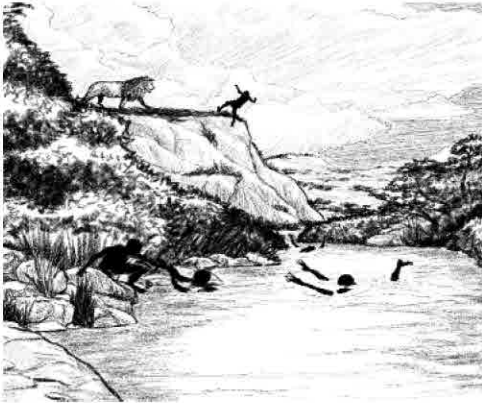


The Plebs News

Jan 24 daveberrygmb@yahoo.co.uk



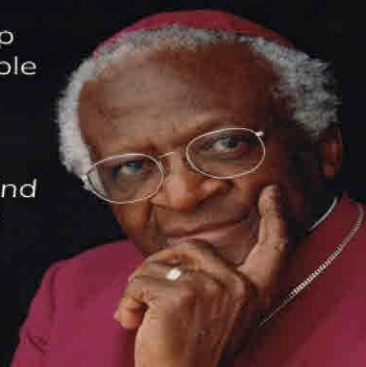
Happy New Year 2024: Same as the old year?



We need to stop
just pulling people
out of the river.

We need to go
upstream and find
out why they're
falling in.

- Desmond Tutu



Plebs News welcomes you to the New Year 2024, as usual filled with hope and optimism but full in the knowledge that unless there is a seismic shift in global politics it may differ very little from 2023. It will still require the fight for change to continue even harder. I was reminded of the saying above over the holiday, and there is some differing views over whether Desmond Tutu coined it or whether it is a repetition of an African saying, and thought that it chimed with my thoughts over 2023. Too much of our politics revolves around dealing with crises and too little at dealing with root causes. Perhaps the favourite response to crises at the moment is the well worn route of forming an inquiry, which may seem a reasonable way forward to search out root causes of problems, but too often is just a method of kicking the subject into the long grass and burying rather than solving problems. In the UK we saw ongoing major inquiries into Grenfell and Covid capturing the headlines and anyone currently watching the Post Office scandal drama on ITV will hope somebody, somewhere will get their comeuppance. Other inquiries around troops in Afghanistan and the Omagh Bombing continue whilst actions resulting from the Infected Blood Inquiry are still awaited. We can only hope that our politicians and public servants take heed of the words from Africa and begin to look to solve the problems at source rather than pick up the pieces. This can be true of the economy, housing, migration, health and many others. Another old saying comes to mind "If I was going there I wouldn't start from here" seems like sound advice for the future. The COP 28 meeting, also saw more prevaricating and delay and after 40 years there needs to be a major question over whether anything meaningful will come from it.

The other outstanding feature of 2024 is that it is the "year of the election" with at least half of the population of the world going to the polls in the year. Depressingly, the democracy of elections and their resultant regimes does not have the optimism we hold for democratic elections and is under challenge. The UK will, almost certainly, go to the polls during 2024 and results of stable Government are hard to predict but unlikely to change things in a major way. The "big one" will be the US Presidential election in November and as we enter the year one maybe even both main candidates will be facing court charges and possible imprisonment. Sadly, much of our political battles are being waged in courtrooms rather than with the ballot box.

Much of S.Asia will be going to the polls, with India being the largest electorate in the world, a large part of S.America. We can only hope that 24 elections buck some of the recent trends, such as the Argentinian elections that saw the election of a populist right wing economist famous for wielding chainsaws and promising a greater round of austerity "shock therapy".

The year of elections – Is 2024 democracy's biggest test ever?

Sarah Shamim, Areesha Lodhi

It's the year of the vote. Countries that are home to nearly half of the world's population will pick their governments in elections in 2024 – something that has never happened in a single year before.

Starting with Bangladesh on January 7, the polls include seven out of the world's 10 most populous nations: India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia and Mexico are the others.

Some are established democracies, others are fledgling ones, and still others are effectively autocracies with votes but few real options for the electorate to choose from.

Yet, amid growing concerns that democracies as a whole are backsliding – worries articulated by nonprofits like the Swedish V-Dem Institute and the US-based Freedom House – the elections in this mixed bag of nations represent a watershed year for the concept of democracy itself, according to cultural and political sociologist Andrew Perrin of Johns Hopkins University.

From increased ethnic violence to steps aimed at weakening judicial and other checks on the power of the executive, the threats to democracy are real, say experts. But Perrin noted that there are countervailing pressures too. The popularity of democracy as measured by public opinion remains high.

A survey of over 36,000 respondents from across 30 countries conducted by Open Society Foundations in 2023 backs this up. More than 80 percent of survey respondents said they wanted to live in a democracy.

That appeal now faces its stiffest test in a single year. Here are 10 key elections in 2024 that could shape the world, and the future of democracy.

Bangladesh

Incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is seeking a fifth term in office after an intense crackdown on opposition parties and activists.

Hasina, who belongs to the Awami League, has been in power since 2009. The main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has boycotted the elections, citing government interference. It had demanded that a caretaker government be allowed to conduct the election – the Awami League government rejected that demand. The BNP's top leadership is either jailed or in exile.

Several political activists including BNP leaders have faced arrests and violence at the hands of police and ruling party supporters. In December 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that at least 10,000 opposition activists were arrested in the month following a planned rally by

the BNP on October 28. Rights groups and countries such as the US have expressed concern about the violence and potential lack of fairness in the elections.

US politics, Canada's multiculturalism, South America's geopolitical rise—we bring you the stories that matter.

Additionally, there are concerns about corruption scandals and an economic downturn. While Bangladesh's growing economy has traditionally been a stabilising force in the country's politics, labour unrest and protests for higher wages, along with diminishing purchasing power, are adding strain.

“Bangladesh's 2024 election can become the most consequential election in the history of the country,” said Ali Riaz, chair of the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University. “The country is standing at the crossroads of becoming a de facto one-party state and reversing its [democratic] course.”

Riaz explained that the lack of a viable opposition can lead to an autocracy. But if the West responds to what many are describing as a sham election by imposing sanctions on Bangladesh, it could hurt the country's working classes the most.

“If any punitive measure is taken by the Western countries, the situation will have devastating impacts on the lives of the poor and middle class, who are already suffering”, he said.

Bangladesh has a population of 170 million people. More than 1,800 candidates will be contesting 300 seats in Bangladesh's national parliament. A total of 27 political parties have registered.

Taiwan

Self-ruled Taiwan, which is claimed by Beijing, will elect its president on January 13. The president will replace incumbent Tsai Ing-Wen and navigate through a critical phase of Taiwan's history.

Tsai of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected in 2016. Ever since then, China has intensified its pressure on the island by conducting military activities around the island and encouraging Taipei's few remaining formal diplomatic allies to switch recognition to Beijing.

The three candidates running for president are Lai Ching-te from the DPP who is known to be even more independence-leaning than Tsai, moderate Kuomintang leader Hou You-yi and former Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je from the Taiwan People's Party.

The stakes are high as China has warned that there is a risk of war if the DPP continues to stay in power. While DPP's Lai is the frontrunner, his opposition is arguing that the ruling party's posture risks creating a security risk for Taiwan in the form of a possible war.

The US on the other hand, is a significant international ally of Taiwan and provides Taiwan with the means for self-defence. Hence, the Taiwanese elections have also become a theatre for the competing interests of the rival superpowers.

Pakistan

Pakistan — which votes for its national legislature on February 8 — has been facing a turbulent political landscape since its former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was elected in July 2018, was removed in a no-confidence vote in April 2022.

An intense crackdown on his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and political activists has sparked concerns about the credibility of the election, and the role of the country's all-powerful military establishment in it.

The country is currently run by a caretaker government, led by interim Prime Minister Anwar ul-Haq Kakar. It has a population of more than 241 million people, and 127 million registered voters, according to data released by the election commission in September 2023.

Political tensions escalated on May 9, 2023, when paramilitary security officials arrested Khan in an anticorruption case that he has denied and said was politically motivated. Following his removal, Khan had openly opposed Pakistan's military apparatus which has been embedded in the country's politics and economy since its inception.

In the month following May 9, about 5,000 supporters and aides of PTI were arrested, according to Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah. Several members also left the party amid this atmosphere. Last week, Khan's nomination bid to contest the elections was also rejected.

"Never before in Pakistan's history have we had such an impression of unfairness and the election process starting a month or two or before the actual elections," said Rasul Bakhsh Rais, professor of political science at the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

The crackdown from the Pakistani establishment has discouraged political participation and added to the impression that elections will be rigged in favour of one of the country's major and dynastic political parties, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) or Pakistan People's Party (PPP), according to Rais.

"We may not see a spirited participation of the people," said Rais, adding that he expects the voter turnout of the forthcoming elections to be the lowest in Pakistan's history.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was in exile for several years following a spate of cases and convictions on corruption charges, has returned to Pakistan. Courts have overturned past convictions against him, and many analysts see him as the military's favoured candidate to lead the country next.

Indonesia

Also in February, Indonesians will vote in the world's largest single-day election to choose their president, vice president and nearly 20,000 representatives for district, provincial and national parliaments.

Although free and fair elections have been widely celebrated in Indonesia since its democratic transition in 1998, the democracy is still dominated by political, business and military figures who established their prominence during Soeharto's authoritarian rule, writes Sana Jaffrey for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

She added that power has largely shifted among the Soeharto-era elites. Even though the current president, outsider Joko “Jokowi” Widodo has subverted this tradition by winning the highly competitive 2014 election through popular vote, he has learned that he needs to play by the rules of the elites.

Now that Jokowi has completed his maximum two terms, three candidates are vying to succeed him: Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan.

Defence Minister Prabowo, 72, is representing the nationalist right-wing Gerindra party. His running mate is Widodo’s son, the 36-year-old Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is controversial due to allegations of inexperience and being a “nepo baby”. Besides this, Prabowo was allegedly involved in kidnappings of student activists in 1998 and is accused of other human rights abuses. Despite the controversy, Prabowo seems to be the frontrunner in the race.

Gibran was allowed to contest elections despite being under 40, the minimum age of running candidates, because he previously held public office as the current mayor of Surakarta. This caveat was introduced by Indonesia’s Constitutional Court in October.

Jokowi’s governing secular-nationalist Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has selected Ganjar as its candidate. Meanwhile, Anies is favoured by conservative Muslims and Islamist groups. He chose Muhaimin Iskandar, the chairman of the Islamist National Awakening Party (PKB), as his running mate.

After the first presidential debate in December, Usman Hamid, the head of Amnesty Indonesia, noted that Ganjar and Anies talked more about freedom of expression, accountability for violence by security forces and resolution for past human rights abuses during the debate, while Prabowo – who has been in power – did not.

India

In the spring of 2014, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Modi was sworn in as India’s 14th prime minister. A decade later, he appears poised to win a third straight term in office in what will be history’s largest-ever democratic exercise: 900 million people voters will choose their next government.

Running against Modi’s Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party is a coalition of 28 parties, called the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). INDIA is led by the main opposition, the Indian National Congress party spearheaded by Rahul Gandhi, whose father (Rajiv Gandhi), grandmother (Indira Gandhi) and great-grandfather (Jawaharlal Nehru) were all prime ministers.

Over the decade of the BJP government’s rule, the country has seen what the ruling party’s critics call an erosion of democracy. Academic and writer Apoorvanand told Al Jazeera that autonomous institutions including the election commission have lost their autonomy.

In December, an investigation revealed that the Indian government was likely surveilling high-profile journalists using the Pegasus spyware. Earlier in the same month, 141 opposition lawmakers were suspended from parliament.

The shrinking space for the opposition and attempts to coerce the media have emerged as prominent issues in these elections alongside a struggling economy, rising unemployment and attacks by Hindu nationalists on religious minority communities. Parts of the country, such as the northeast state of Manipur, have been on fire for months after ethnic clashes broke out in May. Meanwhile, the far-right Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – the ideological parent of the BJP – has increasingly been able to influence the nation's textbooks, sparking concerns that the next generation of Indians could imbibe myth over science and history, and bigotry over secular values.

“These elections are very crucial because this is the only change to revive democracy in India,” Apoorvanand said.

Yet, Modi remains vastly popular in major parts of the country. The BJP steamrolled opposition parties to triumph in a series of state elections in December, signposting its political strength entering 2024. Despite challenges, the size of India's economy has overtaken those of France and the United Kingdom. India also became the fourth country to have a successful moon landing and hosted the G20 summit.

South Africa

Between May and August, South Africa is expected to hold its seventh national election since the end of apartheid in 1994. South Africa has a population of 60 million and about 27 million registered voters.

Since 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) has held uninterrupted power, but supporters fear the party's votes will fall short of the 50 percent needed to win this year. Led by President Cyril Ramaphosa, the ANC's support has dipped to 45 percent, according to an October 2023 poll by the Social Research Foundation.

Corruption scandals linked to government officials have become frequent while Ramaphosa also pardoned his predecessor Jacob Zuma who refused to testify about corruption and state capture during his tenure.

ANC's primary opponent is the Democratic Alliance (DA) led by legislator John Steenhuisen. He has formed alliances with smaller parties to remove the ANC. However, the DA ranks lower than the ANC in polling, while many Black politicians have left in recent years, hurting its potential to be seen as an inclusive institution.

Mexico

Mexico is gearing up for its largest-ever election on June 2 that could see it elect a woman as its president for the first time. Mexico has a population of about 129 million and approximately 96 million registered voters.

For the first time, all 32 states in Mexico will be holding elections concurrently while 20,000 positions including the presidency, congressional seats, governorships and local offices will be filled by contesting candidates.

Better known by his initials – AMLO – Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador from the Morena party currently leads the nation but the country has a one-term limit.

Claudia Sheinbaum, a scientist and former Mexico City mayor, is the new face of Morena and also a frontrunner with a significant lead in polls. She has pledged to address challenges such as gang violence and to try and use nearshoring – a rising trend of the US relocating business operations to Mexico to cut costs – to help the country's economy.

Xochitl Galvez, a senator with Indigenous roots who represents the National Action Party, has set out to challenge Morena's dominance and is campaigning on the promise to combat violence.

AMLO's term has been the bloodiest in Mexico's history, with a record number of murders. The so-called "war on drugs", which was initiated three presidential terms ago, has failed to reduce violence. The next government will be tested on whether it will continue with a militarised strategy or explore alternative, less punitive policies. Deep inequalities in access to quality healthcare and education persist.

European Union

Every five years, European Union (EU) citizens participate in elections to choose their representatives in the European Parliament (EP) – the only directly elected transnational assembly globally. These elections take place across all 27 EU member countries.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) shape and decide new laws that govern various aspects of life in the EU from healthcare to employment. MEPs also elect the President of the European Commission – currently Ursula von der Leyen, the EU's first female president.

The elections will take place from June 6 to June 9. Election days are divided between countries. For example, the Netherlands conducts elections on a Thursday, while France holds them on a Sunday.

A total of 720 MEPs will be elected while members of national political parties can also contest.

Some of the key issues in this cycle include climate policies, immigration laws, security and defence, especially amid the multiple conflicts plaguing the world, from the Middle East to Russia's war on Ukraine.

The United States

On November 5, the US will vote for its president, all seats in the House of Representatives and a third of the seats in the Senate.

The presidential race this year seems to be reminiscent of 2020, where Democrat Joe Biden, who is the current president, faced off against Republican Donald Trump, whom he defeated four years ago.

Trump has a massive lead over Republican rivals Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley — despite multiple indictments against him and his absence from all the Republican debates so far.

Trump's popularity among Republicans remains unshaken because he has reshaped the Republican Party. "One of the mistakes people make is thinking that the group of Americans out there in public who are Republicans has stayed the same," said Perrin. Many traditional

libertarians or relatively religious conservatives have left the party in the wake of the Trump 2016 victory.

At the same time, a segment of what gets called the white working class left the Democrats and joined the Republican Party, he explained. “The people who are now in the party are people who were drawn into it by the popularity of Donald Trump.”

Perrin does not think candidates besides Biden and Trump are likely to stand a chance unless a legal problem or health issue comes up, “They both hold really commanding leads within their electorates”.

Perrin believes that the outcomes of the election could serve as a bellwether for the rest of the world and a victory of the Republicans could mean American isolationism affecting other parts of the world. “Because when Trump says that we will take care of Americans, and we will act only in the interests of Americans globally, that’s also a signal to the rest of the world that they should behave in a sort of self-interested way.”

While it is clear that the outcome of US elections will influence the rest of the world, whether the outcomes of elections in the rest of the world will influence the US is a different story. “From a social science standpoint, I think Americans are not particularly good at observing the rest of the world,” said Perrin.

Ghana

Ghana will head to the polls on December 7 to elect the members of the country’s parliament as well as the successor to President Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

Akufo-Addo of the centre-right and liberal-conservative NPP was sworn in as president in 2017 after winning the 2016 elections. He won again in 2020 and was sworn in for his second term in 2021. In both of these elections, he narrowly defeated John Mahama of the social democratic National Democratic Congress (NDC).

After the 2020 elections, Mahama disputed the results and filed a petition in the Supreme Court, and begrudgingly accepted defeat when it was rejected in March 2021.

Mahama, who was the president of Ghana from 2012 up until 2017, is contesting again this year but not against Akufo-Addo since the constitution bars him from running for a third term. Instead, the NPP elected Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia after he won the primaries.

Bawumia will be the first northerner and Muslim to contest presidential elections under the NPP, a movement dominated by ethnic Akan, which analysts say will pose another challenge for Mahama, who is also from the north.

The West African gold and cocoa exporter currently grapples with the worst economic turmoil in years. Inflation hovers at a record 50.3 percent, the highest in 21 years. Government expenditure during the pandemic led to high public debt amounting to \$48.9bn as of September. That represents 76 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Whoever gets elected will face the challenge of pulling Ghana out of its economic turmoil.

Looking forward to 2024: A year of crucial elections in South Asia

Judicial harassment against the opposition and controversial laws were common

Written by- Rezwan

Global Voices



Suggestive maps remixed by the author

With pivotal elections in 2023 or scheduled in 2024, several South Asian nations find themselves at a crucial juncture. The preparation and outcomes of these elections carry significant implications, not only in shaping the destinies of the respective countries but also in influencing the broader dynamics of the South Asian region and the global landscape at large.

During 2023, the pre-election implications in some of these countries became clear — repressive laws were passed to muzzle free speech or silence critics and leaders and members of the opposition parties have been arrested or judicially harassed. We will discuss some of the stories we covered in 2023 from this region.

Maldives:

In the September 2023 presidential elections in the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, the former Mayor of Malé, secured victory in a second-round run-off, defeating the incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party. The result has significant implications for Maldives' foreign policy and the geopolitical balance in this region.

Under President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's leadership from 2013 to 2018, the Maldives shifted closer to China, distancing itself from India, a long-standing ally. There was a significant Chinese investment in the country, which also racked up a huge national debt. When President Solih assumed power after winning the 2018 elections, he adopted an “India first” policy to restore ties with India while maintaining relations with China.

However, since 2020, the opposition coalition of Yameen's Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the People's National Congress (PNC) initiated an “India Out” campaign asking for the withdrawal of Indian troops from the country, challenging the bilateral relationship. The online version of the campaign reportedly harmed public perception of the bilateral relationship between India and the Maldives.

Mohamed Muizzu, a candidate of the People's National Congress (PNC) and endorsed by Yameen's Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), became victorious in the second runoff on September 30, 2023, banking on this issue, among others. On November 17, 2023, the first day of his office, Muizzu formally requested the Indian Government withdraw its troops stationed in the Maldives, which is a setback to India's efforts to “counter China's influence” in the country. The Muizzu government has also opted not to renew a 2019 Memorandum of Understanding with India from conducting hydrographic surveys around the Maldives, an agreement disfavourable to China.

Bangladesh:

Bangladesh is bracing for its own general elections on January 7, 2024, to elect 300 members for its 12th Jatiya Sangshad (National Parliament). The incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's party Awami League

(AL), is expected to win this election for the consecutive fourth term, given that the major political parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are boycotting the election.

The country has a history of politicisation of the bureaucracy by ruling parties. According to a 2022 research by David Jackman & Mathilde Maitrot published in The Journal of Development Studies, the country's police force is often politicised and is usually directed against the opposition. Human Rights groups have long protested against the brutal crackdown against the opposition by the ruling party. Multiple instances of internet shutdowns occurred in 2022 and 2023, which were used to disrupt opposition rallies.

Before the closing of the 24th session of the 11th Bangladesh Parliament on September 14, 2023, the parliament hurriedly passed the new Cyber Security Act 2023 (CSA). The law is essentially a rebranded version of its predecessor, the draconian Digital Security Act of 2018, which was used as a weapon to suppress critical voices.

The US is pressuring Bangladesh to hold free and fair elections and has threatened to impose visa restrictions on those involved in undermining the democratic process. Russia was quick to accuse the US of orchestrating events to destabilise the nation through opposition protests resembling the Arab Spring. Hasina and her Awami League still have the backing of two crucial powers, the neighbour India and China, which has invested heavily in the country's infrastructures in the past decade.

Pakistan:

The next Pakistani general election is scheduled to be held on February 8, 2024, to elect the members of the 16th National Assembly. The country is currently being run under a caretaker government following the dissolution of its parliament on August 9, 2023. Prior to dissolution, the Shehbaz Sharif government hastily passed dozens of bills that curtailed civil liberties, suppressed public voices and criticism, and enhanced the authority of the military.

Earlier this year, the Shehbaz Sharif government initiated a crackdown against Imran Khan, the former prime minister of Pakistan and the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, while he was demanding early elections. Widespread protests destabilised the country in May 2023 when Khan was arrested on corruption charges.

The protests eventually escalated into riots in Lahore. Subsequently, the Supreme Court of Pakistan declared Khan's arrest as illegal. However, the government responded by invoking the Army Act and Official Secrets Act to persecute the protestors in military court.

Imran Khan was arrested again on August 5, 2023, as the Islamabad High Court (IHC) found him guilty of corrupt practices. Former Prime Minister Khan was removed from office in April 2022 through a no-confidence motion in the parliament as he lost the majority. In August 2023, the Islamabad High Court ordered his release by suspending his trial, but he remained locked up on several other charges.

While Khan is still on trial for leaking state secrets, it is unlikely that he will be released before February 2024 to contest the election. There are concerns about whether the caretaker government and the Election Commission of Pakistan are capable of holding fair elections. The country has a history of censoring social media platforms and attempts to suppress the voting rights of minorities.

India:

The next general elections in India are expected to be held between April and May 2024, when members of the 18th Lok Sabha will be elected. With a weakened opposition and strong performance in the recently concluded State elections, The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to win the 2024 parliamentary elections, enabling Prime Minister Narendra Modi to rule for the third term.

In March 2023, Rahul Gandhi, the former leader of the opposition Indian National Congress (INC), lost his Parliament membership after being convicted of defamation. In August 2023, India's supreme court suspended his two-year jail sentence, allowing him to come back as an MP and to run in the upcoming election.

In July 2023, a political alliance of 28 political parties in India led by the INC was formed which was named The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (I.N.D.I.A). The primary objective of the alliance is to defeat the ruling National Democratic Alliance government led by the BJP. The opposition parties have accused the BJP of changing India's name to "Bharat" to subvert the alliance.

India is constantly pushing itself to replace China as the leader of the Global South and assert its geopolitical agenda in South Asia. In January 2023, The Modi government waged a war against the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) over its broadcast of a two-part documentary titled "India: The Modi Question". The documentary aimed to highlight the rising violence against the Muslim minority population in India under Modi. There were also some protests against the rearranged constituencies in the Assam state of North-eastern India.

Sri Lanka:

The next Sri Lankan Presidential election and parliamentary election will be held in 2024, and the dates have not been finalised. The government's proposed new Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) will provide security forces the power to detain individuals without warrants and will give sweeping powers to the President, police, and military to arbitrarily ban protests and gatherings.

Sri Lanka experienced a severe economic and political crisis in 2021 and 2022. In July 2022, then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) was forced to resign amidst widespread anti-government protests. President Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party was voted by the parliament as Rajapaksa's replacement.

SLPP still holds a clear majority in the parliament, and it may be a strong opponent of Wickremesinghe in the upcoming elections. A November 2023 survey shows the popularity of a number of opposition candidates much higher than Wickremesinghe or SLPP.

Can democracy survive 2024?- Financial Times

Rishi Sunak indicates he will not call election until second half of 2024- The Guardian

2024 Is The Biggest Election Year In History—Here Are The Countries Going To The Polls This Year _ Forbes

COP28 agreement on adapting to climate change kicks the real challenge down the road

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license.

COP28 concluded late on Wednesday morning to a mixed reaction. The Dubai agreement extracted a promise from nearly 200 countries to transition away from fossil fuels, but it leaves many questions unanswered when it comes to keeping global average temperatures from warming by more than 1.5°C. The world is rapidly running out of time to limit temperatures to this level – a crucial threshold for many communities living in low-lying islands and delicate ecosystems such as coral reefs.

The last year was the hottest on record, with catastrophic floods in Libya, extreme heat in south Asia, Europe, China and the US, and droughts across east Africa which were all made more likely as a result of climate change.

Even if the world keeps to 1.5°C, countries will still need to adapt to the effects of a harsher climate. If temperatures exceed 1.5°C, this will be even harder. At COP28, countries agreed the first targets to guide the global effort to adapt.

So, do they go far enough to address the growing scale of climate impacts?

Adaptation is essential

I am a researcher writing a book about the hard choices the world must make to adapt to climate change. For 12 years I have been working on adaptation planning and finance, attending the UN negotiations and researching how to make adaptation more ambitious and inclusive.

Every fraction of a degree of warming avoided by cutting emissions will give communities more breathing space to adapt. Adaptation involves making changes to accommodate the hotter climate and lessen its effects.

Farmers in sub-Saharan Africa struggling to grow food due to changes in rainfall can adapt with improved forms of irrigation and new crop varieties to maintain a similar level of productivity. Coastal communities can build seawalls to protect them from storm surges or plant mangrove forests to prevent the land eroding as fast. Bangladesh has developed early warning systems and invested in cyclone shelters.

The global framework for adaptation's targets set out what countries must do and where the most progress needs to be made for goals like reducing climate-induced water scarcity. Even to get this agreement was a success given the technical and political challenges in measuring something like adaptation, which covers so many different things, from giving farmers in Asia better information on rainfall to increasing shade and cool spaces in cities.

We have limited ways to understand if the world is on track for many of these areas and the agreement contains a two-year work programme to develop indicators. We have more information on the systems and plans needed. For example, 101 countries have multi-hazard early warning systems in place – the goal aims for this to be all countries by 2027.

The framework will guide investment and shape the implementation of adaptation measures for the next decade. It will allow the global community to check if this process is on track, and to change course if it is not.

Will the goal meet the scale of the challenge?

A key sticking point for developing countries across the negotiations in Dubai was securing enough money from developed countries (the largest historical emitters and so the biggest culprits of climate chaos) to actually implement these necessary actions.

Developed countries have failed to deliver the US\$40 billion (£31 billion) to US\$50 billion a year promised as part of a doubling of money for adaptation agreed in 2021. This is part of the overall finance target of US\$100 billion a year – agreed for both mitigation (cutting emissions) and adaptation back in 2009.

The latest UN report on adaptation showed that only US\$21 billion was delivered in 2021, while financial needs for adaptation are 10-18 times higher than the amount of public finance available.

The agreement on adaptation in Dubai talks generally of the need for more finance, but makes few commitments. This is not enough, but detailed work on the next financial deal is scheduled at COP29. The agreement next year will aim to set a new target for mobilising money to reduce emissions and adapt – the target will replace the US\$100 billion a year that runs until 2025.

Research shows that progress on adaptation has been slow, fragmented and uneven across the world. Between 3.3 and 3.6 billion people live in places that are expected to be highly vulnerable to climate change. In Africa, tens of thousands of people will die from extreme heat unless radical measures are taken to adapt. Between 800 million and 3 billion people will not have enough water at 2°C global warming – and up to 4 billion at 4°C. We also have very little evidence that funded adaptation measures are working.

The agreement in Dubai signals that the adaptation effort is off track and highlights areas for action such as water, food, healthcare and infrastructure. Critically, it offers little detail yet to check on global progress – we will need to wait one year for a new financial target and another two years for indicators that can assess progress in adapting lives and livelihoods.

Frameworks can create incentives for action, and it is vital the new global framework creates pressure for ambition and finance. But countries will need to wait to agree the detail on the money and the targets that will give it the teeth it needs.

While COP28 yielded incremental progress, the world waits for a leap forward in the pace and scale of climate adaptation.

About the author: Susannah Fisher is a Principal Research Fellow in the Department of Geography at UCL.morningstaronline.co.uk

How the European Union captured the labour movementmorningstaronline.co.uk

Jacques Delors – end of an illusion

DOUG NICHOLLS, former general secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions and lifelong campaigner against the European Union, reflects on the recent death of one of the main architects of the EU



Jacques Delors and Mrs Thatcher at the opening of the Channel Tunnel

Flickr

I HAD one thing in common with Jacques Delors. We both attended our first TUC Congress in 1988. He had been brought in to seduce the hitherto largely Eurosceptic British trade union movement to support the then-imminent Single European Act to create a single European market of 320 million consumers.

At the time I thought that the standing ovation he received was a little more worrying than just overpolite applause. It represented a really dangerous throwing in of the towel.

Our movement was still reeling from the aftermath of wave after wave of deindustrialisation, failed factory occupations and mass unemployment, the sale of council housing, the lifting of exchange controls on capital, successive rounds of anti-union legislation and of course the severe battering of the print workers at Wapping, and the coal and steel industry generally post-miners' strike.

Prospects for removing the plague of this unprecedented ferocity of the neoliberals fronted by Margaret Thatcher seemed very bad and anyone — particularly a big cheese from “Europe” who spoke warmly about workers' rights and things being “social” rather than individual — offered, it seemed to many, at least straws to cling on to.

Things must have appeared so desperate that the normal common-sense scepticism and independence of thought in the British trade union movement was tragically suspended and Delors's very rhetorical, very thin speech was swallowed whole. He offered merely some scraps in return for surrendering opposition to the domination of market forces and to the power of unelected EU commissioners over our national economy.

A deep-seated socialist concept of democracy, as being rooted in the accountabilities of national parliaments and self-determining political and economic policy-making, was rejected by many in the unions as being old hat.

They were in favour of the new-fangled fantasy that none of the countries in Europe needed sovereignty. Instead, they needed a single capitalist market in command which was able to move labour, goods and services, and above all capital, around the world without restriction.

This “uniquely European model of society,” as Delors called it in his speech at the TUC, was painted in the soft pastel colours of social democratic impressionism.

We would get, he said, “close co-operation and solidarity as well as competition.” We would be strong on “social solidarity of protection of the weakest and of collective bargaining.”

And, he went on to assure delegates: “...the large market should not diminish the level of social protection already achieved in the member states ... every workers’ right [would be] covered by a collective agreement and more specific measures concerning, for example, the status of temporary work.”

Not only would we get all this, we would see “the extension to all workers of the right to lifelong education.”

On the basis of these promises — and there were no others in his speech — the organised trade union movement raised the white flag, opened union offices alongside the much more effective 30,000 corporate lobbyists in Brussels and said it could rely on those we never elected and the ever-so-clever lawyers in Europe to save us from everything bad in Britain.

Fortunately, workers generally, including the vast majority outside of the trade union movement, remained consistently more shrewd and sceptical, and voiced their opinion eventually in the 2016 referendum when the people were given their first opportunity to comment on EU membership.

The trade union movement has been slow to realise that union activism and membership also declined in direct relationship to the pro-EU proclamations of many unions. Believing that joining a bigger jungle would make the jungle any better was always seen as daft.

Even if Delors believed his own rhetoric in 1988, he would not have been able to claim that the “social Europe” he promised had subsequently either protected social benefits in member states, or introduced a range of measures to increase solidarities.

Indeed, the demolition of collective bargaining, final-salary pension schemes and relentless attacks on workers’ rights across the EU as it ruthlessly prioritised the needs of the employer’s market always demanded that we should look at reality not rhetoric.

The aspirations for a Europe of united nations that arose after the first world war then again after the second did indeed include some socialist and more latterly social democratic political traditions. Many of these currents came from experiences we simply had never had in Britain. In most European countries fascism had been successful in ways that it never had been here, and there was a laudable imperative on the heart of the European mainland to prevent its resurrection.

But one form of autocracy would never supplant another. And dreaming that the peoples of Europe could be saved from the horrors of themselves by hollowing out their democratic national institutions and replacing them by directives written by unelected bureaucrats was a sure way to ignite the forces of reaction once more. And it did.

Capital demanded that to secure its new single market in Europe it needed a single foreign and defence policy to back it up. This would drop bombs on the former Yugoslavia, returning warfare directly to European soil. And it would require the stunting and

suppression of emerging producers and markets, notably in Africa. While being a market in part designed to compete with the US, the EU, German-led market would know where its bread was buttered short term and would take the side of the US and Nato in Ukraine against Russia, and support Israel in the Middle East.

No-one rejected the illusion of EU membership in order to buy into the continuing illusion that the hidden hand of the market and the ownership of our national assets by overseas corporations can bring prosperity and social solidarity.

So to rid ourselves of the Delors delusion that underpins much working-class thinking about how to run society and the economy, regardless of the EU, we have to reassert some hard truths — the competitiveness of the capitalist market in all things cannot be tempered and tamed by minor legalistic adjustments; workers' rights are not given, they are fought for; public services cannot be in private ownership; movements of goods, services, capital and labour must be controlled nationally; peace will come to the world if there is mutual respect for the self-determination of nations.

Jacques Delors obituary _ The Guardian

Champion of the European Union's single market and currency whose vision of a centralised, federalist bloc found less favour

Jacques Delors, one of Europe's greats, has died Le Monde

How the European Union captured the labour movement

In 1988, the late Jack Delors ‘sold’ the EU as the future of industrial and economic harmony to a much-diminished TUC — instead of more protection for workers’ rights, what came next was a neoliberal coup, writes NICK WRIGHT

THE YEAR was 1987. Thatcher had signed the Single European Act. This signalled Britain’s fuller integration into what became the European Union.

With sovereignty surrendered, the pressure for a reversal of the labour movement’s long-standing opposition to European capitalist integration intensified.

In the late 1980s, the labour movement was in bad shape. A slump conjoined with a Thatcherite destruction of manufacturing capacity and Thatcher’s deregulation of the financial markets — combined with the unashamed “monetarist” fiscal policies she and her chancellor pursued — drove unemployment over three million.

Coal, energy (gas and electricity) and water were privatised diverting a revenue stream to private owners.

With rising unemployment, pay inevitably came under pressure — and despite mass campaigning, notably around the left-led Marches for Jobs, the unions were on the back foot. Membership fell from over 13 million in the mid-1970s to under eight million with many more now outside of collective bargaining agreements.

Attacks on union rights, which under the previous Labour government had been defeated by firm union opposition to Barbara Castle’s In Place of Strife proposals, were renewed.

After a decade of fiercely fought rearguard actions the coup-de-grace on union workplace power was administered by the 1988 Employment Act only made possible by the defeat of the miners’ strike.

The introduction of new technology in the printing industry was pushed through without union agreement by a combination of anti-union laws, the scab leadership of the Electrical Trades Union and outsize bonuses for Maggie Thatcher’s boot boys in the Metropolitan Police.

Sensing union weakness, Thatcher’s cabinet abandoned any pretence that consensual relations along the “corporatist” model were either possible or desirable.

The scene was set for further retreat on pay and jobs while the erosion of the foundations of the post-war economy presaged a more complete defeat for the working class and its movement.

While this had organisational and political features it was in the sphere of ideology and class consciousness that retreat was most apparent.

Jacques Delors — who died last week at the age of 92 — became president of the European Commission in 1985, and continued in post through to 1995, by which time the defeats the British working class suffered had been eclipsed by counter-revolution which overthrew socialist relations of production in the USSR and socialist Europe.

It was in this growing atmosphere of defeat that the long-standing trade union and Labour Party opposition to Britain's integration into the capitalist common market came under attack.

The TUC position — withdrawal from the European Economic Community as it was known — was grounded in a 1981 Congress decision that reflected fairly solid opposition by many unions. It was echoed in Labour Party conference policy that party leader Michael Foot upheld, although an active right wing — stronger in Parliament than in the constituencies or unions — was a constant pressure to conform to ruling-class preference.

The TUC establishment — always close to the Foreign Office on the cold war Atlantic alliance and thus bound to protect US interests in European affairs — was an enthusiastic participant in the various European industry and trade union adjuncts.

By his own admission, the key figure in this process was the TUC functionary David Lea, who was eventually elevated to the Lords for his services — and is now disgraced.

As head of the TUC economic department and assistant general secretary, Lea had worked with Delors when he was the French EEC commissioner. Delors, now elevated to president of the EU Commission, planned to bring before the European Council proposals for an added “social dimension” to the European Single Market legislation then being formulated.

This was to include tidbits in the form of workers' rights to information, consultation and negotiation, as well as to permanent training.

I was reporting from the 1988 TUC conference when Delors sold the forthcoming 1992 Single European Act as the foundation of the “social dimension” to the integration of the European Single Market. He held out a vision of a regulated market that reconciled capitalist competition with “close co-operation and solidarity.”

The code word was “social dialogue,” presented as a mechanism which held the promise of guaranteed social rights including worker's right to be covered by a collective agreement; labour market reforms such as the status of temporary workers and the right of workers to lifelong education in a changing society.

For the trade union right wing, it presented a formula for dissolving class conflict in the workplace and in wider society, while among delegates, it seemed to offer a chance to win concessions that could not be won within the British state — but through the institutional power that, so Delors offered, resided in institutions at the European level.

In a round table discussion 20 years later, the GMB's John Edmonds, who as chair had skilfully steered the September 1988 TUC conference, reflected on the speed with which attitudes had changed. The TUC, he said, had a longstanding opposition to EC membership and was calling for withdrawal, but by October, both the TUC and the Labour Party were actively in favour of membership.

This he described as a veritable “coup,” with the TUC shift in position then confirming the reversal in Labour's position, with the affiliated trade unions then disposing of 90 per cent of votes at the party's conference.

With union opposition neutered and Labour bought into the consensus, Thatcher's successor as Tory prime minister, John Major, negotiated an opt-out from the Social Chapter.

This left Britain bound into the mechanisms of the single European (capitalist) market replete with the Maastricht treaty obligations that enforced privatisation, imposed budgetary constraints and put important elements of the economy under external control.

Game, set and match.

Inevitably rank-and-file opposition surfaced but the overall political effect was to corral the trade unions into a pathetic pleading for the return of the Social Chapter with hope repeatedly deferred to the election of a Labour government.

The eventual New Labour administrations of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown — even more committed to labour market flexibility than the Tories — proved substantially more sympathetic to employers than to trade unions.

It was to meet the public expenditure constraints imposed by the EU treaty that then-chancellor Gordon Brown enthusiastically took up a Tory government mechanism — public-private partnerships — that notionally shifted investment in health, education and infrastructure off the index of public spending.

It quickly became clear that these private finance initiatives were a disaster. Far from the private sector taking on risk, government had to underwrite investment.

On the eve of the 2008 financial meltdown, the total capital value of PFI contracts signed was £68 billion, with the British taxpayer tied to a £215bn bill over the life of these contracts.

Workers at the sharp end of public spending constraints, most notably in local government, health and education, made sure that their unions took opposition to PFI to the TUC and the Labour Party.

TUC general secretary John Monks — later made a baron and recycled to lead the EU-funded European TUC — was humiliated when TUC delegates repudiated his rearguard defence of Labour's PFI policy. Subsequent events confirmed the principle that when affiliated unions surrender opposition to right-wing policies this is quickly implemented but when they oppose Labour's right-wing drift they are systematically ignored.

Thus, when in 2002, delegates to the Labour conference condemned PFI the policy was ignored by the parliamentary party and leadership.

It was a wilful blindness to the neoliberal nature of the eurofederalist project that hobbled trade union opposition to the policies that inevitably flowed from Britain's obligations under the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties. There developed a schizophrenic approach in which the effect of the policies was condemned but the official gaze was averted from the root cause.

This weakened the anti-capitalist case against neoliberalism. It was not that outside of the EU any conceivable British government might not adopt neoliberal policies. The capitalist crisis's global character meant that it would, just like every other developed capitalist government. But the fact is that the decisive elements of the British ruling class were bound into the EU as their chosen instrument to implement these policies. This had the added

attraction that without repudiating the country's treaty obligations and leaving the EU decision-making was even further from the reach of the working class.

The Brexit referendum into which Cameron, in a fit of bourgeois Bullingdon bullishness, blundered was the accidental mechanism whereby power was, for a moment, in the hands of the British people and not their masters.

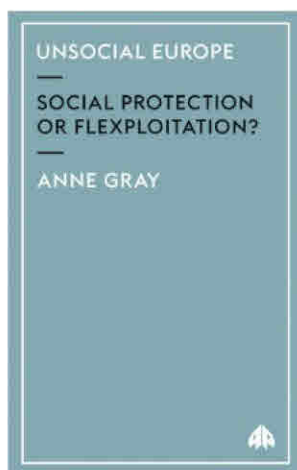
The tragedy of these years lies in the failure of the labour movement to take advantage of the split in our ruling class and take the lead in the fight to regain sovereignty.

Where elements in the labour movement sided with big business and the banks, this surrendered the initiative to those capitalist and finance sector elements who inflected opposition to EU membership with a divisive and diversionary racism and chauvinism.

It was persistent illusions about the nature of the EU that gifted Boris Johnson a wedge issue with which Labour's right wing, in alliance with every element of the big business Establishment – from security services to media moguls — could beat off Corbyn's Labour challenge.

Nick Wright blogs at 21centurymanifesto.wordpress.com.

This article first appeared in the Morning Star.



Unsocial Europe - Social Protection Or Flexploitation?

by Anne Gray

How and why are European welfare systems and the labour market changing? How do they affect the daily lives of those facing unemployment or precarious work?

Anne Gray shows how the idea of unemployment benefits as a right is evolving into a regime closer to American 'workfare'. She explains how this policy forces the unemployed into low paid, temporary or part-time jobs associated with the new 'flexible' labour market. Drawing on unemployed people's own accounts of their experiences - in the UK, Germany, France and Belgium - Gray illustrates the job market as seen from the dole queue. Exploring the changing nature of work in Europe, Gray reveals why there is a shortage of full-time permanent jobs, what is to be done, and what the future holds for labour market regulation in Europe.

Australian by birth, John Pilger died on December 30 2023, at the age of 84.

The world will be a worse place without the exemplary journalist and peace advocate to shine the light of truth on injustice, writes PAUL DONOVAN, looking back at a remarkable career

Morning Star

He initially rose to fame for his international reporting on the Vietnam war, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Burma, East Timor, Australia and the Middle East.

Together with filmmaker David Munro, he broke the news of the devastation in Cambodia, caused by four years of tyrannous rule by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. In a later documentary, the team revealed training being given to the Khmer Rouge in exile by British forces.

In the US, Pilger was accompanying Robert Kennedy on his presidential campaign in 1968, when the senator was shot in the Ambassador Hotel. Reporting for the Daily Mirror on June 5 1968, Pilger wrote: "'He's the next President Kennedy!' said a woman standing next to me. She then fell to the floor, with a bullet wound to the head."

Born in Bondi, New South Wales, Pilger moved to Britain in 1962 — he did much to bring to light the inhuman treatment of indigenous people in Australia.

The multi-talented journalist communicated stories of injustice via his work for the Daily Mirror newspaper (1962-86) and documentary films, mainly for ITV. He was also, later, a columnist for the Guardian and New Statesman. Pilger also wrote many books.

On the domestic side, Pilger brought the story of the struggle of children to get compensation for the damage done by the drug Thalidomide to national attention.

He won a stream of national and international journalistic awards, being declared Journalist of the Year in 1967 and 1979. Pilger, though, remained a true advocate of speaking truth to power, a real seeker after justice.

"Secretive power loathes journalists who do their jobs, who push back screens, peer behind facades, lift rocks. Opprobrium from on high is their badge of honour," said Pilger, who remained a stern critic of the mainstream media to the end.

He particularly loathed those who used their positions to parrot establishment PR, rather than doing the job of bringing the powerful to account. He warned of "fake news" long before it became a term.

Pilger was a peace campaigner throughout his life. Over recent decades, he exposed the tragedies of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Long before the second Gulf war of 2003, he was writing about the crippling sanctions on Iraq, that were killing thousands of children.

Always an advocate for the Palestinians, he was campaigning to the end for recognition of the crimes being committed by the present onslaught. He was a passionate supporter of the Stop the War Coalition, regularly addressing rallies down the years.

In later years, Pilger stood by Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, as he was persecuted, standing bail and visiting him at the Ecuadorian embassy and prison — unlike many media people, Pilger stood by Assange till the end.

Typically in his final published piece, a month before he died, Pilger, called on everyone to stand up to authority. He called Julian Assange a Spartacus figure: "The Palestinians are Spartacus. People who fill the streets with flags, and principle and solidarity are Spartacus. We are all Spartacus, if we want to be."

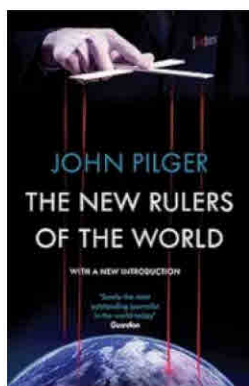
On a personal note, John Pilger was a great inspiration, friend and support, particularly when starting out in journalism. It was his work that played a major part in inspiring me to want to write. Later, I did research on his films, books and columns. The generosity of time, encouragement and support given by John over many years are something that I will never forget

He was also a strong supporter of the Morning Star, which ran his columns for a number of years. He often contrasted the content of the paper with much of the sycophancy found in the mainstream media.

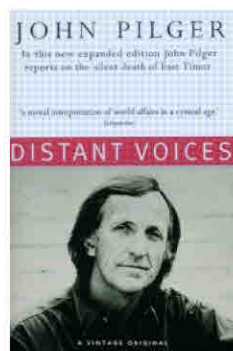
A man who remained true to his principles to the end, admired and respected internationally, the body of work he leaves behind will stand the test of time. He was also an inspiration to so many, some of whom he helped along the way. A truly inspirational journalist and human being, he will be sorely missed.

John Pilger is survived by his partner Jane, and children Zoe and Sam.

John Pilger made his excellent films such as *The War You Don't See*, *The Dirty War on the NHS*, *The Coming War on China*, and many more, available to watch free online at www.bit.ly/PilgerFilms.

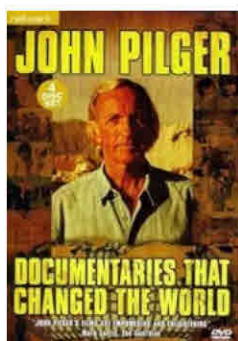


John Pilger is one of the world's renowned investigative journalists and documentary filmmakers. In this classic book, with an updated introduction, he reveals the secrets and illusions of modern imperialism. Beginning with Indonesia, he shows how General Suharto's bloody seizure of power in the 1960s was part of a western design to impose a 'global economy' on Asia. A million Indonesians died as the price for being the World Bank's 'model pupil'. In a shocking chapter on Iraq, he delineates the true nature of the West's war against the people of that country. And he dissects, piece by piece, the propaganda of the 'war on terror' to expose its Orwellian truth. Finally, he looks behind the picture-postcard image of his homeland, Australia, to illuminate an enduring legacy of imperialism: the subjugation of the First Australians.



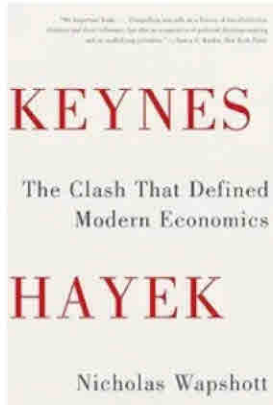
Throughout his distinguished career as a journalist and film-maker, John Pilger has looked behind the 'official' versions of events to report the real stories of our time.

The centrepiece of this new, expanded edition of his bestselling *Distant Voices* is Pilger's reporting from East Timor, which he entered secretly in 1993 and where a third of the population has died as a result of Indonesia's genocidal policies. This edition also contains more new material as well as all the original essays - from the myth-making of the Gulf War to the surreal pleasures of Disneyland. Breaking through the consensual silence, Pilger pays tribute to those dissenting voices we are seldom permitted to hear.



Twelve documentaries from the campaigning journalist John Pilger, exposing the West's continued exploitation of the Third World, and criticising the military interventions of western governments, from Cambodia to Iraq. The documentaries included are: 'Year Zero - The Silent Death of Cambodia'; 'Nicaragua - A Nation's Right to Survive'; 'Burp! Pepsi vs Coke in the Ice Cold War'; 'Flying the Flag - Arming the World'; 'Vietnam - The Quiet Mutiny'; 'Death of a Nation - The Timor Conspiracy'; 'Inside Burma - Land of Fear'; 'Welcome to Australia'; 'Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq'; 'Palestine is Still the Issue'; 'Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror'; and 'Stealing a Nation'. Also included is interview footage with Pilger from the 2006 Guardian Hay Literary Festival.

Reading and Media - My Xmas suggestions

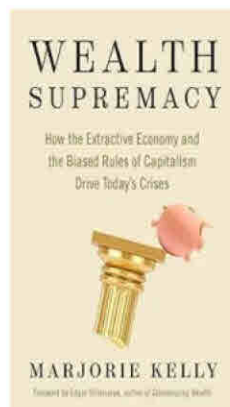
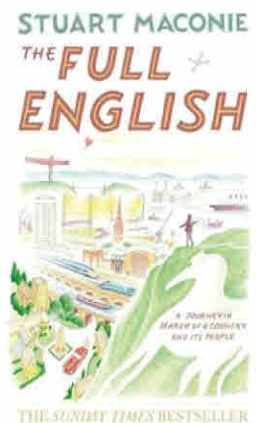


As the crash of 1929 plunged the world economy into turmoil, two men emerged with competing claims on how to restore balance. John Maynard Keynes, the mercurial Cambridge economist, believed that government had a duty to spend. He met his opposite in a little-known Austrian economics professor, Friedrich Hayek, who considered attempts to intervene pointless and potentially dangerous. From their first face-to-face encounter to the heated arguments between their ardent disciples, Nicholas Wapshott unearths the contemporary relevance of Keynes and Hayek, as present-day arguments over the virtues of the free market and government intervention rage with the same ferocity as they did in the 1930s.

Join Stuart Maconie on an enlightening, entertaining journey through England, from Bristol's Banksy to Durham's beaches, from Cotswolds corduroy to Stoke's oatcakes.

As his guide, Maconie walks in the footsteps of J.B. Priestley's classic travelogue, *English Journey*, to explore our national identity and how it has evolved over the last century. On his way, Stuart takes inspiration from the people he meets at bus stops and train stations, cafes and corner shops.

Travelling the length of the land, Maconie explores the differences between city and town, north and south, and examines our past and present with affection and insight. Whether he's passing the boutique hotels of Manchester, the moors of Ilkley or the grand houses of Tynemouth, looking out over misty fens or urban skylines, he shines a light on the people who make these places and asks what the future holds for them. Along the way, he uncovers local heroes and secret histories over early breakfasts and



A powerful analysis of how the bias towards wealth that is woven into the very fabric of American capitalism is damaging people, the economy, and the planet, and what the foundations of a new economy could be.

This bold manifesto exposes seven myths underlying wealth supremacy, the bias that institutionalizes infinite extraction of wealth by and for the wealthy, and is the hidden force behind economic injustice, the climate crisis, and so many other problems of our day:.

Kelly argues instead for the democratization of ownership: public ownership of vital services, worker-owned businesses, and more. And she sketches the outlines of a non-extractive capitalism that would be subordinate to the public interest. This is an ambitious reimagining of the very foundations of our economy and society.

In 1947 the Gwr was at the lowest ebb of its entire history. Worn out by war, there had been no maintenance for 6 years and the government couldn't supply the steel they needed for repair. The staff coped with rationing, a desperately cold winter and blazing hot summer, and death with floods, collisions, broken rails and failing locomotives. The incredible strength of character and can-do attitude of Gwr workers kept the railway running through it all. This history, drawn from Gwr papers, reveals the details of everyday and the problems and difficulties the staff faced. Above all it shows how well they overcame their problems with only muscle power and a steam crane to help - and, of course, no H&Se regulations and arguments to slow them down.

