the defining policies of globalisation in the Third World since the 1970s. During the 1980s Debt Crisis in Latin America, state-owned utilities and monopolies were sold off, or transferred to the private sector, under the belief that the market, meaning US and European corporations, were more rational and better able to manage such enterprises (Roddock 1988). Privatisations increased after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, when across the world, including Australia, there were massive privatisations. Yet this was done despite the large number of bankruptcies of giant corporations in the USA such as Pan Am, Enron, Lehman Brothers, General Motors and CIT Group, to name but a few. This showed that privatisation was not more efficient than SOEs.

Recent studies have confirmed that public ownership can be just as efficient as private ownership, if not more so. Over the past 50 years, SOEs have been attacked, especially by the IMF, as inefficient and that their profits were used to prop up inefficient governments. Recently there has been a turnaround in regard to SOE efficiencies. Between 1980 and 2004 over 8,000 SOEs were privatised around the world, worth over US\$1 trillion. “For every dollar a developing country owed the IMF in the early 1980s, it subsequently privatised state-owned assets worth roughly 50c” (Brune, Garrett and Kogut 2004, 195). Katarzyna Szarzec investigated the effect of SOEs on economic growth in 30 European countries in the period between 2010 and 2016. From the dataset collected on the economic weight of more than 130,000 large nonfinancial companies, with good governance, the report concluded, positive external effects of SOEs may outweigh the loss in economic growth caused by SOEs’ possible inefficiencies (Szarzec, Dombi and Matuszak 2021). What is needed is the return to public ownership and not to regard private property ownership as a human right.

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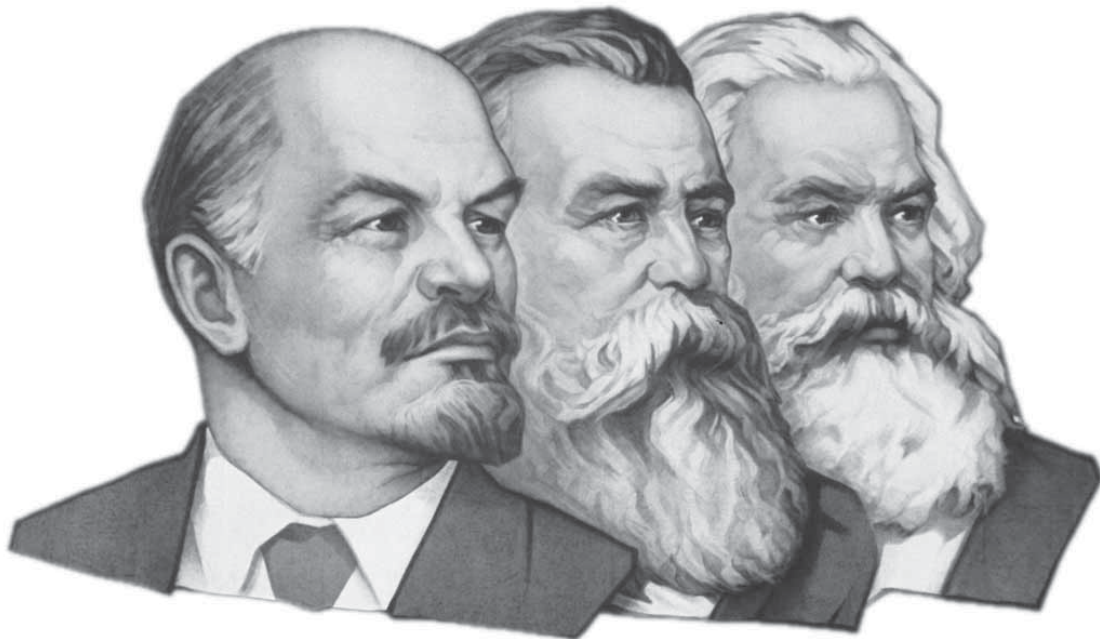
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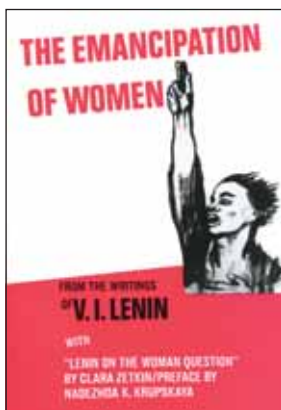


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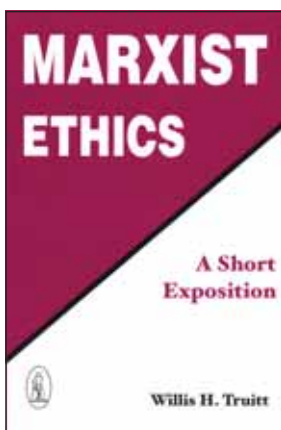
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There is a widespread misconception that Marxism is limited to material facts, mostly economic in nature, and does not and cannot delve into the realm of values and value judgements. Yet, as the author of *Marxist Ethics: A Short Exposition* points out, Marx condemned the injustices of capitalism in moral language. The volume covers ethical concerns that were deemed important by the young Marx; the question of determinism in Marx's writings; justice and workers' interests; integration of needs and rights of the individual with that of whole society; the intersection of the arts and morality; and much more. (International Publishers)

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**“Capitalism has triumphed all over the world,  
but this triumph is only the prelude to the  
triumph of labour over capital.”**

*Lenin, The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism (1913)*



## **Communist Party of Australia**

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