

Russians rally behind Putin –Wagner coup collapses!

by our Eastern European
Affairs correspondent

Life is returning to normal in Moscow following the Wagner mutiny last weekend that began as high drama with an abortive “March on Moscow” but ended in low farce with Wagnerians returning to their barracks and their boss Evgeny Prigozhin going into involuntary exile in Belarus.

No one knows exactly what Putin offered Prigozhin to end the crisis apart from a safe-conduct to leave the country with his immense wealth untouched and an apparent amnesty to all the Wagner troops.

Wagner, the Russian ‘foreign legion’ which has played a major role in the Ukraine war, has tanks, anti-aircraft systems and war-planes under its control. They now will have hand over these arms as part of the post-mutiny arrangement, which also requires any Wagnerian who wishes to continue service to join the ranks of regular Russian units.

At the moment, people can only speculate on why Prigozhin decided to bite the hand that has fed him for so long. The Wagner boss did little to hide his contempt for Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, whom he blamed for incompetence and corruption on the front.



• Putin calls for unity

Prigozhin is a billionaire who made his money in the gambling and catering industry, but none of the other oligarchs backed him apart from a handful that broke with Putin and fled the country to do the imperialists’ bidding in Western Europe and the USA. He then went into the mercenary business, setting up the Wagner private military company in 2014 with the support of the Putin government.

In Western circles Prigozhin was once seen as a protégé of the Russian president. Although that may once have been true, it was clear this year that the Wagner

boss was being frozen out of the corridors of power in the Kremlin.

Some say that’s why he played his last card. Others look at the suspicious timing of the revolt – in the middle of a large-scale Ukrainian offensive – and draw other conclusions.

Viktor Zolotov, the commander of the National Guard of Russia, thinks the West was clearly behind the Prigozhin mutiny.

Speaking to journalists on Tuesday on the sidelines of an awards ceremony at the Kremlin, Zolotov said he was certain that the mutiny “was inspired by Western special

services, because, as they said, they knew about it several weeks ahead of time.”

Media reports claim that US intelligence had prior knowledge about possible trouble coming from Prigozhin and his Wagnerians. But the Biden administration vehemently denies any involvement in the revolt, which it called a domestic Russian affair.

Zolotov claims that Prigozhin’s camp had been

deliberately leaking “focused” information about a possible mutiny coming sometime between last Thursday and Sunday. He further suggested that Western agents may have been directly involved in conducting the operation.

The mutiny began on Friday evening and dissolved the next day when Prigozhin accepted a Belarus-mediated deal with the Russian government. Wagner troops had entered the city of Rostov-on-Don and were on the move towards Moscow by the time the insurrection was aborted.

Back on the front it’s business as usual as the Russians battle to stave off the long-expected Ukrainian summer offensive. But the Ukrainian army, beefed up with new NATO armour and rockets, has still to make any significant breakthroughs.

After weeks of attempts to break through Russian lines, they’ve only managed to take a few villages on the front and secure a bridgehead over the Dnieper river. And they’ve paid an horrendous price for such meagre gains.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defence, between 4–21 June the Ukrainians lost more than 13,000 troops and 246 tanks, including 13 supplied by the West, and 152 infantry fighting vehicles.

FUND

Last week was hectic. Our internet connection was cut and it took us a few days to find alternative broadband suppliers. But now we’re back and almost back on track!

Two London comrades stepped into the breach to get us back online, and supporters rallied to the fighting fund with a very generous donation of £1,000 from a long-time supporter in East London and £15 from another old friend in Virginia Water that along with other contributions totalled £1,800. The June appeal now stands at £2,227. We need £1,273 by the end of the month to hit our target!

Help us on our way. 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:

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THE NEW WORKER

Summer Shutdown

The New Worker two-week summer shut down will begin on Monday July 10th. We will return to work on Monday 24th July.

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

The dreams of a war-lord

In October 1922 Mussolini's Blackshirts marched on Rome. Within days the fascist leader had been appointed prime minister by the Italian king and was forming his first government.

Last weekend the Wagner Force, Russia's 'foreign legion', marched on Moscow – but within 24 hours they were back in their barracks whilst their boss was ignominiously packed off to Belarus under an agreement with President Putin.

Yevgeny Prigozhin is, of course, no Duce. Benito Mussolini was already a national figure when his followers marched on the Italian capital. His fascist movement had significant backing from the Italian ruling class – including army chiefs, nationalists, business leaders and members of the royal family. They wanted an iron-fist regime that would deal with the unions, the 'Reds' and the assorted socialists that they feared would lead to anarchy or a Bolshevik revolution. But they needed a front-man.

Mussolini wasn't even their first choice. Gabriele D'Annunzio, the fiery nationalist poet, didn't want the job. Neither did General Peppino Garibaldi – the grandson of the great Italian liberator of the 19th Century. So it finally went to a turn-coat socialist – the immensely vain and ambitious Mussolini. Needless to say, the future "Duce" didn't do any marching – he took the train to Rome from Milan.

Prigozhin, an oligarch who made his fortune in the catering and entertainment industries during the worthless Yeltsin era, is neither a politician nor a professional soldier. He has no support on the Russian street. He made no appeal to working people apart from a diatribe against the Ukrainian conflict that seemed to blame Putin for the war, and he didn't get any support from any sections of the Russian oligarchy or the armed forces.

Russia's communists closed ranks to defend the people of the Donbas when they cried out for help against Ukrainian terror. They closed ranks around country last weekend to stop the Wagner legion's march on Moscow.

Prigozhin's revolt was met with glee in the Western chancelleries. They hoped for civil war or a coup that would give them and their Ukrainian pawns the victory that has so far eluded them on the battlefield. The Wagner boss certainly basked briefly in the praise of the self-styled Western gurus who told us this was the end for Putin and that a Ukrainian victory was just around the corner.

As Putin said: "They were rubbing their hands in glee as they dreamed of revenge for their failures on the front during their so-called counteroffensive, but they miscalculated."

So did Prigozhin.

Some say Prigozhin was lashing out because his private army was going to be incorporated, against his will, into the regular Russian armed forces. Others believe he was bought off by Western intelligence.

Whatever his motives, Prigozhin's abortive revolt objectively served imperialism. US imperialism wants regime change in Russia. They want to get rid of Putin and his national bourgeois circle and replace him with a weak and pliant regime like that of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s that would break up the Russian Federation and open it up for plunder by the trans-national corporations.

Every oligarch has a price. Hopefully we will soon find out whether Prigozhin was suborned by Western intelligence...

Bitter battle for NATO job

by Ilya Tsukanov

Secretary of Defence Ben Wallace, seen by the media as the top candidate to replace Jens Stoltenberg when he resigns as NATO chief, announced last week that he has no plans to put his hat in the ring for the job. "It's not going to happen," Wallace said, suggesting the alliance may "want a prime minister" for the NATO chief role instead of a career military man like himself.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced in February that he would leave the job after his term expires in October. Last week, amidst reports of a deadlock regarding his replacement, Stoltenberg said he might stay on. Behind the scenes, a hidden transatlantic feud risks bubbling to the surface.

The British media reported earlier this month that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak planned personally to lobby Wallace's candidacy to US President Joe Biden as Stoltenberg's replacement. Stoltenberg, who became NATO chief in 2014, is the second-longest-serving secretary-general in NATO's history, behind only Dutch-born NATO chief Joseph Luns, who held the post between 1971 and 1984.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, another figure mentioned as a possible challenger to Stoltenberg, also brushed off her possible candidacy this month, saying she's not looking for a job and is "happy to be prime minister of Denmark".

Wallace's comments follow reports late last week that the USA had expressed unspecified "reservations" about the British defence chief's candidacy, with some US military officials reportedly "unhappy" with his "forcing the pace" on the crisis in Ukraine.

Formally, NATO's rules require consensus of all 31 of its members to choose a new secretary-general. In place of a

vote, members simply discuss potential candidates until a mutually-agreeable name can be found. In practice, major NATO bloc countries such as the USA, UK and France, as well as Germany, have more influence on the decision. An American occupies the bloc's top military position – the post of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), at all times, hinting at where the real power lies.

Alongside Wallace and Frederiksen, other names floated to replace Stoltenberg have included Canada's hawkish former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chrystia Freeland, who now serves as deputy prime minister, and Ursula von der Leyen, the former German defence minister now serving as president of the European Commission.

Ruling himself out of the race Wallace mentioned that whoever the next NATO chief is, they're "going to have to please both [French President Emmanuel] Macron and Biden". Those comments came after UK media reported last week that Paris had communicated to Washington and other NATO allies that France sought someone from the EU to take up the job and opposed Wallace's candidacy. Norway, Stoltenberg's home country, is not a member of the European economic bloc and the UK left the EU in 2020.

"I don't think that the Americans 'prefer' Stoltenberg," says Matthew Gordon-Banks, a former Conservative MP and senior research fellow at the UK Defence Academy.

"I think the Biden administration wishes to maintain the status quo up until the next US presidential elections in 2024, and it seems until then, US policy will continue to press Ukraine for further attempts at offensives in the meantime," he said.

"The easiest thing for the USA, who largely control NATO, is to keep Stoltenberg in place even longer as arguably the British government will not wish a parliamentary by-election were Ben Wallace to resign to take up the role of head of NATO."

As for President Macron's reported desire to see an EU official in the job, Gordon-Banks said he doesn't see "any high calibre candidates" mentioned so far who could rival Wallace in terms of political skills, military experience and support from Washington. Even if Wallace did take up the job, it would continue to be "business as usual" within the alliance, with the British defence chief "fully-paid up to the Western NATO narrative", Gordon-Banks said.

Dr Deepti Bisht, founder of UNIT – a UK-based defence and intelligence analysis resource – agrees with Gordon-Banks's assessment on the insignificance of French wishes as far as the NATO gen-sec post goes.

"The shots are being called by the United States. And frankly, unless there is a big decisive factor that Macron is putting forward, I don't think the US would listen to Macron on such an important matter," she said.

"Decisions of [this] sort are made in the United States keeping US interests in the centre. Whether EU states like it or not.

"What's going on behind the scenes is something difficult to gauge. But I guess the most important decision-making factor would be to see what Stoltenberg is representing. The Russia-Ukraine situation is primarily a European situation and Stoltenberg being a European, experienced in diplomacy and being the head of NATO for several years is the natural choice in this particular time."

Sputnik



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Workers' Notes

This week we take a look at industrial struggles in areas that do not normally make the headlines. These are undertaken both by the smaller trade unions and the biggest. Firstly we look at recent struggles carried out by the small non-TUC affiliated unions that specialise in organising migrant workers in precarious employment before throwing light on a nautical matter, weighty spiritual matters and finally concluding with high culture. Whilst the numbers may not be large, they have interesting lessons to teach trade unionists.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness

by New Worker correspondent

Firstly, over to the non-TUC-affiliated street union United Voices of the World (UVW), which has been organising its members, largely migrant workers, in taking industrial action at various locations across London.

About 45 low-paid cleaners, carers and concierge workers took action in mid-June, launched with a double decker bus tour around their battlegrounds in central London.

The seven workplaces involved across the public and private sector were predatory retailer Amazon's London HQ, PR firm Ogilvy, the London School of Economics (LSE), the Department of Education (DoE), Sage Nursing home, West End Quays luxury flats, and Streatham & Clapham High School.

All of these wealthy companies and organisations sub-contract many of their building services to exploitative companies.

Carlos Llerena, a cleaner at Streatham & Clapham High School, spoke for more than just his workplace when he said: "We do not want to be outsourced because it's almost like being sub-employed. This has a very negative effect on us workers,

as we are slowly losing all of our rights. We want our bosses to see that they have made the wrong choices because we are not prepared to give up our rights."

Naturally pay is top of the agenda. This varies from modest increases to the level of the London Living Wage (LLW), presently £11.95 per hour, as at Amazon. In other cases £13 or even £15 is demanded.

Demanding basic legal rights often has to be fought for. At the LSE the lawful entitlement to annual leave pay is the target. At the private Streatham & Clapham High School full sick pay is seen as an impertinent demand. At the DoE workers are simply demanding parity with Civil Service benefits.

Long hours are the order of the day. It is unlikely that the conditions described by Magaly Quesada Herrera, at La Retraite Roman Catholic School, are unique to her school: "As a general rule the vast majority of cleaners get up between 4am and 5am. We have to work at least 10 hours a day to barely make ends and tend to work several jobs of 1-2 hours. The jobs are in different places which means we are on the streets for approximately 12 to 14 hours a day, eating many times in buses, far from our families and with hardly any rest. On many occasions our only contact with our children is during the week and over mobile phone." The three one-day strikes are not the end of the struggle, but the beginning.

The dispute at La Retraite School will resume next week in conjunction with striking teachers belonging to the National Education Union (NEU). This action takes place after the school effectively tried to sack some cleaners as punishment for earlier winning a wage increase. This was done by changing hours to times when the School knew the cleaners had other jobs.

Roberto Hernández Diaz complained that "after many years working in that school in the schedule from 2.00pm to 5:30pm now the school wants to change our work schedule from 5:00pm to 7pm. Most of us cleaners would be forced to stop working at the school because many of us have other jobs we need to get to, which we need to pay our rent and food. So, it would be very difficult for us to



• UVW with visiting militant workers from the Philippines in London this month

make ends meet if the changes go ahead."

One of the UVW cleaners has been dismissed without being allowed to work their notice and three others suspended for, we believe, their active role in trade union activities in their workplace.

Petros Elia, the union's general secretary, said: "The school management has shown its true colours and the decision by the cleaning contractor – which we can't confirm wasn't taken in conjunction with the School – to dismiss one of our members and suspend three others on flimsy trumped up charges, is an outrageous act of union busting that we will respond to robustly."

These ongoing disputes follow on from two recent successful strikes organised by UVW. At the Mercedes showroom at Colindale in north London cleaners won a 25 per cent pay rise, whilst 19.5 per cent was won at the same company's Dartford showroom. Eleven per cent has been won at the Condé Nast offices in the Thames-side Adelphi Building in central London.

Their employer Samsic is now committed to raising wages automatically in line with the London Living Wage.

The two victories at Mercedes were against cleaning providers SBFM Limited. Maritza Bolívar, a UVW member and cleaner at Colindale, said this was a win for everyone and encouraged other workers in similar conditions to follow suit.

A Dartford cleaner added: "The cost of living in the UK is very high and the pay very bad, so we will support the comrades who continue in the struggle.

We'll continue to fight because this is about moving forward and supporting each other."

Amazon cleaner José Francisco Mora Varón rallied cleaners across the country by saying: "To those workers that are already union members, don't let your bosses divide you, and to those who are not, join the struggle without any fear in the knowledge that there are those who are going through the same situation. Do not allow fear to defeat you. This is the strategy that all companies use to make us believe that they are in the right, so that we let ourselves be trampled on, so that we let ourselves be pressured. Don't be afraid of losing your job, because at the end of the day this is happening everywhere in the UK."

Apart from sick pay and holiday pay issues, the struggle is also against outsourcing, which enables huge organisations to "shirk social responsibility and accountability towards the workers they indirectly employ". UVW says it is nonsense for the ultimate employer to claim they have no power to intervene, or that is not their responsibility because it is them who dictate every dot and comma in the contracts that impose the cost-cutting at the expense of the workers' material, physical and mental health.

Lighting the Way

by New Worker correspondent

Lighthouse keepers more frequently feature in fiction where they go mad from isolation rather than in the annals of working-class struggle.

gle. But on Monday and Tuesday workers employed by Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) took noon-to-noon 24-hour strike action. About 40 Unite members, such as able seamen, base assistants, cooks and technicians, walked out. Although there are no longer constantly manned lighthouses, the NLB maintains two lightships and 208 lighthouses around the Scottish coastline and the Isle of Man. Even in this age of satellite navigation there is a real need for old-fashioned lights.

After a lengthy ballot in April, Unite NLB members voted to support taking strike action after rejecting a miserable two per cent pay offer by 90.6 per cent in a turnout of 86.5 per cent. Thus is well below pay offers made to other public sector organisations and follows a pay freeze last year.

The NLB's HQ is based in Edinburgh's New Town but its main base is in Oban, where its two ships are based along with workshops for the maintenance and construction of beacons and buoys. It also has smaller bases in Inverness, Shetland and Orkney.

On the eve of the strike, industrial officer Alison MacLean said: "The strike action by our NLB members is historic and the first in a generation. The reality is that talks with the NLB have run aground. This is largely down to the UK Government, who finance the NLB, not providing the extra finances required to make a better offer to our members."

General Secretary Sharon Graham skilfully deployed a number of metaphors by adding that the union "will continue to push the boat out in defence of our members, and they will have our full support in their fight for better jobs, pay and conditions", adding: "We are demanding that the Scottish Government intervene and apply pressure on the UK Government to resolve this dispute or it is in danger of remaining in troubled waters."

Down the Nave

by our Ecclesiastical Affairs correspondent

Another group of workers not noted for industrial militancy are Church of

England (CoE) clergy, who for the first time in their history submitted a formal pay claim. The claim was lodged by the Church of England Clergy & Employee Advocates (CEECA), part of Unite the union's Faith Workers Branch. The Church of England's Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee (RACSC) graciously invited CEECA to make their proposals.

Life is apparently hard being a clergyman or woman. The Clergy Support Trust recently reported that nearly a fifth of clergy households turned to them for charitable aid in 2022 to make ends meet.

The CEECA politely requested that the clerical national minimum stipend be increased to £29,340 from 1st April 2024 and the national stipend benchmark be increased to £31,335. Unite has also wants a new national funding system to ensure that dioceses can afford to pay their clergy.

Sharon Graham said: "Like all workers Church of England clergy are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. While many will argue their work is a vocation, the simple truth is that on their current rewards they are among the working poor.

"The Church of England has billions in the bank and can fully afford to pay its clergy the modest increase in their stipend they

are seeking. The clergy deliver a clear message for the Church of faith in the hereafter. Unite is fighting for a better deal for them in the here and now."

Times are tough. At clerical outfitters Charles Ferris a simple Polywool single-breasted cassock will set you back £235.62, but the CoE is well able to afford a decent rise. It is good at serving Mammon. The Church Commissioners report it has £10.3 billion in the bank. It is doubtless due to divine blessings that it increases its holdings by an impressive 10.2 per cent per year.

Horsham vicar and CEECA chair Sam Maginnis said: "Clergy have been working tirelessly to support their local communities through the cost-of-living crisis: facilitating and co-ordinating vital services and activities, providing personal care and guidance to individuals in need, and speaking hope and a sense of togetherness in unstable and uncertain times. However, last year many clergy had to turn to charitable aid because they couldn't make ends meet.

"All clergy should be paid at a level that secures relief from financial hardship, promotes personal well-being and enables them to effectively serve and support their local communities. The proposed increase is necessary to start bringing pay back in line with inflation while addressing the most urgent hardship and anxiety faced by too many clergy and their families."

We look forward to militants from Unite's Association of Methodist Faith Workers and Bolshevik Baptists taking up the same call in their denominations.

The Faith Workers Branch was founded in 1994 when it was part of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF) union. Many of the first wave were not of the most revolutionary types, being Anglican clergy fearful for their jobs if they did not accept the introduction of women priests. It was originally for clergy but now covers others employed by religious organisations.

It has played an important role in disputes involving religious charities such as the St Mungo housing trust, which has featured on these pages.

It is not the only union with vicars as members, both Prospect and the Prison Officers Association recruit prison chaplains. Community, the former Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and knit workers merger, also has a Faith Workers sector.

Anglican clergy have a vague employment status as it is not entirely clear if they are employed by the CoE or directly by the Almighty. Whereas a private or public employer would get into trouble for sacking someone for their beliefs, it can happen to clergymen if they change their views on theological matters.

As a result of the many sexual scandals involving clergy, strict new safeguarding rules have been

put in place. CEECA complains that ecclesiastical bosses too easily cave in when complaints, justified or malicious, are made against the clergy. CEECA claims to be based on Reformation era Anabaptist theology and points to the term "Father of the Chapel" for senior shop stewards as a justification for clerical organisation.

Unsurprisingly, about two-thirds of the Unite branch are Anglicans. This has caused some dissent. Complaints have been made that the majority of members who are white discriminate against black members. Battles have been fought over charges that the Branch does not allow a Black Section.

A former National Secretary of the Branch, David Isiorho, a Black Anglican clergyman now based at Lichfield, has published a whole book, *Faith in Unions*, attacking the branch and its present leadership for its alleged discrimination. He complains that former General Secretary Len McCluskey was hostile and that the Branch is still unsympathetic to Muslims and Hindus.

This correspondent is uncertain what to make of these charges, but it appears there is a different sort of factionalism at work in the Branch than the normal left-right battles in British trade unions.

Some Rabbis have also resigned alleging the union is anti-Semitic, but this seems to be the normal attack on anyone

who points out that the Israeli policies towards Palestinians are not entirely spotless.

A night at the opera

by New Worker correspondent

Opera is rarely seen as a trade union issue. The actors' union Equity and the Musicians' Union recently won a partial victory in opposing plans by Arts Council England (ACE) to defund the English National Opera (ENO) unless it moves out of London. ENO workers from Equity and the Musicians' Union successfully secured cross-party support for their campaign to keep the ENO in London, but this victory came at a cost because the ENO will now have to maintain two sites on a reduced income.

Equity fears redundancies will result. It points out that ENO's Chorus members currently represent one-third of all the permanent opera chorus workforce in the country, and the stage management roles are rare permanent jobs in the industry.

The high redundancy payments costs would mean that surviving jobs would be subject to fire-and-rehire on a wide scale, resulting in formerly permanent jobs being reduced to precarious, freelance work.

Lottie Stables, Equity's Industrial Official responsible for Opera, said that: "A cultural institution that makes opera affordable and accessible, and our members' livelihoods, are being put at risk by an ill-conceived requirement establish a primary base out of London. Equity will continue to defend our members' jobs, and fight for properly funded opera accessible to all – including working class Londoners."

The Musicians Union agrees but warns the greatly reduced funding now needed to stretch across two workplaces, which will impact immediately on the amount of opera ENO can effectively produce and deliver. This means ticket sales and donor investment will fall, making the Company proportionately more reliant on ACE funding.

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

New Worker 4th July 2003

UNION LEADERS Tony Woodley and Bob Crow last week made empathic calls for Tony Blair and the whole New Labour clique to step aside, demanding that the Labour Party be restored as a party for the working class.

At the annual conference of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in Brighton, newly-elected general secretary Tony Woodley said that the days of New Labour "are numbered" and that working men and women felt "bitter disappointment" towards the Government.

He asked why Blair's government was

the first Labour government to extend privatisation; to do nothing to prevent job losses and to preside over an increase in the gap between rich and poor.

"The days of New Labour are now numbered," he said. "Working people want something different. I say it is time to reclaim our party, not walk away from it as a few on the fringes would argue but reclaim it for the values of working-class men and women, the values of socialism."

He said he planned to work with the leaders of other unions to put Labour "back in our party".

His remarks came just after RMT general secretary Bob Crow told the union's annual conference that union funding for Labour could be withdrawn and re-directed to other, more working-class friendly parties.

At the RMT conference in Glasgow, Bob Crow blasted Blair as a war criminal and

threatened to disaffiliate his union from the Labour Party, divert funds to the Scottish Socialist Party, Plaid Cymru and the Greens in England, and back independent London Mayor and suspended rebel Labour MP George Galloway.

Conference voted to give support to these parties and halved its contributions to Labour from £25,000 to £12,500. A year ago its regular support was over £100,000.

Labour Party general secretary David Triesman warned that if RMT did support other parties standing against Labour candidates, it would "put itself beyond party rules" and face possible expulsion.

This could precipitate the kind of split that other left union leaders are trying to avoid. If all major unions disaffiliated, the Blair clique will be left in control and unchallenged. They will probably then seek and probably gain, replacement funding from big business.

Visiting Russia during sanctions and war

by Theo Russell

On a recent visit to Russia to attend an activist conference in Moscow I gained a fascinating impression of this great and civilised country during a time of war.

Just getting to Moscow was quite a challenge. I ended up flying to Helsinki, taking a bus to St Petersburg (the trains run by Russian Railways are suspended), and a train to Moscow.

There was much talk of long delays at the border, with some being questioned by Russian border staff and the fact that Finland had just joined NATO. So there were any number of things that could have gone wrong and it was a huge relief to actually arrive in Russia.

The other problem was being unable to use any Western cards or payment apps, which entailed relying on people living in Russia buying rail tickets for me. It wasn't possible to buy Russian roubles in London, or even at Helsinki airport, so I had to take US dollars (the easiest to exchange) and rely almost completely on cash.

The overall impression I gained was of an incredibly civilised, very modern and dynamic country. From the time I came into the outskirts of St Petersburg, on the journey to Moscow and in Moscow itself there was new building work everywhere, many impressive looking modern buildings, and the transport, road and rail infrastructure was in perfect condition – a huge contrast with Britain's degraded infrastructure.

Unlike Europe and the USA, despite the sanctions the Russian Federation has extremely low unemployment and inflation, virtually no national debt, and huge



• Vosstaniya Square, St Petersburg

reserves of foreign currencies and gold. Russia has more than recouped the assets illegally seized by Britain and the USA.

I was in Moscow for about a week, spending most of my time in the suburbs and travelling right to the city boundaries in the north, south and east. Everywhere I went I saw new, beautifully designed flats, and even the bus stops right at the edge of the city looked very modern and clean.

I asked many comrades "where are the poor run-down areas with high crime levels?" but travelling all over the city I didn't come across a single area that wasn't pleasant, green and extremely safe. I was told that the suburb of Xovrina had been rough and dangerous 25 years ago but was now regarded as very desirable. These comrades had no reason to paint a rosy picture.

As for the Western-backed

sanctions – supported by only 30 of the UN's 193 members (including the USA's Pacific dominions) – there was virtually no sign. In fact there are more empty shelves and missing items in UK shops, for various reasons, than in Russia.

Even the medium-sized supermarkets on housing estates (these were built in Soviet times) found all over Moscow had all the daily needs of local people and of a very high standard. One very ordinary small suburban supermarket had a freezer with different types of caviar, the most expensive costing £13.

Many Western – and British – companies still operate in Russia, including KFC, Marriott hotels, Subway, Auchan and Spar supermarkets, Philips, AstraZeneca, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Carlsberg, JP Morgan, Microsoft, Spotify, Toyota, Nestlé, Red Bull, Total, Unilever, Benetton and TGI Friday.

One unintended result of the Western sanctions is that the wealthy oligarchs have returned their assets to Russia and are now investing their enormous funds in Russia.

Moscow is an incredibly green city. Even on suburban housing estates where ordinary workers live, behind the blocks of flats are large areas of greenery and children's playing areas. I spent one night in a 13th floor 1970s Soviet-era flat. Whilst parts of it could do with a makeover, it was a lovely and surprisingly large flat with an enormous main bedroom. The area outside was clean, pleasant and safe.

I don't mean here to paint a perfect picture of the situation in Russia, I'm well aware that Moscow and St Petersburg are not wholly representative of this vast country, and that there are many problems in Russia. But we have to acknowledge that it is an extremely well-run country.

I was told that most Moscow residents prefer to buy their flats. But the boom in construction of new blocks, with a far higher architectural standard than in Britain and similar to that in Germany or the Netherlands, is also a boom for property developers.

One comrade told me that mafia gangs were targeting elderly and vulnerable people to force them out of their flats, and that many migrants, mainly from the former Soviet Central Asian republics, were crowded into flats in large numbers. That was only one person, however, and I didn't see any signs of corruption, gangs or criminal types, something I certainly came across in Moscow when I visited at the time of Gorbachev.

I also asked comrades about racism and racist attacks in Moscow and St Petersburg, which were sadly commonplace in the 1990s and early 2000s. All confirmed that both racism and racist attacks in the cities are virtually non-existent today, a very positive piece of news.

According to Scott Ritter, who recently visited several Russian cities, Moscow receives more government money than other cities, but he says cities such as Novosibirsk and Ekaterinburg were also flourishing, and in fact had cash to spare and were looking for new projects to fund.

In Moscow, the transport system is infinitely better, and far cheaper, than London's. A single metro ticket for the whole network costs 60p, less than a quarter of that in London and a tenth of the cash fare, but the service is far more frequent and there are no signal failures, train failures or 'shortages of driv-

continued on page 6...

...continued from page 5

ers'. I also used buses and trams, which were modern and clean.

Russia is also a surprisingly modern, hi-tech society. Few in the West realise that Russia is one of only three countries with their own internet and social media infrastructure, the others being the USA and China. Here in Britain we are almost totally dependent on US platforms for our maps, e-commerce and media.

The Russian postal service has very smart-looking parcel collection lockers in metro stations. There are apps to locate and instantly use cars or scooters on the streets. Yandex, the Russian equivalent of Google (with its own global maps), has very smart Chinese cars parked everywhere for instant hire. Most Russians use mobile payment apps rather than cash.

Every metro station (in Moscow or St Petersburg) is fully staffed, including ticket offices – very useful for confused foreign visitors! All stations also have security staff and bag x-ray machines, a legacy of past terrorist bomb attacks.

One amazing discovery on my trip was the "stolovaya" restaurants, which originated in the 1920s to provide affordable meals for workers and to liberate

women from domestic drudgery.

These 'canteens' can be found everywhere, with several on St Petersburg's Nevsky Prospekt, and offer a huge range of very healthy and high-quality food, incredibly cheaply and even affordable for pensioners (I checked). Many are even open 24 hours! There are also several commercial chains modelled on the stolovayas, all equally high standard and cheap, which can be found all over Moscow.

Although there are many Western-style fast food chains, Russian fast-food chains sell very healthy traditional dishes. I saw no equivalent of the fried chicken and pizza shops that saturate working-class areas in Britain.

In Moscow I visited an enormous shopping centre, complete with a beautiful ice skating rink. I tried the re-branded Russian McDonalds (controversially named "Tasty – and That's It!"). The food was excellent and there were plenty of people queuing there.

Another discovery was the currency exchange offices on which I was totally dependent. Although they close at 6pm, they are extremely safe, some with security guards at the door, very fast and professional. The rates are fixed, so



• New flats in Southern Moscow

no need to look around to avoid being conned.

In general, Russia is incredibly cheap. I stayed in a 'two-star' hotel in the centre of St Petersburg the size of a small flat, with living room and bedroom areas, two TVs, kettle with tea/coffee and en suite bathroom, for £25.

As the US journalist Scott Ritter points out: "If you convert roubles into dollars it wouldn't translate to what many Americans earn, but the rouble buys four times what the dollar does. If you go to a Russian supermarket and buy a basket of shopping, what would cost you thirty dollars in the United States costs six dollars in Russia."

The train journeys to and from St Petersburg-Moscow were a great experience. Having missed my fast train to Moscow, with help from a very patient cashier I managed to re-book for a 'slow' train (5h 48m for a 392 mile trip) on the same day, for only £14. It was the smoothest rail journey I've ever experienced. On the way back I took

a sleeper train with my own compartment, for £65. The trains run exactly on schedule and the staff are very smart, efficient and friendly.

In the stations there were displays on the contribution the railways made in the Second World War in memory of Victory Day on 9th May, and the front cover of the Russian Railways monthly magazine was the hammer and sickle flag being raised over the Reichstag in 1945.

Many people have asked me about signs that Russia was at war. In the rail and metro stations, and next to main roads, there are many posters and video signs showing the 'Z' symbol or encouraging recruitment to the military. Whilst writing this I heard that in May alone around 13,500 people volunteered to join up.

Apart from that there were few signs, except that Google and Yandex (the Russian equivalent) maps, and navigation apps went down on a couple of evenings in Moscow. As a result I lost my way once, and

a comrade who was driving me somewhere eventually gave up and ordered a taxi.

I was also aware of the Ukrainian terrorist attacks in St Petersburg and near Moscow, but there is tight security everywhere, all done politely and professionally. The night I returned to St Petersburg eight drones reached Moscow, two of which landed not far from where I had spent a night. Most were brought down, and there was only superficial damage.

I spent one day in St Petersburg, a very pleasant, beautiful and proud city with a rich history, and very much a seaport city. Opposite the Moskovsky Station on Vosstaniya Square is a huge sign lit up at night, "Hero City – Leningrad". I was very lucky to be given a tour of the main sights by two comrades from the St Petersburg Communist Party (CPRF) Komsomol. If anything I found Petersburg even more friendly than Moscow.

Unlike the car park next to Helsinki Vantaa airport where I caught the bus to St Peters-

burg, the Petersburg bus station was the nicest I have come across in many years of international bus travel. Dating from Soviet times, it had everything a traveller needs including food and drink counters at 6:30am, souvenir shops and large plant displays.

Despite the many problems to overcome, the visit was a fascinating experience. My impression is the Russian Federation is an extremely strong and self-reliant country. It is increasingly clear that throwing every possible sanction at Russia has had very little effect, and the country, whose economic fundamentals are in far better shape than other European states or the USA, is now returning to growth.

Returning to Britain with its depressing, crumbling infrastructure, a country where there are no reasons to be optimistic about the future, I am now missing

Russia and its people and would like to return there at the first opportunity. It is a country I would love to live in.



• Obvodny bus station, St Petersburg



• St Petersburg–Moscow train, Moskovsky Station



• New house on outskirts of Petersburg



• Some of the many food choices at Stolovaya No 1

Prisoners of war – in Russia and Ukraine

by Evgeny Glebov

Prisoners of war (POWs) are usually treated according to rank. Officers get better treatment. They can be used as camp supervisors. They can refuse to work at all. But other ranks often end up doing heavy, and sometimes meaningless jobs, poorly fed and treated quite cruelly. The Nazis and the Japanese militarists even carried out hideous experiments on them.

Prisoners of war have, however, long been treated differently in Russia. In the 18th Century, Peter the Great set new standards. The Czar understood that they would have to be sent home when war ended. On his orders prisoners were well-kept and paid the going rate for their work. Many retained fond memories of their days in captivity.

It was the same in Soviet times. For example, there was a separate Main Directorate for Internees and Prisoners of War within the interior ministry (the NKVD) the GUIVP, and not the

Gulag. The food standards in the GUIVP were higher than in the Gulag, set at the level of the norms for Soviet workers.

Prisoners of war had to work but they could choose their own foremen. At first, of course, the officers were the foremen, but gradually life put everyone in their place. If an officer could only command and not really lead the team, then he was soon replaced.

Ordinary soldiers retained many kind memories of Soviet captivity. Wehrmacht and the Japanese officers didn't like being treated the same as other ranks and

obliged to engage in productive work. One of the few exceptions was Konrad Lorenz, a well-known zoologist and Nobel Prize winner. He was a doctor and in captivity he learned a lot from Russian colleagues. He praised the Russian captivity very much.

The same cannot be said about the Ukrainians. They treat their Russian POWs in the traditional Western way. The Russians are held in very harsh conditions. Many are bullied, mutilated and tortured.

Ukrainians in Russian captivity are kept according to the usual norms of prisoners in

Russia. The food, treatment and the absence of abuse comes as a pleasant surprise to them.

Many Russian citizens are surprised by the ongoing exchange of prisoners during the conflict. POWs are usually freed after a truce and after former enemy soldiers at least partially make amends for their crimes.

Now it is happening during in the course of hostilities. War criminals have a completely different attitude than ordinary POWs; and they very often do not even have time to acknowledge their guilt for participating in the crimes of their regime.

Moreover, the Ukrainian side wants only to exchange officers and stubborn Nazis. They don't care about ordinary soldiers.

It is quite possible that the Ukrainian side is deliberately exploiting traditional Russian humanism for its own purposes. This is a typical psychology of criminals – to take kindness for weakness. But they do not understand that in the end they will have to answer for everything.

Russia sees the exchange of prisoners as a way to get our people out of trouble. But the Kiev military authorities are pursuing much

more cunning goals. Zelensky refuses to exchange his wounded because they can no longer fight. He chooses only the healthy.

First, they demand the release of only physically fit prisoners to send them back to the front. Some have ended back in Russian POW camps two or three times over the last year.

What is interesting for a researcher, but angers me as a person, is that they easily track the condition of prisoners of war on social networks. And most importantly, they very accurately seek the exchange of those who have retained their Nazi ideology in captivity.

We are forced to exchange these Nazis just to get our Russian POWs out. And as a result, quite motivated Nazis again lead the units of Ukrainians, who are sent to the meat grinder on the battle line.

It seems that something needs to be changed in the ways of dealing with the Kiev military on prisoner exchanges...

MART



• Ukrainian POWs in Russian hands

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Many individuals in my local Momentum group maintain a passionate support for the Palestinians against exterminator settler imperialism. But those running the economy in the UK cannot understand this view. They cannot imagine an economic system based on anything other than the 'get out of there so I take your land, your wealth and even your place'. As a result therefore, they deny the existence in the world of the Workers State economy based on production for human need.

In the Labour Party, the continuation of the *Labour Briefing* magazine (calling itself "the Original"), along with pro-Palestinian others, demonstrates that there is still some political life in the Party. This is greatly sustained by the trade unions not having marched away from Labour. With the approach of the black clouds of world war, the trade unions are unlikely to jettison their Labour point of class concentration and centralisation.

So, it would be wrong to just turn away from the political life that remains in the Labour Party on grounds of objection to leaderships.

In practice and for electoral purposes, it would be good to take part in hustings and encourage the Labour members who still defend ordinary workers. In future elections, Labour comrades and Labour 'exiles' could decide to support (politically) the best candidates in their areas and lend support to independents where necessary. As we are down to the fight for the right to live, there should be no shortage of friends of the working class.

I make you a prediction: the Independents, Corbyn

included, will not do well in the elections. This is so because the choice goes on being between Tories and Labour.

Jeremy Corbyn could still make a difference as an Independent, however, if he organised his constituents (and allies) into a Left Labour current. Starting from his constituency, even as a small core, he could organise for the official re-adoption of his programme and work from there towards building a national tendency of Labour. He still has enough support for this.

Only, like Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn has a parliamentary take on politics. He criticises the employers' class and their indefensible imperialist deeds, but he stops when it comes to the Party's political functioning. He had a thousand opportunities to dismiss the right of his shadow cabinet and draw on working-class substitutes. He never called out the Parliamentary Labour Party, its monarchist loyalists, its cowards and its traitors. He never organised in the Party against the Labour 'triage' system that enables his enemies to become MPs, fill most Labour benches and expel his supporters. This is not an oversight on his part. It is a policy that still trusts in capitalism. This makes him unable and unwilling to give the fight in the Party on a socialist basis.

As Corbyn is unlikely to start this now, the task of creating a Left Labour current is falling on ordinary comrades. Not a small job. It consists in confronting the combined strength of the capitalist and Labour apparatus in the Labour Party. Proof that this Labour apparatus combines with the capitalist class shows in the hold it grants, for instance, to the imperialist lobby over the Labour Party, the Party's conferences and the Labour regions – much of

this with tentacles in the unions, the local councils, the universities and beyond.

As the ordinary comrades face this combined front of domination, they need a powerful anchoring in the trade unions and working class (in Britain and internationally). They need consistent and political work in the trade unions for the aim of a Left Labour current in mind. The 2024 elections are not more important than this.

Sensing this is going to happen eventually, and even quicker should war start engulfing the country, the right-wing union and Labour apparatuses cling all the more desperately to Starmer's coat-tails – and he to the capitalist state's. The UK is one of the six European countries where the USA and NATO proliferate their B612 atom bombs, along with any number of Stealth F35 atom bombers.

The plausibility of a general strike at some point causes the trade union bureaucracies to retreat in terror towards the employers' class, in search of continued protection for their 'go-between' bureaucratic roles between labour and capital. But capitalism has no protections left to offer them. What better example than the "minimum service" legislation to prove it? Why then are they so supportive of Starmer and his handlers? Answer: they are terrified of the working class. Should the unions decide to break the 'law' – and strike all at once – the bureaucrats joining the workers will be annulled as bureaucrats, and the bureaucrats siding with the bosses will lose their power to the workers.

Another one of my predictions therefore: The longer the Labour and trade union right-wingers are allowed to consort with the bosses' class, the more radically they will be extirpated from their bureaucratic roles by the working class. And the longer the Labour left current takes to develop, the more likely it will be stimulated to adopt the anti-nuke and anti-NATO programme that was always missing from Jeremy Corbyn's manifestos.

Marie Lynam
NW London

Dear Comrades

On the 14th June, the BBC, aka the British Brainwashing Corporation, broadcast a programme full of lies claiming that people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) were starving.

If the BBC were right about the DPRK, by now everyone in the country would have starved to death not once but several times over!

The BBC does not have reporters inside the DPRK. In fact, the borders of the DPRK were closed in January 2020, so the BBC has no access to people in the DPRK.

To make matters worse, the BBC claimed that they carried out interviews with DPRK citizens with the help of the *Daily NK*, a south Korean anti-DPRK propaganda (so-called online newspaper) website linked to the CIA and south Korean intelligence as well as ultra-rightists and south Korean nazis. It receives funding from the US government-funded 'National Endowment for Democracy'. Even the south Korean 'Unification Ministry' once criticised the *Daily NK* for what it called a "flood of raw, unconfirmed reports" about the DPRK. The *Daily NK* has become notorious for wild stories that are usually proved false a few months later.

The fact that the BBC admits that the *Daily NK* was involved proves that it is a fake story! The so-called evidence offered was third-hand reports and anecdotal, which was almost certainly false in the first place.

In the DPRK all citizens are supplied with food at low cost as well as free housing, free education and free health care. The DPRK has a State Price Commission that controls prices.

Let us reject the lies of the BBC about People's Korea! People should cancel their TV licence and stop paying for the BBC's lies and the lavish lifestyles of lying BBC reporters!

Dermot Hudson
Chairman of Korean Friendship Association UK
south London

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.

UNTIL 9 SEPT

John Rylands Library: Workers' Playtime: culture and community in industrial Lancashire. Exhibition, 10:00–17:00 Weds-Sat. Free. Deansgate, Manchester.

SAT 1 JULY

Women Chainmakers' Festival: High Street, Cradley Heath, West Midlands.

SAT 1 JUL

International Brigade Memorial Trust: Annual commemoration. 13:00, Jubilee Gardens, Belvedere Road, London SE1 7PH.

SUN 2 JUL

Bevan Day – celebrating 75 years of the NHS, 11:00–15:00, Bedwellty Park, Tredegar, NP22 3XN.

SUN 2–24 JUL

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Freedom Flotilla ship visiting ports to highlight the Israeli blockade of Gaza: Liverpool 2–4, Cardiff: 7–10, Bristol 10–19, Southampton 21–24. Details on PSC website.

WED 5 JUL

Unite the Union: Protest the Party – Save our NHS. Protest at a Tory NHS anniversary dinner 18:00–20:00 outside the Carlton Club, 69 St James's Street, London, SW1A 1PJ.

WED 5 JUL

Keep Our NHS Public: Online rally to mark the 75th birthday of the NHS. 18:30
www.facebook.com/

The editor welcomes letters from our readers. If you have a contribution to make please make sure it reaches us before Wednesday. You can send your letters to: PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ, or email party@NCP.clara.net

events/962492601458279.

THUR 6 JUL

Marx Memorial Library: Commemorating British Labour History: Foundations & Future Plans. 19:00, Online symposium. Book on MML website.

SAT 8 JUL

Durham Miners Association: Durham Miners Gala, The Racecourse, Durham, DH1

FRI 14 JUL–SUN 16 JUL

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival: Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle, DT2 7EH.

THUR 20 JUL

Marx Memorial Library: Spencer A Leonard: Marx on India: The Immanent Dialectical Critique of (Anti-)Imperialism 19:00. Onsite and online lecture Book on MML website. MML, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU

28 JUL–30 DEC

Working Class Movement Library: That Impudent Little Party: The Independent Labour Party 1893–1975. Exhibition, Wed-Fri afternoons, WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX.

THUR 6 AUG

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Hiroshima Day commemorations. See CND website for local events including Nagasaki day on Sun 9 August.

SUN 3 SEPT

Burston Strike School rally: Church Green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk.

MON 4 SEPT–FRI 15 SEPT

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Protests at DSEI Arms Fair. London's Royal Docks, London E16.

SUN 10 SEPT–WED 13 SEPT

Trades Union Congress: 115th Congress 2023, Congress, ACC Liverpool King's Dock, King's Dock Street, Liverpool, L3 4FP.

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

Caird Hall, in Dundee was the venue for the SNP's "Independence Convention" last Saturday. This was open to any SNP member willing to pay a tenner to attend. Caird Hall has a capacity of 2,000 but just under a thousand of a claimed 74,489 membership did so. It replaced the regular Spring conference that was hastily cancelled after Nicola Sturgeon's sudden resignation.

The meeting was designed as more of a rally than a decision-making conference. This was obvious from the line-up of speakers, who were all close allies of the leadership: Humza Yousaf himself, former deputy First Minister John Swinney, the present deputy leader and the Westminster group leaders. No dissenting voices, such as Fergus Ewing or Joanna Cherry, were allowed on the platform. Kate Forbes, the unsuccessful leadership challenger, was allowed on the platform but only to chair a session, which imposed a sort of neutrality on her. Nicola Sturgeon was nowhere to be seen.

Matters such as breaking-down ferries, overdue, over-budget and unbuilt ferries, NHS

waiting times, bottle recycling schemes, gender recognition and striking junior doctors were left at the front door, and all eyes were on the SNP's so-called independence strategy (which basically means they want to hand over powers to Brussels). Only a heckler from the floor demanding a public inquiry into an incompetent surgeon who had left her in pain interrupted the love-in. She was initially booed by the delegates but Yousaf took time-off to speak to her.

The problem for the SNP leadership is that the party is going nowhere. The constant demands for a second independence referendum have been rejected by Westminster and the Supreme Court. All they've got in its place is Yousaf's bright idea, adopted at the Convention, to make the next General Election a de facto referendum. The SNP would then claim victory if they secured a majority of seats and begin negotiations with Westminster for another referendum. This was considered before by the SNP, but whereas Nicola Sturgeon thought that the SNP winning over 50 per cent of the votes would be a mandate, Yousaf declared that the SNP winning a simple majority of seats would be sufficient to start talking about dissolving the Act of Union.

There are, or course, a few things wrong with this plan. The SNP are unlikely to remain the largest single party at the next general election. Even if they do so with about 35-40 per

cent of the vote (Labour comfortably won the 2005 election with 35.2 per cent of the vote) that isn't a strong hand to play in any hypothetical negotiations, a fact not unobserved by friend and foe of the SNP. As the SNP presently have 46 of the 59 Scottish Westminster seats, they could do this right now. This is not enough to sway the Westminster parliament, which ultimately has the final say, to change its mind.

Making a second independence referendum the central plank in the SNP election manifesto will hardly win over wavering voters more concerned with the pressing issues on the street.

Scottish Labour deputy leader (now Dame) Jackie Baillie bluntly says: "Humza Yousaf has made it clear - if your priority isn't a divisive and disruptive referendum, the SNP doesn't want your vote." Ian Murray, who is Labour's Shadow Scottish Secretary as he is their only MP, says Yousaf has produced "a losers' referendum" to distract from the NHS and economy: "Humza Yousaf is clearly preparing for failure with these plans, which seem to suggest that even if his party haemorrhage seats at the next election they will take it as a mandate to continue focusing on separation."

SNP Perth MP Pete Wishart also put the boot into Yousaf's plan, saying "it would have to be 50 per cent plus [of votes] for it to carry any credibility", adding "and I just don't believe it would be possible to move to a situation where we're trying to progress independence, not taking a majority of the Scottish people with us".

Yousaf has already had

his first electoral test. The SNP lost heavily to Labour in the Bellshill council by-election. This saw Labour increase its vote by 13 per cent and the SNP fall by the same amount. The combined SNP, Green and Alba vote was 33 per cent, and this is in one of the only four local authorities to vote Yes in 2014. This was an easy win for Labour because the election was caused by the enforced resignation of the SNP's former North Lanarkshire council leader after his colourful private life became public property. Despite the departure of the offending councillor, questions are being asked as to why the SNP leadership put so much effort into trying to save his career and attacked his critics within the party, a policy leading to the defection of six SNP councillors to form their own local party.

If Labour's lead holds, then the Bellshill result is likely to be replicated in the general election. Even if the nationalists hold the balance of power in a hung Parliament, Labour will simply call the Scottish nationalists' bluff and tell the SNP to vote with the Tories if they don't like Labour.

The Scottish Labour Party also has its own problems. The well-publicised resignation of former Aberdeen Lord Provost Barney Crockett (who delivered the 2001 Marx Memorial graveside oration) in protest at Sir Keir Starmer's plan to halt North Sea oil production (a policy imposed in the SNP by the Greens) is only the tip of the iceberg of a serious dispute within the party and the unions that have members employed in the industry, but that is small beer compared with the SNP's troubles...

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Hainan Airlines restores Edinburgh flights

by New Worker
correspondent

China's Hainan Airlines on Monday relaunched its regular flight operation between Edinburgh and Beijing. Hainan Airlines now flies twice per week from Edinburgh to Beijing, on Mondays and on Fridays.

Hainan Airlines is the fourth largest airline in the People's Republic of China. With hubs at Haikou, Hainan island's provincial capital, as well as Beijing, the airline has non-stop flights to about 90 domestic and international destinations.

Hainan Airlines was established in January 1993 in Hainan province, China's largest special economic zone and free trade port. As of 2022, the company had around 1,700 domestic routes, as well as more than 200 international routes covering Asia, Europe, Africa, North America and Oceania.

Since its maiden flight in 1993, Hainan Airlines has not had a

major accident in its 27 years of operation, having logged over eight million hours of safe flights.

Although Beijing remains the tourist's hot-spot with must-sees such as the Forbidden City and the nearby Great Wall of China, the balmy climate, beautiful beaches and lush forests are now beginning to draw Western visitors to Hainan island.

Humans arrived on the island some 6,000 years ago but its written history begins when it came under the control of the Han Dynasty in 110 BC. Plenty more followed.

Although she died in 612 AD people still worship Lady Xian, the legendary noblewoman known for her justice and incorruptibility. She peacefully restored order on the island, winning people over with her virtue and prestige. Former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai called her "the First Heroine of China" and Chinese

Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin praised her as "the role model that the later generations should learn forever".

The feudal era left its mark. You can still see the Dongpo Academy of Classical Learning that was established in 1098 and the Temple of Five Lords, which commemorates five disgraced, high-ranking central government officials from Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) times.

Those interested in the revolutionary upheavals that paved the way for the revolution that established the people's government in 1949 can also visit the ancestral home of the Soong family – one of the prominent figures in modern Chinese history.

Soong Ching-ling, a former honorary president of China and wife of China's revolutionary pioneer Sun Yat-sen, lived here. Her father Charlie Soong, one of the key players in the 1911 Revolution that

overthrew China's last imperial dynasty – the Qings – was born in the same house in 1864.

You can also go to the Red Detachment of Women Memorial Park dedicated to the communist guerrillas immortalised in the revolutionary ballet that dominated the national stage during the Mao era.

Proclaimed one of the Eight Model Operas during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the *Red Detachment* was performed for US President Richard Nixon on his ground-breaking visit to People's China in February 1972. The story was later made into a TV series in 2006 and restaged by the National Ballet of China in 2014.

The theme park tells the story of the China's first women's militia during the struggle on the island against the landlords and the Chiang Kai-shek regime during the first civil war the 1930s.

The 103-strong



• At Edinburgh airport

communist-led women's brigade earned the title of "Red Detachment of Women" after several successful battles against General Chiang's Nationalist Army. The last surviving member passed away in 2014.

The islanders established many 'overseas Chinese' communities. These days about three million Hainanese live overseas, many of them in Hong Kong and Macao.

Hainan is also the home of over a million Chinese who've returned from abroad. For decades, these people

have contributed to the development of all walks of life in Hainan.

The Eighth Congress of the World Federation of Hainanese Associations, a body set up for discussing the future of Hainanese in the world, was held in Hainan in March 2004.

Hainan is also the host of the annual World Hainan Youth Summer (Winter) Camp of Culture, Science and Technology. Through its various activities, overseas Hainanese youths are able to experience their homeland culture.

USA out of Korea!

by New Worker
correspondent

NCP leader Andy Brooks joined a Korean solidarity protest picket outside the US embassy last Saturday to mark 73rd anniversary of the

Korean war and to call for the end of the American occupation of south Korea.

On 25th June 1950 the US imperialists and their south Korean puppets launched an attack on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) that devastated the entire peninsula.

The Americans and their lackeys, flying the false flag of the United Nations, were beaten to a standstill and were forced to sign an armistice in 1953.

They promised to hold free elections in south Korea to lead to the reunification of the country. Seventy years later the

USA still occupies south Korea, propping up a puppet regime that rejects all DPRK proposals to ease tension on the divided peninsula.

Dermot Hudson, chair of the Korean Friendship Association (KFA) UK, which called the protest, said that US imperialism had not abandoned its dreams of conquest.

"This year reactionary armonger Biden threatened People's Korea with nuclear annihilation saying it would be the 'end of whatever regime'.

"The US imperialists and south Korean puppets are stepping up

their war moves plus the USA is openly deploying strategic nuclear assets," he said.

"The USA and south Korea have this year carried out massive war exercises that were suspended by Trump. US troops and nuclear assets should be withdrawn from south Korea and a permanent peace treaty signed."

Messages of support were received from KFA Germany, KFA Switzerland, the International Central Committee for Songun Study, the Bangladesh Songun Politics Study Group and the People's Korea Initiative of Poland.



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Donbas communists speak out!

by Theo Russell

“The immediate aim is the demilitarisation of Ukraine, and the removal of the current leadership of Ukraine by any means.”

– Boris Litvinov

On 28th May 2023 I met with Boris Litvinov, secretary of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) District of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), in Moscow. His comments are reported below.

“We have spent eight years fighting for the Donetsk People’s Republic with volunteer detachments against the Ukraine Armed Forces (UAF).

“The Western Powers cynically used the Minsk and Normandy negotiations to buy time for Ukraine to build up its armed forces, and in 2021 Zelensky declared his intention to reoccupy the Donbas.

“After 17th February 2022 shelling of the Donbas by the UAF greatly increased, and on 18th February the mass evacuation of children from the war zone to the Russian Federation began.

“The UAF launched an attack with 60,000 troops, and the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s militias had to defend along a border of 476 kilometres with a force of 27,000.

“We realised that we had to defend our self-determination and independence with our lives. Faced with this situation, the Donbas republics appealed to the vice president of the Russian Federation for military assistance.

“The Kiev regime still controlled 35 per cent of the DPR. We

forget that for the UAF reoccupying all of the DPR was symbolic, as this is where the ‘Anti-maidan’ movement began in 2014.

“The DPR is 96 per cent urbanised, it has a strong community spirit and strong ties with Russia. We feel that it is a part of Russia.

“Before 1860 there was no industry in Donetsk. The Welsh engineer John Hughes was invited by the Czarist government and founded the city of Donetsk in 1870. Some of the factories he built there are still operating today.

“There is no history of conflict between the Christian, Russian Orthodox, Jewish or Buddhist communities in Donetsk, and there has always been a strong sense of unity amongst the population.

“During 20 years of Nazification Russophobia has spread to the whole of Ukrainian society, from primary school education onwards.

“Only this month (May 2023), Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, at a meeting with Zelensky in Kiev, publicly praised the death of Russians in the current conflict, saying that US support for the war in Ukraine was ‘the best money we’ve ever spent...and the Russians are dying’.

“It will take at least 15 years for this anti-Russian mentality in Ukraine to change, requiring a complete transformation of education and the media.

“In our view the immediate aim in the current war is the demilitarisation of Ukraine, and the removal of the current leadership of Ukraine, by any means.

“On May Day this year an exhibition was



• Boris Litvinov with Theo Russell

held in a park in Donetsk City on international solidarity with the Donbas republics, with photos from the UK, USA, Ireland, Italy, Germany and other countries.

“At the Havana Conference of Communist and Workers’ Parties in November 2022, general

secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine Pyotr Simonenko stated that the current war is not a Ukrainian war, but a world war about the shape of the global order and said that our noble task is to preserve the Russian nation.

“The plan for West-

ern imperialism is to solve the so-called ‘Russian problem’. If Russia is eliminated, the imperialists plan to replace it with multiple states governed by fascist regimes. This is the only way in which imperialism would be able to control such a vast country.

“Today many socialists and communists around the world are together with Russia, but in future they may move in different directions, so there is a necessity for a left turn in Russia. We believe that only socialism can provide the opportunity to restructure and rebuild such a large country.

“For several years the CPRF has upheld the slogan ‘save the Russian world’ – ‘the Russian Mir’.

“At the CPRF central committee on 27th May 2023 it was decided that it was necessary to fight for a Soviet world in Russia, as well as for all other national groups of the former Soviet Union. This was the first time such a goal was stated at a CPRF CC meeting.”

Cuba strengthens ties with Europe

by María Josefina Arce

The intense agenda that Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel developed last week on his tour of Europe began in Italy – to which we are united by 120 years of fluid relations. Cuban-Italian relations are characterised by important moments such as visits at the highest level and great solidarity in complex situations.

The authorities of the two nations have described these bilateral ties as historic and stable, which have been consolidating and expanding in various areas such as health.

The country of the so-called old world is amongst the top 10 trading partners of the socialist island in the Caribbean that has become

a hot spot for Italian tourists. Now the governments on both sides of the ocean are working to boost trade and tourism to even greater heights.

To that end, in June last year Havana hosted the Thirteenth Congress of the Confederation of Italians in the World, an opportunity to learn about the updating of the Business Portfolio of Cuba.

Italian investment is present in our territory in priority sectors such as energy, construction, industry, tourism and precisely in terms of foreign direct investment.

According to official data, there are 17 Italian businesses in operation, six branches of travel agencies, three businesses in

the Mariel Special Development Zone, west of the Cuban capital, and 45 Italian branches.

Italy also had an outstanding participation in the Havana 2022 International Fair, held last November, which shows the interest of Italian businessmen in the potential of the archipelago.

Last May the Ninth Session of the Cuba-Italy Business Committee took place in the city of Venice, to facilitate exchanges between entities of the two nations and define concrete projects.

The Cuban authorities have stressed that the Italian business community remains loyal, interested and actively participating, despite the difficulties

faced by Cuba due to the complex international situation and the tightening of the US blockade.

Solidarity is an essential element that defines the relationship between both peoples. During the difficult times that Italy experienced during the COVID-19 crisis, Cuban health professionals made their valuable contribution in hospitals in the cities of Crema and Turin, where they tirelessly worked during the pandemic.

Their extraordinary work, together with their Italian colleagues, was highlighted by the authorities, who together with the citizens expressed their gratitude and affection for the Cubans.

Radio Havana Cuba

Imperialist media can't stop lying about mosques in China

by Arjae Red

Over the last few years, the US media have routinely run stories accusing China of the erasure of Islam, in part based on the alleged mass demolition of mosques. All over the American, British and French news outlets, you can find headlines claiming there is "forceful destruction" of mosques in China.

These stories are often twisted or outright fabricated. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), an anti-China thinktank with ties to weapons manufacturers such as Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, has produced various articles and an interactive map of China that supposedly lists sites of "forced labour camps" and "destroyed mosques".

This so-called database has been cited as a source by many articles criticising China. But like other widely discredited sources – such as the far-right religious extremist Adrian Zenz, known as the architect of the "Uyghur genocide" narrative – the ASPI map contains a plethora of misinformation. This map, dubbed the "Xinjiang Data Project", has incorrectly listed mosques under renovation as "demolished", including the Keriya Aitika Mosque in Hotan, Xinjiang.

The renovation of mosques is widely exploited by dishonest reporters looking to spin a story. Renovations of mosques, housing units, cultural sites and virtually every other type of structure are common throughout China, especially in southwestern regions such as Xinjiang, where earthquakes are common.

On a recent visit to Kashgar, Xinjiang, home to about 80 per cent of the ethnic Uyghur population, this writer had a chance to speak to residents and learn about local architecture. Many of the buildings in Kashgar are 1,000 or more years old. These old buildings, whilst stunningly beautiful, were not built to standards that would be considered seismically safe today in areas with a risk of earthquakes. In the past, collapses and deaths were common.

The government's solution was to rebuild and renovate much of the Old City with modern building techniques. Taking into consideration the culture and desires of the local population, people who



• Chinese President Xi Jinping on a walk-about in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

lived in buildings undergoing renovation were given the option of having their home built in a new style or in an upgraded version of the older style, which still maintains that ancient Kashgar feeling. The government pays for a large portion or all of the renovations, depending on which alternative was taken.

Mosques are unfortunately not immune to structural vulnerabilities. Although it is true that some mosques, particularly those in a dangerous state of disrepair, have been demolished, many have been restored and upgraded with modern utilities and reinforced frames. More

of them have been rebuilt anew, in fact, than those lost to disrepair over the years.

In 2020, the US Mosque Survey counted 2,769 mosques in America, compared to China's more than 35,000 mosques. This means that Chinese Muslims have nearly three times more mosques per capita than do Muslims in the USA.

But the accusations don't stop at alleged demolition. The Western media have also claimed that the Chinese government is carrying out a process of "Sinification" through the renovations, meaning that China is allegedly removing the Arabic aspects of mosques and replacing them

with traditional Chinese architecture.

Mosques built in the traditional Chinese-style architecture are presented in the Western media as "evidence" of "cultural erasure", when in reality mosques built in Chinese style have existed as far back as around 700 AD. There are also many Muslim populations in China that are not Arabic in origin, such as the Hui population, who were originally descended from Han Chinese and are Chinese-speaking.

Because of the ancient Silk Road and the historical mixing of peoples from the Chinese coast with Arab, European and many other peoples, the blending of language, religion and architecture should not be seen as an attempt at Han hegemony, but rather as a natural blending of peoples living side-by-side in a multi-ethnic nation with more than 5,000 years of recorded history.

Traveling through Xinjiang, this writer saw many mosques in the cities and the countryside. Some resembled traditional Han temples of the east, and others were golden-domed traditional

Arab-style mosques with minarets.

The cultural diversity and rich history of Xinjiang are unlike any other place on Earth, especially from the perspective of someone from the USA, where Indigenous histories have been deliberately erased. Today, genuine culture in America survives in the crevices between corporate shopping malls and billboards, despite the relentless onslaught of capitalist consumerism.

One must recognise the insurmountable hypocrisy of the US and European media, which presume to be conveying the interests of Muslims in China, when these same news outlets have spent decades justifying brutal US and NATO invasions, occupations, sanctions and coups throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia, as well as the ongoing genocide and displacement of Palestinians by Zionist forces.

If the US government truly cared about Muslims, it would have lifted the sanctions on Syria, cut its ties with Israel, ceased to support the brutal war in Yemen and withdrawn its troops and mercenaries from Afghanistan and Iraq long ago.

The US imperialist ruling class doesn't care about preserving Muslim traditions and architecture. Its only goal with regard to China is to create possible flashpoints for conflict, by exploiting ethnic and religious tensions or to create them from thin air in order to throw China off-balance and disrupt the Belt and Road Initiative – a project that is crucial both to the growing local economy of Xinjiang and the many majority-Muslim countries that border it.

The US population is subjected to a nonstop barrage of anti-China propaganda, so the motivations of the US imperialist ruling class and their media mouthpieces must always be kept in mind. There is always another side to the story.

Workers World (USA)

Syria Times

The Arab Summit – Syria's Summit

by Reem Haddad

Undoubtedly and irrevocably the spotlight was on Syria in the last Arab Summit that was held on the 19th May in Jeddah. And undoubtedly and irrevocably Syria delivered as if 12 years of absence had never taken place. Syria, a founding member of the Arab League, sat in its rightful place welcomed by all.

Every single Arab leader who took the stand and delivered a speech unfailingly mentioned Syria, welcoming it back to its proper place.

President Assad in his succinct speech shed light on Arab co-operation and the right to govern without external interference.

"I hope that it marks the beginning of a new phase of Arab action for solidarity among us, for peace in our region, development and prosperity instead of war and destruction," he told delegates.

"Today is an historic opportunity to rearrange our affairs with the least amount of foreign interference," he added.

How did all this come about?

Diplomatic shifts had accelerated in the Arab arena after a sudden Chinese-brokered agreement announced on 10th March, which resulted in the resumption of relations that were severed between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Less than two weeks after announcing the resumption of relations, Saudi Arabia said that it had started talks about resuming consular services with Syria before announcing the decision to re-open its missions in Syria.

In the statement they issued on 7th May, in which they announced the return of Syria to its seat in the League, the Arab foreign ministers affirmed "the keenness to launch an Arab leadership role in efforts to resolve" the Syrian crisis and its repercussions, including refugee crises, drug smuggling and the "threat of terrorism". The meeting decided to form a ministerial committee that

would work on continuing "direct dialogue with the Syrian government to reach a comprehensive solution to the Syrian crisis."

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Al-Miqdad, talking about "conditions for reconstruction and the return of refugees", said: "We did not beg, and we will not do so ... and we waged a war against terrorism. Anyone who wants to help is welcome," refusing to talk about "conditions".

Al-Miqdad said: "We stressed that the Syrian refugees must return to their homeland, and this return needs capabilities." About 5.5 million registered Syrian refugees live in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and

Egypt, according to the United Nations. All's well that ends well?

In Syria all will be well when the Americans and Turks leave the Syrian land they occupy – when the blood of its martyrs doesn't go to waste and Syria's sovereignty is untarnished and unchallenged – when the reconstruction process flows smoothly and what was destroyed by a terrible terrorist war is rebuilt – when reconciliation take place without interference and those who erred are embedded back within the mosaic of Syria's social fabric. Only then can all be well that ends well.