

RUSSIANS WIN BATTLE FOR BAKHMUT!

by our Eastern European
Affairs correspondent

The battle of Bakhmut is over. Russian troops have now crushed all Ukrainian resistance in the strategic Donbas city, ending one of Russia's bloodiest and longest sieges since the Second World War. The Ukrainian defeat clearly wrong-footed their puppet leader's promenade at the G7 imperialist summit in Hiroshima, and a half-baked commando raid over the border did little to convince his NATO masters of their capabilities in the future. The Zelensky regime called it the "Bakhmut Fortress". Now that fortress is gone.

On Saturday 20th May, units of the Wagner company, Russia's 'Foreign Legion', gained complete control of Bakhmut after 224 days of bitter street fighting. Regular Russian units are now replacing the Wagnerians, who are pulling back for rest and retraining whilst the Ukrainians lick their wounds well away from the Donbas city that they still cannot officially admit to losing.

But the Ukrainians have definitely gone – as the acting head of the Donetsk People's

Republic (DPR) saw for himself when raised the DPR flag above the ruins in the centre of town that has now reverted to its old Soviet name of Artyomovsk.

"Bakhmut is a name from the Russian Empire. But under the Soviet Union it was called Artyomovsk, and that's how we remember it," said Denis Pushilin, who leads the people's republic that is now part of the Russian Federation. The Donetsk leader is now looking at plans to rebuild the shattered city that once housed over 70,000 people. Many hope to return but Pushilin said there's still a lot of work to do in the city, which is full of munitions and mines left behind by the Ukrainian troops.

Meanwhile, Russian border troops have restored order in the Belgorod region following what the Kremlin called a "terrorist act" organised by the Zelensky regime to divert attention from its battlefield failures.

The Ukrainian puppet regime denies any involvement in the raid, claiming it was staged by the 'Freedom of Russia Legion' that is said to be composed of Russian deserters and the 'Russian Volunteer Corps' (RDK) – an armed neo-Nazi gang.

Some say these militias are merely covers for Ukrainian covert operations. True or not, what is clear is that the raiders got a bloody nose. At least 70 of these gunmen were killed and several US-made armoured vehicles and pickup trucks were destroyed during two days of fighting, and what was left of them fled back into Ukrainian territory. One Russian civilian was killed and 12 injured during the incursion, whilst around 100 people, including children and the elderly, were evacuated.

Yuri Afonin, the deputy chairman of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, said the liberation of Artemovsk was a "landmark victory".



• Victory! Wagner chief and his men raise their banners in Bakhmut

"After a series of failures of our army last autumn, Western propaganda has long tried to impose on the whole world the confidence that the military initiative remains with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. And this landmark victory of ours clearly proves that the strategic initiative is ours again. This victory, obtained in a hard battle and with considerable sacrifices, is necessary to mobilise the spirit, strengthen the moral uplift of our people, and understand that certain work has been done on the mistakes!"

Of course, the enemy is "snapping back", including creating incidents such as the Ukrainian raid in the Belgorod region. And until the Kharkiv region is liberated from the Nazis, the threat of such attacks will not disappear, Afonin said. The situation in the border areas is not easy, but the courage of the inhabitants of the Belgorod region should be noted, as well as the rather effective work of the regional authorities with the population.

FUND

A bumper post-bag brought in £1,325 this week pushing the fighting fund for May to £2,896 thanks to supporters across the country including a Southall comrade who sent in £150 and a pillar of the fighting fund in Essex who donated £60. A Midlands reader gave us £20. So did another in Wales and a Cornish friend sent in £15. We now need just £604 to hit our target for the month.

Our paper stands side by side with the people of the Donbas fighting for the freedom and all the peoples all over the world struggling to build a new world, a world free from exploitation and oppression.

Our paper stands with everyone fighting for higher pay, shorter hours and health and safety rights at home and abroad. And above all we stand for real democracy – not the phony ones here where the smallest number of people control the largest number of votes but the mass democracy of the people's republics in the Caribbean and Asia who are well on the road to socialism.

We had a difficult time at the paper. Our lay-out man is recovering from major heart surgery and we rely on volunteers who, with immense sacrifice, are filling the gap to ensure the continued production of the New Worker. But for those who directly lend a hand in the print shop there's still a vital job to do raising money for the fighting fund. All donations, big or small, count. Please send yours 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>

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THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

US imperialism sets agenda at Group of Seven

Once upon a time the Group of Seven (G7) had some purpose – at least for the leaders of the Western world – in providing a platform for the masters of imperialism to present a common economic front to challenge the Soviet Union and the Third World during the Cold War. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 the G7, like the Trilateral Commission and the World Economic Forum that meets in Davos, were used by the Western powers to by-pass the United Nations in their bid to rule the world at the turn of the century.

That American dream brought death and destruction to the Balkans and the Arab world, until finally brought to a halt on the streets of Baghdad and Aleppo. No-one talks about the ‘New World Order’ these days – not even at the G7, which claims to uphold the shared values of what they call pluralism, liberal democracy and representative government.

These mythical ‘values’, which are simply a mask to cover the oppression and exploitation of capitalism at home and abroad, have few takers beyond the heartlands of the Western world that lives off the backs of the Global South that it seeks to plunder and exploit.

The G7 now is simply another forum for US imperialism to set out its agenda to the leaders of the other imperialist powers – Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada – that do the bidding of whoever is in the White House at the time.

No Western get-together can be without the presence Vladimir Zelensky, and this year’s G7 in Hiroshima was no exception. Zelensky turned up in person – invited it is said at the behest of the British government – to appeal for more guns and money to keep his war with the Russians going. Zelensky says that escalation is the key to victory but he’s hardly a military expert. And in any case, everybody knows he merely parrots the wishes of the Biden administration in Washington.

This is Biden’s war. And as retired Italian general Marco Bertolini pointed out the other day, if Western arms supplies to Ukraine had stopped “the war would have ended a year ago and would not have cost hundreds of thousands of lives”.

Zelensky says he’s a “servant of the people”. That was the name of the TV comedy show he starred in when he was still an actor. It’s now the name of Zelensky’s own political platform. And it’s true, Zelensky is a servant of the “people” – but they are clearly not Ukrainians.

The people whom Zelensky serves are the Americans behind Joe Biden – the venal and aggressive war-party of American industrialists, bankers and land-owners that still believes in world domination.

There is, of course, division and opposition to the Ukraine war within the American ruling class. We see it in the dissident voices of investigative journalists, politicians, retired generals and diplomats that even include Nixon’s scheming foreign minister, Henry Kissinger. We also see it amongst the Republican opposition.

The two Republican front-runners set to challenge Biden at the next election are former President Donald Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, both of whom are opposed to Biden’s proxy war. And they’re not the only ones.

This is why Boris Johnson has gone to Texas. He’s in Dallas trying to sway leading Republican politicians, donors and businessmen away from what the war-lobby see as a deviant line from the Trump camp.

Sadly, the dead hand of the bourgeois gurus, the social democrats and the bogus left who also serve imperialism, has stifled open debate on the Ukraine conflict in the media and more importantly, within the labour movement itself.

Communists like us, working with other genuine left anti-war forces, can make the difference and indeed we must, to build the campaign to halt the British role in the war and to build solidarity with the fighting people of the Donbas.

G7 Leaders on shaky ground

by Svetlana Ekimenko

Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) nations met for their summit in Hiroshima last weekend to focus on the Ukraine conflict, economic security, green investments, and developments in the Indo-Pacific region. They pasted on smiles amidst backslapping and hugging of Ukraine’s President Vladimir Zelensky during the last day of their summit. But behind the eagerness to foment the West’s proxy war against Russia, many of them had one thing in common: they are far from popular at home.

Propping up the Kiev regime with military support whilst ratcheting up pressure on Russia and China was the overwhelming focus of attention of the leaders of Japan, the USA, the UK, Canada, Germany, France, Italy and the EU. For all the confidently spouted rhetoric about tackling global challenges such as economic instability, poverty, nuclear proliferation and climate change, many of these representatives of the Western political elite have failed miserably to win support in their home countries.

Plummeting approval ratings are a sign of how electorates assess the leaders’ efforts on the home front. Economic woes, raging inflation, divisive policy decisions, the Ukraine conflict and its fallout, complete with the G7’s self-harming anti-Russia sanctions, all these factors have fed into the poll battering that these politicians have been faced with.

Approval scores above 50 per cent were enjoyed by the leaders of just four out of 22 countries analysed by *Morning Consult* ahead of the summit. These were India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Lopez Obrador of Mexico, Switzerland’s President Alain Berset and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia. Modi can boast a 78 per cent approval rating whilst Italian premier Giorgia Meloni drummed up a 49 per cent approval rating.

The *Morning Consult* data showed US President Joe Biden with 42 per cent, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada with 39 per cent, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany with 34 per cent, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with 33 per cent, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan with 31 per cent and French President Emmanuel Macron trailing with 25 per cent. Here

are just some of the compelling examples of G7 leaders talking big on the global stage whilst floundering at home:

Biden: 80-year-old US President Joe Biden is a good case in point. The POTUS [President of the United States] had to get on the phone with Washington on Friday, the opening day of the three-day G7 summit, to check on the progress of protracted debt-ceiling wrangling with Republicans. Biden then left the leaders’ gala dinner on the island of Miyajima earlier than the others for more phone discussions on how to avert a major default catastrophe. Biden has seen some of the lowest approval ratings of his presidency, as the gaffe-prone octogenarian gears up for a re-election fight in 2024. The Democrat enjoys the approval of little more than a third of Americans, a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll showed in early May. With an approval rating of 36 per cent, in a hypothetical match-up for 2024, Joe Biden trailed Donald Trump with 38 points to 44 points.



Macron: The approval rating of French President Emmanuel Macron has also plummeted. It dropped to levels unseen since the 2019 Yellow Vests protests, an IFOP poll commissioned by French magazine *Le Journal du Dimanche* showed in April, in the wake of the pension reform turmoil. Macron’s decision to invoke Article 49.3 of the French constitution, which allowed the government to override the parliament to raise the retirement age, triggered a massive backlash in French society and battered his approval rating. Macron would lose a rematch to Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Rally parliamentary group whom he defeated in last year’s election, a May poll by the Élabé group for the BFM TV channel showed.

Sunak: If elections were held now in the UK, recent surveys show Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s Conservative Party would lose to Labour in the wake of steep losses of Tory seats in local elections. “Make

no mistake, we are on course for a Labour majority at the next general election,” Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said earlier in the month.

Scholz: In Germany, an April survey showed the government faced its worst popularity ratings since Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s Social Democrats took power together with the Greens and the Free Democratic Party in December 2022. Recent polling revealed that the Social Democratic Party would lose to the Christian Democratic Union in Germany if elections were held now.

Trudeau: Approval of Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has also dropped, according to the polling results of the Angus Reid Institute, which canvassed almost 5,000 Canadians in March. The Institute states that Trudeau’s approval has slipped down six points in the last three months to 37 per cent. With some 57 per cent of Canadians disapproving of Trudeau, this is his lowest approval rating since September 2021. Furthermore, the ruling Liberal Party has been trailing the principal opposition Conservatives by six per cent in voting intention preference. The clobbering at the polls came amidst a federal workers’ strike in April, and uptick in inflation, and ongoing shortage of housing. Trudeau’s Conservative rival, Pierre Poilievre, has pointed to such issues as high inflation and a housing shortage, stressing on social media: “After eight years of Trudeau, everything feels broken.”

“The upshot is an environment in which the leaders of the world’s most powerful democracies have to engage with an ever more challenging world, even as they’re on shaky ground at home,” says Suzanne Maloney, director of the foreign policy programme at the Brookings Institution, was cited as saying by a US media report.

As the G7 leaders’ personal ratings take a drubbing, so the G7’s influence on global politics shrinks. Meanwhile, other emerging blocs and formats, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or BRICS, the bloc, which unites the world’s largest developing economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – are rising to prominence, espousing commitment to creating a more equitable and fair global community.

Sputnik

Workers' Notes

On the education front

by New Worker correspondent

During the Blair era Labour posed as a champion of “education, education, education” whilst imposing masked cuts to the schools’ budget in England and Wales. In what are hopefully the latter stages of the Sunak Government things are even worse in all levels of the education sector, but there is welcome reaction from those at the chalk-face.

Starting at the top, we open by looking at some ongoing struggles in the universities. They have issues that affect not just professors and lecturers, but also technicians, typists, librarians and cleaners, without all of whom universities could not function. One such is the long-standing pension dispute. The University and College Union (UCU) claims that it would be easy for the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) to reverse a 35 per cent benefit cut made in April 2022 as the scheme has a £7.6 billion surplus.

Jo Grady, UCU’s general secretary, said: “This latest report confirms we are on course for the biggest pension win in UK trade union history. We were told it was impossible to take back a stolen pension but we are now on course for a historic victory that will send shockwaves through the workers movement.”

This is not surprising as the better British universities are presently thriving, largely due to the large number of high-fee-paying students from China presently doing higher degrees. This will not last as China’s universities are getting bigger and better, with the prospect of bright British students heading off east in the future.

UCU has condemned bosses for refusing to negotiate pay and conditions despite having large enough surpluses to increase pay by 10 per cent with hundreds of millions to spare. At present UK universities rake in £44.6 billion, an increase of £3.5 billion from the previous year; there is a £2.6 billion surplus, with £19.6 in cash and current investment holdings. At the same time staff expenditure is only 51 per cent of income, which is an all-time low.

The bosses claim the Teachers’ Pensions Scheme (TPS) is too expensive for the post-1992 universities (the

former polytechnics) and that any increases will come at the cost of jobs, both present and future, and student services.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) do not accept this. In the 2021/22 financial year, UCEA imposed a 1.5 per pay award, which was about a 10th of the inflation rate. UCU claims that since 2009, real wages have fallen by a quarter. Nevertheless, UCEA says it will not negotiate unless UCU calls off its marking and assessment boycott at 145 universities and colleges. UCU say that UCEA is entirely responsible for the dispute. It accuses bosses of punitive pay deductions of up to 100 per cent, whilst staff are only on a work to rule.

UCU also accuses UCEA of focusing on a small number of institutions that are in difficulty to pretend it cannot afford to produce a fair pay offer for its members.

Ms Grady warned that: “A national scandal is brewing that will see hundreds of thousands of students graduate with degrees not worth the paper they are written on, unless universities make staff a fair pay offer. With the employer body now refusing to negotiate students and their parents will rightly be furious.”

On Monday, the august, and well-heeled University of Cambridge called on UCEA, to resume

negotiations with UCU so that students can graduate. Anthony Freeling, acting vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge, and Michael Abberton, President of UCU’s Cambridge branch, issued a statement to that effect.

College humour

The famed playwright George Bernard Shaw once said that “the only time my education was interrupted was when I was in school” – but whilst he was joking it’s no joke for those who have to work there, such as Manchester College and UCEN Manchester (a 16–19 college) where strike action over low pay is currently underway.

On a 59 per cent turnout, 94 per cent of UCU members at the colleges voted for 12 days of strike action, the fifth time this year. They were angered by a miserable offer of 2.7 per cent, the lowest for colleges in the North-West.

Matt Arrowsmith, a regional official for the union, said: “Manchester College is financially healthy and can afford to pay much more. Staff always have the students’ best interests at heart and only take action as a last resort after more than a decade of below inflation pay settlements.

We have seen so many colleagues leave and it is difficult to prepare students for summer exams and assessments in this uncertain environment.”

This strike follows that by workers at the Huddersfield and Dewsbury-based Kirklees College, which already has taken two days of strike action this month with two more next month. On a low turnout of 54 per cent, 94 per cent of UCU members voted for strike action. They had sensibly rejected an imposed one per cent consolidated pay award for 2022/23 and a 2.5 per cent consolidated pay award for 2023/24. Whilst this came with a move in scales at the top of the pay bands for lecturers and scarce skills lecturers, this is well below inflation, to add insult to injury. The College has £10 million in the bank.

Another UCU regional official, Julie Kelley, said: “We are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, yet our members are being forced out onto picket lines to fight for fair pay. It is simply scandalous that Kirklees College is pushing its employees into poverty by holding down their pay with year after year of swingeing real term pay cuts.”

In nearby Yorkshire, UCU members at Bradford College have been taking 14 days of intermittent strike action since the beginning of May that will continue until the third week of

June, which is exam season.

Having demanded a 10 per cent increase they were offered a £1,160 rise, which works out at 4.3 per cent for lower-paid staff and 3.2 for teaching staff. The College, which nearly went bankrupt a few years ago, says that acceding to the claim would only result in job losses. Bosses assert their £9.3 bank balance is largely ringfenced for essential student learning facility refurbishments and block payments from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Last year’s accounts indicated the college had breached banking covenants four times in 2021/22, with further breaches forecast.

Julie Kelley said staff take-home pay had “systemically declined in value over the last 10 years, with current pay levels embedding years of pay stagnation. Our members have had enough, they want a salary that keeps up with inflation and working conditions that treat them with the professional respect they deserve.”

Yet another post-16 college dispute is at the City of Glasgow College, where staff are fighting against 100 redundancies that bosses say are essential to keep the College solvent. Staff are furious that the redundancies were announced soon after it was discovered that the College

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• teachers demo in Southampton

...continued from page 3

had spent a £250,000 lavishing wining and dining delegates to the COP26 conference for no particular reason.

It has a £6 million deficit as a result of a £26 million cut to the sector's budget by the SNP Government, compounded by inflation, spiralling energy costs, and increased staff costs.

Struggling to hold back his crocodile tears Paul Little, the Principal lamented that: "... we are also forced to address a funding shortfall of £6 million next year and, regrettably, have exhausted all other possibilities except the last resort of proposing 75 compulsory redundancies, subject to consultation with our staff and trade unions."

EIS national officer Stuart Brown warned that: "Our members have begun a campaign of action short of strike to push back against these cuts, to defend jobs and also defend the principle of quality further education in the heart of Glasgow."

A common problem in the 16-19 sector is that about half of the colleges are seeing a drop in enrolment figures which is largely due to the loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This effectively makes education unaffordable."

The Association of Colleges (AoC) surveyed 182 colleges. This reported that half of them were seeing dips of between 5-15 per cent. Competition from other providers, the lack of affordable transport and cuts in funding per student were the main factors to blame.

Over 60 per cent of colleges

reported a drop in transport spending by their local authority. Over half of all colleges are 'topping up' Government bursary funding with their own contributions and the same proportion are spending more on subsidising transport this year than last. In a sign of the times, 79 per cent of colleges agreed that free meals in colleges for 16-19-year-olds would encourage people to continue with their education.

Fiona McMillan, president of the AoC, who is also principal of Bridgwater College in Somerset, said that at her own college EMA provided students with about £1,000 per year. Now, there is only £152 per year available for students.

She said: "We are all aware that funding is tight. But these young people are our future and we must consider our investment in them."

"We would all regret a situation where young people miss out and then become the so-called lost generation."

Ms McMillan said the new 16-19 bursary, which replaced the EMA, is "better than nothing" but in terms of what it provides, "there is a big gap". To cope, her college - like many others - has subsidised the cost.

She is also concerned that colleges will miss out on vital funding, adding: "We are paid by our student numbers. So it's an important issue for us."

Gordon Marsden, the Shadow FE and Skills Minister, said the "alarming figures" show the impact of the government's policy to scrap EMA. He said: "The government has left FE colleges facing a double whammy at a time

of real economic uncertainty."

Back at school

The Tory Government had a nasty surprise when news that leaked that the School Teachers' Pay Review Body (STRB) had recommended a 6.5 pay rise for teachers, a figure above that of the 4.3 per cent which is on offer from Department for Education's (DfE).

The Government has often used pay review boards as an excuse for low pay offers, and indeed Education Secretary Gillian Keegan has herself said the STRB was her lodestar on pay meters. The National Education Union (NEU) gleefully leapt on the leak saying: "The 6.5 per cent recommendation does not make up for the poor awards it has made almost every year since 2010, leading to declining rates of pay and enormous problems with teacher recruitment and retention." The NASUWT and the National Association of Head Teachers also said the report confirmed their views. The leak broke soon after NEU started re-balloting for further action because existing ballot mandates expire on 13th July.

The NEU executive meets on 17th June to decide whether to take further strike action in the week commencing 3rd July based on its present strike mandates. And even the normally compliant Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is now balloting members on national strike action in England

for the first time in its history.

The NEU warns that: "With four education unions balloting members for strike action in the autumn term this should be a wake-up call. Our re-ballot would allow the NEU to co-ordinate action with other teacher unions in the autumn term if Government does not provide a settlement to the dispute. It is never too late for the education secretary to come to the negotiating table and make an improved offer."

Unison, the giant union which represents many school support staff, is now entering the fray. Tuesday saw the union open a ballot for strike action involving more than a third of a million council and school support staff across England and Wales. In urging a "Yes" vote for strike action, Unison said the offer of a flat rate £1,925 (for full-time

workers only) was "nowhere near" enough to meet rising prices during the cost-of-living crisis. Instead, it is seeking an increase of two per cent above inflation, which amounts to 12 per cent. The six-week ballot includes workers at 4,000 different employers, with a separate ballot in Northern Ireland opening in August.

General secretary Christina McAnea said: "Too often council and school support staff are taken for granted. Without them, the services on which whole communities rely won't exist."

"With cuts to local government and education budgets, employees are having to do more with far less. That puts huge pressure on an already-stretched workforce struggling to keep afloat as costs continue to soar."

The times they are-changing...

...at least on the independent schools front in Scotland. Last week we even had the curious spectacle of a senior Labour politician joining a picket line. Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar took part at a picket line at Hutchesons' Grammar School, the Glasgow school at which Sarwar (and now his children) and the present SNP First Minister were educated. Several members of the House of Lords and the First female lawyer in the UK are also amongst its alumni.

The private school, which charges £13,000 per year, saw 80 per cent of local members of the EIS vote in favour of industrial action on an 86 per cent turnout.

This came after Easter, when staff were told that they would have to sign new contracts and that the jobs of anyone who declined would be advertised externally.

Another former public schoolboy, one-time Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard, welcomed Sarwar's action, saying "this is what Labour leaders should be doing".

Andrea Bradley, EIS general secretary, said: "The school's actions throughout this process have been shameful - from launching a consultation amongst staff which they then ignored the result of, to issuing 'fire and rehire' letters to teachers over a holiday period. The school must now think again, reverse its course, and reinstate teachers with their previous contractual terms and conditions."

The board of governors actually deny that they are imposing "fire-and-rehire" but they admit that they are "withdrawing from the Scottish Teacher Pension Scheme

(STPS) to cap pension costs at a sustainable level to protect the jobs of teachers going forward" and attacked the EIS, saying that: "From discussions with the EIS on Wednesday when the rector and the chair of the board of governors met with a senior official, they do not believe the union shares their aim of protecting teachers' jobs." Those who signed the new contracts stating they only agreed because they were under duress, were promptly told that if they didn't sign "clean" copies of the contract they would be sacked.

Also taking industrial action at the school, after an equally high vote, is the NASUWT-The Teachers' Union, whose four-day stoppage begins next Monday. NASUWT General Secretary Patrick Roach complained that: "The employer has treated hard working teachers appallingly throughout this saga. Teachers have been subjected to intimidation by an employer whose conduct is redolent of the worst employment practices in the country."

Mike Corbett, the unions National Official for Scotland, added: "This contemptuous attitude sums up the employers' attitude towards their staff, who have faced the worst kind of coercive and bullying behaviour from those who are supposed to lead them."

"We appeal to parents and the wider community to join with us in calling on the school to drop its hostility towards its loyal and dedicated staff and to agree to work with us to address these attacks on teachers' basic terms and conditions so that the disruption of strike action can be avoided."

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

New Worker 30th May 2003

TEACHING unions are demanding an emergency injection of cash to save schools throughout England and Wales, which are now facing huge deficits because the way in which their funding is worked out has been restructured.

Already 1,570 teaching job losses have been confirmed with more in the pipeline and pupils being sent home because schools cannot afford teachers.

In theory the education budget was increased by £2.7 billion, and it should have been a good year for schools

to expand their services.

The Government claims this was an expansion of 11 per cent. Close examination shows it was more like five per cent - but even this should have been enough to fund some growth.

The funding system for schools is extraordinarily complex. In theory it comes from local government, but it originates from central government with heavy strings to local authorities on how they may use it.

There is a funding formula to reflect local circumstances, then an amount per pupil, varying according to their ages.

There are funds for "additional educational need" and "high-cost pupils". There are area cost adjustments to use for teacher recruitment. Then there are "standard funds" direct from the Government to cut class sizes.

This direct Government funding has been phased out, to be targeted on a smaller number of schools.

More problems are on the

way as schools next year will have to pay extra to employ more teachers to cover the workload agreement with the teaching unions.

Amidst all this funding sleight of hand, a lot of money is going to end up in the pockets of the private companies that are increasingly being brought in to run various parts of the education system.

Education Secretary Charles Clarke has failed to acknowledge that the Government has got its sums wrong. He has blamed local authorities for not passing on the money. They have retaliated by threatening to sue the Department of Education to win back some of the funding lost by schools.

Schools in six London boroughs have had their budgets cut by £20 million because they are now deemed outer London boroughs and therefore do not now qualify for as much London weighting.

Financial crisis drives towards war

by Manuel Raposo

Since the beginning of March, when Silicon Valley Bank collapsed, US government officials have repeatedly declared that the North American and European financial system is safe. The facts, however, show at a minimum that the threats of bankruptcy persist, and the remedies are failing to produce the desired improvements. Going further, warnings of an essential defect affecting the entire Western, and possibly worldwide, financial system say, without a shadow of a doubt, that the problem goes far beyond the collapses seen so far.

In addition to the cracks resulting from a hyper-developed financial system that is out of proportion with the real values of the economy, today we have to consider an issue of unprecedented proportions: the competition, taken to the extreme, between economic blocks that are breaking the ties that united them until recently and are opening, at an accelerating pace, a gap between two worlds.

The challenge is to know to what extent this factor, relating to the global political order, will alter the evolution of events, be it in the immediate term with regard to the announced financial meltdown, or with regard to the changes in the world economy in the coming years or within the scope of the general confrontation between great powers – a confrontation that will surely determine the shape of the world in the near future.

Notorious facts

The source of the most recent problem is in the USA, just as it was in 2008. This time it started in medium-sized regional banks; some of them specialised in financing startups in cutting-edge technology sectors. In less than two months, three of these banks have gone bankrupt, and others are threatened with the same fate.

Despite voices to the contrary and appeals for calm, in a few days a rapid spread to other banking sectors took place, which led to the intervention of the US central bank for fear that the contagion would spread and reach the large banks. According to authoritative testimony, hundreds of US banks are bankrupt and as many as half of the 4,800 banks that make up

the US banking network may be at risk.

The crisis extends beyond the USA, which is why American and European officials immediately tried to agree on palliative measures. But developments in recent weeks have failed to reduce the threats: The gold rush is a sign of the insecurity felt by investors and speculators faced with the real prospect of a recession in the USA. This has led strategists at JP Morgan, one of the world's largest banks, to admit that this turn towards gold could be considered a defence against what they call "a catastrophic scenario".

In Europe, it was Crédit Suisse that sank and was absorbed by its competitor UBS, in a race against the clock led by the Swiss state to avoid a resounding bankruptcy with unpredictable consequences. The immediate cause of the collapse of Crédit Suisse (foreseen even before the collapses triggered in the USA) is said to have been the refusal of Saudi investors (the Saudi National Bank) to reinforce the bank's capital, which provoked strong distrust in financial circles.

Days before this incident, Swiss banking officials had expressed their displeasure with their government's decision to go along with the sanctions on Russia, which were decreed right after the beginning of the war in Ukraine – sanctions, remember, under which the West froze and stole hundreds of millions of euros of Russian capital.

This high-profile piracy is said to have led 'hundreds' of Asian capitalists (Chinese and others) to be afraid to deposit their money in Switzerland, fearing that the same would happen to them as it did to the Russians.

This fact, denounced by the Swiss authorities themselves, shows how the confrontation unleashed by Washington against Russia and China, dragging the Europeans along with it, is playing a role in this banking crisis, adding to the intrinsic problems of the hyper-financialisation of Western capital.

Looking back 15 years

The financial crisis of 2008 was reduced by massive injections of money [from governments] to cover losses and prevent bankruptcies of banks, other financial institutions and commercial and industrial companies. Credit levels were



• Police control access to the SVB as customers rush to withdraw deposits

thus sustained at the expense of a gigantic multiplication of banknotes in circulation. As a result of the problems resulting from the COVID19 pandemic, which paralysed much of the economic activity, the central banks' procedure was repeated – injecting money.

Added to this, low or even negative interest rates were also set, designed to spread credit, with the idea of stimulating economic growth. Such growth has been stubbornly anaemic and has remained anaemic, despite all these efforts by government officials.

The amount of money in circulation (not only money itself, but also all the multiple forms of credit, which end up representing purchasing power, at least potential) far exceeds the real value of the goods actually created and made available by the productive sectors of the economy.

The lever of consumption

Why has it been necessary to keep credit growing? In recent decades (practically since the 1970s), world capitalism has been suffering from an incurable disease. To put it simply: The enormous productive capacity it has reached has no relationship to the market's capacity to buy; the overproduction of goods is matched by chronic under-consumption.

In the final analysis, this is due to the enormous technological

progress, responsible both for the exponential increase in the volume of production and the corresponding reduction in the unit value of goods, on the one hand, and for the downward trend in the employed labour force and the fall in wage rates, on the other.

the
overproduction of
goods is matched
by chronic under-
consumption.

Feeding widespread credit has been essential in recent decades to keep businesses afloat. In fact, as contemporary capitalism is increasingly a low-wage capitalism, the global fall of real wages results in a fall of global purchasing power, only attenuated by the extension of credit lines for the most diverse consumption purposes.

By making consumption dependent on credit, however, an "artificial system of forced extension of the reproduction process" of capital is created. It happens that as Marx says: "In a system of production, where the entire continuity of the reproduction process rests upon credit, a crisis must obviously occur – a tremendous rush for

means of payment – when credit suddenly ceases and only cash payments have validity."

This is why, says Marx: "At first glance, the whole crisis appears as a simple credit and money crisis." In reality, however, "at the basis of the whole crisis" is "a volume of buying and selling [represented by credit securities] that far exceeds society's needs", that is, "its purchasing capacity". For this reason, too, "no kind of bank legislation can eliminate a crisis".

Stagnation

The stagnation of economic growth, which mainly affects Western capitalism (as the most recent data from the IMF have confirmed), has resisted all measures aimed at combating it. What's more, it contrasts with the enormous multiplication of fictitious capital – capital that, not finding conditions for productive application and appreciation, is dedicated to financial speculation in search of yield.

Within the enormous mass of financial assets, the obscure world of the so-called derivatives is of particular relevance. According to data from the Bank for International Settlements, the derivatives market amounts to more than \$632 trillion (a million million), six times the value of the world annual GDP!

continued on page 6...

continued from page 5...

The primary cause of the galloping inflation that has broken out over the last two years is thus to be found in the very remedies given to the 2008 financial crisis: the provision of virtually unlimited 'liquidity' by governments to banks, financial institutions and large corporations.

To the soil thus fertilised by the public authorities was added the breakdown of supply chains resulting from the pandemic (causing shortages of goods, supply delays and rising transport prices) and the economic war against Russia and China unleashed by the USA and followed by the EU (affecting energy, cereals, fertilisers and various raw materials).

High-risk side effects

Western authorities have increased interest rates in an attempt to combat inflation. The effects of uncontrolled inflation are well-known.

One example is the reduction in purchasing power, caused by the devaluation of money, reinforcing the tendency towards a drop in global demand with which capitalism is struggling. Another example is the devaluation of debts, a fact that is particularly worrisome for the creditors

of the gigantic state debts. For example, what will German and French creditors say about the Portuguese government's debt, if it is paid at the nominal value of the euro, devalued by 9 per cent or 10 per cent due to inflation?

Those who promote increases in interest rates, however, have brought about consequences for themselves that are undesirable but inevitable. The higher rate causes business to contract, worsening the economic slump. It reduces investment, compromising the prospect of future growth. It promotes bankruptcies in the financial system, devaluing the assets (stock portfolios, treasury bonds, etc) that the financial institutions hold. It generates unemployment, reducing purchasing power, multiplying poverty and creating grounds for social unrest.

The irony of all this is that every measure taken to resolve one problem generates another problem that must be remedied by counter-measures. The most recent example comes from the bankruptcies of American banks. In order to fight inflation, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates, aiming to reduce the volume of money in circulation;

the rise in interest rates devalued the banks' assets and drove them into bankruptcy. In order to prevent the bankruptcies from cascading, the state had to promise to insure all deposits of any amount, injecting money into the financial system.

A sword poised over our heads

The financial crisis that the world is again facing, whether fully unleashed or mitigated, remains like a sword hanging over the head of the entire capitalist economic system and obviously over the heads of the wage-earning populations.

A financial crisis, as we have seen, is not 'just financial'. Economic crises always appear in the form of financial crises because, in contemporary capitalism, it is through finance, particularly through credit, that the entire economic system is managed and its evolution determined.

The absence of growth, the threat of recession, etc, appear even bleaker if we understand that the tremors that shake finance anticipate the threat of an economic earthquake of unprecedented proportions. In other words, the recurrent financial crises are a sign of an economic crisis

that is dragging on and on, accumulating an unprecedented explosive potential – not only on the strict economic plane but also in the political sphere.

Hence the growing threats of war between the great powers fighting for world primacy indicate that economic disputes no longer fit within the limits of business competition, but rather overflow into the terrain of political and military confrontation.

In the present situation therefore, in addition to the factors intrinsic to the mechanism of a failing capitalism, it is necessary to take into account factors of a political nature and of global competition that affect the course of events in an equally decisive way.

The current threats to the economic and financial system are unfolding in a new general framework, marked by a tendency towards the partition of the world into blocs – one formed by the imperialist powers (the 'expanded West', in their own expression), the other being formed in opposition to the first (the so-called 'Global South').

It is impossible to ignore the role that this great confrontation plays in the unfolding of the current crisis.

Where does this change

originate?

After 30 years of unbridled globalisation, imperialist capitalism gained access to two immense territories that had been closed to it, the Soviet Union (mainly Russia) and China, and was able to expand without external opposition to all corners of the globe. New phenomena with new actors have appeared: the re-emergence of Russia as a national and military power, backed by the immense resources at its disposal; and the

and Russia, is a symptom of two things: the weakness that is affecting the USA, which is progressively unable to compete with more powerful adversaries on a strictly economic level; and the increasing recourse to means other than economic ones in the attempt to stop these adversaries – that is, by using military force (an area where the USA is still dominant).

Customs tariffs on foreign products, sanctions on competitors (countries and companies), confiscation of astronomical sums of money from adversaries or simply victims (Russia, Iran, Venezuela, Iraq, Afghanistan), the (largely illusory) pretences of re-industrialisation – all these measures adopted by the enlarged West are evidence of the gigantic confrontation that is taking place between two worlds.

The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the late 19th Century. Frederick Engels said, around 1886, in a note in *Das Capital*, that: "These customs protections are nothing but the weapons destined for the general battle of industry, which will finally decide the domination over the world market."

There is, however, a significant difference. At that time, Britain was the dominant power, and it was Britain that fought to eliminate barriers; and its competitors surrounded themselves with protective measures in order to survive. Today, it is China that, confident of its economic strength, is fighting for free trade, and the losing USA is hiding behind all sorts of barriers.

A new question

This division of the world poses a largely novel question regarding the financial-economic-social-institutional threat hanging over Western bourgeois civilisation. To what extent will the financial collapse looming from the USA and Europe affect everyone? To what extent will the abyss that is deepening between two worlds keep China, Russia, India, Iran and the countries that line up on that side safe?

From the answer that reality gives to this question, we will be able to determine the pace at which the sinking of the 'wider West' will proceed.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva recently paid a

“every factor, which works against a repetition of the old crises, carries within itself the germ of a far more powerful future crisis”

Engels



• The American dream...



• People's China: powering up the nation...

visit to China that provides interesting data. Speaking in Beijing at the China Development Forum, she said that up to 90 per cent of advanced economies will see a drop in GDP by 2023, but that "Asia will be a beacon of light" in the general gloom.

Georgieva said China and India together will

account for half of world growth. China, past the constraints of the pandemic, will make "a strong leap" with 5.2 per cent growth in 2023, contributing a third of world growth. By a spill-over effect, every one per cent growth in China will induce a 0.3 per cent growth in the rest of the

Asian economies.

She said the global economy will grow (despite the growth in Asia) by less than three per cent in 2023, and the same slump will continue for the next five years, the worst performance since 1990. The USA is striving for 0.7 per cent growth in 2023, the EU for 0.8 per

cent and Japan for 1.3 per cent, all pulling down the overall average.

Georgieva also warned of the "risks of geo-economic fragmentation" that could lead to a "division of the world into rival economic blocs". As a result, world GDP could fall by seven per cent (\$7 trillion), equivalent to the

combined output of Japan and Germany, or even by as much as 12 per cent. For all this, forecasts for the world economy in the medium term "remain bearish".

Moreover, as we have seen, the measures taken in the West to curb inflation, which in some countries exceeds 10 per cent, are

an additional factor in the fall of consumption, employment and the economy. Meanwhile, inflation in China remains below one per cent; domestic consumption is growing; there is strong demand for credit in the real economy, and there is no need to raise interest rates.

If these trends continue – added to the dollar's loss of prominence and the consolidation of alternative organisations with a global dimension, such as the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa] and the New Development Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the new Silk Road – it seems inevitable that a gap will open between two rival blocs, as Georgieva had feared.

We are witnessing the increasingly extreme contradictions of a senile capitalism, incapable of responding to the demands of human progress. The world, specifically the Western world, is "in the dead end of a permanent and endemic depression" and "every factor, which works against a repetition of the old crises, carries within itself the germ of a far more powerful future crisis". Even at the distance of almost 140 years, these words of Engels seem especially dedicated to the moment we are living in.

Workers World (USA)

Syria is back

by Roberto Morejon

Syria's return to the Arab League, from where it was removed in 2011, highlights the strong change in Damascus's political relations with its neighbours, in a process brewed long ago but accelerated recently.

A Syrian delegation headed by President Bashar al-Assad took part in the 30-second ordinary session of the Arab Summit that, with the presence of several regional leaders, was held in the Saudi city of Jeddah last week.

Syria's membership was unique after the Arab League restored its seat after 12 years of marginalisation, following the events that unleashed a

prolonged war, sustained from abroad.

After a long period of intransigence encouraged by the West to corner the Syrian government, new winds are blowing in the Middle East, where many have come to the conclusion that the conflict in the country should be resolved with the help of Damascus.

Between 5–6 million displaced persons, more than 300,000 dead, serious economic and living conditions, are some of the effects of an internal war, aggravated by US and allied sanctions.

With the help of Russia and Iran, mainly, and the effort of the nationals and the army to recover ground in the hands of opposition

groups, the government of Bashar al-Assad has managed to sustain itself.

Even with the presence of US troops and armour plundering the native oil, Syria has been taken into account by its neighbours in a more pragmatic way.

There are many who argue that the distancing of Western countries from the Middle East, now engaged in confrontation with Russia, has contributed to this change.

It is to be expected that with the new climate in the region, conditions for the return of refugees to Syria will be negotiated and the situation in areas not controlled by Damascus, such as the northwestern province of Idlib, will be examined.



• President Bashar al-Assad lands in Jeddah to attend the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia

An increase in visitors from the Gulf countries to Syria can also be expected, with the consequent encouragement of the revival of small and medium-sized businesses, and even projects aimed at

rebuilding the deteriorated electrical infrastructure.

As predicted by the Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the recent diplomatic rapprochements imply the beginning of

a process to settle the crisis in Syria, too long fuelled by the language of conflagration.

Radio Havana Cuba

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

The determination of our dedicated nurses to continue their fight for a fair, affordable and much-needed pay award has the full support of the New Communist Party of Britain. Those betrayers within the Labour Movement who are willing to merely sit back whilst waiting for their elevation to the House of Lords will no doubt be dismayed. Labour's shadow health secretary has said that he does not back the nurses' strike action.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Unison and the GMB recommend acceptance of the miserable pay offer that would leave nurses worse off after years of pay restraint; only Unite said that they could not recommend acceptance. Nurses have faced a 25 per cent pay cut during austerity.

The current pay offer of five per cent in face of high inflation has been rejected by a ballot of nurses in the RCN, which has now called for negotiations to be reopened. Unite members representing mainly ambulance workers have also rejected the government's offer and further strikes are planned.

High inflation has been the result of both failed sanctions against Russia and the underlying financial crisis as capitalism's contradictions continue to worsen. Energy bills have surged in Europe with little hope for relief. A situation compounded by the blowing up of the Nord Stream pipelines by NATO terrorists. Austerity is exposed as an elaborate confidence trick that has solved nothing. It has left millions much worse off, pot-holed roads, crumbling infrastructure, crippled public services and has left the NHS in a state of near collapse. The wage restraint, meanwhile, has allowed the rich to grab more surplus value and

become even more wealthy.

It is against this background that our nurses, junior doctors and others are making a principled stand. The reactionary right-wing Labour Party that should be leading the fight for working people and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them is firmly on the side of the establishment. It is letting down its natural supporters. What does the right-wing leadership believe in apart from serving imperialism and enjoying the privilege of high office? Its support for the NATO aggressive block, total subservience to the USA and increased funding to prolong the Ukraine conflict along with an abandonment of the class struggle at home poses an important question. Has it totally abandoned any socialist ethos it once might have had and now grown to embrace bourgeois ideology?

To abandon the Labour Party, as bad as it has become, would be a mistake. It would be a retreat. It would allow the Labour Party to degenerate further into an establishment body and leave what's left of the labour movement without a parliamentary voice.

It is important to give our maximum support to those progressives still left in Labour Party ranks and through discussion hope to influence the movement. My personal opinion is that support for Labour needs to be qualified. If at election time we are asked to support another back-stabbing, NATO-loving scoundrel and Tory in all but name we should respond by calling on them to campaign for the reinstatement of the popular Jeremy Corbyn, the release from prison of the Julian Assange, expanded public ownership and a re-distribution of wealth.

**John Maryon
Suffolk**

Dear Comrades

As regards the recent suspension of the London Labour MP Diane Abbott, it seems to me that Sir Keir Starmer spends a lot more effort rooting out 'anti-Semites' than he does trying to get into power. I have serious doubts about whom he is serving – Britain or Israel?

A man cannot serve

two masters and if he is working for 'them' not 'us' he would be a very serious threat to this country, backing up any crimes or illegal actions 'they' do, and would be in a position to give not just political and moral support to them but intelligence as well. I trust before he gains power in this country, that the security services will thoroughly check up on his actions and intentions for the future.

**RJ Smith
Sutton-in-Ashfield**

Dear Friends

In light of the 13th May explosion of uranium weapons at the ammunition depot near Khmelnytsky, western Ukraine, the American Peace Information Center (APIC) calls for an international ban on deployment and use of uranium weapons.

Uranium weapons are battlefield nuclear weapons, developed originally to penetrate Soviet tank armour. The UK has sent uranium weapons to the fascist Kiev regime under the pretence of strengthening it militarily. But British scientists have shown that the use of uranium weapons in Iraq and Serbia has had devastating effects on human health and makes soldiers terribly ill.

Dr Chris Busby, a physical chemist who has worked for the UK government's uranium committee, told the media group Sputnik that "this substance [uranium] contaminates Europe and will cause all of the effects that it caused in Iraq... It will cause all those effects in Germany, and Luxemburg, and France, and Sweden, and the Baltic States and a long list of countries which stand between Ukraine and the United Kingdom, where we measured it."

Those effects include frightful birth abnormalities and cancers that have been experienced by the people of Fallujah, Iraq, since 2003, including "babies born with only one eye; babies born with missing limbs or too many limbs; a higher-than-normal incidence of babies with brain damage or tumours; cardiac defects; and missing genitalia," wrote Sputnik. The fact that the UK knows that uranium weapons produce these effects suggests that they

are deploying the weapons to weaken continental Europe so Britain can dominate it yet again.

Fifteen per cent of children born in Fallujah, Iraq from 2003 to 2009 exhibit horrible birth abnormalities as a result of their parents absorbing uranium into their bodies during the American invasion. When uranium shells explode on a target, the uranium vaporises into dust, which is inhaled by people in the vicinity. That is how it gets into the body. A European laboratory has confirmed that the mothers of babies suffering from birth abnormalities had absorbed high doses of uranium.

The uranium is toxic. It binds to DNA. Then gamma rays absorbed by the mothers and alpha- and beta-particles emitted by the uranium interact with the uranium and the DNA, resulting in birth abnormalities as shown in the photo of the baby with its intestines outside its body. The Veterans Administration admits that soldiers in Iraq, Bosnia and elsewhere were exposed to dangerous substances and it now has a uranium exposure testing programme.

The *Irish Times* asks: "How can one explain that children of Gulf War veterans suffer the same birth defects as Iraqi children born in zones contaminated by DU [depleted uranium]?" The US Environmental Protection Agency also warns of the danger of uranium weapons.

The uranium exposure also causes cancer. "We analysed the cancer data that we got over the five years [from 2005 to 2009 in Iraq] by comparing it with cancer rates in Egypt and in Jordan as a sort of background. We found that the levels of cancer were enormously high, for all cancers, the rates were extraordinarily high and even higher than in Hiroshima... And what we found was that the levels of cancer in Fallujah were higher than that, leukaemia in children, and also lymphoma in children," said Dr Chris Busby.

The European Parliament has repeatedly passed resolutions requesting an immediate moratorium on the further use of depleted uranium

ammunition, but France and Britain – the only European states that are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – have consistently rejected calls for a ban.

APIC calls for the

European Parliament and the United Nations to ban the use of uranium weapons.

**American Peace
Information Center
Seattle**

Diary

EVERY SATURDAY

Committee to Defend Julian Assange: Protests: 12:00-14:00, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, London SE28 and 16:00-18:00, Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, London SW1.

TUES 30 MAY

Korean Friendship Association: Film Night 19:00-21:00. Online event on Facebook and Skype.

THURS 1 JUNE

Marx Memorial Library: Book launch James Crossley and Robert Myles's *Jesus: A Life in Class Conflict*. 19:00, MML onsite, book on MML website.

FRI 2 JUN-SAT 3 JUN

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: 40th anniversary of the Four Day Peace Blockade at USAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire, OX25 5HQ. At base. See CND website for details and transport.

SAT 3 JUN

Working Class Movement Library: Book launch: Lydia Hughes and Jamie Woodcock's *Troublemaking: Why You Should Organise Your Workplace*. 1400-15:00, WCML. Book on WCML website

SAT 3 – WED 14 JUNE

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Lissette Rubio Mederos on Cuban education. See CSC website for various venues.

THURS 8 JUNE

Marx Memorial Library: Richard Burgon MP. Tony Benn and Labour's 1973-74 programme for "an irreversible shift of wealth and power in favour of working people". 19:00, Online and onsite, Book on MML website.

SAT 10 JUNE

Cuba Solidarity Campaign AGM and public meeting 10:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London, WC1H 9BD

SUN 11 JUN

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Memorial Concert for Bruce Kent, 18:30-20:30, St Mellitus Church, Tollington Park, London, N4 3AG

UNTIL 16 JUNE

Working Class Movement Library: Photographs of Salford by Shirley Baker. Weds-Fridays afternoons. WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

We return once again to Port Glasgow to contemplate the sorry fiasco of the unbuilt ferries. The disputes over who is to blame for the mounting costs continue unabated, with the potential operator blaming the yard whilst the yard places the blame on the future owners constantly changing their minds. Without wishing to apportion blame, the latter is normally the case in such construction disputes.

The former owner of Ferguson Marine Engineering Limited (FMEL), Jim McColl, under whose watch the original contract was secured from the SNP Government, has offered to buy back the yard for the magnificent sum of £1 after the SNP Government announced it was thinking about privatisation.

This is somewhat less than he paid for last shipyard on the lower Clyde in 2014. The two ferry contracts were hurriedly awarded by the SNP Government to show they had an industrial strategy soon after the UK Government heavily invested in the nearby Faslane nuclear submarine base.

Delays to the two ferries were such that the yard had to be nationalised in 2019, by which time McColl and the SNP had parted company politically. The delays have seen engine design changed, wiring ripped out, and even saw fake windows painted on the most advanced ferry so they could have an official launch presided over by Nicola Sturgeon – who naturally was entirely blameless for any later developments. The ships in question are only suitable on a few routes that have harbours big enough for them, even these harbours do not yet have facilities for the specialised fuels the new ferries are supposed to run on. Plenty of pub bores and shipping experts assert that the whole fleet could have been renewed for the costs already incurred if more basic ships had been

approved.

The £1 offer comes at a time when the SNP Government said it was pressing on with getting both ships completed despite admitting it would be cheaper to scrap one of the ships and start again rather than throw any more money down a seemingly bottomless pit. Jim McColl said this was the right decision from “a moral standpoint” because it protected the workforce, but from a commercial perspective it made no sense.

In particular, it has been claimed that the latest extra £60 million (to the present £350 million on an original £90 million contract) alone could have bought three catamarans similar to those in use on the Orkney to the mainland routes.

Already operators Caledonian MacBrayne have hired one such vessel to replace one of their many ancient ships, which keep breaking down and ought to have been replaced years ago but weren’t. On Tuesday, to add to MacBrayne’s woes, it was announced that their brand new £18 million ticket system was not working, which was a largely theoretical question as there are few working ships. Some 11,301 journeys were cancelled last year, and another 5,781 sailings were late, resulting in compensation payments amounting to £454,000 – nearly double that of the previous year. Now it is a case of “roll of the dice” as to whether lifeline ferry services “will be late or cancelled”, according to the Liberal Democrat who went through the Freedom of Information process to establish these facts.

MacBrayne’s seem to be in danger of losing their contract, which is up for renewal next year. A consultancy firm has been paid £4 million by the SNP Government to look into the future of the Clyde and Hebridean routes. They could recommend continuation, find another public sector contractor (which does not exist) or find a private contractor. Whilst trade unions (particularly RMT) support the continuation of MacBrayne’s it might prove difficult to find many islanders keen on the status quo.

Ironically, the Scottish Tory transport spokesman condemned the SNP for opening up the question of privatisation and not letting Holyrood know what they are up to.

Battle of the Bottles

Another SNP policy is in the final stages of unravelling but this time the SNP will be relieved that it can be blamed on their hapless Green junior partners, who are responsible for its implementation. As is their custom however, they have tried to lay the blame at the door of Westminster for the failure.

This is the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), which has managed to alienate just about everyone involved in it.

DRS is designed to encourage the recycling of bottles and cans, which are an important part of Scottish life, particularly when they contain alcohol. It has been pointed out that at present about 70 per cent of domestic glass is already recycled through the grey bins from households and 90 per cent of commercial glass is recycled. For councils this is a modest but useful money spinner. The SNP–Green administration have set up a private company, Circularity Scotland, to do the job, instead they have subcontracted work to Biffa, the waste management who have invested in 198 environmentally friendly diesel lorries to transport the bottles around the country.

The Green Circular Economy Minister Lorna Slater has been forced to concede that DRS might have to be abandoned, after being delayed twice. Later, on Tuesday Slater slightly changed her tune and was still confident that the scheme would still go ahead, claiming that she had done all the paperwork correctly.

The earlier announcement resulted in rejoicing from small producers of craft beers and small off licences, who had announced they were boycotting it on ground of expense because they would have to install expensive machines to log the empties and pay out refunds for them. Those larger companies such as supermarket chains that have invested large sums in the equipment will not be happy. Even Tesco, which has invested in the scheme, says it needs to be UK-wide to work. Just such a scheme should be coming into force in England and Wales in 2025. First Minister Humza Yousaf expects them to sue the Westminster Government,

but anger and, more seriously, writs are more likely to be sent in his direction. The £500 million bill for compensation makes it an even worse disaster than the ferries.

Mo Razzag, of the 1,200-strong Federation of Independent Retailers, said the group would take legal action on claiming compensation from the Scottish government, adding: “At the end of the day, our members shouldn’t be liable for the government’s cock-up.” The Scottish Grocers Federation gave the scheme the thumbs up, despite the boycott threats by many of its members, however the off licences and supermarkets of Berwick and Carlisle will be strong supporters of the measure.

The main problem is that the extra cost, 20 pence on each beverage, would break the UK Internal Market Act, a fact the SNP were well aware of from day one. Fears that Scotland would become a net importer of empties from England for which shops would have to pay out were perfectly feasible. The SNP and Greens deplore the Tory Government for not making an exception, but that was to be expected. In any case, it is difficult to make dearer drink for the Scots an issue to raise nationalist anger.

Some Scottish beer producers who make beer in their baths say they will go out of business because of the additional administrative costs.

After protests, revised regulations were produced to exclude products that sell less than 5,000 units per year. It is claimed that this will exempt 44 per cent of small businesses.

Some English products have started appearing with cans labelled “Not for sale in Scotland”.

In 1922, Dundee voters ejected Winston Churchill as their Member of Parliament in favour of a Prohibitionist; but that occasion was widely celebrated in the pubs – and not with lemonade. Depriving Scots of their favoured tippie, or even modestly increasing the price, is not good politics.

The scheme is not like returning lemonade bottles to the sweet shop; in rural areas long-distance travel, by car, will be the order of the day. Local authorities will still have to maintain the same infrastructure for glass containers that do not count as bottles. And apparently vinegar bottles are not bottles!

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(cheques to New Worker)

A British master in Beijing

Like many other foreigners, Rosalind Oliver's initial perceptions of Chinese martial arts came from popular kung fu movies. Rather than settling for the role of student, however, she has become a Tai Chi master herself, teaching the relaxing fitness practice to both Chinese and foreigners.

Rosalind's journey with Tai Chi began in her early 20s, when she was suffering from a back injury and looking for a new exercise regime. The 58-year-old British woman recalls the injury that left her confined to bed for six months.

"As an active youngster at that time, I couldn't bear resting in bed," she explained. "My muscles became wasted and stiff through lack of use, and I was often in a lot of pain. So, I felt that some physical exercise would help."

She then discovered Tai Chi when she spotted by chance a poster advertising classes and decided to try the "mysterious and exotic" eastern sport. Oliver was immediately struck by the gentle and beautiful movements of

Tai Chi, and to her delight, found that her occasional pains disappeared after years of practice.

"Tai Chi is a mind-body exercise rooted in multiple Chinese traditions. It not only helps me to improve physical strength, but also provides me with many mental benefits, such as improved mood and focus, and less anxiety and depression," she added.

Ms Oliver later met her late husband, who was also her Tai Chi instructor. In the early 1990s, the couple opened their own martial arts school in the UK, where they conducted Tai Chi workshops across the country.

To further understand Tai Chi and the Chinese philosophy behind it, they decided to embark on a journey to China. Three years after moving to Shanghai in 2000, however, her husband passed away, leaving her alone to pursue their shared passion for Tai Chi.

She recalled that it was a hard time for her. She was grateful to have formed strong bonds with many Chinese friends in Shanghai who supported her through the grieving



• Rosalind Oliver practices Tai Chi with her students at Shanghai University

process. "They didn't treat me like a foreigner, but rather like a friend who shared their passion for Chinese martial arts. They were very welcoming and inclusive," Oliver said.

In 2005, Rosalind established the Double Dragon Alliance Cultural Centre, which acts as a bridge for foreign people seeking to gain a better

understanding of Chinese culture. The centre supports kung fu masters in teaching martial arts and organises seminars and events for people to experience various aspects of Chinese culture, including acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, calligraphy, painting and Peking Opera.

Apart from her Tai

Chi classes, Ms Oliver now teaches English at Shanghai University and serves as the director of the British Cultural Centre at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

Reflecting on her work, Rosalind said: "For quite many years, my work is actually to be like a cultural bridge. If you don't have

someone in the middle who is appreciative of all the cultures and has the desire to connect people, then it's hard for them to get to know each other. I hope I can be the bridge to bring people close together."

In 2010, Ms Oliver was awarded an MBE for her contributions to Sino-British relations and cross-cultural work. She still vividly remembers the ceremony at Buckingham Palace the following year.

"It was a wonderful experience. The ceremony lasted for about two hours, and Her Majesty the Queen knew a little about each of us and had a quick chat with everyone. We talked about cultural exchange, and I explained my work in Shanghai to her, and she said: 'It's very important work, you must keep it up'."

Rosalind Oliver expressed her deep love for cultural exchange and hope to expand her work in this area. "We need to foster mutual understanding among cultures to promote peaceful relations and friendship across the globe."

Beijing Review

Looted relics return to Greece

by Svetlana Ekimenko

A batch of ancient artefacts spanning historical periods from the Neolithic to Byzantine era are being repatriated to Greece after a 17-year-long legal battle, Greek Culture Minister Lina Mendoni announced last week.

Greece's recent recovery of ancient artefacts comes against the protracted legal ownership tug-of-war between the British Museum and the Greek government regarding the fate of the Elgin Marbles – Parthenon carvings which were removed from the Acropolis over 200 years ago.

The 351 antiquities in question include a white stone Neolithic-era statuette dating to the 4th Millennium BC, an Early Cycladic figurine from between 3200–2700 BC, a bronze statue of Alexander the Great from the second half of the 2nd Century

AD.

Without going into any specific details, Ms Mendoni hailed the joint efforts by Greece's Culture Ministry officials, the legal department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the country's judiciary and archaeologists to wrest the vast collection from

the company of a UK antiquities dealer – Robin Symes Limited – which is currently undergoing liquidation.

Symes is said to have put together the collection with the help of a sweeping network of illegal traders.

The current repatriation comes following an

investigation that was launched in 2006 into the company owned by the now-disgraced British antiquities' dealer. Acting in close co-operation, Italian and Swiss police in 2016 recovered archaeological artefacts from Symes' possession, found to have been stolen

from Italy. Symes, once a famous London dealer in artefacts, was suspected of being in cahoots at the time with Italian tomb raiders.

There has not been any clarification from Ms Mendoni whether the batch of items coming home to Greece now is somehow linked to that discovery at the Geneva Freeport warehouse complex.

Greece has been on a crusade to return looted artefacts from across the globe. The most high-profile artworks in this case are the Parthenon Sculptures. Originally part of the temple of the Parthenon at the Acropolis in Athens, they were removed by British diplomat Lord Elgin during the Turkish occupation in 1802. They were brought to Britain and are now on display in the British Museum in London.

The UK has long argued that Elgin was given permission to take them by local Ottoman rulers. Greece has consistently

demanding the return of the sculptures on display in the British Museum, claiming they are "the product of theft". The campaign to return the artworks continue. Meanwhile, at a reunification ceremony in Athens, three fragments of the Parthenon were returned to the Greek capital and its Acropolis Museum by the Vatican.

Sputnik



• Return the Marbles protest outside the British Museum

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Poland: the road to tyranny

by Konrad Rękas

Some scholars describe Poland's current political system as 'illiberal', ie as preserving the external appearances of neo-liberal parliamentary democracy but with a limited level of human and civil rights. This analysis seems incomplete. Poland is not an exception to the Western system, some relic of an own authoritarian past or a freak of local populist authoritarianism. On the contrary, the example of Poland can be used to trace the evolution that will almost certainly be shared by other countries subject to the neo-liberal domination of the USA and the UK.

Dismantling the last vestiges of parliamentarism and the rule of law is an inherent feature of the present stage of imperialism. They become redundant, as historically they only secured the smooth functioning of capitalist mass production, which is no longer needed today in the realities of global financialised capitalism. The ruling class now has no need for social consensus nor the acceptance of left-wing

parties and trade unions that give a certain scope of freedom of expression and organisation.

Poland shows that in the next phase of imperialism there will be an attempt to strengthen it through authoritarianism – a mono-party system (now poorly concealed by the false division into 'ruling party/parliamentary opposition') and possible references to populist and outright fascist content, whilst of course maintaining neo-liberal slogans and phraseology.

Acceptance of Nazism

In Poland, these processes have been accelerated, especially as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, when surveillance, censorship and repression are carried out under the pretext of "fighting against Russian influence". The Polish prosecutor's office and courts willingly refer to the law penalising "incitement to hatred on the basis of national, ethnic and racial differences" whilst recognising that it prohibits also criticising the Banderite ideology, which is a Ukrainian form of Nazism.

These days the Polish courts regard 'Banderite' as synonymous with

'Ukrainian'. People are prosecuted for recalling the Volhynian Massacre (the mass genocide perpetrated by the Ukrainian Nazis on Poles, Jews and Ukrainian anti-fascists during the Second World War). They include Katarzyna Sokołowska and Andrzej Łukawski, who have been campaigning to commemorate the victims of Nazi crimes. Four residents on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland were arrested for trying to organise civic patrols to protect neighbours from attacks of aggressive Ukrainian immigrants bearing Nazi symbols. Although formally Nazi signs are prohibited in Poland, neither the courts nor the police react to their increasing presence, claiming that they are currently "justified by the Ukrainian defence against Russian aggression". Protesting Poles face up to two years in prison.

Peace prohibited

"Praising Russian aggression against Ukraine" is now considered a crime in Poland and it's used to stifle the anti-war campaigners such as Henryk Mikietyń, a 72-year-old pensioner and

one of the former leaders of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP).

The KPP is banned in Poland and the mere use of communist emblems can be punished. Groups referring to the heritage of communist Poland have taken part in anti-war actions under the banner the Polish Left Movement (PRL). This probably prompted the Court in Legnica to sentence Comrade Mikietyń to three months imprisonment conditionally suspended for a probationary period of two years. His mobile phone was confiscated as a "crime tool". And under the supervision of a probation officer Mikietyń has to now do six months "voluntary service" in "an entity providing assistance to residents of Ukraine affected by the effects of the war".

The blogger Najjika was sentenced to five months restriction of freedom (ordered to do unpaid social work by the Court) for saying, quoting the Bible, that she would not allow Ukrainian Nazis into her home.

Similar judgments have been handed down in other cases in Krakow, Wrocław, Świdnica and in

many other Polish cities. The prosecutor's office is now focusing on activists of the Polish Anti-War Movement (PRA), such as Piotr Panasiuk from Lublin, who describing the alleged "Bucha Massacre" as a Ukrainian hoax.

In addition to the police and the prosecutor's office, critics of Poland's unilateral involvement in the Ukrainian conflict are pursued by numerous non-governmental organisations, mostly financed by the Polish government and its Western sponsors.

Neither Amnesty International nor the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights took any action to defend those convicted and detained for criticising Nazism. On the contrary, the Helsinki Foundation publicly praised the new practice of the Polish Government as an example of the "fight against hate speech".

The fight intensifies

Mateusz Piskorski PhD, a former MP and then founder and leader of the anti-imperialist, left-wing CHANGE party, was arrested in 2016 and for three years he was held in prison without trial on

charges of "co-operation with the Russian and Chinese intelligence". He was released after intervention of the United Nations Working Group, which investigated the lack of rule of law in Poland. To this day, however, Piskorski is under strict police surveillance, he cannot leave the country and his court case is pending.

Janusz Niedźwiecki, a human rights activist, has been in prison for the last two years accused of "espionage for China".

Further amendments to the Polish Penal Code are on the cards including introducing criminal liability for the "unintentional form of espionage" (up to five years in prison), as well as for the crime of "disinformation involving the dissemination of false or misleading information" (up to eight years in jail). The scope of the Internal Security Agency (ABW), a branch of the secret police, will be expanded significantly.

It can therefore be assumed that the number of political prisoners in Poland can only increase in the coming months.

NUJ denounces CIA plans to kill Assange

by Ed Newman

The National Union of Journalists has denounced CIA plans to kidnap and assassinate Julian Assange. Reports show that the CIA, together with the State Department, had plans in motion to kidnap and kill the renowned political prisoner.

Reacting to media reports of the CIA plot, NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "The suggestion that US security services even considered kidnapping and murder on the streets of a trusted ally is chilling. That such acts might have been contemplated as a reaction to an individual who had simply published

inconvenient truths is all the more troubling.

"At Assange's extradition hearings, the US government did not contest evidence that individuals allegedly working on its behalf had bugged the Ecuadorian embassy in London, followed Assange's family and associates, and burgled the office of his lawyer. That context makes these fresh allegations all the more difficult to dismiss.

"If true, the story ... blows a hole in the case made by the US government that its attempt to extradite Assange is not politically motivated. I am calling on the UK home secretary to explain whether the security services had any involvement in, or

knowledge of, these plans.

"Furthermore, it is clear that when the US appeal against the dismissal of its extradition application in respect of Assange is heard in October, it should be dismissed out of hand and its subject released at once."

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) general secretary, Anthony Bellanger, said: "If these accusations are true, it would cast a long shadow over all independent journalism and they would once again prove that extraditing Assange to the United States would put his life at serious risk. We are calling for a full investigation and for the British authorities to release him immediately."



The NUJ has fought for journalists and journalism for more than 100 years. Today, the union is one of the largest independent journalists' unions in the world.

NUJ members work

across the media, from newspapers, broadcasting and book publishing to magazines, websites, mobile devices, social media and PR agencies. Members work across a diverse range of

jobs – anything from reporting, writing, photography and editing to design, videography, communications and presenting.

Radio Havana Cuba

Big boost for Greek communists!

by our Balkan affairs correspondent

The long-awaited general elections took place in Greece on Sunday 21st May and the big news for the left is that the Communist Party Of Greece (KKE) vote rose by nearly two points to 7.23 per cent, almost doubling their number of MPs in Parliament. They now have 26 seats in the new parliament – up by 11 from the last election.

Their main gains were in the urban centres and working-class areas of Athens and the port of Piraeus. They have become the third largest party in the Attica region. In some areas of Athens they got 11 per cent and overall they got 425,646 votes.

The big losers of the night were the main opposition SYRIZA party that ended the night 20 per cent behind New Democracy, the governing conservative party which won with 40 per cent. The sheen of left social-democracy has worn off as the collapse of the

SYRIZA vote shocked pollsters and voters alike. The revamped (traditional social-democratic) PASOK party increased their vote to 11.4 per cent, mostly due to the swing from SYRIZA. The other big loser of the night was Yiannis Varoufakis's MeRA25 European Disobedience Front, which didn't even pass the threshold to win any seats in parliament.

These elections were held using the new proportional method by which if no party receives 45 per cent, then a second round is held if the winning party cannot muster a majority or a working coalition. This being the case with New Democracy, they announced another round of elections on 25th June where only the share of the party vote will matter. The MPs already elected will keep their seats but the party that comes first will get a 50-seat bonus, as with the old but hardly democratic old election rules designed to give the winner an overwhelming majority in parliament.

SYRIZA have no

chance of winning the election so their votes will likely go to other left-wing parties and KKE are hoping to increase their mandate with an even better result in a month's time.

Welcoming the results, KKE leader Dimitris Koutsoumbas said: "We salute the thousands of workers and young people who took this step today and voted for the KKE, resulting in its considerable rise. We want to congratulate the thousands of members and cadres of the KKE and KNE who gave their best, contributing to this election result. The new and old forces that have rallied around our Party can today provide new impetus to the path of the people's counter-attack, to the class struggle by regrouping with the entire labour trade union movement, for the promotion of the social alliance against the monopolies, capital and capitalism."

"The correlation of forces between the bourgeois parties of New Democracy, SYRIZA and



PASOK that emerged from today's elections shows the formation of a government that will continue in the same, anti-popular direction to the benefit of big capital and at the expense of workers in the private and public sector, the self-employed, farmers, pensioners and the youth. Thus from tomorrow, the Greek people will be faced with a new round of cuts and austerity, a strict fiscal policy, the dangerous developments regarding

the war in Ukraine and Greece's increased involvement in it and also the negative settlements regarding Greek-Turkish relations under the umbrella of NATO. No support, no tolerance, no compromise in the face of all these anti-popular policies! KKE will use the power given to it by the people at the elections to contribute in the struggle to organise the popular resistance and counter-

attack, on the path to the overthrow of capitalism. The MPs of the KKE will be a real support for the people's demands; they will strengthen their voice, defending and promoting the people's interests both inside and outside Parliament. The KKE will be the only hopeful opposition for our people. In the coming period, we will continue just the way we started; in a strong, dynamic manner."

China's Role in the Modern World

by John Maryon

During this spring month of May two major gatherings of world leaders took place in Asia at the same time. The G7 Summit was held in the Japanese city of Hiroshima whilst the China-Central Asia Summit was held in Xian, the capital of China's Shaanxi province. There could not have been a sharper contrast between the objectives of the two events. One focused on coercive measures designed to weaken People's China and Russia in support of maintaining US hegemony. The other gathering witnessed President Xi Jinping of China meeting with five leaders of central Asian countries to discuss boosting trade, economic co-operation, regional peace and stability, and

expanding people-to-people exchanges.

The US-led clique of imperialist leaders was met with protests as they gathered to lecture and dictate to the rest of the world. Dealing with more important matters such as the banking crisis, inflation and a looming recession took a back seat to their obvious bitterness, hatred and envy of China and Russia. In what many people would regard as outrageous and astonishing, the USA and its puppets accused China of economic coercion. In an extreme example of 'the pot calling the kettle black' it is clearly seen that it is the USA itself that is the instigator of economic coercion and represents a major threat to global development. By the end of the 2021 fiscal year the USA had already imposed over 94,000 sanctions on 40 countries around the

world, clearly showing it's hegemonic and bullying nature.

"If you have a friend afar who knows your heart, distance cannot keep you two apart. Welcome honoured guests." President Xi Jinping spoke these words to greet the Asian leaders and their wives in the city of Xian, known as the starting point of the Ancient Silk Road. Since China established diplomatic relations with the five Central Asian countries 31 years ago trade turnover had increased over 100 times to reach \$70 billion by 2022. Agreements were reached to boost further trade and to build a closer regional community.

President Xi emphasised the need to work together for a China-Central Asia grouping with a shared future based upon mutual assistance, common development, universal

security and everlasting friendship. The president spoke about the practical measures for co-operation and outlined eight areas of work.

Firstly, the need to strengthen institutional building by establishing dialogue mechanisms for industry, agriculture, transportation, investment, emergency response, education, streamlining customs and working with all political parties. Secondly, Xi called for live-streaming sales events to promote Central Asian products. A third proposal was to deepen connectivity by improving transport links and investing in logistics. His fourth proposal dealt with the need to expand energy co-operation, including transmission links and pipelines for gas and oil.

The fifth area of concern was the need to promote green innovation. The president said that China

would work to co-operate in dealing with water-saving irrigation, sustainable development and to tackle the ecological crisis of the Aral Sea. His sixth point concerned the need for poverty reduction by creating more local jobs.

For his seventh point, Xi stressed the need to strengthen dialogue between civilisations and invited those present to take part in the "Cultural Silk Road". Special train services would be established to promote cultural tourism. His final, eighth point dealt with the need to safeguard peace in the region and to jointly promote security and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

The contrast between the two high-level Asian conferences could not be more different. On the one hand we have declining, but still aggressive and

dangerous, Imperialism attempting to start another war. On the other we see nations with ambitious plans for a shared future. The GDP of the rest of the world is now greater than that of the wealthy western countries combined. Whilst the USA currently has the largest single GDP, People's China is rapidly catching up. This is what US Imperialism fears and hates.

It has been through hard work, study and socialism that People's China has been able to grow into a superpower. Many Western countries grew wealthy through colonialism, slavery and wars of conquest to rob others. Unlike the USA, China does not bully, threaten or provoke conflict. It seeks peaceful co-operation with everyone to build an inclusive world order founded on true socialist principles.