

Stop the War! Stop Israeli aggression!

by our Arab Affairs
correspondent

Israeli forces continue to spread death and destruction throughout the Gaza Strip despite increasing global pressure to stop the fighting. Over 20,000 Palestinians have been killed – mostly women and children. Thousands of others are buried beneath the rubble. Thousands more have been injured.

But the Israelis are paying a heavy price for their aggression. The north Yemen government has used missile and drone power to drive Israeli shipping out of the Red Sea. Israel has been forced to evacuate their settlements along the Gaza Strip and the Lebanese border, and nearly half a million Israelis have fled the country since the start of Israel's brutal onslaught in October. Meanwhile the Palestinian militias fight on, inflicting heavy casualties on the Israelis who say the fighting will not cease until Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza is wiped out.

On the diplomatic front, secret talks between the Israelis and the Palestinian resistance have resumed in Egypt and Qatar over prisoner exchanges and another cease-fire. And People's China has called on the Americans to listen to growing international calls and refrain from unilat-



erally obstructing efforts at the United Nations Security Council to end the conflict.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the USA should play its due role in promoting an immediate cease-fire and ending the violence to prevent a larger-scale humanitarian disaster.

Since the outbreak of fighting China has been committed to pushing for a cease-fire and protecting civilians. As president of the UN Security Council for November, China promoted the adoption of the first resolution and submitted China's position paper to push the UN Security Council to take more action. China has also provided multiple batches of humanitarian assistance, including cash, food and medicine to Gaza.

China always believes that the future of the Middle East should be in the hands of the

people in the region, he said, adding that China supports the Palestinian people's just cause of restoring their legitimate national rights.

At the moment the Americans are still trying to stall the latest call for a cease-fire on the UN Security Council to buy more time for the Israeli invaders. But the Zionist dream of crushing the Pal-

estinian resistance is ebbing away in the streets of Gaza and their masters in Washington are now totally isolated on the world stage.

Even US imperialism's closest European allies are now distancing themselves from the war lobby in Washington and Tel Aviv.

Mounting international anger at Israel's war crimes, which include the gunning down of three hostages by Israeli troops who thought they were Arabs and the massacre of a number of sick and wounded Palestinian Arabs buried alive by Israeli bulldozers near a hospital in northern Gaza, are no longer being ignored in the chancelleries of Europe. Last week Rishi Sunak joined France and Germany in calling for a "sustainable ceasefire" to stop the killing. Like his European allies, Sunak said that "too many civilian lives have been lost".

Back in Israel, Ofer Cassif, a member of the commu-

nist-led Democratic Front for Peace and Equality in the Israeli parliament, said the Israeli government's response to the 7th October attack by Hamas "has nothing to do with the well-being of Israelis". Rather, it "has everything to do with revenge ... and preserving this fascist government in power".

"The Netanyahu government doesn't really care about its own citizens. The assault on Gaza has nothing to do with security. It has nothing to do with the well-being of Israelis. It has everything to do with revenge, a realisation of the subjugation plan, and preserving this fascist government in power. Those are the real interests behind this assault. If one wants to really support the Israelis and the security of Israel as a state and its citizens, it must do everything to assist us in dissolving this government, because this government is an enemy of the people of Israel, and of course an enemy to the Palestinians."

FUND

Our last postbag of the Old Year brought in £1,650 pushing the fighting fund up to £2,510 thanks to old Surrey comrades who gave £1,000 in memory of Harry Danvers and Peter Geddes and a Southall comrade who donated £300 to the New Worker appeal. A veteran Essex supporter sent £50, so did another from Brighton. A Sandhurst supporter topped up his sub renewal with £100, another £100 came from an AKEL supporter in north London, and a member of the Korean Friendship Association put a tenner in his Christmas card. We now need to raise £990 over the two-week break to hit our target for December.

Stand by the Palestinians! Keep up the fight for peace and socialism and above all keep our presses rolling by sending your donation to: New Worker Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the 'New Worker'.

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

INSIDE

THAT WAS THE YEAR
THAT WAS .. P3

TEL AVIV .. P6

UKRAINE .. P7

PALESTINE .. P10

POWER BILLS .. P10

The New Worker will soon be taking its traditional fortnightly winter break.

The last issue of the Old Year will be published on 22nd December 2023.

The first issue of the New Year will come out on Friday 12th January 2024.

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

The hopes and fears of all the years

So this is Christmas. Celebrating the winter solstice goes back to hallowed antiquity from the Stone Age hunter-gatherers whose lives revolved around the seasons, to the Saturnalia when Roman masters served their slaves in orgies of feasting and drinking in which all the rules of society could temporarily be broken. In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church, itself largely a product of the feudal era, turned the old pagan holiday into a Christian holiday to celebrate the birth of the founder of their faith in pageants and parades that heralded the coming spring.

In Britain, Jesus seldom gets a look in these days. Although still fun for the kids, the modern festival has largely been reduced to eating and drinking and a ritual exchange of cards and gifts.

This orgy of consumerism is, of course, a welcome break from the drudgery of work. A chance to put one's feet up, eat and drink and enjoy the life the rich enjoy in their mansions every day of their worthless lives. But for the homeless, unemployed and destitute victims of the capitalist crisis, it's just another day of despair. The festive clichés of the politicians and the princes of the church mean nothing to them. Meanwhile the Palestinian Arabs fight to stave off a brutal Israeli enemy in Gaza.

In Britain, millions of people of many faiths or none at all have taken to the streets to call for an end to the fighting. People from all walks of life are now campaigning for Palestinian rights and freedom. They are taking on corporations that profit from the Israeli occupation, the Sunak government that still refuses to hold Israel to account and the media that does not report the truth.

Palestinian solidarity protests have been held every week in London and in many other towns throughout the country. Huge marches, the biggest in Western Europe, have rocked London. They must continue until the guns fall silent and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs are recognised once and for all.

Over Christmas we get the usual drivel from the Established Church, whose clergy reserve their most pious platitudes for the supposed birthday of the 'Prince of Peace' on 25th December while ignoring his teachings for the rest of the year.

These modern Pharisees talk about the "poor and needy" while ignoring the words of the Nazarene who drove the money-changers out of the Temple and told his followers to "go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven".

They tell us to think about those needier than ourselves and many of us will indeed give generously to beggars or charities. But what we should be thinking about is those much wealthier than ourselves and the capitalist system they uphold and how they've got the money to spend every day of the year like Christmas, living off the backs of workers forced to make do with the miserable crumbs left at the rich man's table.

But the days when people listened to the rich men who told us that the greatest virtue of humanity was the possession of the largest amount of money are over.

The ruling class maintains that capitalism is the only game in town. And it is – but only for themselves. Capitalism, in the final analysis, is simply a system designed to perpetuate the rule of the rich to ensure that a tiny handful of parasites can live the lives of Roman emperors on the backs of the millions upon millions of working people. There is only one answer to the crisis and that is socialism. Speed the day!

The Royal Navy should stick to surfing the Web

The UK's Carrier Strike Group will visit Japan in 2025, as announced by Defence Secretary Grant Shapps recently. This visit is a part of the 'Hiroshima Accord' agreed upon by the leaders of the UK and Japan in May of this year. Fleet visits are a normal aspect of military exchanges between countries, but Shapps claimed that the deployment of the Carrier Strike Group "sends a strong deterrence message" that has added a significant geopolitical competition element to this potential visit. He even said, with a somewhat threatening tone, that "the strength and global reach of the UK's Armed Forces should never be underestimated".

Shapps did not specify to whom his threat was directed, but he mentioned the Taiwan Straits, which is believed to be an attempt at 'restraining China'. If that is the case, it is indeed an over-estimation of the UK's capabilities. If his target audiences are countries in the Asia-Pacific region then apart from a few allies, most countries in the region would simply laugh it off and not take it seriously. The UK once had many colonies in the Asia-Pacific region, but it should not misjudge the current times. Today, this region is the most dynamic in the world, with a majority of countries pursuing independent and autonomous diplomacy.

In fact, no-one "underestimates" the UK. It is the UK itself that cannot position itself correctly. Some Europeans criticise the UK, saying "there are two kinds of European nations; there are small nations and there are countries that have not yet realised they are small nations". This sums up Britain's lingering imperial dream.

The Royal Navy currently has two aircraft carriers, HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and HMS *Prince of Wales*, both of which have been plagued with problems and have experienced serious water leakage incidents, earning them the nickname "sieve ships" by foreign media.

As early as 2021, the *Queen Elizabeth* embarked on a "global cruise mission" during which a fighter jet crashed into the Mediterranean, becoming a laughingstock. Now, the Royal Navy is unable to assemble enough aircraft and escort fleets for two aircraft carriers. The fate of this 'sunset fleet' reaching the Pacific without encountering any breakdowns along the way is uncertain, and even if it manages to reach its destination, it is likely to do so with diminished capabilities.

London should have some understanding of these issues. Why did it set the deployment of the Carrier Strike Group for 2025? There is a mystery behind this: 2024 is the year of the general election in the UK, so this is like an empty promise made in advance to the voters. Regardless of the reasons behind the British side's considerations and whether the Carrier Strike Group will actually be deployed to the Asia-Pacific region in two years, such hype and performance will not enhance the international image of the UK but only bring it closer to becoming a laughingstock.

In recent years, the UK and Japan have promoted bilateral and multilateral military security co-operation, including joint development of next-generation advanced fighters, the signing of a reciprocal access agreement and so on. The two countries have praised each other as the "closest security partners" in Europe and Asia. Some mentioned the 'Anglo-Japanese Alliance' of over 100 years ago during the imperialist era, excitedly claiming that the two countries are forming a "new Anglo-Japanese alliance".

The old Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed, renewed and expanded three times, each time accompanied by aggression and division of the Asia-Pacific countries. It was an imperialist axis, a tool for oppressing the people of the Asia-Pacific region.

Today, the British and Japanese governments are not

ashamed but rather proud of that period of history. This shows that the failure to thoroughly reflect on and hold themselves accountable for the mistakes they made at that time is the root cause of the two countries continuing to go astray in the international arena. The history that the two countries are proud of is precisely what regional countries hate the most.

Shapps claimed that the group will work alongside the Japanese Self Defence Forces and other partners to help defend peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. Such rhetoric is unlikely to win the trust of regional countries.

An earlier column in a Hong Kong media outlet commented that the great power game situation provoked by the USA has allowed some countries with a history of colonialism and imperialism to rekindle once again the "great power dream" of participating in changing history. This comment vividly depicts the current inner state of Britain and Japan. They hope to get a free ride on the USA's global competition. It is for this reason they do not hesitate to take the initiative to take on the role of pawns for the USA. In this sense, although both Britain and Japan face many internal and external difficulties, they are looking to enhance their presence in the US global military strategic system. Trying to regain glory by showing off power is simply drinking poison to quench one's thirst, however; acting as a scaffolding for the USA's foreign strategy will only diminish their own significance.

Peaceful development is the trend of the times, and militarism cannot bring about a better world. Perhaps London still dreams about 'gunboat diplomacy', making it look even more bizarre and lacking in self-awareness in today's era. In the eyes of the outside world, Britain's 'sunset fleet' should just stay surfing the internet. After all, this is less harmful and possibly less costly for them.

Global Times

Workers' Notes

2022 saw the greatest number of working days lost (2.47 million) since 1989 when 4.13 million took to the picket lines. The figures for 2023 are, of course, still to be totted up, but it is clear that industrial action has not slowed down. The public sector and the transport sector, particularly the NHS and railways, have seen most of the action.

Unfortunately this action has not done much to boost union membership figures, which remain stubbornly low at a miserable 22.3 per cent of the workforce, a record low. It has been a comparatively small number of traditionally well-organised workers who have taken the lead.

A notable feature of 2023 was that many groups of workers not normally associated with industrial militancy took to the picket lines. Under the British Medical Association's (BMA's) leadership even senior NHS consultants took strike action, eventually securing a higher pay rise than cleaners and nurses, a matter about which we will not have heard the last.

For the first time in history Anglican clergy, belonging to the Church of England Clergy & Employee Advocates (CEECA), part of Unite the union's Faith Workers Branch, submitted a formal pay claim that could come out of Church Commissioners' £10.3 billion bank account.

Among the smaller groups of workers taking strike action were Scottish lighthouse keepers and the Westminster traffic wardens, who were unfortunately unable to stick a parking ticket on the King's gilded coach when it was parked outside Westminster Abbey for his crowning.

New faces

There were only a few new faces on the trade union scene this year. The main one was Paul Nowak, the TUC General Secretary (GS) who made much of the fact that he began with stacking shelves in Asda at the age of 17 but failed to mention he has been a Congress House bureaucrat for the great

bulk of his working life, latterly as Deputy GS. His inaugural speech naturally deplored low pay and included the rousing message that "ministers, unions and employers should work together on a proper industrial strategy, delivering good green jobs, training and skills across the country", thus demonstrating the TUC's deep attachment to class collaboration.

Another newcomer was at the Transport and Salaries Staff Association (TSSA), which elected Maryam Eslamdoust as the new General Secretary after the incumbent was found not to have behaved as a proper gentleman should. The election inspired a whole 13.5 per cent of the 17,324-strong membership to vote. She triumphed with 46.6 per cent of the vote against two rivals.

In contrast, at the main teachers' union Daniel Kebede was overwhelmingly elected General Secretary, the first since the merger of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teacher and Lecturers in 2017. Out of 445,601 members, 28,636 voted for him and 12,918 for his opponent.

Only last week Fran Heathcote was elected General Secretary of PCS, the main civil service union, succeeding Mark Serwotka who will be retiring next month after being in office since 2000. At the same time incumbent Assistant GS John Moloney was re-elected. Ms Heathcote ran on the Democracy Alliance ticket – the platform for the bureaucrats, former Trotskyists and revisionists that backed Serwotka and has dominated PCS politics for decades – while Moloney stood for the still formally Trotskyist Broad Left Network – an unholy alliance of supporters of the Alliance of Workers Liberty and the Socialist Party. The Democracy Alliance retained their hold on the general secretaryship and Moloney was re-elected Assistant GS. So a no change there. Out of 173,844 members only 20,058 or 11.5 per cent bothered to vote. This went 10,340 to 9,557 in favour of the winning General Secretary and a more impressive 11,705 to 8,152 for the "left opposition" Assistant

GS. From these figures it appears nobody other than activists bothered to vote.

Immediately afterwards at the British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA) a new General Secretary took control of the cockpit. Completing a trio of unions appointing a woman GS for the first time in its history, she secured 100 per cent of the votes in contest that had a zero per cent turnout as it was uncontested. Deplorably, she is not actually a pilot but a career union bureaucrat who has been promoted from the senior civil servants' union, the FDA.

On Land, Sea and Air

Transport services were the main battleground throughout the year, particularly on the railways.

Drivers' union ASLEF was involved in industrial action that caused widespread disruption by talking short strikes at different companies and different times to maximise disruption. It also imposed a number of overtime bans. This was particularly effective as the train operating companies depend heavily on overtime rather than pay to train and employ sufficient numbers of drivers. ASLEF complained that the Government took a "hands off" approach when it declined to pressure employers to settle. Some claim the Government wants industrial action to drag on so as to deplete union funds. Early in the year ASLEF rejected what appeared tempting offers because it would lead to the loss of hard-won terms and conditions. The latest ballot means that drivers have a mandate for another round of strikes in this unresolved battle.

There was a notable success on the railways when the rail unions, united for once, successfully fought off plans to close nearly all ticket offices in England, partly as result of securing 750,000 hostile respondents to the official consultation.

On the London Underground a long struggle saw outsourced cleaners winning the same right to free transport as direct employees. The RMT battle to

have them taken back into direct employment has not yet borne fruit, however, despite the Mayor of London expressing agreement at least in theory. Other battles on behalf of railway cleaners do not seem to be so successful, but RMT continues the difficult battle to organise them. Catering workers on the railways also secured some decent pay rises thanks to RMT campaigns.

Strikes, and the threat of them, at various bus companies up and down the country were a regular event. Only last week 350 London Transit workers, drivers and engineers alike, rejected a 6.8 per cent pay rise resulting them taking strike action that disrupted west London services. Earlier, in February, workers at the neighbouring Abellio service needed 20 days of strike action to win £18 per hour for experienced drivers.

Many bus drivers were aggrieved at discrepancies between different companies. One such dispute was in Newcastle where Go North East driver's average wage was £12.83 per hour while drivers on the other side of England at Go North West earn £15.53 per hour.

During and shortly after the pandemic many bus drivers left the industry in favour of the expanded home delivery services from supermarkets, which resulted in many bus companies raising wages to keep drivers, but the threat of strikes by organised workers is still required. One wonders why the powerful Unite does not launch a nationwide pay campaign and put more effort into campaigning for re-nationalisation. Not all battles were as successful as in the Midlands, where Unite won pay rises of between 20 per cent and 25.8 per cent for 100 Trent Barton bus engineers across five sites in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

In the shipping industry there was no major issue such as the mass sacking of workers by P&O. Government promises to legislate against such acts have predictably proven worthless. The ferry between the Isle of Man and Liverpool saw a dispute between the officer's union Nau-

tilus and bosses, however, over management demands that they spend at least 76 extra days per year on-board rather than with their families.

Road transport saw a number of disputes. The mere threat of strike action can be very effective because of just-in-time working, as disruption can have an immediate effect in companies not handling perishables.

For instance, in May 150 tanker drivers at Fuel Transport & Logistics who service supermarket chain Morrisons' petrol stations secured a 13.5 per cent increase for 2022, a 10.5 per cent increase for 2023 and a guarantee that next year all drivers' salaries will increase to an impressive £65,000 per annum.

The summer holiday season was used by unions in the aviation industry to put pressure on employers. Pilots at Virgin Atlantic sought a reduction in their hours that had been recently increased resulting in increased pilot fatigue.

Around the same time, workers at various airports ranging from refuelling drivers to Gatwick baggage handlers threatened action. British Airways staff, excluding pilots and management, won a 13.1 pay rise over an 18-month period, which was some compensation for pandemic cuts.

Sick of Work

The NHS was another major battleground, with ambulance workers in many parts of England starting the ball rolling with strikes in late January. In April and May the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) took strike action that for the first time included nurses in emergency departments, intensive care and cancer wards. Junior doctors and consultants later joined in, with many using the threat of emigration to Australia as a bargaining tool. Some junior doctors pointed out that as a result of their long hours they were paid less than coffee makers at Starbucks. It was interesting that it was RCN members, rather than one of the more militant health unions, who

continued on page 4...

...continued from page 3

rejected the initial unsatisfactory five per cent offer recommended by union officials.

Apart from the salary issue, medics have suffered from long-term neoliberal policies such as having to pay-off large student loans, the loss of proper catering in hospitals and the ending of hospital accommodation.

One welcome victory was at the Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust where 670 caterers, cleaners, porters, caterers and other domestic services were brought back in-house, but there are many similar battles which are still to be won.

While doctors in England had to take strike action, an overwhelmingly strike vote in Scotland forced the SNP to come up with a better offer before they actually downed stethoscopes.

Tough Battles

While there have been no postal strikes this year all is not well at Royal Mail, which is hoping to abandon its universal service obligation and concentrate on profitable parcel delivery. This will drastically impact on workers' conditions, with the CEO openly supporting the model of hiring "self-employed" drivers who would supply their own vans to spare Royal Mail the expense.

In mid-February CWU called off a further strike, despite a 96 per cent mandate, after Royal Mail bosses took further legal

action against the union. By then the pay offer had been marginally improved to nine per cent over 18 months. That almost 200 CWU reps were suspended for union activity showed how brutal Royal Mail management were.

The prize for the most difficult battle probably goes to the workers at the Amazon warehouse in Coventry however, where they have taken on the notoriously anti-trade-union firm.

Here GMB secured recognition at the predatory retailer, itself a remarkable achievement. Strikes later took place, including one over the "Black Friday" weekend last month. The demand was for a 43 per cent increase from £10.50 to £15.00 per hour, which is much more than the 50 pence per hour offered by Amazon whose owner recently took delivery of a \$500 million yacht. The necessity for a union presence at Amazon was confirmed when *Tribune* reported that in order to get its accident figures down Amazon had resorted to hiring ambulances to ferry over-worked workers to hospital by taxi rather than call ambulances that appear in official statistics.

It is not only Amazon that rejected Victorian Master-and-Servant style industrial relations in favour of a more traditional Lord-and-Serf relationship. Another hi-tech firm, Google, laid-off 10,000 workers globally including hundreds in London and who according to Unite broke redundancy laws and refuses to

meet their Unite representatives. Workers with disabilities had to get doctors' notes simply to have a fellow worker attend their meetings and even in these cases union representation is forbidden.

Classroom Wars

From nursery schools to universities, workers were often found on the picket line.

Perhaps the major triumph was that by members of the University and College Union (UCU), who won a long-running battle to reverse the potential loss of £10,000 per year from their pensions. Their strike actions were often delayed by the failure of the union to whip up sufficient numbers to vote in strike ballots. Even well-paid professors grumble about the astronomical salaries collected by Chancellors and Vice-Principals. Scottish school teachers also secured a decent pay rise of 10 per cent that the SNP denied they could afford. Targeting their action in ministerial constituencies brought rapid results.

Bad Laws

On the legislative front the Strikes Minimum Level of Service Act came into being, which would effectively render industrial action at best ineffective and at worst illegal. Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner called the measure the "Conservative sacking nurses Bill", but that was about the end

of Labour's opposition.

Despite being passed in July it was only in December that the TUC held a special congress to make rousing speeches against it. It was an achievement for the Tories to unite the most traditionally right-wing unions with the usual suspects. Even a Tory supporter of the measure, Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, warned it was so badly written that it will be subject to legal challenges unless it is drastically amended by the House of Lords.

Another move by the Government was a new regulations allowing agency workers to be hired in disputes to replace striking workers. This was condemned even by employment agencies as being unworkable.

And Finally

It is only for lack of space that we have little to say about disputes in other areas such as local and central government, but in both these areas there has been much to write about. The FDA, representing senior civil servants,

used the threat of strike action to secure a decent pay offer and a promise of no compulsory redundancies in the ranks of the Sir Humphreys.

In what remains of British industry there were disputes in the North Sea Oil and Gas industry, where workers have definitely not been benefiting from the increase in oil and gas prices. At Petrofac Facilities Management Limited workers were expected to switch from a seven- to a 14-day rota, double the industry norm, which would see rig workers losing £6,000 per year.

Struggles to save the last British steel mills in South Wales and Scunthorpe are under way. Owners plan to close-down existing plants on environmental grounds and replace them with electric arc furnaces, which will need only a fraction of the existing workforce. They can only handle recycled steel materials however, which cannot produce top quality steel for construction purposes.

What 2024 holds remains to be seen – but there is no shortage of disputes...

CONTACT US...

Post: NCP, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ, UK

Phone: 07497 393 263

New Worker National: www.newworker.org

email: party@ncp.clara.net

London District NCP:
<http://londoncommunists.blogspot.com/>

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

19th December 2003

THE LABOUR Party NEC last Tuesday voted by 26 votes to two to embark on a process of re-admitting London Mayor Ken Livingstone to the party.

This follows the resignation of Nicky Gavron as Labour's official candidate in the next London mayoral elections, leaving the post vacant, and Livingstone himself applying to re-join after he was given a heavy hint the application would be successful.

If the process goes through, Livingstone will become the official Labour candidate for Mayor. Since he would

probably win in or out of the party, this saves Labour from a humiliating defeat in that election in the run-up to the next general election.

The process may not go smoothly. Many of the Labour top brass are firmly opposed to Livingstone's readmission, including Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and Neil Kinnock. But he has Blair's backing. Blair seems to have realised that Labour needs Livingstone and is also trying to rescue his own precarious position.

This month's Guardian/ICM poll showed that 46 per cent of voters believe that Blair will lose his job within the next year.

The re-admission will technically break Labour's rule that those expelled cannot be readmitted within five years. Opponents are saying this is a stitch-up.

But the real stitch-up happened four years ago when New Labour went to prevent Ken Livingstone, then Labour MP for Brent East, from winning the party's nomination.

The vast majority of London Labour Party members, including those who were affiliate members through their

unions, voted for Ken as their candidate.

The majority of Londoners voted for him when he stood independently anyway, partly on the basis of his record as leader of the Greater London Council, which was abolished by Thatcher, and partly for his firm stand against the privatisation of the London Underground.

Labour's official candidate Frank Dobson was humiliated into third place.

But by standing independently Livingstone put himself outside the party rulebook and was automatically expelled.

The majority of Labour members and supporters still voted for him as mayor.

The offer to re-admit him is an admission by the New Labour leaders that not accepting him as the Labour candidate in the first place was one of the biggest mistakes they have made.

The party's NEC will interview him in January to see if he will accept the manifesto.

Shane MacGowan: A troubadour for the Irish in London

by Joe Dwyer

*“Sad solemn notes and
crates of newly drawn
stout,
the usual symptoms when
a life goes out.
But the extinction this time
being seven times the most.
The music held no echo
and the tears drowned our
toast.
Sorrow and bereavement,
life has no meaning now,
silence is master.
Laughter and song bowed
for gone went our great
captain to some more hos-
pitable inn
where cant and hypocrisy
can no longer embarrass
him.”*

So wrote Joe O’Broin in his seminal Lament for Brendan Behan. These words came to my head when I heard the sad news that Shane MacGowan has passed away.

The lament was famously, and powerfully, performed by Ciarán Bourke on *The Late Late Show’s Tribute to The Dubliners* in 1987. A video cassette of that tribute night held a hallowed place growing-up in my family. Passed around between grandparents and put on ‘in the background’ at family get-togethers and special occasions. As hard as it may be to believe, for family of the diaspora in Britain, it was genuinely a treat to have RTÉ on our television screens. Even if only for an afternoon – and even if everyone had already seen the show a dozen times before!

Shane MacGowan features in that tribute evening. The Pogues and The Dubliners perform *The Irish Rover* and then they all return at the end for a group performance of *The Auld Triangle*, alongside the Fureys, Stockton’s Wing, U2, Christy Moore and others. Shane appears in the video young, very thin, and inexplicably holding a paper cup throughout.



• Shane singing during an Anti War Protest, Central Bank, Dublin, February 2003.

The inclusion of The Pogues on that pantheon of Irish musicians was momentous for the diaspora. Even as a young person watching a worn-out video tape, their presence on the stage that evening represented a recognition that the London-Irish were not forgotten back home. We had a place on that stage.

The importance of Shane MacGowan, and The Pogues as a whole, for the Irish in Britain cannot be overestimated. The Pogues validated and gave voice to an Irish identity long disparaged as ‘plastic’ or ‘half’. An Irishness that often had to ‘keep the head down’ in Britain and ‘take a step backwards’ in Ireland.

But Shane didn’t just speak about his Irishness; he shouted about it. The Pogues exploded out of the London punk scene in the late 1970s. Only two of The Pogues’ nine members were born in Ireland. As Phil Chevron once put it: “The Pogues could never have been an Irish band indigenously – it could never have happened in Ireland. It would never have happened from within the island. The Pogues needed to happen from the diaspora... there are two Irelands – the people who live on the island and there’s the people who went away or who are second generation and very often that gives us a different point of

view on the culture and what it is to be Irish.”

Their songs were raucously Irish, but their references were almost uniquely London. Hammersmith Broadway. Albert Bridge. Kings Cross. Euston. Leicester Square. Soho. Camden. In Shane’s voice these spaces suddenly became Irish spaces. One could readily tour the streets of London with The Pogues, whether via the chaotic *Transmetropolitan* or the beautiful *Lullaby of London*.

Lyrics such as “Now Jimmy didn’t like his place in this world of ours, / Where the elephant man broke strong men’s necks, / When he’d had too many Powers...” spoke to a generation that had grown up listening to horror stories about John ‘Elephant’ O’Donoghue, the most notorious ganger-man in London, and just how cruelly he treated men on his jobs. Shane MacGowan’s mastery of word and rhyme established an almost mythical narrative for the London-Irish exile.

But the appeal extended beyond London to the entire Irish in Britain community. As the comedian Frankie Boyle once articulated: “The Pogues did so many great songs though. I can’t tell you what a massive figure Shane MacGowan is for a lot of second-generation Irish people,

a poet of displacement; it’s weird to think some folk only think of them in relation to a Christmas record.”

The Pogues were also unashamedly abrasive and political, at a time when being political about Ireland in Britain was no easy task. Infamously, when the band performed *Streets of Sorrow/Birmingham Six* on *Friday Night Live* in April 1988 they were cut off air mid-performance for an ad-break. Shane’s landlady, Kathy MacMillan, would later complain to *Points of View* about such implicit censorship.

By October 1988, however, the song was banned from the airwaves in its entirety. On 19th October, the Broadcast Ban was introduced. Intentionally designed to de-platform Sinn Féin representatives from the airways, included on the list of censored material was *Streets of Sorrow/Birmingham Six*. According to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the song was guilty of “alleging that some convicted terrorists are not guilty and that Irish people in general are at a disadvantage in Irish courts”. (Heaven forbid!)

Frank Murray, The Pogues’ manager, retorted to news of the ban: “I’m glad to see we’re that important, that we’re a threat to the State.” Within a year of the Broadcast Ban, The

Pogues would be vindicated. In October 1989 The Guildford Four were released and in March 1991 the Birmingham Six were finally released.

In a 1991 interview with *Irish Ways*, a magazine established by Irish in Britain, Shane reflected on the appeal of The Pogues: “I am not one of those people that thinks deeply about the media and how it relates to the arts and what it all has to do with politics. To me it all fits together fairly naturally and I couldn’t explain it to you nor am I going to try but what I will say to you is that Ireland is a country that has struggled for hundreds of years smashing against the walls of cultural, religious and political oppression and now it is a country that has more going for it than this country that has been oppressing it for the last 800 years. Ireland is a more hopeful place today than England.”

It is an observation that could only spring from the diaspora. Shane helped to nurture hope for a better tomorrow as only an exile could. Through the hardship and the struggle, there was a light that stayed lit. That emigrant flame. That was the fire that Shane helped stoke. The Irish in Britain will forever owe a debt to Shane MacGowan for that.

*“I awoke so cold and lonely
in a faraway place
The sun fell cold upon my
face, cracks in the ceiling
spelt hell
Turned to the wall, pulled
the sheets around my head
Tried to sleep and dream
my way back to you again.”
Misty Morning, Albert
Bridge*

Shane died in Dublin on 30th November 2023. He is survived by his wife Victoria, his sister Siobhan, his father Maurice, and family and a large circle of friends.

An Phoblacht

Protests rock Tel Aviv following hostage deaths

Large demonstrations rocked the Israeli capital of Tel Aviv over the weekend as the country's military admitted responsibility for the killing of three Israeli captives who were reportedly attempting to surrender. "Today we learned what happens when there is no deal," shouted protesters outside the urban headquarters of the Israel Defence Force.

The demonstrations began on Friday after news first emerged of the captives' death. The Israeli civilians, all of them in their 20s, appeared outside of a building in the Shejaiya neighbourhood in northern Gaza City, according to an IDF statement released Saturday. The young men held a white flag signifying their surrender and emerged shirtless to demonstrate they weren't hiding weapons. One reportedly yelled "help" in Hebrew.

All three were shot by Israeli soldiers in violation of international law dictating the rules of military conduct. An IDF spokesperson said the soldiers reacted in response to a feared threat from the Hamas militia.

"The shooting at the hostages was against the rules of engagement," conceded IDF chief of staff Herzi Halevi. "It is forbidden to shoot at

someone who raises a white flag and seeks to surrender. However, this shooting was carried out during combat and under pressure."

Halevi said that he accepted responsibility for the killings and claimed "we will do everything" to prevent similar incidents in the future.

A brief ceasefire earlier in December resulted in the exchange of captives held on both sides of the conflict. Hamas brought about 240 Israelis back to Gaza during their surprise 7th October operation in Israel, while Israel holds thousands of Palestinians in prison, including some 2,500 who are detained without charges. Among the captives held by Israel are at least 146 Palestinian children.

Protesters have urged

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to negotiate a new ceasefire and exchange of captives. The US media has reported that the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency was scheduled to meet with the Qatari Prime Minister last weekend to discuss the matter.

"Israel needs to actively pursue another deal, even if it means halting military operations in Gaza or releasing Palestinian prisoners with blood on their hands," said retired Israeli Major-General Noam Tibon to US media. "Otherwise, the cabinet is neglecting the hostages, and we risk not bringing them back alive."

Meanwhile, family members of citizens held in Gaza have slammed the Israeli Prime Minister's prosecution of its proclaimed war on Hamas.

"Yesterday, I heard a minister in the cabinet say that the conditions haven't matured for the return of the captives," said Rubi Chen, the father of 19-year-old Israeli soldier and US citizen Itay Chen who is being held by Hamas. "What is the cabinet waiting for? We urge immediate negotiation for the return of all hostages."

Israeli society has been torn apart by massive protests for more than a year as controversial Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu enters his 17th year as Israel's leader.

Previously, Israeli opposition took to the streets to protest a legal reform package proposed by Netanyahu that critics said would have

gutted the independence of the country's judiciary. Elements of the sweeping proposal were placed on hold amidst the show of defiance, which saw Israeli military reservists threaten mass resignations from their posts.

When a member of Israel's opposition finally took power for just over a year in 2021, former Prime Minister Neftali Bennett's governance showed just how far politics in the country had shifted away from the liberal Labour Zionism that characterised previous administrations. Bennett was criticised for a debate performance where he declared: "I've killed lots of Arabs in my life and there's no problem with that."

Recently, controversy erupted after video

emerged of a 1986 interview with Netanyahu where he appeared to justify the bombing of hospitals. Israel has been sharply criticised for its handling of their military incursion into Gaza, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres saying: "Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children."

More than 18,700 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed in Israel's military campaign in Gaza as the USA has twice vetoed ceasefire resolutions at the UN.

About 70 per cent of the more than 18,700 Palestinians killed in the besieged enclave are thought to be women and children, according to Gaza health authorities that the UN has claimed have offered accurate numbers in the past. Israel disputes the death toll.

Some observers have questioned the competence of the IDF, with critics claiming the military force is more focused on filming TikTok videos than engaging professionally on the battlefield. Historically the army's so-called Hannibal Directive has excused the killing of civilians – even Israeli civilians – in the name of pursuing greater combat objectives.

Sputnik

Antonio Negri dies in Paris

Antonio Negri, a prominent Italian political theorist and philosopher, has died on 16th December in Paris, aged 90.

Most known for his work on autonomism, Negri founded the Potere Operaio (Worker Power)

group in 1969 and was a leading member of Autonomia Operaia. He published highly influential books urging "revolutionary consciousness".

In the late 1970s he was charged with being the mastermind of the



Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse), involved in the May 1978 kidnapping and shooting of the Italian premier Aldo Moro.

Although the court was unable to conclusively prove his ties, he was convicted in 1984 and sentenced (in ab-

sentia) to 30 years in prison. He was given an additional four years on the charge of being "morally responsible" for the violence of political activists in the 1960s and 1970.

Negri fled to France, where he taught at the

Paris VIII (Vincennes) and the Collège international de philosophie, along with Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In 1997, after a plea-bargain that reduced his prison time from 30 to 13 years, he returned to

Italy to serve the end of his sentence.

Along with Althusser and Deleuze, he has been one of the central figures of a French-inspired Neo-Spinozism in continental philosophy of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries.

In 2000, alongside Michael Hardt, he published *Empire*, a book that theorises an ongoing transition from a “modern” phenomenon of imperialism, centred around individual nation-states, to an emergent post-modern

construct created among ruling powers.

Being consistently hostile to the 20th Century socialism and the Soviet Union, Negri gradually ended up being an apologist of modern social democracy, especially in the last decades

of his life. In May 2005, he supported a ‘Yes’ vote to the referendum on the proposed EU constitution held in France.

Having waived any characteristic of revolutionary Marxist thought, at the end of his life he endorsed the left so-

cial democratic group called ‘Democracy in Europe Movement 2025’ (DiEM25) founded by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis.

IDoC

Scott Ritter: Ukrainian Military to Crumble by Mid-2024

by Ekaterina Blinova

The West’s military aid to Kiev has been drying up, sealing the fate of the Ukrainian Armed Forces says Scott Ritter, a former US Marine Corps intelligence officer and UN weapons inspector.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s charm offensive has failed, as US members of Congress are fixing to leave for winter break without passing Biden’s \$61 billion package for Kiev.

Even though the Democratic-controlled Senate has delayed holiday recess to unlock the aid, the House shows no sign of returning to pass it through the full Congress.

“The day of the West turning over hundreds of tanks, hundreds of armoured fighting vehicles, hundreds of artillery pieces is over,” says Ritter. “We just don’t have any left to give. So the best Zelensky can hope for is your penny packets of armour, penny packets of infantry fighting vehicles, some ammunition, and maybe an F-16 or two. He’s going to want a lot of money to continue, to not only sustain the funding of the Ukrainian state, but also to sustain the greasing of Ukrainian corruption,

because that’s the only thing that keeps Zelensky in power.”

The US House of Representatives voted in favour of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on 14th December. The bill extended the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative through the end of 2026, authorising \$300 million for Kiev in the fiscal year ending 30th September 2024, as well as the next one. Still, the US media admits that it’s just a drop in the bucket when compared with the \$61 billion requested by Biden.

Both American voters and members of Congress have grown sceptical about funneling more money into Ukraine. Almost 50 per cent of US voters believe Washington is spending “too much” in military and financial aid for Ukraine, as per

the latest *FT*-Michigan Ross monthly survey. The sentiment is largely explained by Kiev’s crushing defeat during the summer counter-offensive.

Meanwhile, Kiev officials behave as if they are totally unaware of the troublesome trend. Earlier this month the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence handed over a “list of armaments to meet the needs of Ukraine’s defence forces” to their US counterparts.

In addition to artillery shells, F-16 fighters, drones, and missiles the list also included F-18 Hornet fighter jets, Boeing Apache attack helicopters, Lockheed Martin Black Hawk choppers, and even the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) air defence system, among other top-notch weapons.

But Ritter says there’s zero chance whatsoever that Ukraine will ever see anything on that wish list, apart from perhaps a handful of old F-16 fighters and a fraction of the artillery ammunition that they’ve requested.

“This is a sign of absolute panic on the part of Ukraine,” Ritter believes. “Zelensky is approaching a delusional state where he appears to be of a mindset similar to that which Adolf Hitler possessed in the final days in the Berlin bunker as the Red Army closed in, where he fantasised armies, he was moving non-existent troops and aircraft on a map with his hands.”

Providing sophisticated weaponry to Kiev is throwing away money and throwing away capability in the eyes of Washington. Furthermore, Russia knocking

out F-18 fighter jets or THAADs would create a bad precedent, let alone the security challenge of US technologies falling into the hands of the Russian military, according to Ritter.

“Ukraine does not factor into the legitimate national security interests of the USA. We are not going to sacrifice ourselves on the altar of Ukrainian nationalism. We’ve given them some support, but that support was merely sufficient to create the perception of Ukrainian strength. But we were never going to give the Ukrainians the ability to win this war, because they were never going to have the ability to win this war. Ukraine cannot defeat Russia. They’re not physically capable of defeating Russia, regardless of the equipment that the West gives them. So why would we sacrifice the

best equipment we have on this altar?”

Meanwhile, as Western military aid to Ukraine is dwindling, Kiev has virtually no chances of withstanding a potential Russian offensive in 2024, Ritter believes. To complicate matters further, Ukraine lost over 125,000 troops during the six months of Kiev’s botched counter-offensive according to the Russian Ministry of Defence.

Currently, the Russian military is steadily improving its positions along the entire, nearly 2,000 km-long, contact line in the special military operation zone, as Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed last week during his annual press conference.

The fate of the Ukrainian Army is sealed, as it does not have the luxury of an operational pause to catch its breath, according to Ritter. “I don’t see Ukraine surviving too long into 2024. Right now, there has been some talk about the potential of a major Russian offensive in the direction of Odessa sometime in the spring of 2024. And I believe that if Russia is moving towards Odessa at that time, it means that the end is imminent for Ukraine.”

Sputnik



LETTERS

Dear Comrades

If it is ever to break free from the shackles of imperialism the working class is faced with the historical task of overthrowing the capitalist system. Neither the class collaboration of social femocracy, the ineffective reforms of most left parties nor the false promises of the fake left and many Trotskyists will achieve anything. Marx correctly stated that socialism can only be made possible by replacing the capitalist state with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin made it clear that the required conditions can only be achieved through a vanguard revolutionary party capable of uniting and leading the masses.

The way we live, new technology and working practices have all changed greatly in recent years – however, the injustices and exploitation of a social system that is well past its sell-by date and is in terminal crisis remain. The demise of traditional industries with their established trade unions has weakened and fragmented the labour movement. Therefore, we urgently need to build new structures, create new platforms and develop new ways to carry out the essential class struggle. The Internet is the new revolutionary format for keeping abreast of events

and to follow news as it happens. We need to put forward progressive opinion through greater use of social media and by creating more websites to inform and influence. Attempts are continually made to block views and opinions that do not fit the imperialist narrative, as provided by the mass media, therefore we will always need our *New Worker*.

In Britain the class struggle will need to become stronger as the increasing burden of crisis is placed upon the shoulders of working people. It's no good just making a stand on a single issue because all things are connected and affect each other. The struggles for better wages, improving working conditions, restoring public services and peace are all components of the same conflict. Priorities for communists must be to organise through trade unions, expand our *New Worker* sales and party membership, and to use the Internet to increase the unity of the working class. There is a need to educate, inspire and lead the way forward towards building real socialism.

Internationally great changes are taking place as the capitalist crisis deepens. Gross incompetence and dysfunctional leadership in both the USA and among its allies have made the Imperialist crisis even worse.

In Europe many Western leaders have been seduced by the perceived wealth and glamour of US imperialism. Like sheep they have allowed themselves to be driven along a Primrose Road that can only lead to debacle and humiliation as their economies collapse around them. As workers unite and countries cast aside the chains of imperialism there can only be

hope for a better future in 2024. A future in which European fascists are not supported, peace returns to the world and in which the Genocide against the courageous Palestinian people is halted forever.

**John Maryon
Suffolk**

Dear Comrades

On 22nd October 2023 I wrote to Sir Keir Starmer, the Leader of the Opposition, as well as to my local MP Lee Anderson and the PM Rishi Sunak, pointing out that we had taken in a large number of Ukrainian refugees from the conflict with Russia but that I had heard nothing concerning the number of Palestinian refugees trapped in the Gaza ghetto.

As far as I know Ukraine is about the size and population of France, so anyone fleeing from the border battles with Russia has plenty of space to get clear of the fighting. The fate of the Palestinians is far worse, they are blasted day and night with nowhere to escape from it.

My question was a serious one, but evidently it is a case of 'Arab lives do not matter'. At the time of writing, I have had no reply from the three 'Honourable Members of Parliament' to whom I wrote. Perhaps the *New Worker* could take up the case of these unfortunate people, see if any MPs, for example, would make enquiries about this or speak in their favour.

**Robert J Smith
Sutton-in-Ashfield**

Dear Comrades

As someone who lived through the Kissinger era and remembers when I was much younger seeing Kissinger on TV jetting off to this or that country to interfere in and plan regime change, I read your editorial

Kissinger leaves the stage [NW:2233; 8 Dec 2023] with great interest.

What caught my eye was the following: "Kissinger may have called his dealings with the USSR 'reciprocity' or 'realism'; in reality it was just horse-trading with the Brezhnev leadership that was pursuing a futile attempt at achieving nuclear parity with the Americans to divide the world into Soviet and American spheres of influence."

I think it was more of a case that Kissinger was carrying out the US strategy of the so-called 'peaceful transition' of socialism into capitalism, basically an abrupt reversal of the revolutionary process.

Sadly, the revisionist leadership of the USSR under first Khrushchev and then Brezhnev opened their doors to the likes of Kissinger and the imperialist influence that he brought with him. This, of course, became pronounced and got accelerated under the ultimate Judas, Gorbachev.

The Soviet leadership did deals with US imperialism such as SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) and also the disastrous Helsinki accords that allowed the open interference of imperialism in the socialist countries.

Kissinger never set foot in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a truly anti-revisionist and anti-imperialist socialist country, and President Kim Il Sung never shook hands with Kissinger. This is one of the many reasons why socialism exists and is going strong in the DPRK.

**Dermot Hudson
London**

Diary

Check the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition websites for emergency Gaza protests across the country.

SAT 23 DEC

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

SAT 23 DEC

Medical Aid for Palestinians: Saturday Xmas Show, 19:30, Camden Comedy Club, 100 Camden High St, London NW1 0LU. £12.50 Book on Dice.fm

UNTIL 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.

TUE 9 JAN 2024

Marx Memorial Library: Marxism, the State and Revolution. Eight week online course. Register on MML website.

SAT 13 JAN

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Gaza Ceasefire demonstration. 12:00. Central London. Details TBC.

SAT 13 JAN

Radical Options for Scotland and Europe: Conference. 11:00–13:00. Unite HQ, 145–165 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 4RZ.

WED 17 JAN

Anglia Ruskin University: Sir Christopher Pisarides on Automation and its impact on the labour market. 18:00–19:00, Online event. Book on Eventbrite.

SAT 20 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Lenin in Britain: Symposium to Commemorate the centenary of Lenin's death 1924–2024. 11:00. Hybrid meeting. Book on MML website.

THUR 25 JAN

Scottish CND: Peace Poetry Night. The Renfield Centre, Kirk Lounge, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JP.

SAT 27 JAN

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Latin America Conference 2024. 10:00–17:00. Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD. Book on CND website.

SAT 27 JAN

Trades Union Congress: Protect the right to strike: March and rally. 12:00–14:00. Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham, GL50 1UL.

THUR 8 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: Book launch, David Lane's *Global Neo-liberal Capitalism and the Alternatives: from social democracy to state capitalism*. 19:00. Hybrid event. Register on MML website.

SAT 24 FEB

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: AGM. 9:30–16:30. Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1 4RL.

SAT 2 MAR

Women Against Pit Closures: 40th Anniversary, Durham. Details TBC.

SAT 9 MAR

1984–5 Miners' Strike commemoration, Doncaster. Details TBC

SUN 28 APRIL

Workers Memorial Day. See TUC and STUC websites for local events.

WED 1 MAY

International Workers Day. See TUC and STUC websites for local events.

SAT 18 MAY

Burford Levellers Day. 10:30–15:00. Burford, Oxfordshire OX18, starting at the Green by Warwick Hall.

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

continued on page 9...

JOIN US!

For peace!

justice!

socialism!

I would like to join the New Communist Party....

I would like more info about the NCP....

Name.....

.....

Address.....

.....


.....

.....

postcode.....

phone.....

Send to NCP, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.



BOOST OUR FUND

Make your commitment to sustaining the New Worker in the struggle for peace and socialism

COMPLETE THE BANKER'S ORDER FORM BELOW:

The Manager.....

.....

bank. Bank's address.....

.....

Please pay to the New Worker account No 50492464, 08-90-34, Co-op Bank plc, 17 High St, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT1 1LP. the sum of £.....

(in words) each month starting on.....

.....

Signature.....

.....

RETURN THIS FORM TO:

NCP Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.

Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

The last major political event of the year was the annual Scottish Budget, which was unveiled on Tuesday. Holding such a major event in the last working week of the year might seem strange, but it helps because people are too busy with Christmas parties to notice the details of what has been announced.

The Budget was the first to be delivered by the new Finance Minister Shona Robison, whose career a Health Secretary ended when a particularly bad set of statistics was published in 2018. She later returned as Justice Secretary, presiding over the controversial Gender Reform measure that has caused so much grief for the SNP including the departure of the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

The Budget was an uneventful event compared with that in March 2020, when her predecessor was promoted to Finance Secretary just hours beforehand when the incumbent resigned for grooming a 16-year-old boy.

Ms Robison claimed the SNP was “making very different choices to the UK government” in the Budget. Yes, no, maybe.

Deploring Tory cuts in taxes on business is no problem because that is not in the power of Holyrood, except for council taxes on business properties.

Although she did not cut any such taxes, she announced a freeze on business rates for premises valued at less than £51,000. That will be great for businesses with lots of small premises. She also promised that island hospitality businesses will be

given get up to £110,000 relief on their rates, as compensation for the fact that the SNP cannot run a ferry service.

The main announcement, however, was the creation of a new 45 per cent tax band for people earning between £75,000–£125,140. There are now six tax bands in Scotland compared with England's three. The highest rate, paid on salaries over £125,000, will rise from 47 to 48 per cent. Those on low wages still pay less than in England.

These changes mean that someone earning £50,000 in Scotland now pays an extra £1,542 annually than if they lived south of the border. Robison claims this alone will raise about £82 million, but the bean counters at the Fraser of Allander Institute estimate they will only bring in an extra £60 million. In any case it will only make a tiny dent in the £1.5 billion in budget shortfall, but Robison thinks her budget as a whole will bridge the gap.

This affects not just the few millionaires around but many of those who have been on picket lines recently: NHS doctors and head teachers among others. It will be interesting to see what effect this has on voting intentions.

Funding public services by increasing taxation in Scotland is very difficult. There are not enough filthy rich people to tax. Extra taxes on businesses based in Scotland would be virtually impossible because most are multinationals who employ accountants to prove they don't make any money. The SNP Government cannot introduce extra ‘sin taxes’ on alcohol and tobacco and they have long held to a Janus-faced policy on taxing alcohol, saying it is a bad thing in that it damages the Scotch whisky industry but a good thing because it reduces problem drinking.

To the surprise of local councils, in October the Scottish Government suddenly announced that it would be freezing the council tax, a measure which benefits most of all those living in large houses. Before the Budget, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities warned that many councils on Scotland were tottering on the verge of bankruptcy and said that they needed £300 million simply to avoid any further cuts in local authority jobs and services. In response, Robison said they get less than half that: £144 million

to be precise.

Giveaways

A few crowd-pleasing measures such giving local authorities £1.5 million to cancel the school-meal debt owed by parents to local authorities were thrown in. The Child Poverty Action Group denounced the modest increase in Scottish Child Payment from £25 to £26.70 from next April as “bitterly disappointing” after saying it should be £30.

NHS boards are to get an extra £550m, raising the health service budget to £13.2 billion.

Social care, early learning and childcare workers in the private, third and independent sectors are to receive a wage rise to at least £12 per hour after April, a magnificent 54 pence above what will then be the national minimum.

£49 million will be invested in making “progress in Scotland's transition to a circular economy”, which will give the Greens something to occupy themselves if they do not resign in the likely event of the SNP giving up the ghost over the Gender reforms.

At a time when both Glasgow and Edinburgh have declared housing emergencies, £200 million was cut from the Housing budget. The previous day Shelter Scotland called for a £300 million Housing Emergency Acquisition Fund to secure homes for the 1,910 households with children in temporary accommodation for over a year. Instead, Arts & Culture funding is to be increased by £15.8 million in order to keep their luvvie supporters happy.

Labour's finance

spokesman Michael Marra initially responded by saying it was a chaotic budget from an “incompetent government that will leave ordinary Scots paying much more and getting much less in return”.

Roz Foyer, General Secretary of the Scottish TUC, welcomed the Budget saying: “With Westminster induced pressure on public spending in Scotland, we're pleased that the Scottish Government has listened to the STUC and introduced a higher rate of tax for those on higher incomes. This represents a markedly positive approach which should be recognised.”

At the same time, she deplored the Council Tax freeze and said the Scottish Government's refusal “to countenance more ambitious tax reform has left a hole it was never going to be able to fill. High-quality, fully funded public services must be at the heart of a well-being economy and we cannot countenance any cuts – spun and packaged up as ‘reforms’ – which act as a barrier to that goal.”

The main Scottish teacher's union, the EIS, welcomed the school-meals money decision but feared that the promise to increase funding to employ more teachers on permanent contracts will be nothing more than that.

Finally, Scottish Prison Service funding is being increased by 10 per cent and no less £176 million will be devoted to modernising prison buildings. One wonders if a certain former First Minister lobbied for this as, in the light of ongoing police investigations, she might have more than a passing interest in improving prison accommodation.

...continued from page 8

Dear Comrades
Labour MP Andy Slaughter has asked the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what representations he has made to his Saudi counterpart on the death sentences passed on Abdullah al-Derazi. The reply came in a written format saying: “Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Human Rights Priority Country, in part because of the continued use of the death penalty. We continue to monitor the cases of the young men, including Abdullah al-Derazi, who allegedly committed their crimes as minors and are at risk of execution. The Minister for the Middle East and Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon regularly raises

these cases, including Abdullah al-Derazi with the Saudi authorities as a priority.”
John Hughes
Bahrain Freedom Movement

Dear Comrades
What a great job you've done over a very difficult period. Thank you. We need the *New Worker* perspective more than ever!
Rowena Harrison
Dunstable

In Memory of Comrades

HARRY DANVERS and PETER GEDDES

dedicated communists

founder members of the

New Communist Party of Britain

from your comrades in the

Richmond & Kingston branch

of the New Communist Party of Britain

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

4 weeks: £6; 3 months: £20;

6 months: £30; annual: £50

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Post code.....

Cheque/P.O.s, made out to

New Worker, to: NW Subs, PO Box 73,

London SW11 2PQ.

Health Workers stand by Palestine!

by New Worker correspondent

Around one thousand NHS workers and other supporters marched from one of London's leading hospitals, St Thomas', across the River Thames from the Houses of Parliament, to Downing Street in Whitehall. The protest was organised by Health Workers for Palestine and was joined by NHS workers from all over England, including Manchester, Canterbury and Bristol.

One health worker said she had been protesting for Palestinians since she was 13 years old. She said: "I'm here for basic com-

passion. If this happened to us, I would expect people around the world to be as outraged as I am with the genocide which is occurring against the

Palestinian people at the moment. I want to be on the right side of history at the end of the day, which is with people and with compassion. Healthcare

workers should never be a target. These are war crimes plain and simple."

When asked about the failure of Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer

to back calls for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, she said: "Keir Starmer is a monster and should not be in charge. If we want to talk about politicians,

we should talk about politicians like Dara Sultana who's currently putting a bid through parliament for the UK to stop selling arms to countries which are contributing to this genocide. We should be listening to and supporting politicians who are actually doing something, like Dara Sultana and Asama Begum, and quite frankly Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer can get in the bin."

Speakers at the rally opposite Downing Street included the director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign Ben Jamal, veteran peace campaigner Dr Swee Chai Ang, and leading healthcare professionals from Palestine and the UK.



Unpaid Energy Bills Reach Record-High Level

by Svetlana Ekimenko

Anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the West over Ukraine had backfired spectacularly on European economies, resulting in accelerated inflation and prompting energy prices to soar. The UK, where gas is used to heat 85 percent of homes and to generate about 40 per cent of electricity, fallout from these policies hit household finances hard.

A staggering number of British households are unable to pay their electricity and gas bills due to the cost-of-living crisis. The amount owed to energy suppliers has risen by £400 million since mid-October, reaching £3 billion,

revealed a report released on Friday.

These concerns have prompted the industry regulator Ofgem to propose raising its cap on household bills by £16 or £1.33 per month for the next financial year, from April 2024. That rise is aimed at helping intermediary billing companies offset higher debt costs they say

could drive them to bankruptcy.

"The record level of debt in the system means we must take action to make sure suppliers can recover their reasonable costs, so the market remains resilient, and suppliers are offering consumers support in managing their debts," said Tim Jarvis, Ofgem's director general for

markets.

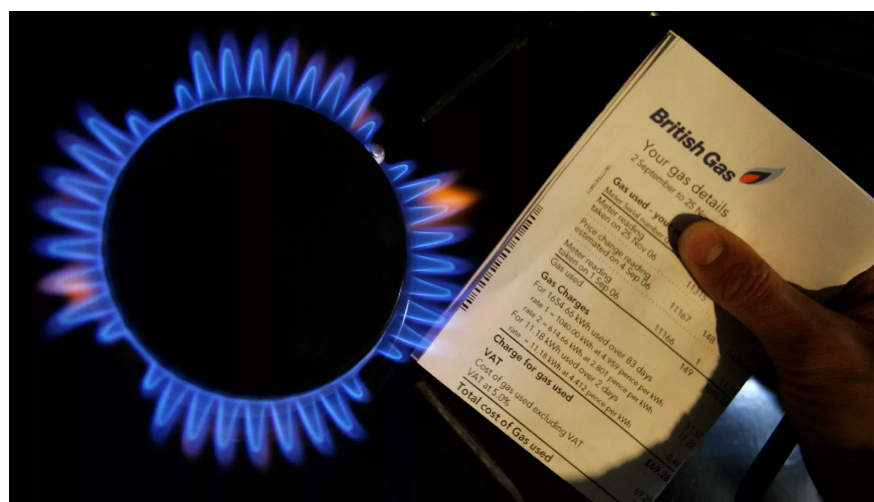
"The proposals set out today are not something we take lightly. This approach will ensure the costs are recovered fairly, without penalising a particular group of customers," Jarvis added.

When the West launched its sweeping sanctions campaign against Russia

over Ukraine in 2022, the USA, EU and UK started seeking ways to limit Russia's income from gas and oil exports. They also boasted their determination to cut their dependence on cheap and reliable Russian fuel – however, embargoes on Russian energy exports led to a sharp rise in prices. Although the UK gets

around half its domestic natural gas from fields in its maritime exclusive economic zone in the North Sea, regional gas boards, electricity generators and consumers must pay the going market rate for supplies.

Record high energy prices last year were partly offset by government support payments averaging £2,500 per household last January. Since then, the price cap set by the government's Energy Price Guarantee scheme has fallen to an average of £1,928 for January 2024. Prices and wider cost-of-living pressures remain high, however, as Ofgem acknowledged in its report.



Ambitious fossil fuel pact on paper

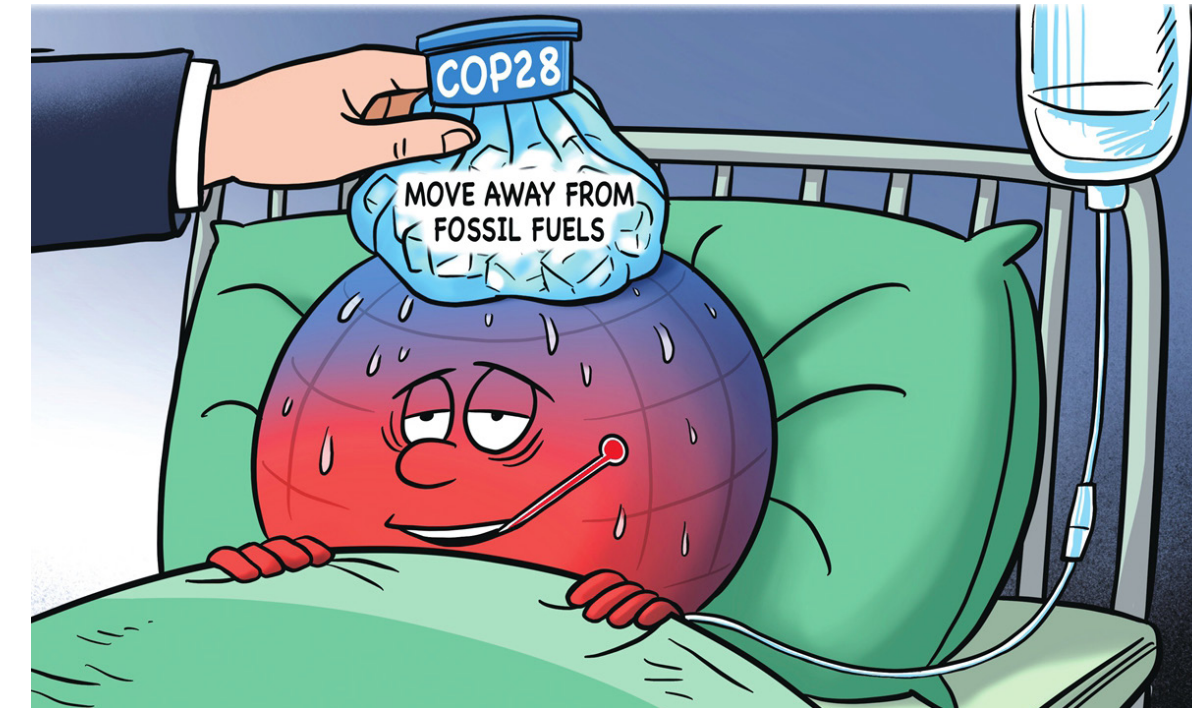
by Roberto Morejón

After two weeks of intense and not always comfortable debates, representatives of almost 200 nations initialled an agreement at the Climate Summit, which has become the first forum in which a transition away from fossil fuels is enunciated.

An issue that had been a hot topic until now, given the dependence of oil- and gas-producing countries, was resolved at the last minute, in what some delegates described as an unprecedented pact.

The need to move away from oil, gas and coal was clearly stated for the first time.

They also agreed to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to do everything possible to limit global warming



to a maximum of 1.5° C, calling for a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

In other words, the challenge of fossil fuels was comprehensively addressed in Dubai after many years in which the

issue had been blocked at conferences such as this one.

Of course, more than a few delegates and observers warned that it would be a mistake to consider that the fossil fuel era ended in Dubai,

but they note that the world has reached the beginning of its end.

The Dubai compromise aims to achieve net zero by 2050, but respecting the different circumstances of each country, an aspect that

leaves a margin for nations dependent on energy production.

A group of countries, however, mainly those most affected by climate change, considered that the text agreed in Dubai did not reflect the sci-

entific mandate to limit global warming as they had hoped.

In the same vein, the Global South insisted that there is still insufficient support for tangible funding to help poor nations, victims of climate anarchy, cope with catastrophic losses.

All is not lost however, as the Dubai meeting created a fund to be implemented from 2024 to compensate the countries suffering most from the effects of environmental damage.

Despite the applause and the “historic” adjectives in relation to the Dubai agreement, the participants decided to ask the UN to convene annual meetings to examine the fulfilment of the commitments made in the fight against climate change. Many demand tangible proof.

Radio Havana Cuba

Khan turns down Kiev plea for cars

by Svetlana Ekimenko

London's Mayor Sadiq Khan has dealt a humiliating blow to his Ukrainian counterpart, Vitali Klitschko. Amid the Kiev regime's scramble to make up for vast vehicle losses, the mayor of Kiev requested that London send cars otherwise destined for the scrapheap under the ULEZ but was turned down. According to the *Telegraph*, London's mayor apparently cited a legal quirk when saying he would not let the vehicles – reportedly pickup trucks and 4x4s – be sent to the Ukraine conflict zone.

ULEZ, the Ultra

Low Emissions Zone, is designed to reduce the number of high-emission cars travelling within them. In the UK capital, ULEZ began to be expanded as of August 2023.

In accordance with London's ULEZ scheme, vehicle owners can claim a one-off payment to the tune of £2,000 if they scrap a car failing to comply with the pollution levy. Drivers of older and/or high-emission vehicles face a charge of £12.50 per day when they drive within the ULEZ.

Vitali Klitschko apparently wrote to Khan in September, asking that such scrapped vehicles be donated to Kiev. According to Klitschko, such an offering would

have “enormous potential” and be used in a “variety of life-saving and transport roles”. On 12th December, Sadiq Khan apparently sent a reply to Kiev's mayor, telling him that the proposal did not comply with a “legal threshold” that requires the ULEZ scrappage scheme to benefit London's residents from an “economic, social and environmental perspective”. As to the number of cars that are estimated to be ULEZ non-compliant in Greater London, in March, RAC research suggested it was close to 700,000.

According to the *Telegraph*, donated 4x4s and other larger vehicles have been making their way to Ukraine over the

last few months with the help of “volunteers” from organisations such as ‘Car for Ukraine’. After the vehicles get there, they are given a coat of camouflage paint and fitted with everything from machine-guns to rocket launchers.

Despite the vast array of military aid supplied by NATO to Kiev, the latter's summer counter-offensive has failed, resulting in horrific losses in personnel and weaponry. The Kiev regime has been forced to rely on such strategies as using refurbished Soviet era T-72 tanks, or endowing NATO armour with a new role as emplaced turrets.

It should be noted that even Ukraine's President Vladimir Zelen-

sky has finally tacitly admitted that Kiev's counter-offensive has failed. Last week, Zelensky admitted to the US media that Ukraine was in a “new phase” of the conflict, while also complaining about the West's failure to provide all the arms he wanted for Ukraine's summer counter-offensive.

“We wanted faster results. From that perspective, unfortunately, we did not achieve the desired results. And this is a fact,” Zelensky said.

Amid human and equipment losses, Ukraine has been forced to give its NATO-gifted armour a new role, using at least some of its German-made Leopard-series main battle tanks as makeshift artillery.

Ukraine's military has begun digging the heavy armour deep into the ground in a ‘hull-down’ position and deploying it to target Russian infantry and infrastructure.

The Kiev regime's military has also been relying on an improvised infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) whose pace is such that a soldier could easily walk as fast. What they reportedly did was to pull a vintage 13-ton MT-LB armoured tractor, dating back to the 1970s, out of long-term storage. This was reportedly provided with extra armour and a remotely controlled weapons station (RWS). The result was the BMP-1LB, used as a ‘surrogate’ IFV.

Sputnik

Slovak leader exposes Western plan for Ukraine

Most European states are consumed by hatred for Russia and Western countries are ready to fight to the last Ukrainian soldier in order to weaken the Russian Federation, and Ukraine and its citizens have simply become bargaining chips in the geopolitical squabble, says Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico.

"In fact, most of the member states of the European Union are obsessed with Ukraine and hatred towards Russia, which leads to peculiar views that are undoubtedly propagated in the European media – that the war in Ukraine should continue to weaken Russia," Fico said in his video address published on social media.

He went on to say that obsession was linked to unfounded scaremongering claims that Russia might attack a NATO member. "In reality, Ukraine is only being used for geopolit-

ical purposes to weaken Russia both economically and internationally."

The Slovak prime minister also viewed Ukraine's possible accession to the EU as nothing more than a political gesture to cover up inconvenient realities on the battlefield.

He pointed out that it will take years before Ukraine can realistically join the EU as the country is not ready both

in terms of democratic functioning and the fight against corruption – putting the EU in a hopeless situation.

"When major EU members calculate the hundreds of billions of euros that Ukraine's EU membership would cost, the decision made in Brussels will remain a political gesture for many years," Fico added.

He believes that

Ukraine is simply a 'golden goose' for Western companies involved in the arms trade – regardless of the human cost.

"I fear that, in the name of these geopolitical goals, the West will continue to fight with Russia until the last Ukrainian soldier, and we are not far from that," Fico said.

On Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed as "complete nonsense" recent com-

ments by US President Joe Biden about a possible Russian attack on NATO. Putin stressed that Russia has no interest in waging war against NATO countries, saying there was no political, economic or military reasons to do so.

Moscow has previously argued that Kiev intends to continue fighting "to the last Ukrainian" in the inter-

ests of Western powers.

Russia earlier warned NATO countries against further arms shipments to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine would be a legitimate target for Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry has previously accused NATO countries of "playing with fire" by supplying weapons to Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that arming Ukraine with Western weapons would not contribute to the success of Russian-Ukrainian negotiations and would only have a negative impact. Lavrov charged that the USA and NATO are directly involved in the conflict in Ukraine, "not only through arms supplies, but also by training personnel... on the territory of the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and other countries".

Sputnik

Biden: A candle in the wind

by Guillermo Alvarado

There are only a few days left until the end of this year and the beginning of 2024, which will be a year of electoral vertigo in the USA to determine the future head of the White House, as well as members of the Houses of Representatives and Senators, in addition to a good number of governors.

For the moment, everything indicates that

Joseph Biden, of the Democratic Party, will once again face Republican Donald Trump for the presidency of the most powerful country from the economic and military point of view.

It is true that the former will enter the race at over 80 years of age, a rather advanced age, and the latter must resolve a series of judicial entanglements that could complicate his life, but no alternative name has yet been mentioned in this process.

For the current president, Biden, things are going uphill according to a survey conducted by *Bloomberg News/Morning Consult*, where it is revealed that if the elections were held now, he would lose in seven key states to remain in power.

These are Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Carolina and Nevada, where Trump appears in the lead.

The reasons are various, according to

analysts, but in general they begin because this administration has not imposed its own stamp and is gradually moving closer to the imprint left by the Republicans, especially on migrants.

Moreover, his almost unconditional support to Israel in the extermination that the Zionist regime is carrying out in the Gaza Strip is creating a cold zone among the American population, particularly among young people and ethnic minorities.

The images coming

from the Middle East are chilling, as are the numbers of children killed or seriously injured as a result of the bombings ordered from Tel Aviv and supported by Washington.

At the same time, as Democratic analyst Stanley Greenberg points out, there are more and more people in the USA whose wages are not enough to make ends meet due to the increase in the prices of the basic food basket.

There is a growing impression that Biden is focusing too much on foreign affairs and not on the domestic economy and the plight of the less favoured sectors of society. In general terms, other analysts believe that the majority of the Democratic electorate is not impressed by Biden's record as president, while Trump retains the hardcore Republican vote.

Radio Havana Cuba