

Gaza: Stop the War Lift the Siege!

by our Arab Affairs
correspondent

The guns remain silent in the Gaza Strip as diplomatic efforts to prolong the Gaza cease-fire beyond the prisoner exchange continue in the Gulf state of Qatar. A total of 69 Israeli hostages have been freed by Hamas, and Israel has handed over 150 Palestinian prisoners in return. Some humanitarian aid has been arriving in Gaza via Egypt as part of the cease-fire deal. But despite growing international pressure to end the carnage the Israelis say they will resume their offensive as soon as the exchange is over.

Sheikha Hessa bint Khalifa bin Ahmed al Thani, a member of the Qatari ruling family and the Arab League's special envoy for humanitarian affairs, says Israeli aggression must be stopped.

"We must move immediately, under international auspices, towards a comprehensive solution," she said. Calls for a lasting ceasefire have become a global demand," she said. "All countries are required to take a moral and humanitarian stance to stop this barbaric war today, not tomorrow."

At UN Headquarters in New York António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the world

forum, said the Palestinians in Gaza were suffering "a humanitarian catastrophe". Marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on Wednesday, the UN Secretary-General said "almost 1.7 million people have been forced from their homes – but nowhere is safe", while also warning that "the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, risks boiling over".

In the Kremlin Russia repeated its support for a "two-state" solution in a message to Palestinian leaders and the Turks are calling for Israel to be charged with war-crimes.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says Israel has violated international law by committing various crimes in its latest war on Gaza, which has killed more than 15,000 people in less than two months. In a phone call on Tuesday with UN Secretary General Antonio Gu-

terres, the Turkish president said that Israel must be tried in international courts for war crimes it has committed in Gaza over the last few weeks.

"Israel continues to shamelessly trample on international law, the laws of war, and international humanitarian law by looking in the eyes of the international community, and it must be held accountable for the crimes it committed in front of international law," Erdoğan said.

The Turkish leader also discussed the "expectations of the international community regarding Israel's unlawful attacks" on Gaza as well as issues such as the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people in the Strip and efforts that can guarantee a permanent settlement in the Middle East.

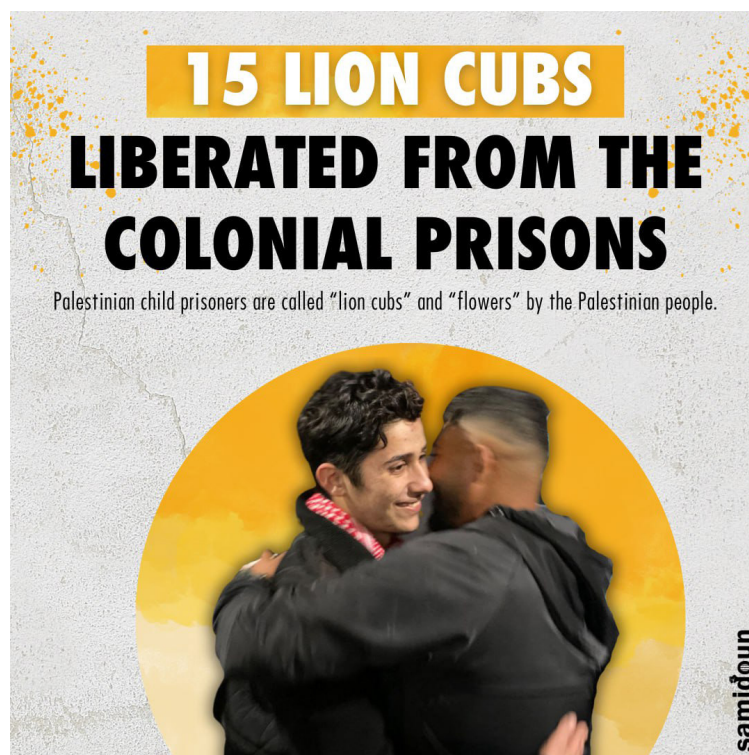
Meanwhile Russian President Vladimir Putin re-affirmed his country's support for a "two-state" solution to end the Middle East conflict. In a message to

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority that runs the "autonomous" zone in the West Bank, the Russian

leader said "it is in this (the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state within the 1967 borders) that we see the key condition for achieving a comprehensive, long-term and just Palestinian-Israeli settlement".

Putin stressed that: "Now, when the bloody conflict is bringing untold suffering to the peaceful population of Palestine, I consider it particularly important to reaffirm Russia's consistent position in favour of the realisation of the legitimate rights of your people to establish their own sovereign state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"This undoubtedly corresponds to our common interests and is in line with the consolidation of regional security and stability. I wish you, Mr President, good health and success, and I wish all Palestinians peace, well-being and prosperity in their homeland."



FUND

Friends and supporters raised £649 for the fighting fund last week, pushing the needle up to £1,840. We now need £1,660 to hit our target for November. We've got one more week to do it!

Getting the *New Worker* back on the street takes time and effort. And above all it takes time and money to buy the paper and ink, pay our suppliers and maintain our electronic press – time and money that can only come from our dedicated supporters prepared to make the sacrifices needed to keep up the fight for peace and socialism.

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. The first issue of the New Year will come out on Friday 12th January. So as we enter the festive season, please consider making an extra special gift to the only communist weekly in the country. We rely entirely on our readers to keep going. Make sure of it 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'.

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THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

The road to Brussels

The Remainers are on the march. The newly ennobled Lord Cameron is back in the saddle as No 3 in the Sunak government and while his first overseas visits were predictably to Ukraine and Israel, his major task is to rebuild economic and diplomatic bridges with the European Union.

Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, may have jumped the gun when she claimed the UK could be on the path to rejoining the EU last week. But she clearly reflects the thinking of the European old guard that want to see Britain speedily returning to the European fold.

Rishi Sunak has made it clear that he's not going to do anything to rock the Brexit boat in the run-up to the next election. But the return of David Cameron to the Foreign Office is more than a sop to the Remainers in his ranks – it's a victory for those sections of the ruling class that want Britain back in the EU and it can only help build their block in Parliament.

The Scottish nationalists and the Liberal-Democrats are long-time Returners. So are most Labour MPs. The next step for the Remainers is to move for the return of the prominenti kicked out by Boris Johnson in 2019 when they tried to stop the no-deal Brexit. This will then, they hope, create enough cross-party support for a second referendum in the near future regardless of who's in power at the time.

The Tory Brexiteers are rudderless. Their self-appointed parliamentary leader was Boris Johnson – now seen for the fool he always was. Their real leader was, of course, Nigel Farage, who has abandoned politics for the more lucrative shores of reality TV. Johnson reduced the Eurosceptic argument to a crude choice between the Treaty of Rome and a Treaty of Washington that was a figment of his imagination. Now all these Brexiteers have got left is planes to Rwanda, racism and anti-immigrant hysteria.

But the EU isn't a benevolent society. It's a fraud, an institution designed solely for the benefit of the oppressors and exploiters. What few benefits the EU has brought, such as increased trade and open borders, could all have been achieved through separate agreements and treaties.

Johnson had a golden opportunity to make Brexit work. He squandered it with all this nonsense about a deal with Donald Trump that was never going to happen. But it still can work if the UK takes Brexit seriously and open its doors to free trade with China and the rest of the world.

The COVID enquiry

The nonsense about 'herd immunity'; the callous and incompetent response to the pandemic that led to many avoidable deaths amongst the frail and the elderly, and the indifference of a Prime Minister who most of the time seemingly let Dominic Cummings, his Rasputin-like aide, steer the ship of state. It's all coming out in the COVID inquiry. None of this should surprise us. Johnson's despicable conduct, and that of his henchmen, showed how totally unfit all of them were for high office.

Johnson counts for nothing in the political arena now. Crawling to the Trump crowd in the USA and grand-standing amongst the Ukrainians is all that Johnson's got left these days. Johnson is fortunately gone. Sunak will hopefully soon follow.

BBC 'blinding public opinion' on Palestine

by Oleg Burunov

The BBC has joined the "yellow press" lacking objectivity and professionalism due to its biased stance on global developments.

A group of BBC journalists have accused the UK broadcaster of bias and double standards in covering the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, arguing that more attention is paid to Israeli victims. In a letter released earlier this week, the journalists in particular made it clear that they would like to know when the number of casualties among Palestinians would be "high enough for our editorial stance to change".

"I do agree that the British Broadcasting Corporation is obviously biased," says London-based foreign affairs analyst Adriel Kasonta. "It is actively dehumanising the other side of the conflict. And I would even go further by saying that there is only one side of the conflict, which is the Palestinian minority, which is occupied by the Israelis. We know about the actions of Israeli settlers who are actively pushing the Palestinian people from their territories," Kasonta said.

He added that the fact that the BBC is paying more attention to Israeli casualties in the current conflict is "obvious".

"The devil is in the details and the detail is very apparent to the public, which can't any longer be deceived by the manipulations of the mainstream media. The accusations are right, are correct," Kasonta said.

When asked about the reasons for this one-sided coverage of the conflict by the BBC, he stressed that from the very beginning of this armed stand-off "the collective West pledged to reassure Israel that they have a carte-blanc when it comes to committing the genocide. We have to call a spade a spade. What the Israeli government and Benjamin Ne-

tanyahu is doing in Gaza is the genocide."

Kasonta added that the general public knows what is happening in Gaza, which he said "has been proved by the numerous protests all over the world, in London, in the United States and other Western countries and in the Arab states. So we know that the general public is outraged by the fact that the mainstream media is blatantly lying and somehow whitewashing and giving the coverage a cover-up."

This was echoed by Lebanese reporter and journalist Hussein Izzedin, who slammed the BBC as "yellow press" that "has lost the spirit of real journalism due to its biased approach to events taking place in Palestine and beyond."

"The media should be impartial and fair, in accordance with the principles of journalism, but today we see the BBC turning the victim into an executioner – and a terrorist and a killer into a humane being who is allegedly defending himself," Izzedin said, dubbing the broadcaster's actions "a policy of blinding public opinion".

He insisted that what the BBC is doing now will mark "a new black spot on its long-standing history of intransigence and complete lack of objectivity, as if the broadcaster was a party to this conflict".

Izzedin says the BBC is unable to inform the public on "the reality of the latest developments" and furthermore, the broadcaster is trying to muzzle those professional journalists who consider objectivity a matter of humanity". He lambasted the BBC as a broadcaster that "has lost its objectivity and professionalism" and has become "yellow press run from clandestine rooms".

Any major mainstream media outlet in the West inevitably has to affirm Israel's right to self-defence even as Palestinians become "victims of some very brutal bombing and other sort of repression", argues Come Carpentier de

Gourdon, the convener of the editorial board of the journal *World Affairs*.

The BBC's stance is hardly surprising considering the fact that the conflict in the Gaza Strip is "a part of the wider conflict between what you might call the collective West and not only the axis of resistance, but also a big part of the developing world," he added.

De Gourdon says that as the BBC is essentially an "organ of the British government" representing "Anglo-Saxon geo-political and financial interests", it "is bound to be at some level aligned with the Israeli positions".

"Therefore I think it is inevitable that any major Western, government-connected or at least mainstream, media will in some way affirm that Israel, as the saying goes, has the right to defend itself and therefore has to do what it can to defeat its enemies when they attack the state of Israel...that is the situation and the position and the whole West is basically aligned on that."

De Gourdon added that he thinks that "the BBC does have a bias" and that "Palestinians are now the victims of some very brutal bombing and other sorts of repression".

Meanwhile, independent media analyst Professor Ellis Cashmore noted that both the UK prime minister and the leader of the opposition Labour Party "publicly announced their alignment with Israel at the very start of the conflict", even though the country has a sizeable Muslim population.

"Muslims in the UK and elsewhere in Europe have shown that their sympathies lie with Palestine. So, the allegiance of Britain's leaders was not representative of the views of the general population," Prof Cashmore said. "As the conflict has progressed, British citizens' perspectives have changed, leaving the two leaders looking one-sided in their approach."

Sputnik

Workers' Notes

Uncharitable Charities

by New Worker correspondent

Around 500 low-paid workers across the UK who are employed by a wealthy organisation with £44.6 million in reserves and which had an income of £373 million last year, are taking industrial action for the first time in the organisation's history.

Some 83 per cent of workers voted on an 82 per cent turnout for action that will involve strikes for more than 17 days in the course of this month, which being a major retailer will hit their bosses hard. They claim their pay has declined by a fifth over the last five years. In addition, a recent survey of their workers found that over the past year: eight per cent had used foodbanks, 22 per cent were unable to pay their rent and 34 per cent have had to choose between heating and eating.

The strike vote came after workers rejected a pay offer of £1,750 or six per cent (whichever is higher), plus a one-off taxed payment of £1,000 for the lowest earners, and after the employer refused to enter fresh negotiations. Their union accuses bosses of planning to undermine by using unpaid volunteers, which the bosses have condemned in the past.

Not all its workers are underpaid. It was able to afford to pay an overseas employee £340,000–£349,000 in the year to 31st March 2022. Four other overseas employees earned over £100,000. This was justified by saying it offered no pension.

Welcome to the wonderful world of Oxfam, the

charity devoted to “overcoming poverty by fighting the injustices and inequalities that fuel it”. The aggrieved workers belong to Unite, whose general secretary Sharon Graham warned that: “Oxfam is an extremely wealthy organisation and can afford to put forward an acceptable offer without impacting its charity work in the slightest. Its workers have their union’s total and unflinching support as they strike to make sure that happens.”

Jamie Major, a regional co-ordinating officer for the union, added: “Like many other employers in the charity sector, Oxfam exploits its workers’ commitment to its aims by not paying them properly. That Oxfam is even thinking of using unpaid labour to break the strike and refuses to talk to its workers’ union, shows this is an organisation that is in danger of losing its way.”

As the workers are generally those who work at the HQ and its shops there will be a picket outside of Oxfam Headquarters at John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford next Friday or outside their first shop in the city’s Broad Street on the following Saturday, both starting at 10 am.

Oxfam was founded in 1942 as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief by a group of Quakers and academics in the city to avert starvation in Nazi-occupied Greece. From a single employee in 1949 it now has a CEO on £120,900, which has represents a slight fall on the previous year. To be fair, this would be deemed a pitiful sum by commercial businesses with an income of £373 million.

In general has to be said that the top earners in the British charity sector are not those in the poverty sector. The average for the CEOs of the largest charities is £176,000, but this is dominated by the medical and scientific sector with the Nuffield Health director topping the table on £1.2 million. Only the Salvation Army whose “Ter-

ritorial Commander” gets £25,000 for living expenses is notable for its restraint.

The Oxfam action is not the only recent industrial action involving charities. At the Citizens Advice Hull and East Riding (CAHER) branch, 60 employees needed four days of strike action to secure a £1,500 consolidated payment across all grades and a £425 non-consolidated payment. For 2024 they will get another £1,000 consolidated payment across all grades.

At the conclusion of the dispute, CAHER said that: “Winter is coming and the number of people asking for help is at the highest level we have ever recorded. We have an unprecedented increase in demand for our services, we will continue to be there for the community.” But for that you need to pay workers properly. Again this was under the auspices of Unite, which has a strong representation in the charity sector. It is, however, useful to measure what sort of density they have. The Oxfam dispute affects only about a tenth of its UK staff.

As reported in earlier issues, the homelessness charity St Mungo’s, which operates across southern England, was also involved in a long-running strike. Here again the contrast between the high pay collected by the CEO and low-paid front-line workers was highlighted. At the start of the strike Sharon Graham commented: “The charity’s staff do not take indefinite strike action lightly but they face a desperate situation – they need St Mungo’s to listen and act. The indifference of the management to their own staff smacks of the corporatisation of the charity sector.”

She complained that: “St Mungo’s have executives on well over £100,000 a year and the same people insist their workers should exist on poverty wages with actual wage cuts.” This was after workers overwhelmingly rejected an offer from the charity’s bosses to raise

the original salary increase by 1.75–2.75 per cent. In the end, strike action secured an inflation-busting 10.74 per cent or £3,125 in cash terms plus a one-off payment of £700 for most workers, with lower-paid workers doing best.

The present Oxfam strike provides us with an opportunity to look at the charity sector more generally in Britain. Many organisations that are registered charities are often not very charitable. The Institute for Economic Affairs argues that billionaires such as Historic Royal Palaces, which display royal treasures, and Oxbridge colleges etc, are all charities for the sake of the tax advantages the status offers. Here we will sidestep the question of which organisations are deserving, however, and focus on those that do good works of some sort for impoverished humans.

Oxfam right or wrong

The latest figures from Oxfam show that it has recovered from the pandemic. The pandemic led to the loss of 350 jobs across the globe, which seems to have passed off without any serious protests. About a decade ago it suffered serious financial losses following the scandals over its field workers in Haiti, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who were frequent users of sex workers on Oxfam premises. In addition to the loss of small donations owing to the scandal (which was compounded by cover-ups by bosses), it lost a number of Government contracts for overseas relief work for a while.

These incidents, and the mishandling, were a godsend for those Tories, including then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss, who were keen to attack charities for reminding us of the extent of imperialist-caused poverty across the globe.

Oxfam has come under fire from the right-wing

for its political campaigning, including such serious offences as pointing out that 85 of the wealthiest people in the world have a combined wealth equal to that of the bottom half of the world’s population who amount 3.5 billion people. Some claim that these figures are not entirely accurate, but they are not far wrong. Just because billionaires often have huge debts, which is not a problem as they are able to service them, or they can sell of a yacht or two in hard times, they are not in theory as poor as people with no assets or debts. The fact that there exists great inequalities can thus be safely ignored as an accounting error.

Oxfam has a habit of caving in speedily to right-wing political criticism. Obviously, it has to tread warily and not put staff at risk in countries wracked by civil war by criticising authorities who could make life very difficult for staff in the field – but there are times when it needs to show some backbone.

Oxfam has no shortage of rival critics in the charity industry who claim it is undemocratic and merely addresses the symptoms rather than the causes of international poverty. It has been accused of accepting neoliberalism as a fact of life and taking on government roles.

Oxfam, however, opposes the excess of both free trade and protectionism. It opposes the dumping of often subsidised, surplus commodities from developed countries such as rice and sugar, which are then sold at low prices resulting in farmers in poor countries being driven off the land.

A major issue highlighted in the pandemic was restrictive patents on essential medicines, computer software and textbooks held by western multi-nationals. Left-wing parties have been saying that for decades – but charities saying so

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makes more people sit up and take notice. Not that it makes much difference.

Oxfam swiftly backtracked from supporting the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel when the Israeli government objected. Indeed, the Zionist Board of Deputies later co-operated with Oxfam on a project to train 25 people “to help fight global hunger” in exchange for Oxfam committing not to “call for a boycott of Israeli goods or to support groups that do so, and will not partner with organizations that advocate violence or oppose a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict”. The Israeli government has still condemned Oxfam for building houses for Palestinians and for digging them wells for water that the Zionists hypocritically describe as water theft.

Oxfam at Home

In Britain, Oxfam is known on the street by its large chain of shops. In some poor areas they are a godsend for selling second-hand clothing. In other, posher, areas

they are outlets for hand-carved toys and ornamental elephants and CDs of tribal music. Controversy surrounds their chain of second-hand book shops that are said to have damaged the commercial trade as they do not have to pay for their stock, but canny commercial antiquarian and second-hand book dealers find Oxfam shops a valuable source of under-priced books. In some high streets of deindustrialised towns the Oxfam shop is sadly the local Harrods.

Recently it has come under fire for spending time discussing whether to ban the *Harry Potter* books from its shops because the author is a mainstream feminist unimpressed by men who want access to women’s toilets. No doubt that will be great cause of concern to refugees fleeing their villages under gunfire.

Setting up a charity can often be a commercial master-stroke. The Captain Tom Foundation founded during the COVID-19 pandemic was of immense value to the family of the foundation’s late founder. This is not the only such case.

Most readers will be familiar with those thin

plastic bags that get pushed through letterboxes into which recipients are invited to deposit old clothes for a hitherto unheard of ‘charity’. In fact 99 per cent of the cash raised this way goes to the dubious companies doing the collecting. Simply mentioning the word ‘charity’ all too often makes people close their critical faculties and open their wallets. Thus the Charity Commission has plenty of work to do.

The Starvation Army

An American folksong called the Salvation Army the “Starvation Army” because it only offered “pie in the sky when you die”. It seems to be making every effort to live up to that reputation at home and abroad. In the UK this charity has been in battle with the Pensions Ombudsman for refusing to pay pensions to hundreds of full-time officers who resign before their official retirement date.

In the USA has been caught-out paying people in their thrift stores as little as a single dollar a week, albeit with room, board and clothing. These people

were “benefiting” from the “Salvationist” government-funded residential adult drug-and-drink rehabilitation programmes.

In Langley in Canada’s British Columbia province, however, 44 days of strike and picketing has resulted in the Starvation Army being forced to pay 35 truck drivers, assistant truck drivers and dock workers at a major warehouse a \$4.50 per hour pay rise as part of a four-year deal when Local 114 Unifor (Canada’s version of Unite) at the Salvation Army have successfully ratified a new collective agreement.

Gord McGrath, President of Unifor Local 114, expressed pride in the accomplishments of this group, stating: “These workers showed that when we unite and stand together, we can achieve significant gains that can improve our lives and set a standard for the future.” Who says you don’t need a union when you’ve got Jesus?

Oxfam’s Rival

Oxfam has a number of rivals, such as War on Want (WoW) founded in 1951 by future Labour Prime Min-

ister Harold Wilson. It is much smaller than Oxfam, with recent annual income being around the £1.5–£2 million mark. This was the charity that exposed the powdered baby-milk scandal in which multinational companies gave away free samples to new mothers in the Third World so that they would dependent on it after their breast milk dried up. Although much powered baby milk is perfectly nutritious, it is expensive and needs clean water.

It was at War on Want that the colourful sometimes MP George Galloway first came to public attention when he expanded its work but came under fire for casual accounting.

Like Oxfam, WoW has come under fire for daring to mention the causes of poverty rather than simply dole out alms to deserving cases. In the 1990s it advocated a tiny tax on financial speculations.

More than Oxfam it has been strongly involved in Palestinian rights, supporting boycotts of Israel which were investigated by the Charity Commission who said such advocacy was a legitimate part of its work. In January 2018, WoW was honoured by the Israeli government by being banned from entering that country.

It has also done good work in exposing the British Government’s Department for International Development for squandering hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money to help multinational companies take control of food production in Africa and in supporting privatisation of crucial water services across the globe.

Exposures of the destructive environmental effects of Coca-Cola plants across the world and of sweatshops in Bangladesh are also to be credited to WoW.

There is a great deal to be done to remedy these wrongs, however, and that will involve mass mobilisation of workers in Britain and abroad.

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

25th December 2003

TAIWAN leader Chen Shuibian will be held responsible if a war breaks out across the Straits; and separatists on the breakaway island province will be treated the same way war criminals are dealt with elsewhere in the world.

These are the stern warnings made by senior members of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officers in Outlook Weekly. “Chen has touched the mainland’s bottom line on the Taiwan question,” said Colonel Lao Yua of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences. “He is playing with fire.”

The warning is the strongest from

the mainland military since Taiwan’s “parliament” passed a referendum law last week, allowing island authorities to hold a so-called “defensive referendum” on its sovereignty in the case of “essential threats”.

At a campaign rally over the weekend, Chen said he aimed to hold such a referendum alongside the “presidential” elections in March, arguing that the mainland is a threat to Taiwan because it has hundreds of ballistic missiles pointing at the island. “It is very dangerous – and immoral as well – for Chen and his predecessor Lee Teng-hui to take the restraints and tolerance of the mainland as signs of weakness,” Lau said.

“If they refuse to come to their senses and continue to use referenda as an excuse to seek Taiwan independence, they will push Taiwan compatriots into the abyss of war,” he added.

To underline the mainland’s determination to “pay any price” to deter Taiwan independence, as indicated by Premier

Wen Jiabo during a recent interview with the Washington Post, Major-General Peng Guangqian – also with the academy – listed the “prices” China is ready to pay for achieving national unification.

These include boycotts of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, decreasing foreign investment, worsening foreign relations, economic recession and necessary casualties of the PLA. “All these prices are bearable,” he said, when they are compared with the Taiwan issue, which is of the highest interest for the Chinese nation.

He added that it is “worthwhile” to achieve national unity and rejuvenation as costs that are partial and temporary. “If Taiwan separatists want to gamble on it (by pushing for independence), they will pay a heavy price and be defeated with shame.”

He said the PLA would never allow Taiwan independence – in whatever name – by taking advantage of Taiwan’s referendum law. “We will definitely intervene,” he stressed.

Ukraine: Who killed the peace deal?

by Ekaterina Blinova

David Arakhamia, the leader of Ukraine's Servant of the People faction, has named former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson among the leading factors behind Kiev's decision to tear the Russo-Ukrainian preliminary peace agreement apart last year. Why did he scapegoat BoJo?

Judging from David Arakhamia's interview to the Ukrainian broadcaster 1+1, it was Johnson who persuaded the Kiev regime to nix the March 2022 negotiations with Russia less than a month after the beginning of the conflict.

According to Scott Bennett, a former US Army psychological warfare officer and State Department counter-terrorism analyst: “It is true that Boris Johnson was the person who ordered Zelensky not to stop fighting, and as a result it is Johnson and Joe Biden who are responsible for over 500,000 Ukrainian lives.. Boris Johnson’s irrational, if not completely mad, decision guaranteed Ukraine would be destroyed and that’s exactly what has happened.”

During the interview, Arakhamia – who headed the Ukrainian delegation during the negotiations with Russia in Belarus and Turkey in 2022 – noted that the centre-piece of the Russo-Ukrainian talks in Istanbul, Turkey, was Ukraine's neutrality and guarantees that it wouldn't join NATO.

“Russia’s original terms were very fair: number one, no NATO weapons would be located in Ukraine, which would put Russians in danger; and, second, no Nazi genocidal maniacs would be in political positions to continue slaughtering innocent Russians, or outlawing the Russian language and culture in Ukraine. Any reasonable person and nation would’ve accepted these terms,” says Bennett.



An offer Kiev couldn't refuse

Meanwhile, some Russian observers are wondering what BoJo promised the Kiev regime to cause them to rush to nix the deal and throw all their resources into the conflict. Apparently, the British prime minister vowed all-out military support and money from the West.

Meanwhile, judging from other Western leaders' rhetoric, Johnson was not alone in derailing the deal. "This war will be won on the battlefield," EU top diplomat Josep Borrell tweeted in April 2022, pledging hundreds of millions of euros for Kiev.

The same month, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin claimed that Washington wanted to see “Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done” in launching the special military operation. He argued that Russia should “not have the capability to very quickly reproduce” manpower and equipment. The USA has disbursed over \$100 billion in support for Ukraine’s military effort since then.

A chorus of Western military experts warned Washington from the very beginning, however, that Russia has considerably more resources in every respect, making it virtually impossible for Ukraine to win. Ukrainian officials could have been aware of this balance of forces since

the inception of the conflict, yet still they bought into the Western plot.

Sergey Tsekov, a member of the Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, believes that Kiev decided to reject peace with Moscow in 2022 due to a lack of experience.

“The people in power in Ukraine got there accidentally – they are shallow, insufficiently experienced, perceiving some momentary tactical successes as successes of a strategic nature,” Tsekov told the Russian press. But, he says, many in Ukraine now regret that they failed to resolve the conflict diplomatically at the very beginning.

Zelensky equally to blame

While speaking to the Ukrainian broadcaster, Arakhmia cited Ukraine's Constitution as yet another obstacle in the path of a peace agreement with Russia. "To agree to this point, it was necessary to change the Constitution. Our path to NATO is enshrined in the Constitution," argued Arakhmia.

Yet, the idea of Ukraine's neutrality is not some Russian invention: the Eastern European country's "permanent neutrality" is enshrined in Ukraine's Declaration of State Sovereignty of 16th July 1990, which was signed before constitutional NATO provisions.

"The Ukrainian SSR sol-

emply declares its intention of becoming a permanently neutral state that does not participate in military blocs and adheres to three nuclear free principles: to accept, to produce and to purchase no nuclear weapons," the text of the document says.

So far, Ukraine's Declaration of State Sovereignty is still valid, per legal observers, with modern Ukraine being the legal successor of the Ukrainian SSR.

Meanwhile, it appears that Arakhamia's argument that changing the Constitution to make Ukraine a NATO member was too hard does not hold water. In fact, Ukraine's NATO membership provisions have repeatedly been included and excluded from the country's laws.

Thus, in 2002, then-Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma announced the nation's goal of "eventual NATO membership" that was reflected in the 19th June, 2003, version of law on the foundations of Ukraine's national policy. In 2010, the government of President Viktor Yanukovich scrapped the plan, embracing the idea of military neutrality.

Following the Western-backed 2014 coup d'état in Kiev, the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, now controlled by Ukrainian ultra-nationalists, passed a law reinstating membership in NATO as Ukraine's strategic objective. In 2019, a corresponding amendment

to Ukraine's Constitution entered into force.

Furthermore in his interview, Arakhamia failed to explain to the Ukrainian press why the Ukrainian delegation – despite all the obstacles – signed preliminary peace agreements with Russia in Istanbul last year. In June 2023, Vladimir Putin showed the draft of the Istanbul agreement on the Ukraine settlement to an African delegation.

“Here it is! It exists!” Putin said, showing the document signed by Ukraine. “And it is called accordingly – the treaty on permanent neutrality and security guarantees for Ukraine. Exactly about guarantees. Eighteen articles,” the Russian president stressed.

No matter how much the West is guilty for derailing the Russo-Ukrainian peace deal, the Zelensky regime is no less responsible for opening the door to bloodshed in Ukraine, says Bennett.

“Ukraine is destroyed,” the expert said. “Its military is completely dissolved, and every Ukrainian citizen is going to turn against the Ukrainian political leadership for this unnecessary and destructive war, which should never have happened. Zelensky may very well be assassinated or overthrown by a coup within his own country and prosecuted and executed as an international war criminal.”

“Zelensky is now being abandoned by his staff, his generals, the Ukrainian people, and the international community as a puppet that has lost all use. If questioned, Boris Johnson will most likely pretend to not even remember Zelensky’s name. But those who know the truth will always remember Zelensky’s name and personality. He was the Devil’s spawn that destroyed Ukraine,” the former US Army psychological warfare officer concluded.

Germany's Left Party splits

by Victor Grossman

Germany's Left Party is splitting in two. Is it a tragedy or a new hope? After months, in fact years, of inner-party squabbling in the LINKE party (The Left), the die has been cast, the Rubicon crossed, and Sahra Wagenknecht, with nine other deputies in the German federal parliament, the Bundestag, have quit the party and announced their decision to found a new party in January. Until then, when it chooses a name, it is being called the Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht – For Reason and Justice (BSW).

Friction from the start

That was on 23rd October. There was friction from the start. The 10, though no longer members of the LINKE fraction in the Bundestag, rejected demands by the 28 deputies still in the party to give up their seats in the Bundestag. They insisted they can remain deputies until new elections, probably in 2025.

But alas! To maintain “fraction” status a party must hold at least five per cent of the seats, currently that means 37. until now the LINKE had squeezed through with 38. But with only 28, there can be no fraction – for the first time since 2005.

Both the 28 and the 10 who left can apply for and may receive a subordinate status as “groups”, but groups cannot propose new bills, have limited speaking time, less office space, worse seats,

and far less money for staff. Up to 100 research, legal and other assistants and secretaries may lose their jobs, with few of the revolving-door company possibilities enjoyed by other parties. And groups have far fewer rights to demand time to be heard and seen in the mass media. Why did this damaging split develop? Was it necessary?

The party – seemingly like leftists eternally – has long been divided. On some issues common grounds were found, but those tectonic plates never ceased moving apart.

An early issue was and remains related to the old German Democratic Republic (GDR). Those often called the “Reformers”, the ones who have not quit the party, carefully distanced themselves from what media and politicians called an “Unrechtsstaat” – ‘a country of injustice’ – overlooked all GDR achievements and came close to equating “Stalinist repression” in the GDR with that earlier state – oh yes, Hitler called it “national socialism”.

By accepting this right-wing interpretation of the GDR and never sounding too radical, it became possible for the LINKE to move up from nasty ‘bad boy’ status and gain partial acceptance as a left-leaning but otherwise tolerably ‘respectable’ piece on the ‘free market democracy’ chessboard. This made it possible to join governing coalitions off and on in a number of provincial governments in Berlin, East Germany and down-and-out western Bremen, and even to head the governing coalition in Thuringia.

Over the years, however, such participation resulted in slip-sliding downhill; more and more East Germans, disgruntled, dissatisfied and worried, viewed the LINKE leaders as ineffective pawns in a rejected Establishment. More and more turned to loud, rightist protest parties or stayed home on election day.

The hope of many ‘reformer’ leaders to become junior partners in a national cabinet with Social Democrats and Greens proved to be not only an illusion

but a catastrophe. The party, which boasted a proud 11.9 per cent in 2009, making it the leading opposition party, had dropped nationally to a pitiful 5.5 per cent in the EU and a shameful 4.9% in the Bundestag vote in 2019.

In October, in state elections in Hessen, the LINKE lost its seats in a West German legislature – held for 15 years – by badly missing that magic five per cent number. And all omens pointed to more tears next year in three East German state elections, where the AfD, the right-wing neo-fascist party, although far short of a majority, now topped the polls.

The ‘reformers’ blamed the Leftists for causing dissension around that very disturbing gadfly Sahra Wagenknecht who received so much media attention. As for the Leftists, they asserted that the party leadership had never properly analysed the causes of their losses, opened up chances for free discussion by the members, and considered changing strategies which were proving

• Peace rally in Berlin

wrong, where despite many good speeches by Bundestag deputies, they claimed there was too much stress on the rights of refugees and immigrants, on identity questions for minorities, but neglect of so-called ‘direct working-class issues’. It was no longer a “truly working-class party”, many leftists maintained and, for some, it was too far gone to be salvaged.

The differences came to a head with the Ukraine war. Both sides condemned the Russian attack in February 2022; any variant on that position would mean being totally denounced as ‘Putin-lovers’ with resultant gagging. But Leftists in the party also accused NATO of defying pleas and warnings from American experts and from Moscow against pushing NATO frontlines and big weapons closer and closer toward total encirclement of Russia, against provocative threats in the form of sea and land manoeuvres, and against arming and training Ukrainian troops while supporting openly pro-fascist Azov units against the

Donbas breakaways.

Peace plans stymied

They contended that all attempts at settlement at Minsk, in Turkey, or with Naftali Bennett, the then Israeli premier, had been stymied and that the basic cause of the conflict was Washington’s goal of world hegemony, as proclaimed by Biden and his predecessors.

The ‘reformers’, on the other hand, while sometimes vaguely blaming all sides, tended to avoid any sharp rejection – or analysis – of NATO but joined in general attacks on “the imperialist Putin” and accepted the sanctions and economic break in relations with Russia, pushed through by Washington, regardless of the severe problems that meant for Germany’s economy, as a necessary sacrifice.

In an angry speech in the Bundestag in September 2022 Wagenknecht rejected this policy, calling it a kowtow to American interests especially in the oil and gas business, which would mean a permanent and perilous split in Europe and the world.

The speech angered many ‘reformers’; some called then for her expulsion from the party. But a major break came when Sahra (as many speak of her) joined a well-known feminist in jointly publishing a Peace Manifesto calling for a ceasefire and negotiations to end the Ukraine war.

It was soon signed, amazingly, by over 750,000 Germans and was followed in February by a call for a giant



peace rally in Berlin. To the dismay of countless adherents, the LINKE party leaders not only failed to support the manifesto and the rally but called upon its members to stay clear of both, thus joining the mass media chorus in accusing Sahra of accepting support from AfD and other far-right leaders, who – for their own ‘oppose-everything’ reasons – have been more-or-less supporting Putin.

This was indeed embarrassing but the rally organisers, led by Sahra, clearly rejected AfD support or participation, while welcoming anyone who genuinely favoured peace – and pointing out that it was impossible to prevent anyone from signing a manifesto or checking everyone at an outdoor rally. But, they stated, controversial banners of any kind were not to be accepted.

The rally amazed everyone; an estimated 40–50,000 or more defied frost and snow, with a sea of peace dove logos and self-made signs. A tiny group of rightists were blocked off and isolated in one small corner, unnoticed by the huge crowd. But the rally boycott by the LINKE leaders, or most of them, marked a point when many Leftists decided that a breakaway was unavoidable.

And that is what finally happened on 23rd October when the 10 Bundestag delegates, led by Sahra, announced their break.

Some Leftists, including those heading the Communist Platform group within the LINKE, opposed these and many policies of the leaders but also opposed a split. “We must fight it out,” they said, but within the party as the only meaningful opposition in Germany.

Some wanted to wait at least three weeks for the national party congress – which was held last weekend in the Bavarian city of Augsburg.

The LINKE made every effort to hold a successful congress. Except for one angry speech by Sahra’s faction co-chair, Dietmar Bartsch, who scolded Sahra for the split, she was rarely mentioned. The well-organised agenda aimed at a chins-up ‘good riddance’ posture, with a call for an active fight for peace and progress, against poverty and the billionaires.

Indeed, the opening speeches of its co-chairs, Janice Wissler and Martin Schirdevan, sounded more militantly anti-capitalist than in a long time. Wissler announced that several hundred new members had joined in recent weeks, far more than had left the party; all efforts must now be concentrated on regaining strength for the European Parliament election in June, vitally important elections next autumn in East German Saxony, Brandenburg, Thuringia, and, in 2025, beating that menacing five per cent hurdle and regaining a strong presence in the Bundestag.

Despite loud, militant demands for a new fighting spirit in defiance of the super-wealthy, however, little was changed, with no analysis of the basic motivation of the EU or NATO, hardly a critical word about them, while criticism of death and destruction in Gaza was weakened so as not to trouble the no-questions-asked friends of Israel.

Any real criticism of past mistaken policies was limited to 2½ minute statements. Even a demand to nationalise

the giant utility corporations was voted down (195 to 175) by the delegates, a large proportion of whom were long-time party officials. From Gaza to Ukraine, the EU in Strasbourg, or the German economy, the bold generalities contained little to alarm the mass media, the politicians, or those behind them.

Chances for a new party

So what are the chances for a new party featuring Sahra Wagenknecht, 54 (who uses the uncommon spelling of her given name because of her student father, who had to return to his native Iran when she was only three and soon disappeared)?

The initial statement of Sahra and her alliance also raised some questions, first of all regarding immigration. She has always stressed the fight for working-class rights and the working-class connections so often neglected or weak in past activities of the LINKE. But, in doing so, she condemned the use of immigrants to depress the wages and rights of workers as a whole. Her position was that “genuine” ref-

ugees must be accepted but that the rules should be “clearer”, even tighter, with purely economic immigrants discouraged – and proven law-breakers deported.

She has stressed that the real fight must be to end and prevent wars and the imperialist exploitation of southern resources, unprocessed crops, and markets too open to cheap northern wares – and thus avoid migration waves. Her critics claim that she edges too close to rightist AfD slogans in hopes of winning, or regaining, their voters. Nevertheless, three women in leadership joining her in building a new party have immigrant backgrounds. One is Amira Mohamed Ali, 33 (whose father is Egyptian). Sahra favours her as the possible main organiser of the new party – a role Sahra is not accustomed to. And no easy one!

The programme of this left-wing, more radical breakaway from a tame LINKE similarly described Germany’s current economic situation as a mess, with a failing education system, painful cutting of medical facilities and infrastructure. It then continued:

“...as a result of the Russian sanctions and exaggerated climate improvement policy, making energy more expensive... our country is threatened with the loss of important industries.”

The programme then calls for “a return of reason to politics: Germany needs a strong, innovative economy and social justice, peace and fair trade, respect for the individual freedom of its citizens... Our country still has a solid industry and a successful small and middle-size enterprise sector... German industry is the backbone of our prosperity and must be preserved.”

Somehow this sounds even less radical or socialist-based than many pronouncements of the LINKE party. Has it been toned down so as not to frighten off middle-class voters? What can then happen in 2024?

It is all too possible that both the new and old parties flop and miss that five per cent mark, as many in the media gleefully predict. This would mean that left-wing views are voiced only by a scattering of small, weak groups and grouplets, no longer in the Bundestag or state legislatures, fully barred from mass media.

With extreme limits on leftist opposition (there are already all forms of censorship), people such as Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and EU boss Ursula von der Leyen (and big biz behind them) could move full steam ahead in further building up Germany as a powerful military force aimed directly against Russia (and then China), with or without close partnership with the unpredictable USA of Biden, Trump or some

other difficult leader.

The present ‘traffic light’ coalition governing Germany is truly in disarray, with the Social Democrats, Greens, and Free Democrats quarrelling more than they work together, all of them ready to jilt the other two and cuddle up with the right-wing Christian Democrats, who, from the opposition seats, play one against the other. With the far-right AfD in second place nationally and first place in much of eastern Germany, the whole scene is lurching to the right! Now dangerously! A growing left is urgently needed, not only for Germany!

Can a new party, aided by Sahra’s ability and allure, engage in hard fights against militarism and war, against fossil-fuel based destruction, against greater hardships for those least able to surmount them – can such a new party win a new and growing stature in Germany – and Europe?

A first preliminary test will be next Saturday when a hopefully giant peace rally is again planned at Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate, with dedicated speakers including Sahra and at least one state leader of the LINKE. The rally will demand a ceasefire and negotiations in the Ukraine war and in Israel’s war.

The larger the crowd the better chance it will be heard – also by politicians worrying about polls and voter counts. It can be disappointing – but perhaps, like unexpected throngs in London, at Grand Central Station and Brooklyn Bridge in New York, and in towns and cities around the world, it might just be big enough to offer another rainbow hope for 2024 and thereafter!

People’s World (USA)



• Sahra Wagenknecht

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Anti-Chinese videos, developed exclusively for the internet, represent one of the very few growth industries in the West. Developed to put a negative spin on all events related to China, they include lies about its flourishing ethnic minorities and also the alleged collapse of the Asian giant's economy.

Among the headlines one may read the following typical examples: "China's economy built on corruption"; "How a Superpower fell from grace"; "China's economy is in crisis"; "China's great slowdown"; and "China's crumbling economy".

In reality, on-target for a projected GDP increase of 5.4 per cent for this year, the economy continues to grow and develop. Its performance is in stark

contrast to leading Western nations and the global average of 2.7 per cent for the current year. Germany's projection is for a fall of minus 0.5 per cent. The USA's increase is expected to be 2.1 per cent, France 1.0, Italy 0.7 and the UK 0.8 per cent. It is interesting to note that despite 12 rounds of sanctions Russia is expecting 2.2 per cent compared with the EU average of 0.7 per cent.

If we examine the challenges faced by China and accept the reality of its impressive growth achievements one thing becomes obvious. The bleak picture painted by the purveyors of misinformation and distorters of the truth is unreal. The USA and its more dim-witted cohorts have sought to cripple China with trade embargoes, sanctions and disruption of supply chains. Such measures can temporarily slow down economic development but ultimately fail as cutting edge research and development provide alternative solutions. The Kirin 9000s being an important example. Meanwhile, companies that had previously traded with China lose big orders.

China's economic recovery from COVID-19 was delayed by an extended lockdown period that put people's health before profits. The country has been able to offset the negative effects of slow world economic growth by increasing trade with Russia and the Belt and Road countries. For example, trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the Xinjiang Autonomous Region is expected to increase by 87 per cent this year.

Appearing at the same time, but not together, we can read claims that China's economy will soon collapse due to the effects of an ageing population on the workforce while on another page we are told that unemployment is soaring.

China's leading positions in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Automation will enable hard hazardous work to be carried out by robots, giving people more time for leisure; and an army of young people graduating from higher education will be required to develop and programme the new systems.

Building an advanced economy and creating the conditions for progressive social changes does of course bring many challenges. The role of the market, the need for effective regulation and an important requirement for central planning need to be balanced. China has a mixed economy. It is essential to have a powerful state sector. Large private companies may evolve into co-operatives with workers taking a share in the business. With the leadership of the Communist Party of China embracing Marxism with Chinese characteristics I feel sure that the People's Republic will continue its dynamic progress towards a full communist society.

John Maryon
Suffolk

Dear Comrades

With deep pride and reverence, the Palestinian Communist Party mourns the martyrdom of Comrade Ra'id Wael Al-Sarfatiyyeh, son of the Central Committee member of the Palestinian Communist Party, Wael Al-Sarfatiyyeh (Abu Mahmoud). He was martyred in an airstrike by the Zionist occupation's planes targeting their home in Gaza City.

The bombardment led to the martyrdom of Comrade Ra'id Wael Al-Sarfatiyyeh, 29 years old, and caused critical injuries to his brother. In this tragic event, our party extends heartfelt condolences to Comrade Abu Mahmoud,

his family, friends and loved ones, wishing them patience and solace.

Glory and eternity to the martyrs!

Swift recovery to the wounded!

Long live the struggle of our Palestinian people!
Central Committee
Palestinian Communist Party

Dear Comrades

Sixteen members of the US Congress have written to President Biden demanding that America withdraw its extradition request against Julian Assange, the Australian founder of Wikileaks.

They want all proceedings against him dropped. And amongst the 16 are both left- and right-wingers. There is left Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and also outspoken Trump supporter Marjorie Taylor-Greene.

Assange remains in Belmarsh prison in London. He faces charges in the USA under the Espionage Act in connection with the publication of leaked classified documents regarding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Alan Stewart
Wakefield

Dear Comrades

A former Tory MP has said he will step down at the next general election after being found guilty of racially abusing a Bahraini activist.

Bob Stewart, who surrendered the Tory whip and now sits as an Independent in Beckenham, south London, was found guilty of telling Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei to "go back to Bahrain" during a confrontation in central London in December last year.

John Hughes
Bahrain Freedom Movement
London

Diary

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

EVERY SATURDAY
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.

UNTIL 14 DEC
Townsend Theatre Productions: *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*. Neil Gore's one person adaptation. Nationwide tour, see TTP website for venues.

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 5 DEC
Socialist History Society: Jad Adams on Decadent Women: *Yellow Book Lives*. 19:00, Online Zoom meeting. Log on at <http://www.socialist-history-society.co.uk>

TUE 5–TUE 12 DEC
International Brigade Memorial Trust: *The Brigaders Return*. Film about the return of the British Battalion in London on 7 December 1938. See IBMT website for 10 UK wide venues.

WED 6 DEC
School of Oriental and African Studies: Costas Lapavistas *State of Capitalism* Book Launch.

17:30, Brunei Galley, SOAS, 10 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG and Zoom: Meeting ID: 904 957 1710 Passcode: t9B-kt1rrMc.

THUR 8 DEC
Working Class Movement Library: *Shirley Baker: Life Through a Lens*. 18:00–20:00 Film Showing. Book on WCML website.

WED 17 JAN
Anglia Ruskin University: Sir Christopher Pissarides on Automation and its impact on the labour market. 18:00–19:00, Virtual event. Book on Eventbrite.

SAT 20 JAN
Marx Memorial Library: Symposium to Commemorate the centenary of Lenin's death 1924–2024. 11:00, Hybrid meeting. Book on MML website.

SAT 27 JAN
Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Latin America Conference 2024. 10:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD.

SAT 24 FEB
Palestine Solidarity Campaign: AGM 9:30–16:30, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1 4RL.

SAT 2 MAR 2024
Women Against Pit Closures 40th Anniversary, Durham. Derails TBA.

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

Labour looks set to take back many of its former strongholds in England but that's not the case in Scotland, where the party's recovery seems as elusive as ever if the latest opinion poll is anything to go by. Although the approval rating for the Scottish nationalists' leader Humza Yousaf have dipped, the SNP remains streets ahead of its rivals when it comes to voting intentions at the next Westminster and Scottish parliamentary elections.

The SNP has a 10 point lead over Labour in the latest Ipsos opinion poll that came out this week. The Nationalists are on 40 per cent

(down one point on the last Ipsos poll in May), with Labour on 30 per cent (up one). The Tories are on 15 per cent (down two), with the Lib Dems unchanged on six per cent. Support for Scottish independence is at a similar level to the last poll in May, with Yes slightly ahead. Among those with a voting intention and very likely to vote, 54 per cent say they would vote Yes in an immediate referendum while 46 per cent say they would vote No.

The poll also showed that a majority of the Scottish public (61 per cent) think Michael Matheson should resign over the issue of his iPad data roaming bill.

The unfortunate Health Secretary has come up with a bewildering variety of excuses as to how he ran up an £11,000 overseas roaming charge bill. He claimed it was his children watching football – on a government supplied password protected machine. He said that “the teams that were playing aren’t even the teams I have any interest in the first place” amid speculation that his sons watched Celtic’s games versus Hibs and Rangers over the New Year period.

It was later discovered, however, that he himself is a devotee of the beautiful game – as can be seen by examining his social media interests. His loyalty is obviously to Glasgow Celtic, from whom he has accepted free tickets. Like many politicians attached to either Rangers or Celtic he pretends to support a lesser team, Partick Thistle, to avoid arousing hostile sectarian sentiment.

Annie Wells, the Tory MSP for Glasgow, observes that: “The Health Secretary is seriously expecting us to believe that a football obses-

sive – someone who boasts of watching six matches in one weekend – was oblivious to the fact that the biggest game in Scottish football was taking place... even by the cack-handed standards of this scandal, his claims surrounding the Old Firm game take some swallowing.”

The Tories are planning to move a vote of no confidence but he will likely survive with his job, but without his dignity, unless more SNPs other than Fergus Ewing change their minds. While an £11,000 scandal might seem like small beer, a Labour First Minister had to resign over a constituency office mix-up from which he did not benefit, a Tory leader resigned over claiming a few taxi rides to his mistress, and another Labour leader stepped down for accepting a £900 campaign donation from Guernsey.

Wrong sort of Green policy

Despite their troubles, the SNP and Green coalition have had an important success towards developing a Net Zero economy. They are reluctant to take credit for it, however, because it takes the form of the closure of Scotland’s only oil refinery at Grangemouth, which started-up in 1919. It presently supplies most of the aviation fuel used at Scottish airports, 70 per cent of the petrol to Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England. Formerly owned by British Petroleum before and after privatisation, it was purchased by billionaire tax exile Sir Jim Ratcliffe in 2005 for £5 billion through his INEOS company.

His approach to industrial relations was notably brutal. In 2007

he temporarily closed the plant (a very costly undertaking) to defeat a strike opposing pension cuts. Ten years ago a similar dispute saw unions successfully oppose plans to close the plant with the loss of 800 jobs, but this came at a cost of severe cuts to pensions and conditions.

Despite £1 billion of investment announced four years ago, under the present plans 400 jobs will go. After the refinery closes, the site will continue to import oil products via a new terminal. The main union Unite says it will oppose the closure. But the workforce, who are skilled workers able to get jobs in other industries or elsewhere, may find the redundancy offers too tempting.

Ratcliffe claims that the refinery loses £260 million per year and like many of his kind he claims the industry is overtaxed. He deplores the fact that the UK has no real energy policy while “the rest of the world is encouraging local oil and gas production, incentivising production through sensible taxation”.

The local Green MSP, Gillian Mackay, hypocritically got on her high horse to condemn the closure of an industrial facility the Greens have always wanted to close. “INEOS has treated its workers terribly, and many are feeling anxious and betrayed,” she lamented.

One notable former oil economist sternly denounced the SNP government for being “asleep at the wheel”. He added that: “Instead of refining our own hydrocarbon product range with all the environmental benefits of proximity, Scotland will soon import them from around the planet, with a far greater carbon impact. In addition, the plans

for a carbon capture and hydrogen hub at Grangemouth must now be at serious risk.” But criticism of the SNP is not surprising from Alex Salmond.

A burning issue

It’s been a bad month for witches in Scotland. The proposed Witchcraft Convictions (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill that would have pardoned those convicted under the Witchcraft Act 1563 has now been dropped. This was due to the promoter of the private member’s Bill, Natalie Don becoming a minister. It is a Holyrood rule that Scottish ministers do not promote members’ bills and the Scottish government has no plans to legislate in this area. The hanged, drowned and burned will now have to make do with a plaque in Forfar Town Hall that will be unveiled this weekend.

The *Scottish Legal News* noted that the decision was welcomed by someone who lamented the lack of “compassion for all those that were turned into newts by witches”. Another wittily pointed out that “if this is your priority then your constituents are being robbed of their taxes”.

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Lift the siege on Gaza!

by New Worker
correspondent

Hundreds of thousands of protesters returned to London last weekend to march through the heart of the capital demanding the lifting of the Israeli siege of Gaza.

The national demonstration was called by the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and a number of other anti-war movements including Stop the War and CND, to demand that the four-day prisoner exchange ceasefire is made permanent, that the cruel siege on the Gaza Strip is completely lifted and that the root causes of the crisis in Palestine are addressed.

These huge demonstrations, five in London since the upsurge of fighting began on 7th October, are repeat-



edly smeared as hate marches by right-wing politicians and their media. Nothing could be further from the truth – they are peaceful mass protests attended by all races and religions, including many Jewish people.

Saturday's march for Palestine was, yet again, an impressive event with a large, coherent Jewish Bloc participating. The Jewish Bloc was prominent on the march and there were a number sig-

nificant contributions from Jewish speakers on the platform. The Bloc is a coalition of Jewish groups joining together as a collective voice in opposition to Israel's war on Palestinians, the ensuing genocide in Gaza, and the UK Government's complicity in war crimes.

The demonstrators march on clear anti-racist foundations believing that the struggles against all forms of racism,

including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Israel's system of apartheid, are indivisible. They reject all attempts to conflate anti-Semitism with legitimate advocacy for Palestinian rights and criticism of the actions of the Israeli State.

PSC Director Ben Jamal said: "This four-day truce will allow some desperately needed aid to enter the Gaza Strip. This, however, will not be sufficient to even ad-

dress the most urgent need. The illegal siege on Gaza must be completely lifted to allow unfettered access for food, water, fuel and medical supplies.

"A permanent ceasefire must be the starting point to address the underlying causes of the situation, including decades of military occupation and a system of oppression against the Palestinian people that is considered internationally to meet

the legal definition of apartheid. The British government must end its complicity in Israel's crimes, starting by joining the call for the killing of civilians to stop completely.

"We will redouble our efforts to ensure that there is no return to violence. We will continue to march, demonstrate and organise to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire and justice for the Palestinian people."

No NATO arms supplies to Ukraine!

by New Worker
correspondent

Last Saturday Theo Russell from the UK-based International Ukraine Anti-Fascist Solidarity joined a protest march in the financial capital of the Netherlands calling for justice for the Odessa Trade Union murders in May 2014, the release of Ukrainian political prisoners, and an end to the torture and killing of Ukrainians opposed to the Zelen-sky regime.

About 60 people protested in Dam Square, Amsterdam, before marching

through the historic medieval centre of the city, calling for an end to weapons deliveries to Ukraine and for NATO to cease provoking conflicts around the world. The protest, which was organised by the Platform for Peace and Solidarity, was joined by several Russian citizens and a correspondent from TASS.

The turnout was smaller than usual as there was a Palestine demo starting from the same place, and it was freezing cold and pouring with rain,

but the organisers still managed to attract considerably more people than similar protests in London.

The Netherlands has been among the

most aggressive and anti-Russian NATO members, pushing hard for F-16 fighter planes to be sent to Ukraine, and staging a blatantly fitted-up en-

quiry into the downing of the MH17 Malaysia Airlines passenger plane in July 2014.

Petra Ottenhof, a leading activist in the Platform for Peace

and Solidarity, said the group's main goal "is to stop the weapons deliveries to Ukraine, and also now to Israel, and also to stop NATO, which make wars everywhere.

"It's really terrible, I really hate to be part of the West because it's evil, the United States, England, the European Community are making wars everywhere, and I don't want to be part of it and I don't want to be responsible for this, I don't want this to happen in our name and with our money."



Hollywood clamp down on pro-Palestine views

by Ed Newman

America's Hollywood film industry has clamped down on actors and actresses over their pro-Palestine views and opposing Israel's brutal aggression against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip.

The United Talent Agency (UTA), a global agency based in Beverly Hills, said that it had dropped Oscar-winning actress Susan Sarandon after she spoke out at a recent pro-Palestinian rally in New York.

The six-time Prime-

time Emmy Award nominee has so far attended several rallies in support of Palestine and drew criticism for saying "there are a lot of people afraid of being Jewish at this time and are getting a taste of what it feels like to be a Muslim in this country".

"People are questioning, people are standing up, people are educating themselves, people are stepping away from brainwashing that started when they were kids," Ms Sarandon said, encouraging others to keep speaking up in support of Palestinians in the

war-torn Gaza Strip.

According to the Gaza-based health ministry, more than 14,000 Palestinians, including at least 5,600 children, have been killed and more than 33,000 others injured in the Israeli strikes since 7th October.

Tel Aviv has also imposed a "complete siege" on Gaza, cutting off fuel, electricity, food and water to the more than two million Palestinians living there.

Sarandon encouraged attendees to "be strong, be patient, be clear and stand with anybody who has the courage to

speak out," and thanked "the Jewish community who's come out to have our backs".

She also went on to repost a pro-Palestinian message from *Pink Floyd's* Roger Waters on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Sarandon is not alone in being in hot water over her stance on the ongoing war against Palestinians. Melissa Barrera, a Mexican actress, was also dropped from starring in the seventh instalment of the *Scream* franchise over a series of social media posts against Israel's brutality

and in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

"Gaza is currently being treated like a concentration camp," she wrote in one post on Instagram stories. "Cornering everyone together, with nowhere to go, no electricity no water ... people have learned nothing from our histories. And just like our histories, people are still silently watching it all happen. THIS IS GENOCIDE & ETHNIC CLEANSING."

Spyglass, the production company for *Scream* 7, said it had "zero tolerance for [anti-Semitism]

or the incitement of hate in any form".

Back in mid-October, it was revealed that American cable channel MSNBC had quietly taken three prominent Muslim journalists "out of the anchor's chair" over their pro-Palestine stance.

About that time, it was also reported that the BBC had taken six of its reporters off the air as an investigation had been launched into their pro-Palestinian posts on the social media platform X.

Radio Havana Cuba

On the Dublin Riots

Statement from the Communist Party of Ireland

First and foremost, the Communist Party of Ireland extends our deepest sympathies and well wishes to all the victims and their families of the horrendous stabbing and the subsequent violence in Dublin on 23rd November, and in the strongest possible terms, denounces the riots on the city centre's streets later that evening.

It should come as little surprise that violence erupted on the streets of Dublin city. Across the cities and towns of our country, decades of neo-liberal economic and social policies have left deep scars, with a generation of people completely alienated and marginalised. This is manifested particularly among large sections of our youth.

Working class communities have been systematically stripped of their capacity to self-or-

ganise by various institutions of the state and NGOs. Their relationship to the state and to power is mediated and defused by layers of bureaucracy and self-appointed 'experts'.

Our people, and in particular our youth, have been subject to a narcissistic ideology of contemporary capitalism, which proclaims that community and social organising is a waste of time and that one should just look after oneself. Working class people are told not to consider or take account of what is best for our communities.

In previous generations in many working-class communities, trade unions and their activists would have been central to self-organising and building support networks within and between working class communities. As the trade union movement

has been increasingly assimilated by the state and has abandoned any concept of class analysis and working-class interests, its political and organisational influence has declined. This is reflected within working class communities, leaving them open to the siren calls of the far-right. Decades of neglect by the state has resulted in many working-class communities being exploited and dominated by criminal gangs.

People's frustrations with decades of neglect is being misdirected against migrant workers and asylum seekers. Neither migrant workers nor asylum seekers caused the deepening crisis in our health service, nor are they responsible for the lack of GPs in our communities, nor the overcrowding in schools, nor the housing shortages, or the minimal services available in

communities.

Responsibility for these serious social crises which impact on the lives of millions of workers lies with capitalism and with successive governments, and all the establishment political parties in the Dáil reduced to a talking shop by EU controls.

This society and this economic system are run to make the rich richer, to grow the profits of big business, to enrich the landlord class – both individual and corporate – and to make workers pay a very heavy price for a bankrupt economic system.

To our youth, turn your anger at those who are responsible, not our brother and sister migrant workers. This violence can only strengthen the hand of the establishment and the state, ensuring more control over our lives and over our communities. It will

only strengthen the power and the grip of petty criminals and criminal gangs. These anti-people forces already have a grip over our communities. Don't allow yourself to be misled by those who wish to steer your anger against migrants, against other workers.

These forces have no answers to our problems, just division and hatred. Kick up, not down.

We express our solidarity with the activists involved in Dublin Communities Against Racism, local activists striving to build and strengthen our communities, and have a record of opposition to government economic policies.

We stand in solidarity with all migrant workers who are experiencing fear and insecurity at this time. In particular, on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we stand in solidarity

with all migrant women workers who experience daily abuse at work and on our streets from racist thugs.

You are not alone, it is not a journey you have to take on your own. Our class has a long history of solidarity and comradeship.

We will walk arm in arm with you, we will stand together, to face down the exploiters and the spreaders of hate and division.

We call upon the trade union movement to lead a community base and lead opposition to both racism and this government's economic and social policies.

Ní neart go cur le chéile!

**James Corcoran
General Secretary
Communist Party of
Ireland**

Zelensky on the ropes

Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky is on thin ice. That's the conclusion of international affairs and security analyst Mark Sleboda, who joined Sputnik's Political Misfits panel on Monday to discuss the ongoing Ukrainian political drama in the wake of the country's failed counter-offensive this year.

Amidst political infighting and underwhelming performance on the battlefield, Sleboda believes the foreign backers of Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky may be looking for a way to remove him from power "without another blatantly obvious US-backed coup".

"He fears another Maidan... he fears a coup," says Sleboda, referring to the 2014 protests that saw far-right mobs drive elected president Viktor Yanukovich out of Ukraine. The unrest,

openly backed by Western powers, was supported by only a minority of the Ukrainian population but succeeded in firmly shifting the politics of the country towards a Russophobic stance.

Sleboda believes the primary challenger to Zelensky's power is Valeri Zaluzhny, the current commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian military. Political forces inside and outside the country may be coalescing around Zaluzhny as an alternative to Zelensky's leadership.

Aware of the threat, Zelensky "has replaced several of Zaluzhny's generals in the past weeks – fired them – without any consultations with him," said Sleboda. He also noted the recent death of Major Gennady Chastakov, a top aide to Zaluzhny, who was killed earlier this month when a grenade given to him as a birthday gift exploded.

Sleboda speculates that the strange incident may have been a "political hit by Zelensky's administration". "Most of the Ukrainian social media channels believe it was a political hit, a warning to Zaluzhny."

Sleboda discounts a story that has recently re-emerged chiefly blaming former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson for Ukraine's unwillingness to seek peace with Russia in early 2022, calling it a "salvo in the quite opaque political infighting that is now going on in Kiev".

"I don't think they [the Ukrainian government] were ever more serious about this than they were about the Minsk accords," said Sleboda, noting the "ideological nature" of the country's firmly anti-Russian leadership since 2014.

Zelensky has faced criticism over Ukraine's counter-offensive earlier this year that failed to

significantly challenge Russian forces as the country's special military operation in Ukraine continues. Sleboda noted recent comments by Zelensky's officials in US media calling the Ukrainian president "delusional".

Host Michelle Witte noted the damage to morale in the Ukrainian armed forces caused by the chronic political dysfunction, saying "constant purges of relatively high ranking military officers during war would seem to perhaps have a negative effect on your war effort".

Sleboda agreed, claiming President Zelensky's western backers are looking for a way to replace the Ukrainian leader.

"It seems quite obvious to me that the USA and in general the West has lost confidence in Zelensky and they're trying to find a way to replace him with Zaluzhny without another blatantly obvious US-backed coup in the country

so soon after the last one," said Sleboda, referring to widely-reported evidence of US involvement in the 2014 ousting of Yanukovich.

Sleboda noted that last week, for the first time, Zaluzhny was invited to a NATO meeting discussing Ukrainian military policy in Ramstein instead of Zelensky.

His analysis comes amidst recent comments by a senior Ukrainian MP lamenting that the country's military leadership "has been unable to provide a [strategic] plan for 2024". The country's Western backers have reportedly encouraged Ukraine to draft the elderly, teenagers and women into the army.

Sleboda also commented on the state of politics in the Netherlands, where the party of populist right-wing figure Geert Wilders recently won elections.

"He [Wilders] has also come out publicly as being against aid for Ukraine, which is the big foreign policy kicker against the Western orthodoxy."

"And at the moment that may be more important for everyone else's panic than anything else. Especially considering that the Netherlands has been a disproportionately large supplier of financial and military aid to the Kiev regime, and they are one of the two principal countries that is supposed to supply F-16s to Ukraine next year."

"That gets interesting from an international perspective," he continued, speculating that the politician's support (or lack thereof) for the Western proxy conflict against Russia may ultimately be more important to leaders than his controversial anti-migrant views.

Sputnik

Fidel and the just cause of the Palestinian people

by **María Josefina Arce**

Fidel Castro imbued the Cuban Revolution with great humanism and solidarity, and made the defence of justice, peace and just causes one of his essential principles, including support for the Palestinians' right to their land and to a sovereign and independent state.

Today, when violence has escalated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the words pronounced by the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution in ev-

ery international tribunal, in which he denounced the crimes of the Zionist regime of Israel against the Palestinians, take on special validity.

"Put an end as soon as possible to the genocide of the Palestinian people? Protect the basic right to life of its citizens, its young people and its children. Respect their right to independence and peace..." he said in September 2001, in Durban, South Africa, during the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and

Related Intolerance.

Much earlier, in 1979, before the plenary session of the UN General Assembly, Fidel condemned Israel's policy of aggression, colonialism and expansionism.

Fidel Castro was tireless in his denunciation of the injustice committed against the Palestinians and in his support for the struggle against the Israeli occupation.

Cuba was one of the first countries to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), constituted in 1964, and the

Palestinian politician and leader Yasser Arafat, who maintained a close friendship with the Cuban leader and visited the socialist island for the first time in 1974.

Under Fidel's guidance, Cuba's support to that people would not be limited to constant denunciation but would also materialise over the decades in solidarity aid.

Many Palestinians have been able to make their dream of becoming doctors come true on Cuban soil. In the Latin American School of Medicine, born at the ini-

tiative of the Commander in Chief, young people from that people have been trained.

To-date, 104 Palestinian health professionals have graduated and currently 200 more are being trained in that institution, 78 of them are from the Gaza Strip, besieged by the Zionist regime.

Every year, Cuba grants around 50 scholarships to the PLO for young people from the occupied territories and refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

The defence of the

Palestinian cause was instilled in us by Fidel. He always advocated a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Palestinians right to self-determination and the creation of two independent states to guarantee those rights.

The Palestinians will never forget the support and solidarity of the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution and as they have said, he will always be present in their memory.

Radio Havana Cuba