

Stop the Slaughter – Stand by Palestine!

by our Arab Affairs correspondent

Hundreds of thousands thronged the streets of Yemen last week to condemn the Anglo-American air-raids on their missile bases and support their Houthi government’s blockade on Zionist shipping in the Red Sea while millions of others took to the streets all over the world to stand by the Palestinians and condemn Zionist aggression. Israel continues its carpet bombing of the beleaguered Gaza Strip where the Palestinian resistance is battling to fend off the Israeli invaders. And Iran has carried out its most substantial missile attacks to-date, targeting ISIS bases in Syria and an Israeli espionage facility in Iraqi Kurdistan.

South Africa accuses Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The South Africans point out that no armed attack on the territory of a country, however serious, such as that perpetrated by Hamas on 7th October, justifies violating the Convention for the Prevention of Genocide and China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi calls

for the establishment of a Palestinian state and a ceasefire in Gaza.

Meanwhile Marc Botenga, a Belgian Member of the European Parliament, said the Belgium government continues to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and other nations must follow. Botenga, a member of the Belgian Workers’ Party (PTB), said the ongoing street protests against Israel’s attack will pressure many governments to follow suit. “The European governments guarantee impunity to Israel, and people out there in the streets are outraged about this,” but at some point, they will be forced to say the word “ceasefire”.

Last weekend a huge crowd marched through the north Yemeni capital, Sana’a, chanting “Death to America! Death to Israel!” to show their

support for their government’s support of the Palestinian cause. “If America and its allies decide to declare open war on us, we’re ready for it and we won’t have any choice but to bring victory or fall as martyrs,” one protester told the French media. “We’re not scared of the American or British air force. We’ve been bombed for nine years and another attack is nothing new for us,” said another.

The Houthis say their blockade, which has shut down the Israeli port of Eilat and forced many other Western vessels to take the long route via South Africa to Europe, will now be extended to British and American ships and it will continue, come what may, until the fighting ends in Gaza.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, UN Secre-

tary-General Antonio Guterres repeated his call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the besieged Gaza Strip. “The world is standing by as civilians, mostly women and children, are killed, maimed, bombed, forced from their homes and denied access to humanitarian aid,” Guterres said. “An immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza” he said was the sole means of preventing “a spillover that could send the entire region up in flames”.

UN human rights experts say that every single person in the Gaza Strip is facing hunger amid Israel’s ongoing war and blockade against the besieged enclave. The UN chief emphasised the importance of addressing the humanitarian situation in Gaza, establishing a ceasefire and releasing the hostages. According to the

UN, 85 per cent of the people of the Strip are already internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine.

None of this is good news for Benjamin Netanyahu, whose dreams of an easy victory are rapidly fading. The Palestinian resistance fights on. They still hold most of the Israeli prisoners taken during their 7th October border raid and the continuing conflict is taking a terrible toll on the Israeli economy.

Nearly half a million Israelis have fled the country since the fighting began. Tourism is virtually dead. Unemployment has jumped from four to 10 per cent and the economy shrunk by 15 per cent in the last quarter of 2023. At least 1,408 Israelis have been killed in the fighting and a further 8,787 wounded.

TELEGRAM: T.ME/PALESTINERESIST

WHO ARE THEY?

The armed wing of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Formerly the Red Eagle Groups, they reorganized under their current name after the assassination of PFLP General Secretary Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa.

NOTABLE FIGURES:

Ahmed Sa’adat (leader), Abu Jamal (spokesman), Tamer Al-Kilani

WHERE ARE THEY MOST ACTIVE?

Dheisheh Refugee Camp (Bethlehem), Ramallah and Al-Bireh, Gaza, occupied interior (via infiltration operations).

ARSENAL

Small arms, explosive devices, mortars, short-range rockets.

The Brigades assassinated Zionist tourism minister Rehavam Ze’evi on October 17th, 2001 in response to the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa. They have participated in major battles from Gaza, utilizing rockets created by the PFLP.

MARTYR ABU ALI MUSTAFA BRIGADES



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FUND

The January fighting fund kicks off with £896 in the bag as supporters respond to our urgent appeal for financial support. A Southall comrade sent in £300 and another from Dagenham donated £110. An Essex veteran gave £50, a Devon supporter sent us £16 and a Welsh reader gave us a score. We now need £2,604 to hit our target for the month.

While Starmer turns his back on the peace movement, the winds of war are spreading across the Middle East and the anti-war campaign and the demand to end the carnage in Gaza grows and grows. The *New Worker* is fighting for a world without exploitation. A world in which the will of the masses, the workers, the toilers, the people who work in the factories and farms, is carried out.

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>

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

A dangerous escalation

In the 19th Century the imperialists used ‘gun-boat diplomacy’ to carve up Africa and the rest of the world into various European spheres of influence. It worked because only the colonial powers could manufacture the weapons of mass destruction needed to enslave the peoples of what is we now call the Global South. They thought their realms, like the British Empire on which “the sun never set”, would last forever. They called it “civilisation” and “the White Man’s burden” when they brutally crushed all resistance to the forces used to build colonial empires that spanned the globe. But they couldn’t crush the spirit of freedom amongst the oppressed masses who swept away the colonial system after the Second World War.

The masses of the Third World who took up the gun in the national liberation wars in Algeria and Zimbabwe showed that it was people, not arms, that decide the outcome of struggles; while the Korean and Vietnamese people taught the American imperialists a lesson they still have yet to learn.

If the Anglo-American attacks on Yemen were meant to build a new NATO bloc in the Middle East to protect Israel and intimidate the Arabs it has clearly failed. Most of America’s allies have refused to join this new “coalition of the willing”, which only consists of Britain, the USA, Canada and some tiny islands in the Pacific that no-one’s ever heard of.

If the US-led attacks were meant to force the Houthi government to abandon its blockade of Israeli shipping they have clearly failed. The Red Sea remains the “Arab Sea” and the Houthis are now adding British and US vessels to their list.

The Yemenis say they will end their blockade once the fighting in Gaza stops. All the Americans have to do to make that happens is to tell their puppets in Tel Aviv to cease-fire and end the carnage.

One up for the RMT

The RMT transport union ended its dispute with Transport for London (TfL) following an improved pay offer from City Hall that has added an extra £30 million to the pay budget to meet union demands on pay, grading structures and travel facilities.

Last month RMT rejected a below inflation pay offer of five per cent from the London Underground. This, they said was “unacceptable when TfL has created a bonus pot of £13 million for senior managers and the commissioner took an 11 per cent pay rise in 2023 taking his salary up to £395,000”.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: “Following further positive discussions today, the negotiations on a pay deal for our London Underground members can now take place on an improved basis and mandate with significant further funding for a settlement being made available. This significantly improved funding position means the scheduled strike action will be suspended with immediate effect and we look forward to getting into urgent negotiations with TfL in order to develop a suitable agreement and resolution to the dispute.”

Although Management initially refused to budge, the solid response by the membership to past strike calls and the union’s determination to continue prolonged industrial action forced them to respond realistically to the union’s demand for higher pay and the restoration of full staff travel facilities for all Tube workers. This is what collective bargaining is all about and this is why it must be defended.

Why the Houthis Can Beat the West

by Russell Bentley

Dr Michael Parenti once said: “Economic violence is physical violence in slow motion.” The economic sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s led directly to the deaths of half a million Iraqi children. Economic sanctions can be a weapon as deadly as any artillery shell or cruise missile.

The Houthis might at first appear to be vastly outmatched by the US/UK armada that has struck Yemen, but militarily and economically, the USA and Europe are actually much more vulnerable than the Houthis. To put it simply, in both economic and military terms, the USA, UK and Europe, and Israel, have a lot more to lose.

The Houthis are not alone – Hezbollah, considered to be one of the most effective fighting forces in the world today, has an estimated 100,000 highly trained and motivated and very well armed soldiers in Lebanon, and is already at (undeclared, but de facto) war with Israel, and will probably escalate in the next few days. In October 1983, Hezbollah was able to kill 305 US and French occupation soldiers at a cost of only 2 KIA [killed in action] on the Hezbollah side.

Of the US and French soldiers, 220 were US Marines, the greatest single loss in one day of US Marines since the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945. In the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War, in which Israel invaded southern Lebanon, Hezbollah was able to inflict ‘unacceptable casualties’

on Israeli forces, which resulted in the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the signing of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Although Lebanese casualties were significantly higher than Israeli, the conflict is generally seen as a tactical and strategic defeat for Israel. Israel and their US/EU allies would do well to remember both of these battles before continuing to escalate an already extremely volatile situation beyond the point of no return.

Escalation between Hezbollah and the Israelis on Lebanon’s southern border will not only expand the current area of conflict into the eastern Mediterranean, it can quickly become a serious threat to the Israeli port of Haifa, only 20 miles from the Lebanese border. Haifa is Israel’s third largest city, with a population of around 300,000. The Port of Haifa is Israel’s second largest by cargo tonnage, and the Haifa oil refinery (the largest, and one of only two in Israel) processes more than 66 million barrels of crude oil per year, more than a million barrels per week. The port, and especially the refinery, would be prime targets, and significant damage to either, especially the refinery, would have serious repercussions for the Israeli economy.

The ‘massive attack’ by US/UK naval forces against the Houthis involved airstrikes, as well as approximately 100 cruise missiles, at a cost of more than \$1 million each. According to reports published by the Houthi military command and Western media, the attack killed five Houthis. Now, do the maths.

The USA and UK just spent a collective \$100 million to kill five Houthis and escalate and exacerbate an already volatile situation. Based on assurances from the Houthi government that only Israeli-connected shipping was under threat, the majority of Red Sea shipping traffic had actually continued in the Red Sea unhindered.

This is no longer the case. As of 13th January, after the US/UK attacks and their possible continuation, the International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (Intertanko), which represents almost 70 per cent of all internationally traded oil, gas and chemical tankers, said in an advisory to members to “stay well away” from the Bab al Mandab strait, and for vessels travelling south via the Suez Canal to pause north of Yemen. This major disruption of tanker traffic may well have an upward influence on oil prices, coming as it does right on the heels of Saudi Aramco’s announcement of a \$2 per barrel discount beginning in February.

The Houthis don’t even have to shoot at any more ships – just the threat of the possibility of Houthi or coalition missiles being fired has been enough to disrupt Red Sea shipping traffic, which carries 12 per cent of all global trade goods and a staggering 30 per cent of all container goods. It is actually the US/UK ‘coalition’ that has escalated the situation to dangerous levels that now interfere with much more shipping, including tanker traffic.

Sputnik



Workers' Notes

Retail Therapy

by New Worker correspondent

As the January sales are winding down it is a suitable time to look at the retail trade, and in particular some of the issues confronting those who work in it.

A walk down any high street or through the more modern shopping mall demonstrates that the trade is not in good shape. The most common name for shops seems to be "To Let" and the only wares they sell are padlocks and window shutters. In this correspondent's home town many shops have fled the town centre and move around different out-of-town retail parks every few years.

Needless to say, not all retailers are suffering. Last week Tesco announced that after a good festive season it expects to make £2.75 billion profit in the year to February, an increase on the £2.49 million made in 2022-3. According to Tesco this was partly due to the popularity of its £2.09 Christmas dinner.

In response, Sharon Graham, General Secretary of Unite, thundered that: "At a time when food prices continue to rise and millions of people are still struggling to feed their families, Tesco have been raking in bumper profits on the back of profiteering.

"Corporations like Tesco have done very well out of the cost-of-living crisis – unlike working people who have had to swallow inflated costs that have lined the pockets of the bosses and investors."

It is telling that these justifiable remarks come from a union that has a very small presence in the sector. Those workers it does represent are almost entirely those in warehouses and delivery drivers. It has a rival in the form of the GMB in these areas.

The main union in the retail sector is the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied

Workers (USDAW). It is the sixth largest union in Britain and claims a membership of 360,000 members on its website. That sounds good but for the fact that there are 3.54 million workers in the retail sector. Its official returns record a membership of 356,652, including the 15,000 for which it has no known address. It therefore only represents less than a 10th of the retail workforce. Three years ago it had 380,000 members and represented 13 per cent of the retail workforce, which was then slightly larger than now. So its website claim that it is a growing union needs adjustment.

Retail has long been a difficult sector to organise. Employer opposition can be brutal, as in the case of Amazon where GMB had recently had some hard-won success. In other companies such as Marks and Spencer (M&S) and John Lewis unions are politely ignored. John Lewis is a co-operative that does not have anything so vulgar as 'employees' but has partners who officially own it, although it is basically like any other company. The CEO earns £990,000 while a new catering assistant can be on £9.35 per hour. As with many other retailers in recent years, overtime rates for Sunday and late hours have faded away into history.

Marks and Spencer also ignores unions and has repeatedly ignored demands from USDAW for recognition. Like John Lewis, M&S has tended to fend off unions by paying staff a bit more than the average on the high street, and by serving edible food in their staff canteens along with other small perks. These perks were found to have no value when both companies started closing and downsizing stores in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Useless USDAW?

It was interesting, but not surprising, that USDAW did not join in the recent protest made by Sharon Graham about Tesco's profits. In 2016 USDAW signed an exclusive recognition agreement with Tesco

to the annoyance of some other unions, which means it represents almost half of the Tesco workforce. It also has non-exclusive partnership agreements with supermarket chains Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, the Co-operative, Argos, Boots the Chemist and downmarket fashion chain Primark.

USDAW has long been run by right-wing factions. The union is affiliated to the Co-operative Party and is a cheerleader for Sir Keir Starmer. It has had eight general secretaries since it was founded as result of a merger in 1947. Of these, two became lords and three others became knights of the realm, which just goes to show how unions promote social mobility for the working class.

Earlier this month it responded to a report by the Centre for Retail Research which noted that in the course of 2023 some 10,494 shops closed and with them went 119,405 jobs. USDAW's solution was simple: It complains that the Government has rejected an online sales tax and wants to help boost the profits of the supermarket chains by cutting business rates. General Secretary Paddy Lillis doffed his cap to say that: "Only by working together can we help to deliver the better jobs retail workers need and deserve, while securing the future viability of the industry for the benefit of customers, workers, communities and our economy."

It claims that a one per cent online sales levy will raise £1.5 billion that could be devoted to cutting business rates by a fifth for retailers. Just what the working class needs! It also wants to see rent reductions for the same 'deserving' cases. USDAW also points out that in the same period that online Amazon has paid a total of £61.7 million in corporation tax, M&S paid £3.3 billion. The difference is not just one of online versus high street, as many businesses use the same tricks devised by clever accountants.

USDAW does not however, neglect the working classes. It demands improved skills and training and deplored the

end of the Union Learning Fund. It demands a minimum wage of at least £12 per hour as a step towards £15 for all workers and an end to lower rates for younger workers, minimum contracts of 16 hours weekly, for everyone who wants it, that reflects normal hours worked and a ban on zero-hour contracts. Proper sick pay, which is rare in the sector, is another demand. Active campaigning on these issues, however, is hard to detect.

One thing USDAW has laid stress on is toughening the law on protecting workers from assaults and abuse and increasing penalties for shoplifters. In 2021 the Scottish parliament passed such legislation. That was a worthy measure, but it is something of a belt and braces measure as there are plenty of laws against such criminal acts. It was one that was supported by the employers, which would not happen if USDAW was demanding higher wages.

It has to be said that USDAW does not have a good reputation. Some disgruntled ex-members suggest it would be better named "Useless Seven Days A Week". This recent review of USDAW's performance on the Trustpilot website is all too typical: "Morrisons have taken everything we had from us at their manufacturing division – loyalty bonus, profit share, overtime pay, pensions have been

worsened, and they proposing further reduction of contributions from the company.

"Full sick pay came up for review, in exchange for a paltry hourly pay increase which didn't even get anywhere close inflationary levels. In exchange for a considerable loss of full sick pay benefit, I received a three per cent pay increase, despite the fact that inflation is at around fifteen per cent, ergo we lost our sick pay and I effectively took a 12 per cent pay cut for the privilege. Yet, USDAW endorsed it! Everyone I know in union voted against it, yet the vote came back approximately 65 per cent for and 35 against the proposal. Whilst this is possible, I find it improbable, like turkeys voting in favour of Christmas. I wouldn't be surprised if USDAW rigged the outcome after the backlash some years ago over a pay increase some years ago which by a majority was rejected by the members, and likely cost them time and money to resolve, along with ACAS being involved. It was pushed through despite the members voting against it. So they probably just fixed this one to save themselves the hassle and cost.

"I'll add that I like the union rep for my area from speaking with over the phone, he's an alright guy. But the union itself isn't good for fighting the corner of their

continued on page 4...

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

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...continued from page 3

members.”

We quote this almost in full because there are far too many similar complaints about USDAW being too cosy with bosses to dismiss this particular one.

There is obviously an urgent need for a tougher approach from unions than the partnership model peddled by USDAW.

A recent example of this was at the Asda store in Gosport, where a threatened strike by GMB members was called off at the last minute. The threat of strike action by 100 GMB members was enough for bosses to offer a four-day week – however, it may have made this concession because its accounts are presently under scrutiny. We shall just have to wait and see if this concession continues after parliamentary scrutiny ends.

While supermarkets make massive profits, they generally do so by making slim margins on huge and quick turnover. Strike action would therefore be effective in speedily hitting them in the pockets. That depends on worker militancy, which will be difficult.

London's Transport Battles

by New Worker correspondent

Transport in London and elsewhere has been the focus of much industrial action recently, some at least has been heading towards a satisfactory conclusion.

On London Underground (LUL), transport union RMT have secured a substantial win over pay, grading structures and travel facilities issues after the Mayor of London caved in to avert strike action by 10,000 workers. While talks with Transport for London (TfL) floundered, last minute concessions were enough for RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch to say that: “This significantly improved funding position (a sudden announcement of an extra £30 million) means the scheduled strike action will be suspended with immediate effect and we look forward to getting into urgent negotiations with TfL in order to develop a suitable agreement and resolution to the dispute.” The deal remains to be voted on.

This did not please the train drivers union, ASLEF, who while having a comparatively small presence on LUL due to the fact that most drivers there belong to RMT, have also been in dispute and

were firmly told there was no money in the pot.

The third rail union, TSSA, is also planning to ballot for industrial action among LUL members after rejecting a five per cent offer that would also see pay bands and salary ranges frozen.

General Secretary Maryam Eslamdoust complained of a “sub-standard and simply unrealistic offer” that “really amounts to a pay cut for our members who do so much to keep London moving every day of the year. It fails to address the fact inflation has been sky high in recent times and other components of the proposed deal, relating to salary bands, are unacceptable”.

Along with ASLEF, TSSA was also angered by the sudden emergence of the extra money suddenly appearing after they had been told there was no more to come.

London's Buses

There have been a number of disputes on London bus companies that have generally been reasonably successful, although it is arguable that they could have been more successful had Unite launched a single London-wide campaign instead of actions against individual companies.

This Friday sees the start of

another of these local actions taking place. This involves about 40 staff working in the control rooms for Abellio buses whose duties involve controlling bus routes, instructing drivers on traffic jams and away from accidents etc. This six-day strike involves control room staff who have rejected a five per cent pay increase for 2023 by their Dutch state railway employers. Even with declining inflation this is a big real-terms pay cut.

To rub salt into the wound, they already earn about £10,000 per year less than comparable staff at other bus companies and have been offered a smaller pay rise. Unite's Sharon Graham warned that: “Abellio's poor pay offer will bring chaos to London as our members take strike action to fight for better pay,” adding that: “Abellio has hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue from lucrative London bus contracts and yet it is trying to short-change some of its most vital staff. It needs to understand our members won't stand for it.”

Abellio London's last recorded profits were over £4 million from revenues of over £165 million.

The dispute involving workers at Battersea and Twickenham garages will largely affect south and south-

west London routes. A regional officer pointed out that the dispute could easily be resolved if Abellio comes “back to the table with an improved offer to avoid ruining the journeys of millions of Londoners. Abellio is to blame for this strike and they need to fix it.”

Beyond the M25

ASLEF train drivers will be taking further strike action and ban overtime at the end of this month and in early February at several railway companies as part of their long-running pay battles to win the first real-terms pay rise for years.

These include Southeastern, GTR Southern/Gatwick Express, GTR Great Northern Thameslink, South Western Railway, Avanti West Coast and LNER, the latter also affecting long-distance routes to and from Scotland.

Mick Whelan, ASLEF's General Secretary, said: “We have given the government every opportunity to come to the table but it has now been a year since we had any contact from the Department for Transport. It's clear they do not want to resolve this dispute. Many of our members have now not had a single penny increase to their pay in half a decade, during which inflation soared and with it the cost of living.”

He deplored the fact that after drivers didn't ask for an increase during the pandemic when they worked as key-workers, risking their lives to allow NHS and other workers to travel, they have been treated so badly.

He complained that: “The government has now tried their old trick of changing the rules when they can't win and brought in Minimum Service Levels legislation. But this new law, as we told officials during the consultation period, won't ease industrial strife. It will likely just make it worse.”

If the strikes go ahead, and it is unlikely there will be any LUL last minute surprise offer, it will be the first major test of the new legislation. ASLEF has long complained of Government reluctance to intervene and end the drivers' dispute.

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

16th January 2004

THE GOVERNMENT of Nigeria has bowed to pressure from oil workers and dropped plans to sell the country's oil refineries.

The workers had given their government a deadline of 31st December to put the refineries back in shape or face a strike.

The Government responded by promising that by next May, the refineries “would operate at the optimal level and produce up to 18 million litres a day, once the Fluid Catalytic Cracking units are on stream”.

The Government also agreed to strategic

partnering towards resuscitating the refineries with “competent and credible investors” allowed the acquisition of a 51 per cent equity while the government retains 49 per cent.

There were major disagreements at a crucial meeting between the Government and the leaders of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers and the Petroleum and National Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) in Abuja at the end of December.

The oil workers' unions had jointly given the Government an ultimatum, which expired on 31st December, to put the refineries in functioning shape or they would down tools.

The ultimatum given six months ago followed a declaration by the Government that refineries would be sold at the latest by next March and that more funds would not be committed to their repair.

The first phase of the planned sale was due to begin with the two refineries in Warri and

Kaduna being sold to core foreign investors.

But, 48 hours before the deadline expired, the Government invited the leaders of the trade unions to an all-stakeholders meeting in Abuja to stave off the nationwide planned strike action.

The president of PENGASSAN, Louis Brown-Ogbeifun, confirmed that the meeting considered all issue raised by the two unions and that agreement had been reached.

He told reporters in Lagos that the Government had also agreed to shelve the sale of the refineries and that they would be fully on-stream to process about 75 per cent of fuel consumed locally by May.

The union leader said they were convinced that the strategic partnership to which the Government had agreed would bring back the lost glory of the refineries.

Brown-Ogbeifun reported that the only issue on which the meeting was divided was the proposed fuel tax.

Zionism and imperialism

by Marc Vandepitte

The genocide the Israeli army is perpetrating today in Gaza is not a slip-up but the logical off-shoot of an imperialist and colonial project established at the end of the 19th Century: Zionism. To properly understand what is happening today, it is necessary to understand the origins and stakes of this ideology and movement.

The Jewish Question

Since time immemorial, Jewish people have lived scattered throughout the world. Even centuries before the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman Empire (70 AD), 3.5 million Jews lived in the diaspora while only half a million resided in Palestine.

The situation of the various Jewish communities in the diaspora was very diverse. Some were prosperous and free. In those regions, Jewish notables even held positions of authority. In others, Jews lived at the bottom of society, were oppressed and were easily the target of anti-Semitism.

At the end of the 19th Century, capitalism was in a serious crisis. Large sections of the population were impoverished. To promote national unity and divert attention from the crisis, the establishment needed a scapegoat, and at that time it was the Jews. There were outbreaks of anti-Semitism in both Eastern and Western Europe. Czarist Russia was rocked by brutal pogroms in 1881, and in France there was the Dreyfus affair at the end of the 19th Century.

Two answers were formulated during that period regarding this anti-Semitic wave. For progressive Jews such as Karl Marx and Moses Mendelsohn, the battle had to be waged on the ground against everything that was reactionary. Others, such as Theodor Herzl, the founder



of Zionism, chose to flee. According to them, the problems of Jews could only be solved in a Jewish state of their own. That was right away the core of Zionism.

Various locations were initially considered for such a Jewish state, including Uganda, Kenya, Argentina and Palestine. Ultimately the choice fell on Palestine. That country had the advantage that the myths of the Torah could be used to mobilise Jews worldwide. Moreover – as we will see further – this plan had the full support of British imperialism.

Zionism was created by a handful of Jewish intellectuals. It had very little support in its early stages. Fierce opposition to this new ideology came from various Jewish circles. The Reform movement, the Orthodox Jews and the socialist movement opposed the idea of a Jewish state.

In the 19th Century, the Jewish bourgeoisie was for the most part well-integrated into bourgeois society and the capitalist economy. Therefore, they were focused on assimilation rather than segregation. They found the idea of a Jewish state of their own nonsensical; it was not at all in line with their interests. Under the influence of the Communist International, the Jewish workers had little enthusiasm for Zionism.

It was mainly among the petty bourgeoisie and more specifically among intellectuals that Zionism emerged and found a following. The crisis of capitalism hit the middle class hard and within this system there was little perspective for solving their problems.

In summary, in the early years, Zionism was mainly supported by petty-bourgeois intellectuals and represented only a small minority movement within Judaism. Before the First World War, the Zionist movement failed to become a major player within Judaism.

The migration to Palestine advocated by the Zionists was equally small. Between 1881–1925, nearly four million Jews emigrated from Europe – but only one per cent of them sought refuge in Palestine at the time.

Imperialist and Nazi support

If Zionists received little support from Jewish quarters, they could count on Britain. At the end of the 19th Century, imperialism was in full swing and a Jewish state in Palestine suited the British imperialists. There are several reasons for this.

The British wanted control over the Middle East. A Jewish state in that region, under British influence, could be

very useful in this regard. Palestine is strategically very important because of its proximity to the Suez Canal (opened since 1869), which provides access to the shortest route to Asia. From 1935 onwards, oil played an equally important factor: The oil supply from Iraq to the Mediterranean also passed through Palestine.

At the end of the 19th Century, the Ottoman Empire was on its last legs, and in this vacuum there was a real possibility of forming a large and strong Arab state. At the beginning of the 19th Century, Egypt's Muhammad Ali had attempted to build a strong Arab empire that, in addition to Egypt, also included Syria and parts of Sudan. With the creation of a Jewish state, the British wanted to prevent this.

Finally, with the creation of a Jewish state, the British wanted to prevent France, a major imperialist rival, from seizing this strategic region. Under Napoleon, France had previously attempted to annex Egypt and Syria.

In 1838, the British opened their first consulate in Jerusalem. The mission included informally encouraging Jews to come to Palestine, promising to protect them. Nearly 60 years before the Jewish Zionists held their congresses, the British not only liked the idea of settling Jewish people here but had already begun to

implement it.

The Balfour Declaration expressed British imperialism's plan to divide and conquer in the Palestine region by promoting Zionism.

In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote to Lionel Walter Rothschild, a member of the prominent Jewish Rothschild banking family in Great Britain. It was a letter to the Zionist movement, which would go down in history as the Balfour Declaration. In it he stated that the British government was positive about the establishment of a "National Home for the Jewish People in Palestine" and that it will do its utmost to facilitate this project.

The aspirations of the petty-bourgeois Zionists coincided with the geo-political interests of British imperialism. To a large extent, Zionism is a product of British big business. In any case, without Britain the Zionist project could never have developed or achieved its goals in Palestine.

But it was not just from British imperialism that the Zionists were looking for support. For example, German Zionists concluded various co-operation agreements with the Nazis. Wealthy German Jews could emigrate to Palestine together with some of their capital. With that Jewish-German capital, the Zionists in Palestine were able to develop the economic infrastructure to receive Jews from Germany. In return, the German Zionists broke the boycott that most Jewish organisations in Europe and the USA had declared against trade in German goods.

In Palestine, the Jewish Agency set up a commission to investigate the problems of the Jews in Germany. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, wrote about this at the time: "It is not the task of the committee to advocate for the rights of the Jews in Germany. The committee should only be interested in

continued on page 6...

...continued from page 5

the problem of German Jews insofar as they can emigrate to Palestine.”

It was thanks to those agreements that German Jews “constituted the super-top class in Israel” at that time.

After the Second World War the role of patron and facilitator would mainly be taken up by the USA with Europe as a junior partner.

Colonial project

The Jews may have been people without a country, but Palestine was certainly not a country without people. At the end of the 19th Century, almost half a million Palestinians lived between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. To turn the area into a ‘Jewish’ state, it was necessary to remove the Indigenous population.

In other words, the project advocated settler colonialism, similar to what Europeans had previously done in South and North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

All projects of settler colonialism are driven by the so-called ‘logic of elimination’, which is the logic of making the native population disappear as much as possible. The history of the above shows that this logic inevitably leads to de-humanisation, disenfranchisement, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

From the beginning, the Zionists’ objectives were clear, although they did not openly state them at first. In 1895, Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary: “We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country...both the process of expropriation and the

removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.”

And it was not just words. The Zionists bought up as many pieces of land as possible, built their own parallel state structure and set up militias.

Gradually, the Zionist leadership showed less diffidence and came out openly in favour of an exclusive Jewish state. In 1940, Josef Weitz, head of the Colonization Department of the World Zionist Organisation, no longer beat about the bush: “It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both [Arab and Jewish] peoples...if the [Palestinian] Arabs leave it, the country will become wide and spacious for us...there is no room here for compromises.

“There is no way but to transfer the [Palestinian] Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, to transfer all of them, save perhaps for [the Palestinian Arabs of] Bethlehem, Nazareth, and the old Jerusalem. Not one village must be left, not one [Bedouin] tribe.”

The charter of Likud, Netanyahu’s party, also leaves little to the imagination. It states: “The right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is eternal and indisputable” and “between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.”

We are dealing here with unadulterated settler colonialism, which incidentally fitted in perfectly with the spirit of the epoch, which was characterised by the colonisation drive of European countries. At the end of the 19th Century, almost all un-colonised areas in Asia and Africa were over-run and colonised.

For example, in 1870, only 10 per cent of Africa was owned by

European powers; this rose to 90 per cent in the period before the First World War. At the Berlin Conference (1885), Africa was simply divided among the European colonisers.

Zionism fits into that picture and can, in other words, be regarded as the last European colonial project.

Two-state solution?

The aggressive colonial character immediately became clear with the proclamation and formation of the Jewish state in 1948. This was accompanied by the Nakba (‘catastrophe’ in Arabic): a mass slaughter of the Palestinian population, the destruction of 500 villages and the deportation of approximately half of the Palestinian population. A UN resolution provided for the return of all expelled Palestinians but this was never complied with.

From then on it was a matter of striving for the smallest possible number of Palestinians in the largest possible annexed

area. The 1967 Six-Day War quadrupled Israel’s territory. It occupied the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula (returned to Egypt in 1979), the West Bank (including eastern Jerusalem) and the Golan Heights (taken from Syria).

The Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 were a further consolidation of the colonial project. These agreements were intended to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They provided for so-called Palestinian self-government and would pave the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

But that self-government was a joke. In fact, this “two-state solution” was nothing more than a diversionary tactic that allowed Israel to continue dispossessing Palestinians. Peace was just a pretext for Israel to buy time and continue building Jewish settlements.

And that happened. Half a million settlers now live in the occupied West Bank and that number is constantly increasing. The lives of the Palestinians are made as

difficult as possible: they are humiliated, harassed and robbed. Thousands of them, including children, have been kidnapped and spend years in prisons in Israel.

But that is nothing compared to the Gaza Strip. There, [2.2 million] residents have been subjected to a complete blockade since 2007 and the strip was reduced to a concentration camp. Today, only a tiny part of the original Palestine remains.

The most hated country in the world

The surprise attack from Gaza and the subsequent siege of the Gaza Strip are a turning point in the Zionist project. A return to the previous state of affairs is impossible.

The Israeli army is indulging in primitive and barbaric violence based on the most modern technology, including artificial intelligence. Officially, the goal is to eliminate Hamas. But the severity and ruthlessness of the operation reveal that this is an excuse to make the area uninhabitable and to deport the population completely.

According to the anti-Zionist philosopher Moshé Machover, who is himself Jewish, living in Israel, that plan has been in existence for a long time. In 2014 he said: “[The Israeli regime is] actually waiting for a time when they can be permanently expelled to neighbouring countries. That will only be possible during a full-scale war and I fear that Israel is prepared to provoke it.”

Several plans have already been leaked to deport the entire population of Gaza abroad. Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter openly speaks of

“a new Nakba”.

There is no doubt, the current war is fully in line with the old Zionist dream of ruling over the region from “the sea to the Jordan”.

The imperialist backing of that dream was also made abundantly clear when, shortly after 7th October, American and European leaders rushed to Tel Aviv to support the Israeli government. The USA also immediately sent two warships, loads of ammunition and provided \$14.5 billion in aid.

Why Israel is so important to the USA is clearly stated by Robert F Kennedy Jr, the politically inconsistent nephew of President John F Kennedy: “Israel is critical to the US. The reason it’s critical is because it’s a bulwark for us in the Middle East. It’s almost like having an aircraft carrier in the Middle East. It’s our oldest ally, for 75 years.”

But, for so much savagery, the Zionists pay a price. As Lebanese anthropologist Leila Ghanem puts it, Israel is gradually becoming “the most hated country in the world”.

Since the start of the war, millions of people worldwide have taken to the streets against the genocide in Gaza, trade unions have stopped arms deliveries, and Israeli officials and soldiers have been charged in international and national courts. The improved relations that Tel Aviv had with countries in the region are at risk.

For people of the Global South, the Zionist project is an anachronism of our times and has no future. The ‘Israeli exception’ must end. The oppressed Palestinian people, subject to terror but resisting this ‘last colonial project’, have acquired great symbolic value [for people who confront imperialism].



• Palestinian solidarity in New York.

As a result of what is happening in Gaza, [former US President Barack] Obama warns of a new wave of anti-Semitism. It is the irony of history: Zionism, which wanted to be a solution to anti-Semitism, is now

itself the cause of anti-Semitism.

Imperialism is also in bad shape. The de facto support for the horror in Gaza unmasks the rhetoric about human rights and democracy. The contrast with which the West

dealt with Russia after the invasion of Ukraine versus its support for Israel today could not be greater.

The war against Gaza is accelerating the tilting North-South relations. The West is becoming

increasingly isolated and has definitely lost its credibility among the countries of the global South.

I would like to end with the words of Leila Ghanem: “The battle for Gaza is the battle of

all of us. ... The words of Miguel Urbano still resonate in my ears: ‘Where imperialism concentrates its military, political, economic and media forces, those who confront it do so in the name of all humanity.’

The fall of Gaza will be the fall of all of us in the face of capitalist barbarism. The merit of this solidarity is to have pointed the finger at our class enemy.”

Workers World (USA)

Poetry of resistance

by Normand Raymond

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was followed by the first Arab-Israeli war. Under a hail of bombs, six-year-old Mahmoud Darwish fled with his family to southern Lebanon, where they found themselves among hundreds of thousands of other Palestinian refugees.

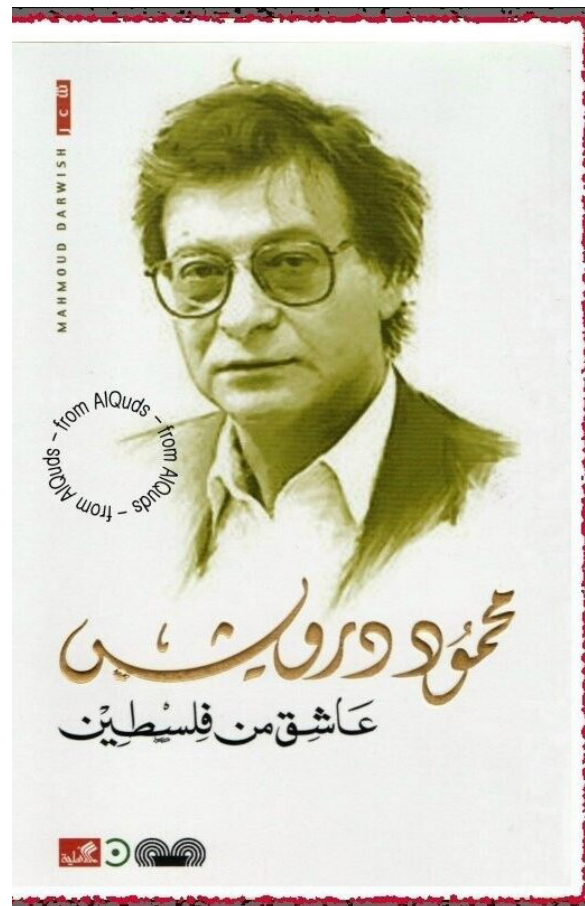
A year later, when the Darwish family returned clandestinely to their homeland, they found their village razed to the ground and replaced by a kibbutz. Henceforth considered “present absentees”, they would be relegated for several years to the status of stateless refugees without papers, becoming illegal on their own ancestral lands.

Born on 13th March 1941 in al-Birwa in Upper Galilee in the north of Palestine, then under British colonial mandate, Mahmoud Darwish is more than a national poet; he is recognised as one of the greatest contemporary Arab poets. He wrote over 20 poetry collections and seven works of prose. In addition to Arabic, he also spoke Hebrew, English and French. His books, which won him numerous prizes and awards, were published in over 20 languages. He died on 9th August

2008 in Houston, Texas following his third open-heart operation.

In 1960, at the age of 19, Darwish moved to Haifa where he published his first book of poems, *Birds Without Wings*. Shortly afterwards, he secretly joined the Communist Party of Israel (Rakah), in which Arabs and Jews campaigned together. He wrote articles for the Party’s official newspaper *al-Ittihad* (The Union) and the cultural, social and political magazine *al-Jadid* (The New), of which he later became editor-in-chief. An historian of the Palestinian cause, critic of Israeli policy, polemicist, humanist thinker, literary critic and poet, he rubbed shoulders with other great Palestinian writers and poets such as Emile Touma, Tawfiq Ziad, Emile Habibi, Salim Gibran and Samih al-Qasim.

Accused of hostile political activities, he was hounded for his writings and imprisoned five times by the Israeli authorities between 1961 and 1969, and placed under house arrest from 1967 to 1970. In 1971, through a Communist Party scholarship from the Institute of Social Sciences at Moscow’s Lomonosov State University, Darwish travelled to the Soviet Union to study political economy for a year. This was



• *Lover from Palestine* by Mahmoud Darwish.

to be the start of an exile that would last more than 30 years, changing countries as the Middle East crises unfolded. After Moscow, he lived in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Tunis and Paris, before finally returning to Palestine in 1995, to settle permanently in Ramallah.

Also known for his commitment to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), he was immediately banned from entering Israel when he joined in 1973. Initially working as an editor at the Palestinian Research Centre, he was elected

to the PLO Executive Committee in 1987, under the presidency of Yasser Arafat, for whom he wrote several speeches including the famous text of the *Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine*. From a simple draft, Darwish turned it into a poetic and lyrical work with an epic tone, which Arafat delivered on 15th November 1988 in Algiers on the occasion of the 19th extraordinary session of the Palestinian National Council.

The UN General Assembly recognised the Palestinian people’s

right to sovereignty over their territory in Resolution 43/177. However, Darwish left the PLO in 1993 in protest against the Oslo Accords, which concluded with a “peace process” that ignored the fate of the vast majority of the Palestinian population living in exile.

Initially impressed by Palestinian poet Abu Salma and Iraqi communist poets Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Darwish was also influenced by Western poets such as Arthur Rimbaud, Federico García Lorca and Allen Ginsberg. Praised in the Arab world and inspired by a modernist vision, his poetry – which speaks of love and death, but also of homeland, prison, exile and war – resonates with an echo of universality well beyond the borders of Palestine. Several of his poems were set to music by Lebanese composer Marcel Khalifé, who in 1984 composed *Ahmad al-Arabi*, a poetic opera based on texts by Darwish.

Although he refused to consider himself a poet of resistance, the exile that runs through all his work and the politics that emerge inevitably reveal an authentic commitment to resistance. Darwish was inspired by images, metaphors and rhythms drawn from the daily lives of people seeking

justice, from the struggles of his people. Never forgetting his status as a Palestinian refugee, he always believed that his poetry was his weapon against occupation, a form of self-defence in favour of Palestinian culture and memory, and his people’s right to sovereignty.

People’s Voice (Canada)

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LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Israel has been committing full-fledged genocide in Gaza for four months against the Palestinian people, without any condemnation from the international community. Israel is carrying out ethnic cleansing, killing civilians, and imposing a complete siege aimed at destroying the Palestinian people, all of which is stated in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Israel is bombing the Palestinian civilians, there are more than 30,000 martyrs, 60,000 wounded and 8,000 missing. It completely destroys infrastructure, bombs hospitals and civilian facilities, including UN centres, destroys schools and bakeries, and deliberately kills journalists.

Since Israel was a party to the Genocide and Punishment Convention, South Africa filed an appeal against Israel in the International Court of Justice on charges of genocide against the Palestinian people, and presented in the first session all the evidence proving that Israel committed genocide under the Genocide Convention.

We call you to support South Africa's appeal against Israel in the International Court of Justice and to put pressure on your governments to be parties to the appeal with South Africa in the international court of justice, in order to expedite the International Court of Justice's issuance of an urgent decision to stop the war in the Gaza Strip and bring in humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

Fouad Baker
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)

Dear Comrades

We note the criminal, racist arrests of members of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) on

various fake accusations, of a leading member of the CPGB-ML, Ranjit Brar, on absurd accusations that selling a book explicitly indicting Zionism for racism and anti-Semitism is a "hate-crime", and the outrageous arrest of Tony Greenstein (and Mick Napier in Glasgow) on fantastic lies that they are in some way 'supporters' of Hamas. These are the tip of an iceberg of police attacks on Palestine solidarity activists and ordinary demonstrators, orchestrated by Tory politicians with Braverman's ravings as the starting point, whose anti-democratic essence continues to this day. None of these attacks will be opposed by the Labour Party under Starmer. They clearly support this genocide, and the attacks against Yemen whose purpose is to protect Israel's mass murder.

We propose that a united front should be created to confront this policy publicly and point out its purpose – police-state methods to repress opposition to the genocide of the Palestinian people. Such fraudulent arrests and harassment, and punitive bail conditions in some case to forbid political activism, as well as the draconian 'conditions' imposed on completely peaceful mass demonstrations in support of the Palestinians by the police, amount to political support for Israel's genocide by the Metropolitan police, the Glasgow police, and no doubt police forces around the country.

We think it would be worthwhile to take an initiative to confront the police politically over this, by initiating a protest at Scotland Yard and seeking broader labour movement support, against this political persecution of left-wing activists for opposing an obvious genocide. It fits in with the admission by the head of the National

Police Chiefs' Council, Gavin Stephens, that the UK police are "institutionally racist" based on too many terrible cases to list, and other appalling actions of the cops, such as their arrests of women demonstrators protesting the murder and rape of Sarah Everard by a serving cop.

We should note that the large-scale murder of unarmed civilians in Gaza, including women, children and even premature babies, and the brazen support for it by ruling-class politicians here, indicates what these politicians are quite prepared to do to ordinary people here if they feel threatened by resistance to their own crimes. The labour movement therefore has an overwhelming class interest in defeating these attacks on democratic rights and defending free speech on this question above all. This needs to be confronted head-on.

Ian Donovan
Consistent Democrats
London

Dear Comrades

A neo-con, meaning a new conservative, is someone with very right-wing ideas. They exist widely in both the major political parties in the USA. They have complete faith in the free market system, but above all they are obsessed with interventionism to promote and enforce their ideas of American exceptionalism and 'democracy'. They are committed to what they assume to be America's unrivalled military power to maintain US hegemony. History has repeatedly shown that their vision of free-market corporate states, subordinated to the USA and maintained by the threat of military force or sanctions, leads only to death and destruction on a large scale.

Neo-cons have been the most ardent supporters of endless wars in Yugoslavia, Libya, Iraq and Syria.

Currently they are the most enthusiastic backers of the Ukraine tragedy, a proxy war that they engineered and provoked that has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers; intentionality not American ones. The conflict has, as with their other wars, left that country devastated. Their ambition was to weaken and break-up Russia, expand NATO, and to make Europe weaker with full dependence upon expensive American gas.

Neo-cons are, as you would expect, 100 per cent behind the genocide taking place in Gaza and would like full military escalation through-out the Middle East. US imperialism appears to be losing interest in Ukraine as they plot and scheme for their next big war, this time with China. A dangerous fantasy that would turn into a nightmare and their ultimate debacle.

A new multipolar world order is taking shape as the position of US Imperialism grows weaker. That does not deter neo-cons such as NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg from dreaming of expanding its malignant influence into the Pacific region. It will not change the thoughts of arch neo-con John Bolton (former national security adviser to Donald Trump) in his support of all US wars from advocating new conflicts. Regarded as a notorious war-monger, he is calling for action against Iran and the DPRK. His most bizarre idea is that diplomacy is a sign of weakness.

The terrifying risk of a total nuclear war increases everyday as US policies become more destabilising and aggressive. As a result, the strategic partnership between People's China and the Russian Federation is most welcome. An effective co-operation that should deter the most extreme neo-cons. This

Diary

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

EVERY SAT

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 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.

MON 22 JAN

Campaign Against the Arms Trade: Say No to Arms Dealers At Twickenham Stadium. Protest against arms fair, Twickenham Rugby Stadium, 200 Whitton Rd, Twickenham TW2 7BA. Time TBC.

TUE 23 JAN

Campaign Against the Arms Trade: Arms Out Tour launch. Film and Speaker event. White City, London & online, see CAAT website for details.

WED 24 JAN

Korean Friendship Association: Online AGM. 18:30, <https://fb.me/e/1k0qaP7Ms>

THUR 25 JAN

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

THUR 25 JAN

Working Class Movement Library: Shanice Octavia McBean on the Abolition Revolution. 18:30–20:00, Hybrid meeting. Book on WCML website.

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.

MON 29 JAN

Korean Friendship Association: Film Night. 18:30, <https://fb.me/e/1hXxOaSb5>

TUE 30 JAN

Campaign Against the Arms Trade: No to the Arms Dealers Dinner! Protest outside a central London hotel. Details TBC.

SAT 3 FEB

Korean Friendship Association: Juche idea as perfect and great builder of the socialist society in the DPRK. 14:00, King Cross Neighbourhood Centre, Argyle Street, London WC1H 8EF.

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.

FRI 16 FEB–SAT 16 MAR

10 To 4 Productions: *Cable Street*. A new musical at Southwark Playhouse Borough, 77–85 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6BD. Book on Southwark Playhouse website.

could be the reason why the treacherous fake-left, who share their depraved values with US imperialism, side with the USA and

NATO over the proxy war in Ukraine.

John Maryon
Suffolk

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

Western European leaders fell over themselves in the rush to pledge military and financial aid to the Zelensky regime when the Ukraine war began in 2022. Then Ukrainian "refugees" were welcomed with open arms when Ukraine could do no wrong and Russia seemed a walk-over. But the Russians and the people of the Donbas have beaten back the fascist legions. Imperialist sanctions have back-fired and it's the Western European economies that are in the doldrums. Nearly two years later many bourgeois politicians are having second thoughts – not least in Scotland.

Scotland became the latest European country

to scale back support for Ukrainian migrants when the Scottish government refused to grant funds to local authorities to cover housing costs last week.

The Scottish government distributed £10 million last year to Scotland's regional councils to help set Ukrainian refugees up in short-term accommodation such as hotels and cruise ships. But to the councils' dismay this will not be renewed this year.

"Our welcome accommodation ensures that we can offer everyone who needs it an initial safe place to stay," said Scottish social justice secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville last month. "However, we do not want people to spend longer than necessary without a settled place to call home...[as a] result of a concerted national effort numbers residing in short-term welcome accommodation have reduced by more than 60 per cent since November 2022. This is against a backdrop of continued low numbers of new arrivals."

She wrote that the Government's budget remained "extremely challenging" and "difficult decisions" had to be made. "For this reason, unfortunately I am unable to agree continuation funding for 'eligible costs' funding in 2023–24. I appreciate this is not the outcome you had hoped for, and I have asked my officials to communicate this to councils as soon as possible."

Armchair Admirals

The SNP have recently taken an interest in naval affairs. The SNP make much about wanting to see Britain's nuclear deterrent abolished, or at least moved out of its home at Faslane on the Clyde. At other times they hope an independent Scotland will use it as a bargaining chip and perhaps collect bigger rents for the base.

The SNP top brass often

claim, however, that Scotland does not get enough of the armed forces budget. The 2006 formation of the Royal Regiment of Scotland and the reduction of traditional regiments into battalions got many a Scottish nationalist foaming at the mouth.

To demonstrate the SNP's loyalty to NATO their defence spokesman, Martin Docherty-Hughes, MP for West Dunbartonshire, has announced that they want to re-establish the Scapa Flow naval base in Orkney that played a vital role in both world wars.

Demonstrating a touching faith in NATO and Whitehall doctrines, he complains that the Royal Navy's ships are not too far away from Scotland for them to sink passing Russian submarines and ships. He laments that due to a "Napoleonic-era hangover" too many naval bases are in the south of England. For what it is worth, Scotland gets about 9.7 per cent of UK military spending with 8.1 per cent of the population.

Taxing issues...

Tuesday saw an announcement that 280 Scottish civil servants are actually living south of the border in England so that they can keep more of their salaries out of the taxman's grasp.

The Scottish Tories who ferreted out this news thundered: "It is embarrassing and telling that so many Scottish Government staff should be paying the rate that applies in England to avoid the punitive tax imposed by the SNP." This is not surprising as Berwick-upon-Tweed is not much further from Edinburgh than Glasgow, two cities which have trainloads of daily commuters going in both directions.

A spokesperson for Shona Robison, our deputy first minister, said: "We will take precisely zero lessons from the Tories on tax policy – their credibil-

ity rating was downgraded to junk status the moment they demanded we copy Liz Truss's disastrous tax policies, which wiped billions from the economy, endangered pension funds and pushed up mortgage interest rates.

"Official statistics show that thousands more people have moved from Tory-run England to SNP-run Scotland than vice versa in the last few years – and no wonder. Thanks to the SNP's progressive tax decisions, the majority of people in Scotland pay less income tax than they would elsewhere in these islands, and average Scottish council tax bills are also hundreds of pounds lower than south of the border. Meanwhile, everybody in Scotland benefits from universal services like free prescriptions when they are ill, and their kids can attend some of the finest universities right on their doorstep without paying a penny."

And finally...

There have been a number of local industrial disputes in Scotland.

On Monday Unite hailed victory by threatening strike action, when over 30 naval shipyard workers employed by CBL Cable Contractors Limited based at the BAE Systems Govan and Scotstoun shipyards secured a £3.05 hourly pay rise amounting to 22.8 per cent for some workers. In the coming few months all workers will be paid the 'shipyard rate' depending on their role.

The dispute saw Unite demanding the workers be paid the BAE Systems

shipyard rate, or an additional £1 per hour on top of the current rates of pay.

Stevie Dillon, Unite regional co-ordinator, said: "The pay deal ensures that our CBL Cable members based in the Govan and Scotstoun yards are now on an equal footing with other BAE workers. Through the determination of our members to fight for what they were rightfully owed; the company has finally seen sense before any strike action took place. The deal was overwhelmingly backed by the membership and it's a great way to start the new year."

Further north, about 400 coach builders and spray painters employed at the Alexander Dennis bus manufacturing plant in Falkirk started a two-week strike action on Monday. This follows similar action in early December after rejecting an additional 0.5 per cent on its original four per cent wage offer (4.5 per cent), and four per cent for 2024. Dennis can easily afford to pay more as it has a full order book constructing green buses and is expanding its plant.

One group of workers who did not need to take industrial action to secure a 6.75 pay rise were the 128 parliamentarians whom readers will be delighted to know are now on at least £72,195, up from £67,662.

The rise is based on the Office for National Statistics annual survey of hours and earnings (ASHE). Last year they received a 1.5 per cent rise and 3.4 the previous year, so 6.7 rise was clearly overdue. Had they gone on strike few people would have noticed...

FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

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Gaza cease-fire now!

by New Worker correspondent

Millions of people took to the streets in cities all over the world in support of the Palestinians on Saturday and London was no exception. The organisers said over half a million

took part in the solidarity demonstration that rocked the heart of the capital. Others, like Arab commentators who add those who lined the streets to support the march from the City of London to Trafalgar Square, put the numbers nearer a

million.

London comrades joined the hundreds of thousands of protesters who marched through the capital on Saturday to demand an end to Israeli aggression and for justice for the Palestinians.

Speakers at Trafalgar



• Marching past St Paul's Cathedral.



• Anti-Zionist Jews join the protest.

Square included former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Sinn Féin President Mary Lou McDonald. McDonald called for an “immediate and permanent ceasefire” and said Sinn Féin had spent 25 years building peace, adding:

“This can happen. This must happen and we will ensure that it does.”

The Palestinian ambassador to Britain, Husam Zomlot, accused the British government of being “complicit” with Israel, and congratulated South Africa for

bringing a genocide case against Israel at the UN’s International Court of Justice in The Hague. He described the Palestinian people as a “nation of freedom fighters” saying: “I stand before you with a broken heart, but not a broken spirit.”

The hypocrisy of MI6

by Mark Blacklock

In recent years, Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) has intensified its attacks on China for alleged spying activities in Britain. If MI6 wants to root out operatives working undercover to steal secrets, then they should perhaps start by looking themselves in the mirror.

The arrest of a businessman called Huang by China’s Ministry of State Security (MSS) exposes the hypocrisy of the spymasters at MI6.

Huang, the head of an overseas consultancy, is said to have worked for SIS for about nine years, using specialist skills and equipment provided to him after being recruited to steal state secrets. The MSS says

that behind his façade as a businessman, his undercover job was to collect China-related intelligence for British intelligence and to identify potential recruits.

This smacks of double-standards. What else would you call repeatedly denouncing another state for espionage and then cynically behaving in the same way?

Last year the head of MI6, Richard Moore, said that China presented “an epoch-defining challenge” and that his organisation commits more of its resources to Beijing’s activities than to any other country. It’s not the first time he’s criticised China. In 2021, he described China ominously as “an authoritarian state, with different values from ours”.

The UK’s assaults on China come in many forms. They can be a warning of vague, unsubstantiated allegations about individuals having undue influence on British politicians. They can come as personal attacks on people of Chinese heritage simply because they work with influential decision-makers to raise issues of concern to the UK’s Chinese community (but without real evidence to back up the slurs). They can even come in the form of sudden arrests by police accusing people of serious espionage offences – and then releasing them without charge. A common feature of these events is that they created a great deal of smoke without fire – generating much Sinophobic sentiment fuelled by unsus-

ported allegations.

The most recent example is of Chris Cash, a researcher in the Westminster parliament, who was arrested, with an associate, under espionage laws. He could hardly be described as pro-China – he actually worked for an anti-China research group and vehemently denied wrongdoing. The substance of the investigation seems to have been that he had contact with influential politicians interested in Chinese affairs. It looked like guilt by association. Neither he nor his colleague have been charged.

Cash’s arrest happened almost a year ago, but it did not become public knowledge until it was leaked to the British media six months later, creating negative

publicity, at about the same time that Beijing was hoping to improve China–UK relations at a high level.

Two years ago, Christine Lee, a London-based lawyer of Chinese origin, was accused by Britain’s domestic intelligence service, MI5, of being a spy for Beijing – and yet again, no arrests or charges followed. All that happened was that her reputation – and goodwill towards China – was severely damaged. The agency accused her of being “involved in political interference activities” in the UK. Members of the House of Commons were also given a so-called “interference alert” – the first issued in at least 80 years. Lee knew nothing about it until she saw media re-

ports branding her “an enemy of the state”. She later launched legal action against MI5 in a bid to clear her name.

Britain’s intelligence services have clearly identified China as a target for their operations. Is one aspect of that to cast suspicion on people simply because of their Chinese background or with personal connections to China, or with a special interest in China? Why is there so much smoke without any fire, so many accusations without substantiation?

In the Huang case London stands accused of doing the very thing it accuses Beijing of doing. It’s astonishing hypocrisy, especially when the West has so often been caught out in the past.

Global Times

A Tale of Two Fates: Gonzalo Lira and Rafi Jabbar

by Russell Bentley

The US State Department has confirmed the death of an American journalist and vlogger, Gonzalo Lira, who was arrested and allegedly tortured in Ukraine. His father, Gonzalo Lira Sr, appeared on ex-Fox News host Tucker Carlson's show on 10th December saying that his son had been detained and tortured by Ukrainian authorities since July for criticism of the Zelensky regime's policies. Lira, who was residing in Kharkov, was first detained for questioning by the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) on 15th April 2022. He was re-arrested last May. Prior to his second arrest Lira appeared on Twitter claiming that the US State Department was well aware of his situation but had not lifted a finger to protect him. Lira added that a second arrest in Ukraine could lead to his death. "Don't be indifferent to my fate," he implored.

I have a friend here named Rafi Jabbar, whom I served with in 2015 in the Vostok Battalion. Rafi earned his Donetsk PR and Russian citizenship in combat, where he was known as a brave and expert soldier until he got wounded by a booby-trap in early 2019.

By "wounded", I mean both his legs were blown off. In 2023, he, like Gonzalo Lira, was arrested in a foreign country on bogus charges, but he was not tortured and he did not die, and in fact was

released in less than a month, on the orders of the very highest levels of the Russian government.

Here's Rafi's story – compare and contrast with the horrific fate of Gonzalo Lira, who the latest reports from reliable sources (not yet, but I think soon to be 100 per cent confirmed) was actually extorted for over \$250,000 by agents of the SBU [Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy, Security Service of Ukraine], with the knowledge and connivance of the vice consul of the US embassy; and when Lira tried to contact a lawyer, was beaten and tortured to death in his jail cell.

Rafi was born in Afghanistan in the 1980s, his parents were killed by jihadists, and when the Russians withdrew, he was taken with them

to be raised in an orphanage in Rostov. When war broke out in Donbas in 2014, he was one of the first to volunteer to join the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) People's Militia. He served in the Vostok Battalion until he was seriously wounded in 2019. Since then, Rafi has worked for the DPR and Russian governments, helping other soldiers wounded in the Donbas War.

In mid-2023, Rafi took a trip back to Afghanistan, as a private citizen, simply to visit his old home and look for friends and relatives. While he was there, he was arrested under suspicion of trying to recruit Afghan mercenaries to fight in Russian private military companies. He was held by the Taliban for 27 days, and never

mistreated in any way, either by the guards or the prisoners. While he was detained, he missed his flight back to Moscow and friends immediately became concerned. Calls were made to Russian special services and to the Russian embassy in Kabul. Within a few days, his whereabouts became known.

The embassy relayed the info to the special services, and within a day a call was made to the Office of the President of the Russian Federation. Putin himself was apprised of the situation, and having met Rafi before and knowing his story, gave an immediate and very simple order: "Get him out and back to Russia."

The Russian embassy contacted the Taliban administration and relayed

the order from President Putin. The Taliban were told to get Rafi ready to go immediately and six cars of Russian spetsnaz special forces were dispatched to the jail to pick Rafi up – which they did. Rafi waited at the embassy until his flight could be arranged, and when he got to the airport, Taliban representatives were waiting with gifts and well-wishes, even taking selfies with Rafi, all hugging and smiling. Rafi is now back in Russia, working, but he still has time to keep in touch with old friends. I had dinner with him last night, where he confirmed the facts above and gave me permission to publish them.

Compare this story to the horrific death of US citizen Gonzalo Lira, held and tortured

for months in nazi captivity with nothing but the most depraved indifference from the US government. Despite the fact that Biden is a senile degenerate, he is still, at least nominally, the President of the USA. He could have, and should have, made a single phone call that would have gotten Lira released immediately. No more than any decent government would do to protect an innocent citizen jailed on bogus charges. But not only did the US government, from Biden on down to the US embassy in Kiev, not make the call, they didn't do anything at all and allowed the Kiev regime to murder an innocent US citizen with impunity.

The whole purpose of any government is to provide justice and security to its citizens. Some do, some don't, and it is perfectly clear who are the Good Guys and who are the Bad Guys, and which is which. Think about it, what kind of government do you want to live under, and what kind of government do you have? And if your government is not the Good Guys, what are you going to do about it?

Sputnik



• Rafi Jabbar and Russell Bentley.

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Ukraine – fierce fighting on a frost-bitten front

After the devastating attacks by Russian drones and missiles on the Ukrainian military-industrial facilities in the beginning of the year, the intensity of Russian strikes has decreased in recent days. But daily precision strikes continue in the eastern and southern regions where the Ukrainian military is accumulating forces and military equipment.

Russian forces are retaking the positions they lost during the Ukrainian counter-offensive. In recent days they have regained control of several square kilometres around Rabinov. On the outskirts of

the Donetsk city agglomeration, the Russians are advancing in Georgievka after they liberated Marinika. Meanwhile they continue to pound Ukrainian positions in Avdeevka, squeezing the town with a pincer attack.

Russian strikes were reported in the Kriviy Rih, Kharkov, Kherson and Sumy regions. In response, the Ukrainians are targeting Russian rear areas. And there's no let up on the Ukrainian shelling of border settlements and attacks in the Donetsk city agglomeration. The growing civilian casualties have absolutely no effect on the ongoing hostilities on



the front but only confirm the terrorist essence of the Kiev regime.

Last week Kiev declared another dubious victory. On the evening of 14th January the Russian

air force apparently lost an A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft as a result of an incident over the Sea of Azov. Another IL-22 aircraft avoided damage and successfully landed at the

Russian Anapa airport in the Krasnodar region. Ukrainian propaganda claimed that the aircraft were shot down by Patriot missiles but the incident was unlikely related to the operation of Ukrainian air defence forces.

Meanwhile, the Russian military continues offensive operations on almost all Ukrainian front lines. In recent days, Russian forces managed to take back control of several positions in the northern part of the village of Krinky. As a result the small Ukrainian stronghold on the eastern bank of the Dnieper river has shrunk. Supplies of any

equipment and reinforcements across the river are constantly disrupted by Russian fire forcing the remnants of the Ukrainian grouping in Krinky to hide in the ruins, unable to conduct any military operations.

Despite the fact that Kiev's counter-offensive in the Kherson region has gone down the drain, Ukrainian commanders continue sending more and more servicemen across the river to their death. Those who refuse to take part in these senseless operations are tortured by their brothers-in-arms. Some of them even commit suicide.

South Front

Lining their pockets while billions go without

The world's richest five men have more than doubled their fortunes since 2020, the charity Oxfam has said, sounding the alarm about unchecked corporate power as business elites hold their high-profile annual gathering in Davos, Switzerland.

These five men are worth a combined \$869 billion after growing their fortunes at a rate of \$14 million per hour during the last four years, Oxfam said in its report *Inequality Inc.*, released on Monday.

Despite the growth in the fortunes of the five – Bernard Arnault the chief of the French LVMH luxury goods empire, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, investor Warren Buffet, Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison and Tesla CEO Elon Musk – five billion people have got poorer over the same period.

Billionaires are today \$3.3 trillion richer than they were in 2020, while a billionaire leads seven out of 10 of the world's biggest companies.

If current trends continue, the world will have its

first trillionaire within a decade but poverty will not be eradicated for another 229 years, according to Oxfam.

Oxfam International interim Executive Director Amitabh Behar said that nobody should have a billion dollars. "We're witnessing the beginnings of a decade of division, with billions of people shouldering the economic shock-waves of pandemic, inflation and war, while billionaires' fortunes boom. This inequality is no accident; the billionaire class is ensuring corporations

deliver more wealth to them at the expense of everyone else," Behar said.

"Runaway corporate and monopoly power is an inequality-generating machine: through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatising the state, and spurring climate breakdown, corporations are funnelling endless wealth to their ultra-rich owners. But they're also funnelling power, undermining our democracies and our rights."

Oxfam traditionally releases its annual report on inequality just ahead of the

opening of the annual World Economic Forum (WEF), launched by a German economist in the early 1970s to champion "stakeholder capitalism".

The charity said that corporations pay about one-third less in taxes than in past decades as a result of a lobbying "war on taxation", starving governments of money that could be used to benefit the poorest in society.

Oxfam said governments should cap CEOs' pay, break up private monopolies and introduce a

wealth tax to bring in \$1.8 trillion dollars each year.

"We have the evidence. We know the history. Public power can rein in runaway corporate power and inequality – shaping the market to be fairer and free from billionaire control. Governments must intervene to break up monopolies, empower workers, tax these massive corporate profits and, crucially, invest in a new era of public goods and services," Behar added.

Radio Havana Cuba

by Guillermo Alvarado

Chile: Embraces and combat

The Communist Party of Chile and Chile's progressive forces celebrated the traditional *Fiesta de los Abrazos* last weekend – a meeting point to share and reflect on the most urgent issues at the local and international level.

After the army coup on 11th September 1973, the Pinochet regime targeted the communists who were

one of the pillars of President Salvador Allende. Hundreds were kidnapped, tortured and murdered. The party went underground and its main leaders, who remained in Chile, organised resistance in the midst of fierce persecution.

It became common that when two or more militants met, often in the middle

of a task, they embraced each other, happy to know they were alive and in the struggle.

In 1988, still under the Pinochet dictatorship, the first fiesta was held and hundreds of communists, many already returned from exile, gathered under the façade of an artistic and cultural event.

During that time a meeting and a farewell could be the last and everyone was well aware of that, therefore the most common gesture among the attendees were the intense and strong hugs, which perhaps would only be repeated in eternity.

In 1991 another symbolic event took place, when the festival began to be held

in the capital's Parque O'Higgins, an extensive green lung that witnessed many secret contacts in the shelter of its groves and large fields where families usually stroll on weekends.

Lautaro Carmona, the president of the Communist Party of Chile, says the fundamental objective

of the left and progressive forces today must be unity to avoid the advance of the extreme right.

The intense solidarity with Cuba and Palestine, the fraternity and warmth in all the looks and gestures and the presence of different generations committed to change flooded the hearts and heads last weekend. "You know what? Let's give each other a big hug and keep fighting!"

Radio Havana Cuba