

IN SUB-ZERO CONDITIONS THE BATTLE GOES ON

by our Eastern European Affairs correspondent

LAST WEEK people throughout Western Europe celebrated in the festive spirit traditionally reserved for Christmas and the New Year. But it was business as usual in Ukraine as Russian and Ukrainian troops fight in sub-zero temperatures on the front that runs from the Black Sea to the Russian border. There was no holiday break for the Ukrainian batteries who relentlessly pound residential areas in the cities of Donbas whilst Russian missiles and drones roared over Ukraine in a renewed drive to cut the Ukrainians' power lines and water supplies.

The Russians still have overwhelming air-superiority but the Ukrainians have been hitting back with new drones and missiles supplied by their NATO masters. Last week they launched a raid on a makeshift Russian barracks in the Donbas. They say that at least 400 Russians were killed and another 300 wounded – most, if not all, reservists called up in the recent mobilisation. The Russians say less than a hundred died in the attack but they have not released the numbers of those wounded in what the Moscow

media concedes was a devastating attack.

At least 89 servicemen were killed when Ukrainian missiles hit their temporary barracks in Makeyevka in the Donetsk People's Republic on Sunday. The building, a vocational college, was targeted by six missiles from an American-supplied HIMARS multiple rocket launcher, four of which penetrated the Russian air defences and hit the building at precisely 0:01am on New Year's Day. The Ukrainian launcher was later destroyed in a retaliatory strike.

Whilst the Russian army has opened an investigation into the raid, it is "already obvious that the main reason for what happened was the turning on and mass use of mobile phones by personnel – contrary to the ban – within the range of enemy weapons" that allowed Ukrainian forces to trace their coordinates, General Sergey Sevryukov told reporters this week.

This, however, is being questioned in the Russian nationalist camp. They ask why were hundreds of troops



• Aid from Russia continues to flow into the Donbas.

all stationed in one building in a village that is constantly shelled by Ukrainian artillery. They want to know why the troops were sent to an unfortified school-house when numerous strong buildings with basements were nearby. Some say this is a blatant case of criminal incompetence. Others say it smells of treason.

Meanwhile on the home front Russian communists are stepping up their efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to the Donbas. This week communists from Siberia are spending three days behind the wheel driving from Novosibirsk to Lugansk to deliver food and medical supplies to the people of the Donbas.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) has so far sent 104 convoys to the Donbas people's republics, which joined the Russian Federation in September 2022.

And the donations are not just from communists. Ordinary citizens have joined in the effort transferring funds and bringing much-needed equipment, medicines and clothes for the convoy that will reach Lugansk this week.

"We are patriots of our country, and when our guys fight there, we are simply obliged to provide them with all possible assistance," says one of the drivers, Novosibirsk communist Pyotr Rybakov.

FUND

Well the festive season has ended with the December fighting fund appeal closing at £3,200 thanks to a Carlisle friend who sent in £50 in memory of Andrew Harvey and another £50 from a regular Essex supporter of our efforts, £700 from an East Anglian comrade, £100 from a comrade in Southall and a tanner from a Korean solidarity activist in London. Though £300 short of our target we live to fight another day so let's get back on the street and step up the work to build the *New Worker*.

The January appeal starts now and all donations, big or small, will count in the fight to guarantee the survival of the only communist weekly in the country. Please send your donations to: *New Worker* Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the '*New Worker*'.

To save a stamp you can also use your credit or debit card to send contributions here:
<http://newworker.org/ncpcentral/fightingfund.html>

INSIDE
America First
means
everyone else
last...p2
The Amazon
jungle...p3

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

Class struggle at a new level

AS THE new year arrives the class struggle has sharpened and intensified in Britain to a level unseen for many years.

Nurses, railway and postal workers, paramedics, bus drivers, border agency staff and many more are taking a stand for fair wages and also on other issues. The years of austerity that have followed the global financial crisis that started in 2008 have achieved nothing. Workers are now starting to say “enough is enough”. The falling value of wages, rampant inflation and inadequate public spending have combined to ensure that as usual it is the workers who are made to suffer from the failings of capitalism.

The Labour Party should be organising, campaigning and calling for action. Where is the reassuring solidarity, the mobilisation for mass rallies and concrete support that is needed now?

A number of Labour MPs have defied the leadership and joined picket lines, but apart from a few words of muted sympathy the Starmer leadership seems more interested in issues of little importance. As workers stand up to defend their rights the New Communist Party fully supports them.

The NCP campaigns for substantial wage awards, improved pensions and a reduction in working hours. A reduction in arms spending and ending the support for corrupt regimes along with making the rich pay more tax could easily fund the benefits. We demand that all restrictive legislation against trade unions should be abolished. We also seek re-nationalisation of the utilities and public transport along with a complete reversal of NHS privatisation and outsourcing. Our policies are bold and include a campaign for nuclear disarmament, an active policy for peace and diplomacy, and the closure of all foreign military bases.

Our progressive policies are dramatically different from those of the mainstream political parties. They possess dynamic qualities that could promote a lively and stimulating debate. Our essential message needs to be presented to a far wider audience. This means gaining an increased readership for the *New Worker* and producing more pamphlets and leaflets.

The working class has to be imbued with enthusiasm for building socialism and given the confidence that with united effort things can and will change. Progress requires an acceptance by the workers of the relevance of socialism and also the fact that capitalism is in terminal crisis.

Unemployment, poverty and soaring inflation plagues the imperialist heartlands of Europe and the USA. But another world is being built in the people's democracies in Asia and the Caribbean.

People's China is once again the workshop of the world with an economy second only to that of the USA. The people of Cuba, Democratic Korea, Laos and Vietnam are taking giant strides to raise the living standards of working people. And at an international level, from Palestine to south Korea, and Brazil to the Donbas, the masses are stepping up the struggle as they fight for their freedom against US hegemony.

We all want to make 2023 a better year. And a good way to make it one is to join the NCP. Our party stands for advancing the material interests of the working class at home and in the rest of the world. We seek to build our vanguard party to ensure that workers have the knowledge, resolve and essential vision to challenge the establishment – and in doing so to lay the foundations for a beautiful new society.

America First means everyone else last

by James Smith

THE USA is pursuing a global campaign to try and contain the rise of China. To do so, the Biden administration has sought to enlist allies and has significantly pushed for transatlantic co-operation. Because of the war in Ukraine, Washington has been able to place growing pressure on European countries to enlist in anti-China goals, particularly through institutions such as NATO.

Whilst such requests have been relatively easy for vassal states such as the UK to follow the USA's demands, as a whole the countries of the EU have been more hesitant in signing up to Washington's agenda, even as certain institutional leaders as such as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyden increasingly parrot such rhetoric. Perhaps clearer amongst US goals is the demand that Europe also follows the USA in “strategic decoupling” against China and reinforcing its ever growing embargo of high-end technologies to the country.

Should Europe follow suit with such decoupling? And is it in the European interest to do so? The answer could not be more clear than European leaders themselves, with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz having made a publicised visit to Beijing in November, who was soon followed by President of the European Council Charles Michel. The messages of both of these leaders were identical, and very clear, that the “decoupling” pushed by the USA, and the forced revision of the international order into a Cold War style confrontation, is not in the interests of Europe.

The USA, however, does not show much interest in listening. Recent news articles detail its attempt to coerce the

Netherlands' world class and leading Lithography firm, ASML, to follow US rules and ban the export of machines that make chips under 14nm nodes to China, to make recent sanctions it imposed ironclad. The firm's executives have always been very outspoken about this coercive behaviour from the USA, pointing out that China is one of their largest markets and such sanctions will not only deprive the company of that, but also accelerate China's resolve to develop the technology themselves and impose long-term damage on the company.

This, however, is only one small aspect as to how the push for “decoupling”, or what we might call “strategic centralisation”, is hurting Europe.

The current foreign policy strategy of the USA has grown to reject globalisation because it now believes it creates an international environment that dilutes and undermines US power by strengthening ‘competitor’ states.

As such, one of America's key foreign policy goals, which began with Donald Trump, has been to instigate geopolitical conflict to recentralise US power over its allies and force them to decouple from economic engagement with these states, in particular Russia and China, aiming to fill the gap with itself.

Concerning the Ukraine war, the USA has pushed European countries to end their energy relationships with Russia, instead selling them its own liquid natural gas products at much higher prices, whilst also ensuring its Military-Industrial complex profits from the growing arms sales and security realignment. But more so has been the fact

that surging energy prices throughout the continent have taken a grave toll against industrial productivity and led to a phenomenon that many commentators have described as “de-industrialisation”, ie the erosion of Europe's own business and industrial capacity by promoting the USA as a more beneficial destination.

Several acts of the US Congress recently passed, such as the Inflation Reduction Act, have made this trend worse by initiating in large scale protectionist subsidies which further hurt European competitiveness. The Biden administration has long stated that its goal is to realign strategic supply chains into the USA, as it is doing with semiconductors, and this comes at the logical expense of allies being “hollowed out”. As another example, outside of Europe, what will the massive US investment in domestic chip capacity do to chip-making hubs such as Taiwan, south Korea and Japan? This is what “decoupling” looks like, and allied states are set to be the biggest losers of this policy because it is initiating an “America First” economic order.

Given this, allied countries should think twice about following the foreign policies of the USA when it comes to so-called decoupling, especially in the case of Europe. The USA does not see the continent as an equal partner in the sense of a multipolar world but sees only a US-led unipolar world whereby Europe is a follower, a passenger and a subordinate. The Biden administration's policies throughout this last year have been damaging to European security, growth and prosperity across the board, threatening the very concept the EU professes to hold known as “strategic autonomy”. A change of course is needed.

Global Times

Workers' Notes

In the Amazon jungle

by New Worker correspondent

THE DUNDEE-BASED *Sunday Post* is Scotland's most mocked newspaper. It used to claim the world's highest density circulation and is famous for its long-running cartoons *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie*, whose annual volumes are an essential part of Christmas for children aged eight to 88.

It also does serious journalism, however. One example of this was the Home affairs editor Stephen Stewart recently taking a temporary second job at the Amazon 93,000 square metre warehouse in Dunfermline, the largest in Britain.

Amazon has two 'fulfilment centres', as their warehouse are known in Scotland. Because Amazon was such a hard-up company it was the deserving recipient of a £5.3 million grant from the SNP government to help build the warehouses.

This is not the first time the Dunfermline site has featured in these pages. In 2018 we noted that Amazon declined to pay workers the Real Living Wage, which the SNP said they would insist on as a condition for their grant. At that time workers had to opt out of restrictions on hours to secure a job. Earlier, on 16 December 2016, we reported that a tent city had emerged outside the warehouse occupied by low-paid seasonal workers.

Then the *Courier & Advertiser* told of the occupant of a tent who said that camping was easier and cheaper than travelling from his home in Perth. A £10.40 single Dundee-to-Dunfermline bus ticket was discovered, perhaps used by one of those agency workers working 60 hours who were only able to afford a weekly journey back home.

To return to the present, to

his surprise Stewart speedily passed through Amazon's brief vetting process that consisted of a few online questionnaires, and a 15-minute video concerned with shoe size and what size of hi-vis vest would fit. This being the Black Friday period of November, Amazon clearly were not fussy, but from the evidence below it is likely that the Dunfermline HR department will now have a vacancy or two after their lapse.

hours per day at a standing workstation for ever grabbing boxes from the conveyor belt, scanning items, repacking them to send to the relevant section by conveyor.

expected

Workers are expected to deal with 350–500 items per shift, failure to do so results in formal disciplinary warnings. Intensive monitoring is in place with literally every

sticker to prove it wasn't stolen from a shelf.

As an ex-Army man, we can take Stewart's word that it is stricter than at high-security military bases. Amazon claim they have a serious problem with thefts, citing cases of security workers helping with loading vans of TVs.

Amongst the cases Stewart witnessed was a young woman berated by her supervisor for going to the toilet too much and that of a man in his

he earned £490 for his 40 night-hours, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos gained an extra £1 billion. Amazon's basic rate is slightly above the minimum wage but below the voluntary real living wage. Joint pain was the main reward of his mercifully brief period of employment. Others have to walk 10–15 miles per day.

Needless to say, Amazon is sternly anti-union. Attempts at unionising American warehouses were met with dirty tricks by management including compulsory meetings on the evils of trade unionism, only in a single New York warehouse did a ballot secure recognition.

In Britain things are only slightly better. Before Christmas Amazon workers at the Coventry warehouse voted by 98 per cent on a 63 per cent turnout for strike action after rejecting a 50 pence per hour pay offer. They want a £15 hourly minimum.

Amanda Gearing, GMB Senior Organiser, welcomed this, saying: "Amazon workers in Coventry have made history – they will be the first ever in the UK to take part in a formal strike. Amazon can afford to do better. It's not too late to avoid strike action; get round the table with GMB to improve the pay and conditions of workers."

Ms Gearing forgets that in August there was a brief sit-in by 1,000 staff under the auspices of Unite at Tilbury over a 35 pence hourly offer.

To return to Dunfermline, Unite's Scottish Secretary Pat Rafferty said Stewart's experience was the norm, not the exception: "It demonstrates what happens when workers are denied a collective voice and must be addressed." He hopefully added: "The Scottish Government should also be examining the concerns raised due to the public money Amazon has received and demanding a meeting with management in Dunfermline to demand unions get access to the workforce."

GMB's Martin Smith pointed out that working for Amazon in real life is not as nice as it looks on those glossy TV adverts. He pointed out that Amazon "produces average earning figures that shows on average people earning £30,000 but that includes software engineers in, for example, the Gourock site, who are on much higher wages."

He also complains that



Soon he became an "Associate" of Amazon, obviously not a worker, perhaps because workers can claim rights. New workers were told they were allowed phones on the floor but not allowed to use them. To quote him in full: "If we receive a call from a number suggesting a domestic crisis, we must find a supervisor and ask if we can take the call. It is suggested, in passing, that citing a 'family emergency' rather than illness if having to call in sick might help us keep our jobs." Charles Dickens's blacking factory was not so bad after all.

returns

Stewart was assigned to Customer Returns, where he examines returned items to see if they can be sold again. This involved spending eight

action, or lack of them, being recorded. "Supervisors have computers on trolleys that they wheel about checking on who is doing what and where everything is going. Some come over to analyse what I have been scanning and sending on," he noted. Stewart was berated by a supervisor for low productivity on the day he was having his worst cold for years.

The days of the foreman with a clipboard are over but more intensive means of surveillance are becoming the norm.

Life at Amazon is not all work. On the nightshift they are allowed two half-hour breaks at 10:40pm and 2:10am (one paid, one unpaid), but undergoing "airport-style security" to get into the canteen eats into that. Mobile phones are marked with an Amazon

60s not allowed to return to his nearby home from his shift to get his glasses. As a result, he ends up with a migraine trying to read the labels on the products he was scanning as well as trying to scrutinise the computer monitor.

minimal

Training was minimal, a hazardous material safety briefing lasted only a few minutes. In his job Stewart had to handle used goods, including a used bidet sprayer. He was issued with two gloves but told only to wear one to deal with the touch-screen monitor.

He also reported that the canteen only sold fried food and energy drinks and no fruit.

For all this Stewart was paid £10.50 per hour plus £1.75 for working nights. He calculated that in the week

continued on page 4...

...continued from page 3

Amazon “describes itself as an e-retailer and say wages in fulfilment centres are comparable to the retail sector. But the work is warehouse work and when you compare them to warehouse wages they are at least £3 an hour less than DPD or any other logistics companies.”

Unite has set up a whistle-blower helpline to gather data and offer comfort, but perhaps it could put more effort into recruitment and co-operation with GMB in preparation for further battles.

Future battles

by New Worker correspondent

RUMOURS are abounding that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will shortly introduce long-promised, new anti-trade union legislation that will enforce minimum “service levels” in a number of sectors in revenge for recent strike action.

The initial plan was confined to the railways, but now the Tories have their eye on restricting or effectively outlawing strike action in the NHS and Education.

It is suspected that the delay is due to the Tories have been making sure their plans are legally watertight before bringing them to Parliament.

Even bosses in the railway industry think that the Tory

plans are unworkable and will only make things worse by causing unnecessary aggravation.

The response of Paul Nowak, the TUC’s new General Secretary, was timidly to warn that: “Unions will oppose any further restrictions every step of the way, including considering a legal challenge if necessary.” He must already be thinking of following his predecessor into the House of Lords.

That must have Sunak trembling in his boots.

National Education Union (NEU) General Secretary Kevin Courtney took a slightly firmer stand by say his union would “resist these measures with all the resources at our disposal”, and the director of legal services at the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) made the blindingly obvious point that health workers already “face the most draconian anti-trade union laws”. Whilst she correctly pointed out that “the Government curtails their right to be heard because it knows it is failing them. Silencing health workers silences the patient voice too”, she made no effort to call for action by her members.

A new boss

by New Worker correspondent

IN HIS inaugural address to the nation, Paul Nowak, the TUC’s new General Secretary made much of the fact that he started stacking shelves in Asda at the age

of 17 and had been a hotel porter and worked in a call centre – but he failed to mention he has been a Congress House bureaucrat since 2000, ie for most of his working life.

Apart from his less-than-inspiring comments on the proposed anti-union laws, he made the standard complaints about workers being “on course for two decades of lost pay – the longest squeeze on earnings in modern history”, deploring low pay and saying that “ministers, unions and employers should work together on a proper industrial strategy, delivering good green jobs, training and skills across the country”. So as might be expected, the TUC is on course for more class collaboration instead of actually rousing the working class to action.

He repeated the tired old slogan that the TUC should be concerned with securing “a fair day’s work for a fair day’s wage” – but we should heed Engels’s 1881 demand that it should be replaced by a very different motto: “Possession of the Means of Work, Raw Material, Factories, Machinery, By the Working People Themselves.”

On another recent occasion Nowak said that that unions including the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) were unlikely secure the 19 per cent they are demanding, meekly saying: “I would hope that there would be a compromise reachable – in order to get to a compromise you need to sit down and negotiate and that’s

what the government is point blank refusing to do.” Such inspiring leadership is what we have come to expect from the TUC.

Counting the pennies

by New Worker correspondent

IN THE present wave of strike action several trade union leaders have condemned the Tory Government for its hands-off attitude. Transport union leaders have pointed out that while Government Ministers and their Civil servants micromanage railway companies, the NHS unions complain that the Government also washes its hands and said that pay negotiations have nothing to do with them, beyond of course saying that demands for higher wages in the public sector are inflationary. This is nonsense of course, as it is plain as a pikestaff that inflation is caused by profiteering.

On the Thursday before New Year, however, the *Times*, the daily organ of the Central Committee of the British bourgeoisie, has suggested that what seems like government inaction could be part of a plan to teach the unions a costly lesson. The *Times* has been active in playing the game of divide and rule by suggesting that some public sector workers are more deserving than others. It has suggested that cute nurses could be given a pay rise of sorts, but obviously not their full demands as that would set a bad example. At the same time, transport union RMT is roundly denounced as Luddite for opposing drastic staff reductions that bosses say are a condition for a pay rise.

It has also suggested, however, that the Government hopes, if not to starve workers back to work, then to drain union resources.

In recent years industrial

action has been at a low level, so unions have been (or should have been) able to build up decent reserves. The fact that there are now fewer but larger unions is also an advantage, although unions are small compared with multinational companies and the state they confront.

Encouraging passing motorists to toot their horns in support of pickets is all very well, but from a financial point of view it is about as helpful as clapping for NHS staff. Bucket collections from the public are all well and good, but serious money is needed, and to be realistic that is not going to come from anywhere but from the unions themselves, either from dues or increased levies.

That said, strikes are an expensive business for unions. PCS is spending £1 million per month on strike pay for the Border Force industrial action at the airports. It has a £4 million strike fund, which it plans to top up with a £5 per month levy from its 177,000-strong membership.

The posher Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has built up a £50 million fund, its two December strikes were limited to 10,000 and 11,500 staff (about a tenth of the membership) walking out. Wider action could potentially cost £5 million for a single day of action.

Needless to say, the RCN denies that they are running out of money. General Secretary Pat Cullen said: “Unhelpful language about the affordability of the strikes from those in power will only embolden nursing staff even more.

“They know what is unaffordable is a failure to invest in nursing. Ministers can stop this now if they are prepared to speak about pay. I will not dig in if they will not dig in.”

Other unions such as transport union RMT do not offer formal strike pay but offer targeted hardship payments of about £50 a day to those at the sharp end. It has £18.6 million in its main account.

**20 years ago
this week
in the New Worker**

AS THE USA and Britain gear up for their planned attack on Iraq, so opposition to the war is growing around the world.

The imperialist powers are trying to isolate and destroy those countries that have the nerve to stand up to them, such as Iraq and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), one by one.

But as they do so, those countries are winning the support of all those around the world who are waking up to the obscenity of the greed and power-lust of the US gov-

ernment and its lackeys.

Earlier this week, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon ordered the biggest British naval task force since the Gulf War to prepare to set sail on Saturday, comprising 3,000 Royal Marines and about 2,000 sailors. This will include the call-up of 1,500 reservists.

Meanwhile the USA is pouring some 50,000 troops into the area and French President Jacques Chirac has put French forces in alert in case they to become involved.

All this is happening in spite of the United Nations inspectors having open access to anywhere in Iraq they want – yet still not finding any weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

All the while the USA and Britain and the right-wing media insist that these weapons do exist and that will be their excuse for invasion – even though Iraq has challenged the CIA to

come to Iraq and show where these imaginary weapons are, without response.

They are even trying to get Turkey on board by dangling the prospect that it might be able to stake a claim to oil fields in northern Iraq.

Turkish foreign minister Yasar Yakis is even now busy rummaging through treaties of the early 20th century to find support for a Turkish claim to oilfields around Mosul and Kirkuk, which were once ruled by the Ottoman Empire.

The workers of Turkey think differently. According to a press statement from the ‘No War on Iraq Co-ordination’ group, on 30 December more than 150 Turkish organisations called on the Turkish government not to be drawn into supporting the US war against the people of Iraq.

Britain, which used to have an empire on which the sun never sets, is experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and it is the people who are bearing the brunt of it. Some use candles instead of lamps. Some just spend the minimum. *Global Times* reporter Wang Wenwen interviews James Anderson, founder of Depher – which stands for Disability and Elderly Plumbing and Heating Emergency Repair – that provides free heating services to the elderly and the disabled, and Michael Burke, a London-based economist, on their experiences of living under the cost-of-living crisis.

Wang Wenwen: You set up Depher in 2017 to help people in deprived circumstances suffering from poor heating and plumbing. Compared with 2017, do you help more people now? Why has the number of people who need help grown?

Anderson: We have had 80 per cent more people who need help than in 2017. The phone never stops. It's going 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I would say about 80 per cent more, easily. It's getting more and more, and it's not just because of the cost-of-living crisis that we're going through. I think it's just because people now know there is someone there to help them. They now know they don't have to suffer on their own and there is somebody that'll listen, help them and contribute toward it or pay for it.

How do you help people in deprived circumstances? Can you give an example of someone who is deeply affected by the cost-of-living crisis?

Anderson: We could be walking into a situation where somebody has not had any heating or hot water for a year, two years, three years. We've had a lady without heating or hot water for eight years.

Winter has come heat or eat?



And you walk into a situation where they've tried every avenue, so they rang the government, they rang the council, they rang all the charities. They've exhausted every other avenue of help that's out there that they know about. And then up pops Depher and we give them the solution. We don't always give them the answer, but we give them the solution, so they can find

the answer. So we don't just remove the problem. We educate them to stop the problem from happening again.

How serious is the energy crisis? As winter comes, what difficulties does the energy crisis bring to the British people to get heating? How do people save electricity?

Anderson: At this mo-

ment in time, I'd say it's serious. But it's not as serious as it is going to get if the [Ukraine] war does not end and the winter comes. Because that's when people will have no choice. The people will be in a position where they will have to use the boilers, they will have to use the gas, they will have to pay the high prices. It's going to get bad if the winter is bad. If it's a mild winter,

it'll be better. But looking at the weather forecast, we could be looking at a bad winter.

If you have a boiler that runs your heating and your hot water, all you do with them is to turn them down, you turn the usage down, you turn the temperature down. You turn appliances off when you go to bed, you don't use appliances as much during the day. So you reduce your consumption. And that is the only way of saving money and it won't save a hell of a lot of money, but it may get you through the period that we're going through now.

They've never done it before the cost-of-living crisis because people could afford to run the houses the way they did. And they budgeted, and they had a set plan of what they could spend, where they could spend it and how they could spend it or what they could save. So everybody had a plan and everyone was living happily, but obviously since the cost-of-living crisis has come, especially after the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, we got into an unprecedented area where nobody knows, not even the government knows, what's going to happen next. So I think we're all going to be blind, but we need to hold each other's hands and guide ourselves through it as much as we can.

Burke: I wouldn't be anywhere near the most badly hit type of person in Britain. I think the most shocking thing for me is how much energy bills, gas and electricity, how much they've risen over the recent period. They've been more than doubled. And we're going into winter now. No-one can tell us for sure how severe the winter will be. I think it's bad for me, so I think it must be desperately worrying for many other people.

My energy bill is getting on for something close to about one-fourth to one-third of my take-home pay. In this country, there's an accepted measure of fuel poverty, which is, if you're spending more than 10 per cent of your income on energy costs. Now, by that definition, I have fuel poverty. There's a phenomenon here known as "heat or eat", which means that people have to choose



• Queuing at a Food Bank over Christmas.

continued on page 6...

...continued from page 5

between whether to heat their homes or to feed themselves but can't afford to do both.

Why couldn't the UK government effectively manage the prices?

Anderson: The UK government can't effectively manage the crisis because it's out of their control, because the companies that are charging these places are doing this because they're private companies, they are not state-owned, they are not owned by the public, they're not owned by the government.

So the government can only cap, the government can only advise. The government can only go so far before the companies reply and turn round and say what we'll charge what we want, we'll do what we like because you don't own us. We will charge what we please. And if the government then starts fining these companies, then these companies will eventually remove themselves from the country, which will have a worse effect on us.

Do you think changing the prime minister can solve the problem?

Anderson: No. I don't think any politician in this country, no matter who they are, no matter what party they are from, will have the answer to the problems that we are facing now. I don't think any of them has got a clue what to do. I don't really think any of them should be in the job that they're in, but that's my personal preference.

Burke: Because the government plays such a direct role in making matters worse, it could just make matters better. It could do the opposite of what's doing. It could have genuine windfall taxes. It could force, by regulation, prices

to be lower. It could nationalise the energy companies or at least the parts that operate in this country. All of those things are possible. All of those things happen in other countries. It's all quite easily doable. Banks are making a fortune. The government has just given them a huge subsidy. We have austerity here, which is a big offensive against the living standards of ordinary people.

The British government is quite committed to this project – what I would call an Americanisation project. It has a project of lowering living standards, lowering wages, removing lots of powers of trade unions, and privatisation. There is a big change taking place. Because it's a big change, the British government has got itself into a mess about how far and how fast to go, but there's no real disagreement about where they want to get to, which is a society or an economy much more like the USA than a traditional Western European social, democratic welfare state-type model.

Are you disappointed about your country which used to be an empire on which the sun never sets?

Anderson: The UK was once that way inclined and there's a lot of history within the UK that I am so ashamed of. I really am. But we're now a diverse country, with diverse people from all over the world we're a multicultural country now, and I think together as that multicultural, we can move forward and champion everybody in the whole world to be the same. Don't forget about the past but learn from it. We can't be that people anymore. We need to be loving. We need to be a community. And I'm hoping that goes forward, we will be there.

Global Times

People's Korea's Defence guaranteeing the socialist system

A Friends of Korea committee seminar was held at the NCP Centre in London to commemorate on the anniversary of the passing of dear leader Kim Jong Il, who died on 17 December 2011. Chaired by Andy Brooks, the symposium heard papers from Dermot Hudson and Michael Chant and video link contributions from supporters in London, the Midlands, the North and Scotland. This is the contribution from Dermot Hudson, the chair of the Korean Friendship Association (KFA).

AS WE are gathered to remember comrade Kim Jong Il it is important for us to study the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK's) great achievements in the work of national defence. Indeed, Kim Jong Il's whole life was associated with the Songun (army first) revolutionary leadership that began when he gave guidance to the Seoul Ryu Kyong Su 105th Tank Division of the Korean People's Army.

The issue of the DPRK's successful defence upbuilding is one that has come into sharp focus. On 15 December the Academy of Defence Science tested a high-thrust solid-fuel motor with a thrust of 140tf, the first of its kind in the country, at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground. This important test has provided a sure sci-tech guarantee for the development of another



• The dear leader Kim Jong Il.

new-type strategic weapon system.

This year [2022] has seen truly amazing and phenomenal advances in DPRK missile technology. The imperialists and their south Korean puppets have complained that the DPRK has carried out approximately 60 or so missile tests during the last year

and have clamoured for more UN sanctions whilst imposing their own unilateral sanctions.

On 24 March the new type ICBM Hwasongpho-17 was tested. The missile, launched at Pyongyang International Airport, travelled up to a maximum altitude of 6,248.5 km and flew a distance of 1,090 km

for 4,052 seconds before accurately hitting the pre-set area in open waters of the East Sea of Korea. This was the first time for five years that the DPRK has tested an ICBM, although tests of medium- and short-range missiles had been carried out in the intervening period.

On 18 November in the



• The new ICBM Hwasongpho-17.

presence of Kim Jong Un, the general secretary of the Workers Party of Korea (WPK), the Hwasongpho 17 ICBM was successfully tested at Pyongyang International Airport. The Hwasongpho-17 reached a maximum altitude of 6,040.9 km and flew a distance of 999.2 km for 4,135s before accurately landing on the pre-set area in open waters of the East Sea of Korea.

Kim Jong Un was accompanied by his daughter and his wife, comrade Ri Sol Ju, and comrade Kim Yo Jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the WPK. The presence of the young daughter of the Korean leader symbolised the fact that the DPRK's nukes guarantee the future of the DPRK's children.

The new type Hwasongpho-17 ICBM has the ability to strike the US mainland, thus it greatly strengthens and augments the DPRK's self-defensive potential.

The DPRK's ballistic missile tests fully reflect the will of the leadership of the WPK and the government of the DPRK consistently to bolster the national defence capacity of the DPRK in line with the decisions made by the 8th Congress of the WPK.

Earlier in 2022, on 6 January the Political Bureau of the WPK agreed to resume "temporarily suspended activities", meaning ICBM and nuclear tests, because "all the facts clearly prove once again that the hostile policy towards the DPRK will exist in the future as long as there is the hostile entity of US imperialism".

Unlike some countries both past and present, the DPRK saw through the nature of US imperialism. After all, it was US imperialism that had divided Korea in 1945 and had started the Korean war. The DPRK's policy is absolutely correct. A few years ago, when there were the summits between the DPRK and USA and also the DPRK and south Korea, some people said that the DPRK would unilaterally disarm itself and even open a McDonalds in Pyongyang. Nearly five years on, not a single nuke or ICBM has been dismantled by the DPRK and there is no McDonalds in Pyongyang and the DPRK is consolidating its national defence capabilities. Also the DPRK is raising militant anti-US slogans and intensifying anti-US

imperialist education.

It is worth mentioning Cuba here as this year also saw the 60th anniversary of Khrushchev's shameful capitulation during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which saw the USSR kneel down before the US imperialists and agree to withdraw their missiles within six days and sell out Cuba by allowing UN inspections of Cuba. The DPRK's independent and militant anti-imperialist stance contrasts with that of the former Soviet Union.

The DPRK's correct nuclear policy has now been fully enshrined in law and is a permanent state policy of the DPRK. On 8 September this year the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly passed the historic law on "On The State Policy On The Nuclear Forces", which fully legalised the DPRK's status as a nuclear power.

The new law defines the mission of the DPRK nuclear forces as being "to deter a war by making hostile forces have a clear understanding of the fact that the military confrontation with the DPRK brings about ruin and give up attempts at aggression and attack."

According to the new law, the DPRK's use of nuclear forces can only occur under certain situations, these are defined as follows:

- "In case an attack by nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction was launched or drew near is judged";

- "In case a nuclear or non-nuclear attack by hostile forces on the state leadership and the command organisation of the state's nuclear forces was launched or drew near is judged";

- "In case a fatal military attack against important strategic objects of the state was launched or drew near is judged"; and

- "In case the need for operation for preventing the expansion and protraction of a war and taking the initiative in the war in contingency is inevitably raised".

Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his speech to the Supreme People's Assembly pointed out that: "The legalisation of the policy of the nuclear forces in accordance with the unanimous desire and iron will of all the people is of tremendous significance. With this, the position of our state as a nuclear nation has become irreversible."

Needless to say, the



• DPRK leader Kim Jong Un with his daughter at the launch.

enemies of People's Korea such as the Americans and their south Korean puppets, as well as the vassal states of the USA are not happy about this.

Even CND has chimed in with the clamour of the US imperialists and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) by saying that the DPRK's Law on Nuclear Forces is a "very worrying development". We answer this 'criticism' as follows:

First, the DPRK's new law on nuclear forces does not make explicit reference to 'first strikes' or 'pre-emptive strikes', although it is implied that under certain very limited situations these may be carried out. There is no blank cheque for a pre-emptive nuclear strike by the DPRK; importantly, the DPRK's nuclear weapons are a last resort and a deterrent.

Second, the USA has a nuclear first-strike policy so why shouldn't the DPRK have one? Why do some people think the imperialists and big countries

should have a monopoly on a nuclear first strike? Surely it is only fair that the DPRK should match the US policy of a nuclear first strike with its own?

Third, it is the USA that first developed nuclear weapons and actually used them against a non-nuclear state when it bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Moreover, the USA considered a nuclear first strike against the DPRK during the Korean war of 1950–1953, during the Pueblo Incident of 1968 and the Panmunjom Incident of 1976, and other occasions.

The USA designated the DPRK a target of a US nuclear first strike in 2002. The USA stationed 1,000 nuclear weapons in south Korea, at one point the number reached 1,700. Supposedly the USA withdrew these weapons in the 1990s, however, the USA refused to accept international inspections to confirm this and later stated it would 'neither confirm nor deny' the existence of its nuclear weapons in

south Korea.

Many believe that US nuclear weapons are still in south Korea. What is beyond all doubt is that the USA and south Korea have on numerous occasions staged nuclear war exercises against the DPRK, and US nuclear submarines and nuclear aircraft carriers have been in Korean waters as well as US nuclear bombers overflying the Korean peninsula.

Fourth, Korea was divided by the USA in 1945 and the DPRK was invaded by the US imperialists in 1950. At least 1.2 million civilians were killed and the country completely devastated. The DPRK's nuclear deterrent will ensure this does not happen again.

Fifth, is the DPRK supposed to fold its arms and just sit and wait to be invaded by the US imperialists?

Sixth, the experience of the 1962 Caribbean crisis in which the USSR pulled its missiles out of Cuba and allowed UN inspections after only six days

and without consulting the Cuban leadership shows that a small country cannot rely on a big country for its defence. Moreover, recent events this year show that some big countries may not be such efficient allies as some may imagine. These countries have their own problems and internal contradictions, so it would be unwise for the DPRK to rely on them.

Seventh, the DPRK did all that it could to work towards a peaceful settlement of DPRK–USA relations and issues on the Korean peninsula by holding two summits and one meeting with US president Trump as well as three Inter-Korean summits. It should be added that the DPRK carried out its first nuclear test 59 years after the USA first introduced nuclear weapons into south Korea in violation of the Korean Armistice Agreement.

In conclusion, we would point out that the DPRK's Law on the State Policy of Nuclear Forces is about defending the DPRK's independence and territorial integrity as well as the socialist system of the DPRK. It is regrettable that some who style themselves as 'progressives' or 'leftists' share the desire of the imperialists for the dismantling of the socialist system of the DPRK, or for 'reforms' and 'opening up'.

Bravo to People's Korea for declaring itself a permanent nuclear weapons state. The DPRK has rejected all attempts to disarm it and push it down a certain path. The DPRK also rejected so-called aid from south Korea that was conditional on the DPRK unilaterally disarming itself. The DPRK also rejected imperialist aid when the COVID 19 epidemic arose in the DPRK.

The DPRK's nuclear policy and its efforts to build up the national defence capabilities are its independent right to do so, which no-one from whatever quarter, whether they are the imperialists or their fake-left fellow travellers, should try to interfere with. The great advances in the DPRK's defence abilities that are surprising its enemies are a sure guarantee for the independence of the country that comrade Kim Jong Il worked hard all his life to safeguard and also guarantee the existence of the people-centred socialist system that is the legacy of comrade Kim Jong Il as well as the cradle of happiness for the Korean people.



• Modern socialist Korea must be defended.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

I would like to make a few points in response to the *Daily Mail* attack on Gary Neville last month.

There is no hypocrisy in Gary Neville criticising Qatar at the same time as he works for that country, however well paid that work might be.

He did not, as the *Mail* falsely implies, equate the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar with the government's treatment of workers in this country.

The true hypocrisy in the matter of Qatar and the World Cup lies with mainstream media such as the *Daily Mail* and with British politicians. Britain has high-level engagement with the Qatari government and military. It became known many years ago that there was a terrible death toll amongst migrant workers building the stadiums.

There was silence from mainstream media and politicians here up until about a year ago when the issue could not be ignored any longer. If leading politicians, the BBC *Six O'Clock News* and the front page of the *Daily Mail* had reported what was going on from the outset there is little doubt that many lives could have been saved. They have more powerful voices than any football pundit and more moral if not legal responsibility to expose and condemn human rights abuses wherever they occur.

Brendan O'Brien
London

Dear Comrades

Syria has been so demonised that the trade unions and the Labour Left,

Labour MPs particularly, keep mostly silent about the USA's and Britain's exactions in Syria.

In the UK, bogus 'left-wing' organisations do their best to vilify Syria themselves. One of these is the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL). It demonises Assad in order to demonise Syria, Russia and anti-imperialism.

The AWL calls the opposition to the Syrian government a democratic revolt. Never mind that this revolt contains associates of Al-Qaeda, financed by the USA, NATO and their world allies.

NATO's partner Israel attacks with impunity the Iranian tankers that bring petrol to sanctioned Syria. Few are those in the general Labour left, who denounce this sort of 'democratic revolt'. Too many in fact go along with it, and this is so even in the trade unions.

Wasn't the capitalist reunification of Germany facilitated by the 'democratic revolt' that tore down the Berlin wall?

In the fascist renewal taking place in Germany today, I see one result of the so-called 'democratic revolt' that brought down the Berlin wall.

In the UK, the TUC and most trade union leaders applauded the fall of the wall. Later, they stayed silent about the reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis. They quietly accepted the destruction of East Germany, a country that had given courage, wealth and support to the world's workers and colonial revolutions.

Backed by the main capitalist media centres, the 'democratic revolt' that brought down the Berlin

wall pretended to champion the liberation of Eastern Europe from communism. In reality, it was bringing counter-revolution and its Nazi attendant into Germany.

This year, the German parliament voted to indict the 1930s USSR for the famine that it said took place in Soviet Ukraine, accusing the USSR of genocide.

The motivation to lie about the Ukrainian famine (an event that engulfed the whole of the USSR and not just Ukraine) stems from old Nazi remnants now joining hands with the new Nazis – in the AfD and others – in the reunified capitalist Germany. Here is one of the most dangerous fruits of the almost complete absence of theoretical and political debate in world's trade union and workers' movements.

In the UK, trade union structures and most of the workers' leaders do not trouble much about the nature of jobs. "A job is a job" they say. Some jobs help build society but most of them serve capitalist war. Take Harland and Wolff. In combination with Spain's Navantia (read NATO), they envisage the creation of thousands of jobs in Belfast. Jobs 'with a world reach' but in the manufacture and commercialisation of the most advanced weapons, nuclear included.

There will be exceptions, but in union thinking this is generally welcomed as 'good for jobs'.

In the trade unions, this facile pragmatism blocks the creation of working-class structures where the priorities of profits for the few can be challenged. This deprives the workers of spaces where they can consult, discuss, analyse, reflect and decide on the authenticity of all 'democratic revolts'.

We should condemn the USA's and UK's criminal sanctions on Syria, unlike the AWL that, in its view, claims it is not the sanctions that are criminal, but Assad himself or his government. The AWL does not view the sanctions as criminal because in the end it is not sorry to see

them used against Assad.

If there is a truly democratic revolt in Syria, it is the one being carried out right now by the Syrian population struggling for its rights as part of the support it gives to its leaders against the US, UK and NATO imperialists.

In the political language of the left, the word 'democratic' can be manipulated to insinuate that workers 'revolts' will be made to stay within capitalist confines, and even within bounds favourable to capitalist restoration, as in Germany. And so yes, the sanctions against Syria must be denounced. Difficult to find a Labour MP to do so these days, but change is coming, particularly where it counts, in the trade unions and the working class.

Marie Lynam
North London

Dear Comrades

The article about the Putney Debates that appeared in the *New Worker* last month was spot on about the Levellers' demands. The call for widening the franchise was, of course, a democratic demand. But their main demand, as the article points out, was for a democratic republic in which sovereignty would be vested in the people.

All those opposed to the monarchy claimed to speak for the "people". But the grandees that supported the rival 'Presbyterian' faction or Cromwell's 'Independents' in the New Model Army that was set up by Parliament during the civil war, argued bitterly over who the "people" were. The English 'Presbyterians', whose most prominent leader was General Fairfax, believed the 'people' were themselves. All they wanted was an oligarchy of landlords and merchants. They opposed the trial and execution of Charles Stuart and the republic that was proclaimed soon after.

Cromwell's supporters grudgingly agreed with the Levellers over the republic and the issue of religious freedom for all Protestant sects. But that's as far as

it went.

Both grandee factions wanted sovereignty vested in parliament – their disagreement was over who would run it.

All of them agreed that parliament should be an instrument of what we would now call the "stakeholders" in the country who were led by the land-owners and merchants who fought to end the feudal rights of the aristocracy. They disagreed on how wealthy they needed to be to directly be part of this new governing class and whether it should include senior officers in the New Model Army.

Nevertheless both sides of the fence closed ranks to oppose the Leveller demand to empower their definition of the "people" – a broad swathe of the population including small businessmen, artisans and petty landlords – because they could see that it directly challenged the right of the rising bourgeois class as whole to rule.

The English republic, now with a hereditary head of state much like the Dutch Republic, barely survived Cromwell's death in 1658. He was succeeded by his son, Richard, who was neither a politician nor a soldier. Unable to reconcile republican generals with the demands of the rich merchants and landowners to curb the influence of the New Model Army, Richard Cromwell resigned the following year. The government collapsed. The monarchy was restored in 1660 and the New Model Army was dissolved.

In the end the 'Presbyterian' faction, or Whigs as they were now commonly called, got the oligarchy they wanted with the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 that deposed the hated Stuarts and put William of Orange on the throne. The Levellers were long gone. Cromwell's supporters were driven underground during the Stuart comeback. Most gave up the fight or fled to the American colonies.

But as the Marxist historian Christopher Hill says: "It is struggle that wins reforms, just as it is struggle that will retain the liberties which our ancestors won for us. And if the people find the legal system 'not suitable to freedom as it is' then it can be changed by united action. That is the lesson of the seventeenth century for today."

Dave Danton
Dagenham

Diary

THUR 12 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Screening of Barry Gardiner's film on fire and re-hire. 19:30, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book via MML website.

SAT 14 JAN

People's Assembly Against Austerity: Annual conference. 11:00, Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Register at www.facebook.com/events/721702045562415.

WED 18 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Book launch: Alexander Buzgalin and Andrei Kogonov 21st Century Capital: post-Soviet Marxist reflections 18:30, Online. Book via MML website.

THUR 19 JAN

Socialist History Society: Tony Greenstein on Zionism During the Holocaust. 19:00, Online Zoom meeting. Register on at SHS website.

SAT 21 JAN

Stop the War Coalition: Trade union conference. 10:30, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD

SAT 21 JAN

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Boycott Puma in protest over it supporting Israeli apartheid. Details of nationwide protests on PSC website.

FRI 27 JAN

Soviet War Memorial Trust: Holocaust Memorial Day, Act of Remembrance 10:45 for 11:00, Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park (Imperial War Museum), London SE1 6HZ

FRI 27 JAN

Haringey Education Aid for Cuba: fundraiser with live Cuban music 19:30, £12.00 book on Cuba Solidarity Campaign website.

SAT 28 JAN

Latin America Conference 2023: 10:00-17:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD Tickets £10/ £8 at <https://bit.ly/LA23ticket>

MON 30 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Engels and the Housing Question 150 Years. On Panel Discussion. 19:00, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book on Eventbrite.

SAT 4 FEB

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Vigil against the blockade 13:00-13:13:45 Marks and Spencer's, Argyle Street, Glasgow.

THUR 9 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: The Energy Crisis. Panel discussion. 19:00, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book on Eventbrite.

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Scottish
Political
News

by our Scottish political
affairs correspondent

Christmas Crackers

THE END of a parlia-
mentary session is nor-
mally the occasion for
governments rushing out
unflattering statistics,
making announcements
about dodgy appoint-
ments and offering insin-
cere platitudes in seasonal
greetings.

It was slightly different
at Holyrood, where two
major events took place
just before Christmas.
First there was the Scot-
tish Budget – but this was
only the warm-up act for
the more colourful passing
of the controversial Gender
Recognition Reform (Scot-
land) Act (GRA), which
saw a protestor flashing
in the public gallery. The
measure was debated over
two long days when peo-
ples’ minds were on Christ-
mas shopping and parties.

To give a flavour of
the debate, one rejected
amendment was one that
would have prevented con-
victed male sex offenders

claiming to be women.
Now residents (from the
age of 16) of Scotland can
now legally change simply
by a declaration without
any medical reasons and
living in their new gender
for three months. In Eng-
land and Wales, it takes two
years and needs a medical
diagnosis of gender dys-
phoria and medical approv-
al at the end.

Soon after the passing
of the GRA both Prime
Minister Rishi Sunak and
his Scottish Secretary Alis-
ter Jack suggested that it
could be refused Royal
Assent on the grounds that
the measure will adversely
affect the law as it applies
in the UK, in particular the
2010 Equality Act. Nobody
seems to have thought what
would happen if a man
who likes wearing dress-
es and who has the same
features as Michelangelo’s
David who claims to be a
woman in Scotland will be
accepted as such south of
the border.

The matter is a bit more
serious than the King magi-
cally switching from Angli-
canism to Presbyterianism
when he takes up residence
at Holyrood House or Bal-
moral. Already women
have complained about
such people claiming to be
women in sports clubs and
in prisons.

Normally Nicola Stur-
geon would relish a fight
with Westminster for in-
terfering in Scottish af-
fairs, but a battle on this
issue would be another
kettle of fish as it is such
a controversial measure that
has alienated many of her
female supporters.

The GRA has also
brought out some very
curious defenders of wom-
en’s rights, such as Alex
Salmond whose opposition
to the measure might just
be based on other factors.
Despite being passed by
a large majority of 86–39
it is an unpopular measure
with the electorate, which
saw no less than nine of the
usually supine SNPers vote
against it. The opinion polls
also show that the measure
is unpopular.

Afterwards Angus
MacNeil, the Western Isles
MP, said the GRA should
be scrapped due to what he
calls a “loophole” which
would allow “bad-faith
actors” to self-identify as
women to gain access to
female safe spaces. He is
not the only senior nation-
alist taking this view and in
addition to the nine dissent-
ing MSPs there are several
more spineless opponents
of the measure.

The Holyrood vote was
met by one woman shout-
ing “if you are not going to

be decent, I am going to be
indecent”, before lifting up
her skirt to reveal her mer-
kin, a pubic wig. Another
made the same perfectly
valid critique of identity
politics by announcing:
“I am a duck trapped in
a woman’s body, quack
quack, quack quack”, as
well as “shame on you”
and “there is no democracy
here”.

No doubt further leg-
islation is in the pipeline
to deal with this particular
form of discrimination.

Counting the Pennies

Before these colourful
events took place we saw
the more mundane unveil-
ing the Scottish Budget.
Even according to Acting
Finance Secretary John
Swinney, the Budget was
“bleak”, but obviously that
was not his fault. There
were some modest alter-
ations to the higher rates
of income tax that means
those earning more than
£43,662 will pay the high-
er rate, which went up
from 41p to 42p, the top-
rate threshold was brought
down to £125,140 and that
rate increased from 46p to
a revolutionary 47p. The
latter will only raise three
million pounds as the Scot-
tish bourgeoisie are careful
at tax planning.

The Budget did not go
down well with the Con-
vention of Scottish Local
Authorities (CoSLA), who
claimed that the announced
£550 million increase in
council funding was actu-
ally a real-terms increase
of just £71 million.

Swinney added: “The
country should be open to
reforming public services
in a bid to save money.”
Whilst he was naturally
vague on details, this can
only mean cuts and priva-
tisation.

The main teaching union,
the Education Institute
of Scotland (EIS), deplored
the fact Swinney “failed
to deliver any positive
news on pay for Scotland’s
hard-working teachers.
Scotland’s teachers current-
ly remain in dispute over
the series of inadequate,
sub-inflationary pay offers
that have been made by the
Scottish Government and
CoSLA this year.”

Being a very respect-
able union, it was not terri-
bly pleased about income
tax policy because the in-
creases affected its own
higher-paid members who
number amongst their ranks
head-teachers, and warned
it was going to factor these
changes into its pay claim.

The Institute for Fiscal
Studies (IFS) agrees with

CoSLA and the EIS saying
that they have lost out, but
expenditure on devolved
benefits will greatly in-
crease.

Swinney said that there
would be an extra £1 bil-
lion for the NHS, most of
which will come from the
Westminster block grant
because his tax rise will
only bring in £139 million
at best (about three days
NHS expenditure). Swin-
ney managed to infuriate
nationalists by scrapping
the £20 million set aside for
their planned Independence
Referendum.

On Solid Foundations

Finally, it is worth not-
ing that the Holyrood build-
ing is already falling to bits
despite only being opened
in 2004. The building cost
£414 million compared
with an original estimate
of £10 million. The Scottish
parliament was built on
the site of a brewery at the
insistence of the first holder
of the post of First Minister,
the late Scottish Labour
leader Donald Dewar. It is,
as Winston Churchill would
say, a remarkable example
of modern architecture.

Designed by a Spanish
architect the parliament
building has won numerous
awards, including the 2005
Stirling Prize. It has been
described by landscape
architect Charles Jencks as
“a tour de force of arts and
crafts and quality without
parallel in the last 100 years
of British architecture”, but
it remains a controversial
building.

It has lots of sloping
roofs facing each other,
which sends rainwater into
all sorts of nooks and cran-
nies and into the building.
No less than eight separate
“reactive maintenance”
services, at a cost of £2.1
million, have been carried
out in the last three years.

Six years ago it was
revealed that it cost £1 mil-
lion simply to change the
lightbulbs for the chamber
alone when it was realised
that 30 bulbs per year were
expiring instead of the ex-

pected one or two.

Tory MSP Edward
Mountain, who is a sur-
veyor by profession, noted
that: “In the last three years,
there has been a long list
of repairs to the roof of the
Scottish parliament and this
has contributed heavily to
£2.1million being spent on
repairs and maintenance. I
cannot believe that a build-
ing less than 25 years old
needs that sort of money
spent on its roof.” He added
that: “As a surveyor, if I had
authorised the construction
of a building needing such
maintenance at this early
age of its life, I would
probably have to look at
my professional indemnity
insurance.”

In line with SNP policy
these details were only
extracted via the painful
process of making Freedom
of Information requests.
One of the details was that
Holyrood uses a falconry
service to chase away the
pigeons, whose droppings,
the wags say, could be
taken as a metaphor on
Scottish politics.

The trend started with
Ken Livingstone who,
in 2001, was the London
Mayor who branded pi-
geons “flying rats”, banned
the selling of bird seed
in Trafalgar Square and
brought in hawks. The pi-
geon lovers fought back,
creeping around at night
to scatter bag loads of seed
around the square to keep
our feathered friends hap-
py.

In 2009 these dreaded
birds of prey were un-
leashed over the Scottish
parliament, much to dis-
may of the pigeon-loving
community. And in 2012
an enraged pigeon fancier
was fined £350 and ordered
to pay NBC Bird & Pest
Solutions £1,500 in com-
pensation for shooting one
of their Holyrood hawks.

In days gone by pigeons
amused kids whose parents
bought them seed to feed
the birds. Now they’re
called vermin and a health
hazard. One wonders what
the Greens think of all of
this.

FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

The Middle “Class” by Neil Harris £2 plus 50p P&P
(New Worker reprint)

The ruling class, fascism and the State by Neil Harris
£2 plus 50p P&P (New Worker reprint)

The poisoned well (an insight into
imperialist intelligence work) £2 plus 50p P&P (New
Worker reprint).

Communists and the united front by Neil Harris £2 plus
50p P&P. (New Worker reprint).

New technology and the need for socialism £2 plus
50p P&P.

Communists in Britain today £2 plus 50p P&P (New
Worker reprint).

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Low pay fuels industrial strife

THE WINTER of strikes in the UK is the result of immediate pressure from high inflation and a longer-term decline in pay and working conditions, says Deborah Dean, the co-director of the Industrial Relations Research Unit at the Warwick Business School.

“There have always been strikes and there always will be strikes,” said Dean, “but the very large number of strikes, very much concentrated in the public sector or previously public sector occupations, is really the result of an unprecedentedly long period of downward pressure on pay.”

The wave of strikes

continued unabated in December, with rail workers and nurses, amongst others, walking out for better pay and working conditions. December saw over a million days lost to strike action for the first time since 1989.

Part of the problem is the persistently high inflation. The annual inflation rate reached 10.7 per cent in November whilst wage growth was falling. Adjusted for inflation over the year, both total and regular pay amongst UK employees fell by 2.7 per cent in August to October, the largest drop in growth since comparable records began in 2001.

“Real pay has been

in decline, and public sector pay, in particular, is in decline in comparison to the private sector at the moment,” as the austerity policies introduced after 2010 have had a disproportionately severe effect on the public sector, she said.

An analysis published by the London Economics consultancy in October and cited by the Royal College of Nursing found that the salaries of experienced nurses have declined by 20 per cent in real terms over the last 10 years in most of the UK.

The nurses’ union is now taking industrial action over pay.

A new YouGov poll showed in December that the historic strike of



• Postal workers strike back.

UK nurses was backed by two-thirds of the British public, with 45 per cent “strongly” supporting it.

Dean said it was difficult to say, however, how long public support will last for any group of striking workers.

The Sunak government continues to lock horns with the unions. It

said that the pay rises are unaffordable and higher pay will not help fight inflation. Health and railway workers have announced new strikes in January.

A large proportion of British workers in the late 1970s used to have their pay either decided directly by collective bargaining or affected

by the agreements of collective bargaining, and the trade unions played a key role, Dean explained. That, however, changed completely from the 1980s onwards, and now “there’s been a move towards individualisation of employment and negotiating around pay and your own conditions”.

Xinhua

Putting people first

PEOPLE’S China always puts people first and that’s what the Zheng Zeguang, the Chinese ambassador in London told the readers of the Guardian last week in an article outlining his country’s response to the continuing COVID 19 crisis.

Zheng stressed that over the last three years, China has always put people and

their lives left, right and centre whilst it tries to keep COVID 19 under control, and to promote economic and social development. China’s response policies have been effective, science-based and in line with China’s national conditions.

The Chinese ambassador underlined that as the COVID 19 situation in China continues to improve,

the effects of policies to stabilise economic growth continue to emerge, and the exchange of Chinese and foreign personnel becomes easier, China’s long-subdued consumer demand will be released, investor confidence will be boosted and the economy will rebound strongly. This is good news for not just China but the entire global economy.

People’s Daily (Beijing)



• Nurses on the picket line.

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• China has battled Covid with great success

Anti-war campaigner targeted in Germany

by Phil Wilayto

ON 22nd June 2022, the 81st anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, a prominent German anti-war activist took the occasion publicly to question why the German government is now supporting neo-Nazi organisations in Ukraine. As a result, that activist is now facing the possibility of up to three years in jail.

Heinrich Bucker runs Berlin's popular Co-op Anti-war Cafe, which since 2005 has been a gathering space for activists working on a wide range of issues. Since 2019 the cafe has co-organised the weekly *Frente Unido América Latina* event in front of the US Embassy in the German capital. He's a member of the Kommunistische Plattform in Die Linke (The Left) party, a member of the League of Anti-Fascists, and represents the US-based World Beyond War in Berlin. The cafe also represents the 'Aufstehen' Initiative in Berlin Mitte, backing the left politician Sahra Wagenknecht and organising left events against sanctions and for peace.

On 22nd June Bucker gave a speech at an event hosted by Berlin's Friedenskoordination (Peace Co-ordination) at the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Trepower Park, in which, according to a statement on the anti-war cafe's website, he said that "... it seems incomprehensible to me that German politics should again support the same chauvinistic and especially Russophobic ideologies on the basis of which the German Reich found willing helpers in 1941. The SS and Wehrmacht used Ukrainian national-fascist organisations as repressive and murderous squads against their own countrymen, including



• At the Anti-War Cafe.



• Heinrich Bucker.

millions of Jewish men, women and children."

The collaboration of ultra-nationalist Ukrainian movements with the Nazi occupation is a matter of historical record. Before the current war, Western mainstream media would routinely report on the existence of present-day fascist organisations in Ukraine, such as the Azov Battalion, Right Sector, National Militia, C-14 and many others – but that coverage has now ended.

On 19th October Bucker received a letter from the Berlin State Criminal Police Office notifying him that he was under investigation for possible violation of Paragraph 140 of the German Criminal Code, which has to do with disturbing the public peace. A violation of the statute can be punished by a fine or a prison sentence of up to three years. The investigation was apparently prompted by a complaint by a Berlin attorney upset

about Bucker's speech.

"In Germany, we are currently experiencing a narrowing of the space for debate and massive restrictions on freedom of expression, caused by one-sided reporting in the mainstream-media," Bucker writes. "There are now a number of individuals who are in the focus of the German criminal investigation authorities. Similar tendencies are also reported from other EU countries."

The Co-op Anti-war Cafe itself has also come under attack. In addition to threatening emails, the cafe's front windows were recently smashed.

Along with his 22nd June speech, Bucker also initiated a statement on the war in Ukraine that questioned the official line that it's simply an act of unprovoked Russian aggression. Instead, the statement, posted on the cafe's website, points to the steady eastward expansion of NATO up to the very borders of Russia, and US and European support for the 2014 coup that drove out the elected president of Ukraine and brought in a right-wing government anxious to join NATO and hostile to both Russia and the country's ethnic Russian minority.

Another reason for the police interest in Bucker

could be the prominent role he has played in promoting an anti-imperialist statement on the war in Ukraine initiated by the US-based Odessa Solidarity Campaign, a project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. That statement, similar to the one initiated by the Co-op Anti-war Cafe, has been endorsed by more than 230 organisations and individuals in 22 countries, with nearly two-thirds of the endorsers from Germany.

Meanwhile, in the USA, the African People's Socialist Party (APSP) is calling for support in the face of expected indictments of four of its leaders and prominent supporters who have been actively speaking out against US support for Ukraine. The APSP is a Pan-African organisation that for the last 50 years has been opposing US wars at home and abroad.

In response to the police pressure, Bucker's allies and supporters in Germany have been preparing a united defence effort. Stay tuned for new developments and calls for solidarity.

Phil Wilayto is editor of the Virginia Defender newspaper and co-ordinator of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign.

The tragedy of Palestinian children

by María Josefina Arce

THERE IS a tragedy that many prefer to remain silent, the one experienced by the children trapped in the midst of Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. They are victims of Zionist repression and every day they see their right to life and physical integrity violated.

A new report by the Commission for Detainees and Former Detainees Affairs confirms the horrors experienced by Palestinian children and adolescents. Last year more than 600 were under house arrest in East Jerusalem, claimed by the Palestinian people as the capital of their independent state.

A report by the Palestinian Prisoners Society revealed that from 2015 to the present the Zionist police and army arrested more than nine thousand infants and adolescents.

The document says that many of them are taken at night in their homes, beaten in front of family members, handcuffed and subjected to interrogations without the presence of parents.

According to international organisations, this persecution and Israeli violence against Palestinian children in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem has in-

creased shockingly since the 1990s.

Last August, the United Nations expressed its concern at the alarming number of children killed or injured this year in the occupied territories, where some 44 per cent of the population is under 18 years of age.

Human rights organisations, including Israeli ones, put the number of children killed in these enclaves by Zionist troops since 2000 at more than 2,000.

Serious psychological problems are faced by this segment of the population, in addition to poverty, lack of housing, and scarce access to drinking water, electricity, education and health.

Many children are forced to work due to the poverty of their families, a situation that worsened with the arrival of COVID 19, which also meant the abandonment of studies for many of them.

Israel violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child under the indifferent gaze and silence of many, even though it is one of the signatory countries.

Palestinian children, like those in the rest of the world, have the right to study, to medical care, to be safe in their homes, and to be free from violence and arbitrary detention. They have the right to life.

Radio Havana Cuba



• Many Palestinian kids have been arrested.

Solidarity with Palestine marks World Cup

by Kathy Durkin

IF THERE was a clear victor at the World Cup in Qatar, it was the Palestinian people. Even though they were not competing, solidarity with their struggle was front and centre in the stadiums, markets and streets of Doha, the country's capital, the site of the first such competition ever held in the Middle East.

The games have not been free of controversy. The mistreatment, even deaths, of migrant workers since Qatar was named host of the games in 2010, has been criticised. FIFA banned players from wearing "One Love" rainbow armbands symbolising inclusivity because they promoted LGBT rights, violating Qatar's strict laws. State

officials did, however, allow armbands and other symbols of solidarity with Palestine.

"Free Palestine" flags flew everywhere. Thousands of fans wore pro-Palestine armbands. Chants and songs supporting the struggle against US-backed Israeli repression reverberated throughout Qatar and the Arab world and further, as anti-Zionist allies worldwide showed their solidarity.

During a game between Tunisia and Australia on 26 November the crowd displayed an enormous "Free Palestine" banner. When Tunisia played France four days later, fans ran onto the field waving Palestinian flags whilst the crowd chanted "Palestine!".

Significantly, Morocco's national team high-



• In Qatar.

lighted the Palestinian cause by raising Palestine's flag after its many victories. Fans celebrated, especially when Moroc-

co eliminated Spain in a penalty shootout on 6 December; and then on 10 December Morocco beat Portugal 1-0.

Morocco is the first Arab team to make it to the quarter-finals of the World Cup, and the first African team to make

the semi-finals. Their wins are seen as a victory for Africa and the Arab world, and especially for the Palestinians.

Following the teams' victories, celebrations occurred nightly in Doha of Arabs cheering for Palestine. Thousands joyfully danced and honked car horns in Ramallah and throughout the Occupied West Bank and Gaza; festivities occurred throughout the Arab world. After the team beat Spain, ecstatic fans filled the streets of Rabat and Casablanca in Morocco and in London, Paris and Madrid.

Despite diplomatic ties between some Arab governments and Israel, the masses in the Arab world defiantly support the Palestinians. This love and solidarity is heart-warming to the Palestinian people.

Workers World (USA)

New hope for Brazil

by Maria Josefina Arce

THE YEAR 2023 has brought hope for Brazil. For the third time, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva has assumed the presidency of the South American giant. He has promised to work to rebuild a country with increasing levels of poverty, inequality, armed violence and deforestation of the Amazon.

Twenty years after arriving for the first time at the Planalto Palace, the former union leader will have a very difficult task, inheriting a nation with many debts and with the majority of its citizens highly divided, after four years of government of the already-former president Jair Bolsonaro, who throughout his administration maintained a racist and hateful discourse, encouraged the sale of weapons and brought the military to key positions.

In fact, violence broke out in several parts of Brazil a few days after the

inauguration of Lula Da Silva, led by supporters of Bolsonaro who, by the way, preferred to travel to the USA to avoid passing the presidential sash to his successor.

The supporters of the retired captain, a great admirer of Brazil's old military dictatorship, deny the results of the general elections of last October in which in the second round the former union leader won with more than 50 per cent of the votes.

The inauguration of Lula Da Silva was received in Brasília, the capital, with a large demonstration of support, however. Millions of Brazilians trust Lula. During his two previous mandates they came out of poverty and saw their living conditions improve.

But with Bolsonaro in office, Brazil returned to the map of hunger. Currently, more than 30 million citizens are victims of this scourge, in addition to which almost 63 million are immersed in poverty.

The new president has expressed his intention to reverse this situation. A political triumph of the incoming government was that last December the Congress approved expenditures of \$28 billion during the current year

to finance the social programmes of the executive.

The reality is that the situation deteriorated even more after the two years of the COVID 19 pandemic, which did not have an effective response from the authorities. Brazil became the second country in the world, only preceded by the USA, with the highest number of deaths due to the disease.

The ultra-right-wing Bolsonaro downplayed the importance of the coronavirus, which he described as a flu, and opposed the use of masks and other measures necessary to prevent its spread, whilst delaying vaccination. The pandemic left 40,803 children and adolescents orphaned in Brazil.

Another challenge to be faced by the new executive is the deforestation of the Amazon. According to the Socio-Environmental Institute, Bolsonaro's government was the greatest environmental setback of the century, with a 94 per cent increase in the indiscriminate felling of trees in the largest tropical forest in the world.

Lula Da Silva assumed the presidency again on 1 January and, according to the Datafolha Institute, the majority of Brazilians

believe that his government will be much better for the country. For the time being, he has reiterated his goal of providing better living conditions for the people.

Radio Havana Cuba

Israelis hit Damascus

by Ed Newman

ISRAEL HAS launched a new missile attack on the Syrian capital Damascus in continuation of the regime's acts of aggression against the Arab country. According to Syria's official SANA news agency, citing a military source, the early Monday attack targeted positions south of the capital.

The military source added that Syria's air defences intercepted most of the Israeli missiles, which were launched from the direction of Lake Tiberias, targeting Damascus International Airport and its surroundings.

The source noted that the attack left two

Syrian soldiers dead and several others injured, whilst causing some material damage as well, bringing the airport's operations to a temporary halt.

Israel frequently carries out missile attacks on targets in Syria, mostly using the airspace of Lebanon or the occupied territories. The regime launched a similar attack on the Syrian capital in December last year, during which most of its missiles were shot down by the Syrian air defence units.

The Zionist regime frequently violates Syrian sovereignty by targeting military positions inside the country, especially those of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement that has played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists.

Israel mostly keeps quiet about its attacks on Syria, which many view as a knee-jerk reaction to Syrian government's increasing success in confronting terrorism.

The Zionist regime has been a main supporter of terrorist groups that have battled the government of President Bashar al-Assad since foreign-backed rebel violence erupted in Syria in early 2011.

Syria has repeatedly complained to the United Nations over Israeli assaults, urging the Security Council to take action against Tel Aviv's crimes. The calls have, however, fallen on deaf ears.

In early November 2022, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Faisal Mekdad strongly condemned the latest Israeli airstrikes, emphasising that his country will definitely give a crushing response to such acts of aggression at some point in the future.

"Our position concerning such attacks is fairly clear. We warn the Tel Aviv regime that an adequate response to such hostilities awaits them and it will be given sooner or later," he said.

Radio Havana Cuba