

# Guns blaze as Israelis spurn peace offer

by our Arab Affairs correspondent

Guns blaze in the streets of Gaza. The Palestinian resistance hits back at the Israeli invaders forcing the Zionists to extend conscription to three years and raise the age limit to 45 for reservists. Egyptian and Qatari efforts to end the fighting continue in Cairo. Hamas says it's willing to consider a short-term truce for a prisoner swap and the supply of emergency food and medical supplies into the Palestinian enclave as the first stage towards a truce. Saudi Arabia says there can be no diplomatic relations with Israel until the war stops and an independent Palestinian state is recognised on the 1967 borders with Arab East Jerusalem as its capital. And Spain has suspended all arms export licenses to Israel, noting that recent events "made us realise the importance of a just and permanent solution to the question of the Palestinian people".

Hamas is proposing a three stage peace plan. Each stage will last 45 days. The Israeli hostages will be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners. The reconstruction of Gaza will begin and Israeli forces withdrawn completely from the Strip. But the Netanyahu government in Tel Aviv says it

will accept nothing less than the complete destruction of Hamas and Israel's permanent occupation, in one form or another, of the Gaza Strip.

Last weekend thousands took to the streets across Israel to call for far-right Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's resignation and new elections. Speakers at the Tel Aviv protest demanded the return of hostages held in Gaza accusing the Netanyahu government of being indifferent to the hostages' fate and Netanyahu of being guided by personal considerations and stalling to avoid fraud and bribery investigations and elections.

Meanwhile the American foreign minister, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is holding talks with the Arab mediators and the Israelis says "a lot of work" remains to be done to bridge the gap between Israel and Hamas on terms for a new ceasefire and hostage-release deal. But the real problem is not Tel Aviv, but Washington itself. Though Blinken talks about a "two state"

solution that would give the Palestinians some semblance of sovereignty no-one on the Arab street believes him. All the imperialists want is to maintain their Israeli puppet's position in the region and all that they're prepared to give the Palestinians is the bogus "autonomy" that operates in parts of the West Bank.

Last week United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the world is entering into an "age of chaos" as the UN Security Council remains sharply divided over Israel's war on Gaza. Guterres said he was "especially alarmed" after Israel said last week that it intends to focus its military assault in Gaza on the southern city of Rafah, where more than a million people have sought shelter.

The head of the UN also called for reforms to the UN Security Council, which has been unable to agree on a joint position on the war in Gaza despite calls from many UN agencies for an urgent ceasefire. "The United Nations Security Council – the

primary platform for questions of global peace – is deadlocked by geopolitical fissures," he said. "This is not the first time the

Council has been divided – but it is the worst. Today's dysfunction is deeper and more dangerous".

The Israelis say their new offensive is aimed at rooting out the Palestinian guerrillas entrenched in a network of tunnels across the Strip. But the Palestinians believe the ultimate objective is to force the Palestinians to flee to Egypt to get their hands on the still to be exploited natural oil and gas fields in Gaza's waters and clear the Strip for Zionist settlement.

This will inevitably lead to another blood-bath. "Any military operations in Rafah – with its limited space and overcrowdedness with over 1.5 million Palestinians displaced by the Israeli army – would lead to brutal massacres unprecedented in modern history," said Mustafa Barghouti, the leader of the West Bank Palestinian National Initiative party.



• The resistance hits back.

## FUND

We garnered £907 this week boosted by PayPal donations and standing orders as well as £150 from a comrade in Hereford and £30 from a veteran supporter in Essex. A Midlands reader sent in £25 and another from the West Country gave us £6. The January appeal closed with £,2932 in the pot – sadly £568 short of our fighting fund target for the month.

The February appeal starts now and we desperately need more contributions to keep up the fight for peace and socialism this year – a year in which we will almost certainly go to the polls in a general election.

Despite the efforts of China and Russia at the UN and the almost unanimous demands of the Global South to end the fighting Israeli aggression continues unabated under the protective wing of Anglo-American imperialism. Sunak and Starmer grovel to the Americans.

We take the principled stand supporting the anti-war movement in Britain and national liberation movements all over the world.

Help us keep up the fight and 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/npccentral/fightingfund.html>

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# THE NEW WORKER

## Where are we going?

**Labour looks set to win the next general election. The opinion polls say Starmer's heading for a landslide victory of Blairite proportions. But surveys can be misleading.**

Sunak is undoubtedly in trouble. He's failed to win back the "middle Englanders" who abandoned the Tories when the economy nearly collapsed under Liz Truss. Sunak's failed to appease the Tory bigots over the refugee crisis who are now turning to the "PopCons" – the 'Popular Conservative' Trussite faction in parliament or the Faragist Reform Party.

Only time will tell whether the appeal of the "Popcons" or the "Reformers" will split the Tory vote. Sunak's team hopes not. Some think they can still rally the Tory faithful. This, of course, may just be wishful thinking. Or maybe not.

Peter Mandelson, a Blairite grandee, says people "are not pricing in sufficiently" the possibility of Labour failing to win a majority. Labour's lead is "artificial" and "is going to contract". A landslide is not a foregone conclusion and if Labour fails to maintain its current momentum, it is on course for "a somewhat more ambivalent result than the opinion polls are currently suggesting".

That's certainly true. Starmer has hounded out the Corbynistas that the party relied on to do the canvassing needed to get the Labour vote out. Starmer & Co may well believe that crawling to big business and the Americans is the key to victory – but it means nothing to the workers who will only rally round Labour if there's real reform on the agenda.

But the left social-democrats who call themselves "revolutionaries" aren't the answer. They claim to be the alternative voice of the labour movement. But they will end up, as always, amongst the also-rans at election time. The same goes for George Galloway and his new "Workers Party of Britain". Though he bucked the system in the past, returning to parliament on two occasions on his Respect platform, he achieved nothing.

These posers call for social-democratic reforms while campaigning against the only force capable of implementing reform, the Labour Party itself. Their paltry votes reflect the futility of trying to compete with Labour in bourgeois elections.

They foster the illusion that there is a left electoral alternative to Labour when the reality is that, at the moment, the only alternative to a Conservative government is a Labour government. They end up portraying Labour rather than the ruling class as the main enemy of the working class. They end up in the camp of the class enemy.

A Labour government, with its links with the unions, offers the best option for the working class in the era of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Our strategy is for working class unity to defeat the right-wing within the movement and strengthening the left within the Labour Party and the unions.

We want a Labour Party that reflects the wishes of the millions of its affiliated union members, expressed through the unions' democratic procedures. We must struggle to elect union leaderships that will genuinely represent and fight for the membership.

We want a democratic Labour Party controlled by its affiliates; a Labour Party whose policies reflect those of a democratic union movement would become a powerful instrument for progressive reforms that would strengthen organised labour and benefit the working class.

Our Party's strategy is the only way to fight for the communist alternative. We want day-to-day reforms and they can only be achieved by the main reformist party in Britain, the Labour Party. We want revolution and that can only be achieved through the leadership of the communist party.

# NATO escalation: a new provocation

by Mark Blacklock

**It would be misleading to call NATO's ongoing exercise simply a war game because that evokes scenes of people in costume re-enacting historic battles or modern armies charging about field-testing their tactics and equipment. But Exercise 'Steadfast Defender 2024' is far from harmless. It is very much a rehearsal, and – in a theatre where war is already raging – possibly even a provocation. With the Russia-Ukraine conflict still ongoing, Steadfast Defender – NATO's largest military venture since the Cold War – could be seen by Moscow as a deliberate poking of the Russian bear.**

As the bloc's 31 armies, along with another from membership contender Sweden, hurl 90,000 of their military personnel into a make-believe battle, Russia and Ukraine's forces are engaged in a very real and deadly conflict on NATO's doorstep. It is crucial for NATO to consider the risks of miscalculation and the resulting escalation to ensure that their simulated exercises do not inadvertently become entangled with the actual theatre of war next door, which would be too terrifying to think about.

Let's not forget that while NATO is engaged in military exercises from throughout Europe until 31<sup>st</sup> May it is simultaneously deeply involved in the conflict with Russia through its proxy, Ukraine. Furthermore, the alliance's own statements claim the drills are specifically to test its ability to "deploy forces rapidly from North America and other parts of the alliance to reinforce the defence of Europe." In other words, the large-scale participation of 32 armies is a preparation for the potential scenario where proxy engagement escalates into open warfare with Russia.

It is a day that Western politicians and senior armed forces personnel increasingly seem to expect. In January, Britain's

defence secretary Grant Shapps ominously predicted that the UK could be at war with Russia, China, North Korea and Iran within five years. Then Britain's top soldier, General Sir Patrick Sanders, Chief of the General Staff, made a rallying cry last year, urging his troops to prepare to defeat Russia "in battle".

The chair of NATO's military committee, Dutch admiral Rob Bauer, said large numbers of civilians will need to be mobilised for a Russia conflict.

Sweden's Military Commander-in-Chief, General Micael Byden, stated that all Swedes should be mentally prepared for war. Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said war with Russia could be possible in the next five to eight years. General Eirik Kristoffersen, the head of Norway's armed forces, warns that "the people of Norway should give thought to their readiness. We recommend being able to cope without outside help for three days". Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas cautions that Europe has three to five years to prepare for any threat from Russia. All suggest that civilians will be central to any future war. The populations are being groomed. They are being told NATO is a defensive shield, when increasingly it looks like a brandished sword.

Talk of "three to five years" is significant, as that is the time it will take NATO's nations to restore their equipment and ordnance stockpiles, after supplying so much to Ukraine.

The NATO countries are so deeply enmeshed in the Russia-Ukraine fighting that they have effectively become Kiev's quartermaster. It is a role they have played with increasing enthusiasm – and increasing lethality. When the conflict began almost two years ago, there were diplomatic protests, many nations threw open their borders to refugees, but James Heapey, the UK's minister for the armed forces, told the House of Commons: "British and NATO

troops should not – must not – play an active role in Ukraine".

Yet two years on, we are much closer to realising what he said should never happen, with NATO's generals and Europe's politicians openly talking of war with Russia and prepping their populations for the worst.

Britain escalated its initial token military support of anti-tank missiles and modest kit like rations to include many thousands of missiles, air defence systems, and £25 million to pay armed forces' salaries. Mission creep eventually saw more than 120 armoured vehicles, anti-ship missile systems, and £1.3 billion of financial aid followed. Short and medium-range missiles soon became long-range missiles.

Then there were strike-capable and naval drones. Long-range artillery, cruise missiles, helicopters, a squadron of 14 Challenger 2 main battle tanks, and even ships were dispatched. With the US' blessing, the Netherlands and Denmark supplied F-16 fighter jets.

Crucially, the West's war aims have also changed: the Tallinn Pledge committed some to not only defend Ukraine but also to remove the Russians from disputed territory. If they continue down this path, could this pledge, along with the Article 5 commitments of the recently-expanded NATO – with Finland now part of the family and Sweden awaiting only Hungary's approval – unleash the dogs of war?

Under cover of the ongoing exercises, with officials and politicians talking almost casually about World War III, NATO is not merely playing at war but preparing for it, and perhaps, it could even provoke it. Exercise Steadfast Defender marks the point at which NATO transitions from the pretence of a defensive union into a warlike one. Is the world on the brink of no return? Is it a matter of "when" rather than "if"?



# Workers'

## The Childcare Crisis

by New Worker correspondent

**As a General Election is looming it is essential for the Tories to throw a few crumbs in the direction of the peasantry. One of these is the pledge of 15 hours of free childcare for two-year-olds during term-time in England from April, with children from nine months included from September. From September 2025 working parents of children under five will be get to 30 hours' free child-care every per week. That is the theory at least, but the plans are not going smoothly.**

At present two-year-olds in England receive 15 hours per week of government-funded childcare if their parents are on universal credit and three and four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours of childcare. This can be used in private nurseries, state-run pre-schools or childminders. The present scheme extends it to better off parents, which in some cases will help them with their skiing holidays.

While Education Secretary Gillian Keegan has said that the scheme is on target, many others are not so sure. Her department's IT system dealing with the expansion has not been up to the task. Within hours on Sunday she gave two different assessments about progress on two different TV politics programmes. However recruitment for people willing to deal with tantrums over the number of chocolate biscuits their clients are allowed is unsurprisingly difficult due to the low wages in the sector. In August almost all English councils who responded to a Coram survey said that childcare providers in their area were having difficulty recruiting childcare workers.

Clear signs that the expansion of childcare was running into trouble came last Friday when the Government announced that it was offering £1,000 to new childcare staff in 20 parts of the country.

*This week we take a look at some issues affecting workers in the social care and social work sectors which means the provision of non-medical care to everyone from pre-school age children to the elderly. Formerly a largely direct local authority service, in many cases the only responsibility councils have is deciding which contractor will take over the running of care homes.*

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak responded to this announcement by saying: "This is too little, too late. It does nothing to address the retention crisis in childcare, or this Tory government's chronic underfunding of the childcare sector over the last 13 years. Caring for and educating young children is skilled work, and the overwhelmingly female workforce deserves decent pay and conditions".

He made the specific demand that "Ministers must introduce a £15 an hour minimum wage for childcare workers, and work with unions to upskill staff and stop the race to the bottom on pay and conditions. And they should require childcare employers to end the use of zero-hours contracts and pay decent sick pay to all workers."

TUC analysis published in August found every English region was struggling to recruit childcare workers. Nearly all (95 per cent) of English councils who responded to a Coram survey said that childcare providers in their area were having difficulty recruiting childcare workers – and eight in 10 local authorities described it as "very difficult".

## Low Workload Problems

**Across the Irish Sea the new Stormont administration is facing demands from Unite the union's Registered Childminder (RCM) branch which points out that due lack of an effective government in the six provinces about 300 Registered Childminders have left the profession. This is due to both low wages and the number of infants they are supposed to look after. Ironically they are not complaining that they deal with too many but are only allowed six compared to 12 in England and 10 in Wales, resulting in much lower incomes.**

Dolores McCormick, Chair of the RCM branch demanded that the new Minister Robin Swann immediately increase the ratios.

This she said was essential as: "The failure to address this crisis threatens the future of the sector – which would leave parents with no other choice but to use unregistered childcare services where they will be unable to claim financial help with childcare". The problem could be resolved at a "minimal cost", she added.

## Actively Preventing Recruitment

**Local government union Unison has accused the Government of actually obstructing recruitment for social care jobs.**

Unison has come out strongly against another major barrier discouraging recruitment: the recent announcement by Care Minister Helen Whately that migrant care staff coming to the UK will be banned from bringing their families with them from next month.

The union's Head of Social Care, Gavin Edwards pointed out that: "Care companies couldn't function without migrant care workers. Firms have to recruit from overseas because the government's done nothing to solve the care staffing crisis".

These "reckless changes to immigration policy spell disaster for social care. Until pay rates rise substantially, there'll never be enough UK-based recruits to plug the huge hole in the care workforce.

"The ban on families means overseas care staff will be much less likely to come to work in the UK. The few that do will be more isolated and at even greater risk of exploitation".

## Social Worker

## Wars

**In Wiltshire both the Tory County Council and the Labour controlled Swindon Borough Council are in dispute with their social workers. GMB say that social workers are facing a proposed pay cut which will see their contractual out-of-hours bonus removed, resulting in some staff losing up to 20 per cent of their annual salary.**

GMB Branch Secretary Andy Newman said "it is ironic that while Wiltshire Council's elected Conservative administration is boasting of being in a sound financial position, the officers of the council are threatening to rip up the contracts of frontline staff, and justifying the cuts by an alleged financial emergency. Someone's not telling the truth".

He noted that while "The council claims that's its investment in children's services is saving money through reducing the costs of later interventions, but the Chief Executive Terence Herbert and HR Director Tamsin Kielb are threatening those social workers with Fire and Rehire, and they would each lose from £500 to £750 per month of contractual guaranteed pay".

As a result strike action will be taking place every weekend until the 19th May. This is the fifth such action English social workers have taken part in the past year. For instance in November social workers in Brighton took strike action over pay. They demanded that a 12 per cent market supplement for social workers working with children is also paid to those working adults.

The union cited the high cost of living in Brighton paired with similar salaries to elsewhere in the country as a reason why talented social workers were choosing not to work in the city. Unison's Brighton & Hove joint branch secretary, said at the time "central government needs to

act now to restore funding to local authorities like Brighton & Hove, and fund proper pay rises for essential professionals like social workers and care workers, who have experienced some of the lowest pay growth of any professions".

Wiltshire is proposing to replace the 20 per cent increase in their salary for working unsocial hours secured in 2021 with a 20 per cent supplement only for each of the unsocial hours worked.

The council has now said the present arrangements were "not financially sustainable", and has offered staff four years' pay protection once the scheme is implemented. GMB also accuses the Council of seeking to dismiss staff and then re-employ them on the new terms. The Council's CEO Terence Herbert claimed: "It's important to note there will be no immediate dismissal and offer of re-engagement (also called "fire and re-hire") despite GMB repeatedly stating that this will be the approach". He claimed that: "Staff are currently receiving a full 37 unsocial hours plussage even if they only work 3.7 unsocial hours." However he refused to claim that such staff were overpaid.

In Labour controlled Swindon GMB has also announced that 19 social work managers will be taking strike action two days week from the end of this month. The Assistant Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers are taking action over pay after a "botched" pay and grading exercise.

Again Andy Newman said "having failed its Ofsted, Swindon Borough Council (SBC) drew up a 'Children's Services Care Improvement Plan', but has since deliberately demoted the quality control – the very people who had specific roles in that plan to ensure the improvements".

As a result: "there has also been an exodus of talent at the senior management level, so SBC

...continued from page 3

has lost their knowledge, and instead of stability, the department is now led by a chaotic team of agency staff. He condemned the council for rebuffing calls from GMB for ACAS talks, saying they don't know what we want to talk about.

"GMB believes that the buck stops with the incompetent Labour leader, Councillor Jim Robbins and Cabinet child services lead, Councillor Paul Dixon, who need to step up and show some leadership and get this resolved."

Last August Swindon's social workers were also involved in a dispute over their unsocial hours payments which the Council said was unnecessary after a general pay increase. This is one of the reasons so many staff left.

## Never Knowingly Over Paid

by New Worker  
correspondent

**All too belatedly, workers (sorry, partners) at John Lewis and its supermarket chain Waitrose are discovering the merits of trade unionism. This come after the company (sor-**

**ry, partnership) announced it was cutting its redundancy pay in half. John Lewis closed eight stores after the pandemic lockdown was lifted forcing the bourgeois of Aberdeen, Tunbridge Wells and York to slum it in Marks & Spencer and the House of Fraser.**

GMB reports that the announcement of the drastic cut is merely the harbinger of further closures and job cuts. Nadine Houghton, a National officer for the union said: "Our members at John Lewis Partnership [JLP] are worried; they are frightened about their futures. "JLP discourages workers from joining unions, but many have still joined for exactly this eventuality.

"JLP are saying this is cost-neutral and savings will be passed directly into partner wages, but this is little consolation for any of our members who end up losing their jobs. They are supposed to be 'partners' rather than workers but they have not been consulted about these changes at all".

He concluded by saying "the more staff join GMB, the less chance managers will be able to get away with these sort of power moves in future." True enough, but if GMB and shopworkers' union Usdaw had put more effort into recruitment earlier things might not have got to this stage.

At least a tenth, and possibly

up to 11,000 of 76,000-workforce could be in for the chop at HQ and shops. Bosses claim that at John Lewis staff pay is much a much higher 17.3 per cent of sales than the 13.3 at M&S and 11.6 at Tesco. That sounds like a good case for higher pay at Tesco, rather than cuts at John Lewis which is still very profitable, despite a recent decline.

## Pensions Robberies

by New Worker  
correspondent

**Last week, a downmarket rival of Waitrose announced a jump in profits for the sixth consecutive quarter. For the year to 29<sup>th</sup> October Morrisons reported an increase of 6.5 per cent to £970 million with fourth-quarter profits up 8.5 per cent to £306m. This came despite heavy investment in smaller shops and taking over others.**

Announcing the results the new chief executive Rami Baitieh said to the workforce "I would like to thank our exceptional colleagues for their hard work throughout the year and especially over the critical Christmas period".

However he carelessly omit-

ted to mention his plans for his workers' pensions. Morrisons is reducing its employers' contribution from five to three per cent and increasing employees' contribution from three to five per cent.

It will also be withdrawing the option for hourly paid employees to step up to a matching 5 per cent contribution. It is also reducing life cover, again for hourly paid employees only and ending the bonus paid to all employees after 5, 10, 15 and 20 years' service, only retaining the silver jubilee 25 year award. However it boasts of offering new benefits in the shape of improved staff discount, maternity, adoption pay and neonatal and paternity leave as well as flexible working.

The response of Usdaw, the supermarket chain's main union, was predictably feeble. One of its national officers Darren Matthews, grumbled that "after a series of consultation meetings with Morrisons, it is deeply regrettable that they are pressing ahead with proposals to seriously reduce the terms of the pension scheme. The company claims that these changes are due to upcoming Government reforms, despite the fact that there has been no actual timetable announced for these changes".

While he muttered that "we are angry and disappointed that

Morrisons has not accepted any of our counter proposals and we will be looking at every measure available to us to persuade Management to review their position and come back with a fairer offer". He made no mention of any threat of industrial action, which might just force a rethink. Little wonder the retail sector is so weakly organised and that the John Lewis "partners" are not flocking to the Usdaw banner.

Needless to say it is not just Morrisons workers whose pensions are under threat. It has been suggested that the pension age in Britain should rise from 66 to 71 as early as 2040 in order to maintain the ratio of active workers to pensioners according to the International Longevity Centre (ILC). Were it not for the Darwinian effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, this would have come sooner.

The problem with this, admit the ILC is that only half the population over 70 are up to working, and that more people face ill health earlier.

In an election year that is not the sort of thing governments like to talk about, and it is much worse for low paid manual workers.

NHS workers are one group of workers who are facing damaging changes to their pensions, particularly for low paid workers who are facing a rise in contributions due to the number of contribution bands being reduced, meaning that to stay in the scheme workers will have to pay more, which is not an option for many, despite the increases being fairly small at the lower rates.

The Royal College of Nursing points out that part time staff will be particularly badly affected, and that those planning a part-time return to work after retiring will lose part of the pension they had long paid for.

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

**6th February 2004**

*CONTRARY to various reports, the Czech Republic's Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) does not support the immediate foundation of a so-called "Party of the European Left". According to a report in the Czech left daily Halo Noviny there are plans to found such a party in April.*

*But representatives of some 20 parties attending a meeting in Berlin on 11/12 January, hosted by Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism, were seriously divided over the plan, especially as the new*

*party's statutes, which have to be approved by the EU as condition of the party receiving funds from Brussels.*

*Leader Miroslav Grebenicek said the party had adopted an unequivocal position on the formation of a European Left Party. He quoted the view of the Communist Party of Greece, which refused to attend the meeting on the grounds the new party's statutes included an article stating that: "The European party will develop its activities in the interest of the European Union's institutions."*

*The founding of a European Left party has been a controversial issue for the CPBM, which is one of Europe's most influential communist parties, with a membership of 120,000; 41 deputies in the Czech parliament and over 6,000 local government councillors.*

*Miloslav Ransdorf, one of the party's five vice-chairs and responsible for international relations, was criticised at the January*

*CC meeting for ignoring last October's CC resolution and creating the impression that the CPBM endorsed the founding a European Left party in April by signing a statement at the end of the Berlin conference committing the Czech party to supporting this, even though the party had sent him there only as an observer.*

*On 14 November last year the CPBM issued a statement opposing the formation of a new Europe-wide Left party and criticising behind-the-scenes moves to side-line the Czech party and parties sharing its view that forming such a party would harm their attempts to build sustainable long-term unity on the left. It said: "Attempts to create a European Left party – without consulting a number of influential parties sharing our views – are at odds with the aims of some European Communist parties.*

*The driving force behind the Berlin meeting were the German Party of Democratic Socialism and the French Communist Party. They both agree the EU is reformable.*

## The NCP badge



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# Zionism's unsolvable predicament

by Sara Flounders

The 22<sup>nd</sup> January explosion in Gaza that killed 21 Israeli soldiers and left 33 wounded, 11 critically, happened as they were attempting to lay down explosives to demolish a block of housing units. The explosion brought the buildings down on top of them, burying them under tons of rubble. It was the largest reported casualty for the Israeli Occupation Forces since they began the invasion of Gaza.

The demolition unit was surrounded by tanks and explosives and supposedly had layers of protection. This was their undoing!

This war crime of systematically demolishing entire neighbourhoods with high explosives to establish a “buffer zone” between Gaza and exclusively Israeli settlements across the border exemplifies the predicament of Israel today. Its all-out genocidal effort to destroy the Palestinians will lead to the Zionist state of Israel's own demise.

While the US and Israeli media mourn the deaths of 21 Israeli soldiers, there is not even a nod of empathy toward the thousands of people buried under the rubble in Gaza by US-supplied bombs. The number of Palestinians buried alive is in addition to the over 26,000 reported killed and 65,000 reported injured since 7<sup>th</sup> October.

Using mass demolition charges, on 17<sup>th</sup> January, Israeli forces rigged Al-Isra University with more than 315 mines to level the entire campus. There was no military reason for the destruction. Israeli forces were pulling out. For 70 days, the Israeli military had used the campus as a barracks and a torture centre.

Israeli soldiers have posted on TikTok and other social media sites videos



• Zionist terror: Gaza.

of themselves laughing and dancing as they hit buttons triggering massive explosions that turn Palestinian schools, hospitals and entire neighbourhoods into rubble.

The vengeful acts against the Palestinians in Gaza and the lynch mob attacks throughout the West Bank are exposing Zionism as a racist and colonial ideology. The whole world has watched, in real time, as Israel has blatantly destroyed the infrastructure of sanitation, sewage and electrical wiring with bombs, then uprooted it with bulldozers. This calculated destruction of thousands of housing

units, hundreds of schools and all of the hospitals in Gaza has aroused a global movement.

Israel has lost all the political standing that US power could dredge up for its “strategic ally” from around the world. Now, Israeli ports have been targeted by resistance forces and its industries impacted negatively. Israeli forces are tormented by daily ambushes and have completely failed to achieve any of their stated goals.

## Israelis flee

Within the first two months

of the Israeli attack on Gaza, 470,000 Israelis left and did not return. The number of Israelis applying to obtain European passports has reached unprecedented levels. The Israeli media bemoans this as a “reverse Aliyah,” or a mass exodus of Jews from Israel. The number of Jews immigrating into Israel has declined by 70 per cent.

According to data cited from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, one in three businesses have shuttered or are operating at only 20 per cent capacity. Israel's Labour Ministry reports that 764,000 citizens, close to one-fifth of Israel's



• Zionist terror: West Bank.

workforce, are jobless because of evacuations, child-care responsibilities due to school closures, or reserve duty call-ups.

Israelis were already abandoning the Zionist state in huge numbers before 7<sup>th</sup> October. According to the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023 edition of the *Times of Israel*, 28 per cent of Israelis were considering leaving the country over the divisive judicial overhaul that reinforced the most reactionary and ultra-right forces. The sheer brutality of four months of massive destruction has revived internal dissension in Israel.

What was most unexpected by the Zionist political establishment is that millions of Jewish people in Israel, in the US and around the world — in horror over Israeli genocide — would awaken to an anti-Zionist consciousness.

## Wider war won't save Israel

Step-by-escalating-step, wider war threatens the region. US arms and funds allow brutal Israeli attacks to continue despite the growing outrage. This blatant aggression by American imperialism and its allies clarifies that the protection of markets and profits takes precedence over protection of Palestinians.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January three American soldiers were killed and at least 34 wounded in a drone attack on US troops in north-eastern Jordan, near the Iraq-Jordan border. These were the first reported casualties of US military personnel in this period. The Islamic Resistance movement in Iraq claimed responsibility for the strike.

The US military has hundreds of troops stationed in

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Jordan, supposedly as “trainers,” and holds extensive exercises there throughout the year. Now the Jordanian monarchy is fearful of the rising anger of its own Palestinian population; the majority of the Jordanian population are Palestinian refugees violently driven out of Palestine in the Israeli wars of 1967 and 1948.

US forces have come under attack more than 150 times in Iraq and Syria, causing at least 70 casualties prior to Sunday’s attack, most of them traumatic brain injuries. The US continues to blame Iran for all of



• Palestinian resistance.

the attacks and not the destructive impact of its own past wars in Iraq and Syria.

A senior official of Hamas, Sami Abu Zuhri, directly tied the attack in Jordan to Israel’s campaign in Gaza: “The killing of three American soldiers is a message to the US administration that unless the killing of innocents in Gaza stops, it must confront the entire nation. The continued American-Zionist aggression on Gaza is capable of exploding the situation in the region”. In addition to the three US soldier deaths, two U.S. Navy SEAL team members were declared dead yesterday after a 10-day search in the region.

## Imperialists bomb Yemen

The Ansarallah movement in Yemen, popularly known as the Houthis, has closed the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to all ships intending to dock in Israel until Israel stops its all-out attack on Gaza. Rather than end the flow of arms to Israel, the US and Britain carried out 18 bombing attacks on Yemen and

labelled the Ansarallah movement as “terrorists”.

As a result of the US and Britain’s brazen military intervention, the Americans and French are attempting to put out a fire on a British oil tanker *Marlin Luanda*, the latest ship hit by Yemen in the Gulf of Aden. Shipping giant Maersk said that the *Maersk Detroit* and *Maersk Chesapeake* freighters were attacked during transit through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

Having little confidence in the ability of US and British forces to protect them, major shipping companies have largely paused operations in the Red Sea and are sailing around Africa in a long and costly diversion. Shipping costs for any supplies to Israel have skyrocketed and this heavily impacts the economies of the other staunch supporters of the Zionist state, the European Union countries.

## Militant response to

## bombing of Lebanon

In response to Israel’s continued bombing of Lebanon, including targeted assassinations of Hamas officials and Hezbollah leaders, the Lebanese resistance carried out a series of daily missile attacks that forced Israel to evacuate 28 settlements and towns. More than 120,000 Israelis have been evacuated from the border since 7<sup>th</sup> October and, according to many interviews in Israeli media, the majority do not plan to return.

Hezbollah mounted a third attack on the Israeli army’s Mount Meron base. They also attacked Israel’s major northern military command base in Safed, five miles from Lebanon’s border. The Mount Meron base is crucial to the Israeli

Iron Dome high-tech air-defence system – and it is crumbling under the repeated blows.

A video released by Hezbollah showcases the attack by 15 missiles on the strategic Israeli air base. Lebanon’s defensive attacks are escalating because, rather than implement a ceasefire, Israel has stepped up its strikes on Hezbollah using fighter jets, drones, helicopters and artillery. Hezbollah have bombed Haifa, Israel’s only other port.

Turkey, a major Israel trading partner, is finally cutting off trade with the Zionist state. Most damaging for Israel is the cutting of its oil supplies. Trade has been replaced with sanctions for companies attempting to do business with Israel.

Corporate powers in the US and their neo-con strategists are increasingly willing to expand the death and destruction to Yemen, to Lebanon, even to Iran, to save their one “strategic ally” in the region.

But Zionism is self-destructing. Solidarity with Palestine is a global phenomenon. This is the urgent moment for the people of the whole world to demand an end to US diplomatic, political, economic and military support for the racist Israeli settler-colonial enterprise.

Workers World (USA)

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# China: Ice-breaking spirit for a better future

*In 1954 the “Ice-Breakers”, the 48 Group Club was established after the first British trade delegation travelled to the newly formed People’s Republic of China to initiate trade relations between the two countries. Seventy years later, China-UK relations face greater uncertainties and challenges. In an interview with Global Times reporter Ma Ruiqian, the Chairman of the 48 Group Club, Stephen Perry, shared his views on the “ice-breaking spirit”, China-UK relations and the current hype surrounding the “China threat”.*

**GT: Your father, Jack Perry, is acclaimed as one of the “icebreakers” in China-UK relations. What insights can be drawn from the “ice-breaking spirit” for today’s China-UK relations?**

**Perry:** It’s a difficult world today. China is experiencing a great deal of resistance. The 48 Group Club experienced this as well when US former president Donald Trump became very concerned about the trade deficit and imposed tariffs. This was the beginning of a deterioration of the China-US and China-West relations. It was also the beginning of a deterioration of respect for each other.

The ice-breaking spirit is about breaking through the relationship between groups on each side, aiming to build something for the future. It means managing differences in culture, education and objectives, considering the 5,000

years of Chinese history compared to more than 1,000 years of British history. Despite these dramatic differences, it is worth it because of the lessons from the two World Wars, where millions were killed. If we don’t want to see that again, we have to have better ways of dealing with misunderstandings and building a positive environment for global peace and development.

I believe that’s what the ice-breaking spirit is: I want to do this deal; I want to make some money out of it, but I also want to lay down tracks that enable better, more peaceful coexistence. My father once told me that many Chinese people overcame very difficult conditions, aiming to create a better world where trade and peaceful coexistence prevail, instead of wars. We need to find ways to understand each other and conduct business together. If we can establish more connections between Chinese businesses and the West, we stand a better chance of achieving peaceful coexistence. I think that’s what the ice-breaking spirit is - creating a better opportunity for peaceful co-existence so that people can grow and develop together.

**During the past year, the UK has intervened many times in the operations of Chinese companies in the country, citing security concerns. From a business perspective, do Chinese companies truly pose a threat to the world?**

People do not understand how China has

succeeded. They do not understand China’s reform and opening-up. Let’s go back to 1978 when the reform and opening-up began. The Chinese people, the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government were highly capable of transforming not only their internal system, including agriculture, manufacturing and service industries, but also being able to incorporate sophisticated new ideas from abroad.

I think China has made the decision to transform itself. It needs to buy a lot of technology and take in many foreigners, but the essence is to do it themselves. China learned very early on that if they’re going to do something, they have to learn how to do it themselves. They do not want to depend on those who, a century and a half ago, sought to take advantage of them. It doesn’t mean that there’s malice in China toward foreigners. China is big enough with a large enough population, and they can do it themselves. China achieved this by working with foreigners but not by being dependent on them.

**How do you think the UK should rationally manage its relationship with both China and the US?**

The US’ involvement with the UK is too deep and powerful. And the US believes it has to show China that it can stop China’s progress in countries like the UK, bringing many things to a standstill. However, this is now beginning to

change for two reasons. One is that the power of the US is not as powerful as it once was. Therefore, people are not so inhibited to challenge American views, regarding what should be done and how. The other significant change is the UK. The UK is now finding that the world is changing. Too many countries are growing, and any major, powerful country attempting to establish an empire is unlikely to succeed. So I think maybe we are headed toward the world of a global community of shared future, as advocated by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

We’ve had a long number of years benefiting from the special relationship with the US. I don’t think that the UK is at that point of change. We will be cautious as a country, but we also have to participate with China. I think that the production forms of the world will change and that the UK will begin to realise that it can do lots of things in Asia with China and with other countries, making the UK feel a somewhat more independent than if works solely with China, which has 1.4 billion people and is the second-largest economy in the world.

**Many Western countries firmly believe that a strong China will inevitably seek hegemony, leading to the perception of China as a threat that needs to be contained. What is your view on this?**

The West can benefit from working with China. It has nothing to

benefit from a war or aggression. And if we use hegemony against China, it will weaken us.

There is no great long-term benefit that comes from hegemony. China knows that and it does not use hegemony, as it is not part of the Chinese culture. I think China knows that wisdom works much better in the long term, drawing from very old Confucian ideas. The Chinese way of doing things is different from the Western way of doing things. China just sits down and works out how to deal with issues.

The Chinese history of 5,000 years has taught its people to do things and think things in ways that work well, especially in the big issues of the world. I believe what will happen in the world is that the ideas from President Xi, rooted in 5,000 years of Chinese history, will gradually become better understood in the West. This will introduce the notion that there are other ways of doing the big things in life that can benefit us all. It’s not something for us to fear. When we get to know each other, the world becomes a much simpler place.

**In November, David Cameron returned to the British government as the Foreign Secretary. Do you hold an optimistic outlook for the China-UK relationship in 2024? In what areas can China and the UK deepen their relationship through common interests and collaboration opportunities?**

I don’t think Cameron

returned to the government because of a plan to improve relationships with China. I believe Cameron came back to the UK government because it was facing internal difficulties within the Conservative Party and parliament on various issues. For instance, immigration became a powerful force for the people who were in favour of Brexit.

Cameron has moved into the international statesman’s arena, walking the tightrope between the US and China. The best opportunities for the UK lie in trade and investment with China, but the historical relationship of the UK lies with the US. It’s akin to having parents who are constantly arguing, leaving a child unsure of what to do or say. Cameron, I believe, has a pretty good idea of how to handle such diplomatic situations. He may be able to make a difference, but considering he might only be in office for less than a year, we shouldn’t expect too much.

Is it a sign of a better attitude toward China? As I mentioned, I don’t believe he was brought in specifically for the China issue. However, it is as significant that he was not avoided from this role due to his historical relationship with China. This suggests that within the British elites, he had the acceptance of his role coming into parliament and government again, signifying recognition. Also, I think China does have a role to play in the future of the UK. It is a sign that Britain takes its engagement with China seriously.



## LETTERS

## Dear Comrades

With regards to the horrific events in Gaza there have been many comments in the media on the catastrophic failure of the Israeli security services to have foreseen and stopped the Hamas raid on Israel. Evidently Hamas fighters trained and rehearsed the raid quite openly, so why did the Israelis miss the warning signs?

Surely we must assume that the Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, was told about all the activity by Hamas in Gaza, but allowed the raid to take place so that he could carry out his plan for the 'final solution to the Gaza problem'.

I feel certain that one day the truth of this will come out. There can be no other solution to the apparent failure of Israeli intelligence to miss the evidence, to see and prevent the attack coming.

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

## Dear Comrades

When Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and Dr Owen formed a Social Democratic Party in 1981, they were the ones who eventually disappeared, not the Labour-Trade Union centre.

Now Andy Hudd, the vice-president of ASLEF and one of the leaders of George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain, is calling for the unions to disaffiliate from Labour.

Though he may perhaps want to replace Labour with the Workers Party this is no small task because past Labour governments have succeeded in obtaining the monopoly of working class

representation from the capitalist system. To challenge this now, even if only partially, an organisation like the Workers Party or TUSC needs to be strong enough to make capitalism undo this arrangement. But at this moment such a challenge can only weaken the unions' link to Labour without breaking the historic connection of that link with the bourgeois state.

I do not exclude that, in the tremendous upheaval that is coming, some key unions may disaffiliate. This could happen. But from there to the point where working-class political representation can replace Labour, I do not believe any new Party will be able to cope with social democratic piousness. I do not think that the working-class gains achieved since 1945 through Labour are recoverable through anything short of a communist agenda.

I don't see the unions disaffiliating from the political centre they forged back in the 1880s. The working-class is more likely to want to push its own leaders up through its existing organisations.

If this is generally correct what is needed is the formation of Labour and union currents with anti-bureaucratic demands. Comrades thrown out of Labour could organise themselves into tendencies, organised and seeking working class ideas, publications and programmes. After-all Labour used to have newspapers of its own.

Now it concerns me that the Tories are hoping that Labour's divisions will

weaken it at the next election. Better to say to left and alternative candidates: replace the Labour MP, try to keep the seat. Same with the councillors.

**Marie Lynam**  
London

## Dear Comrades

In 1930 Wilhelm Frank, a Nazi member of the Reichstag (and later Hitler's Minister of the Interior) introduced a bill calling for the castration of homosexuals. Homosexuality was, he said, a "Jewish pestilence." Some Nazi papers were also already advocating the death penalty for gay men.

Many German gays, like German Jews, weren't unduly perturbed. They still believed that Nazi policies would be moderated once the Nazis actually took power. However hatred of homosexuality was both part of Nazi party ideology and a personal obsession of its leaders.

Himmler in particular appeared to have been a key architect of the persecution. He linked Jews and homosexuals. They were both "outsiders" and "inferiors" hell bent on destroying Germany's racial purity. They were "incarnations of moral degeneracy". And whereas Jews allegedly preyed on Christian women homosexuals were accused of doing the same with Aryan men.

Ironically Hitler's second in command Ernst Röhm was gay. He was the head of the brown-shirted stormtroopers, the SA – a ruthless Nazi paramilitary organisation full of "rootless ex-soldiers and hooligans".

Röhm was too radical for Hitler however. Hitler wanted to attract industrialists and aristocrats. Röhm would put them off. So Hitler had him shot as part of the Night of the Long Knives in the summer of 1934. Himmler then became Hitler's No.2.

Paragraph 175 of the

German legal code, punishing male homosexuality with jail, was reinforced and extended. And in 1936 a Federal Security Department for Combatting Abortion and Homosexuality was established at the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin.

Homosexuals were soon being transferred to the concentration camps. There they had pink triangles on their uniforms. They were given the worst jobs (it was believed that hard work would turn them into heterosexuals!) and they were rejected by other inmates. Some 53 per cent were said to have died in appalling conditions.

**Alan Stewart**  
Wakefield

## Dear Comrades

The rapidly increasing United States national debt stands at over \$34 trillion dollars and is expected to exceed \$50 trillion by the end of the decade. Currently that debt is so high that it exceeds the annual GDP by over 23 per cent. US national debt is by far the world's greatest. Almost all governments have a level of national debt as they choose to invest in infrastructure and long term economic development. China which has held US treasury bonds, as part of a policy that helps to maintain favourable exchange rates to boost exports, may now decide to sell as part of a new strategy to secure economic growth that puts increasing emphasis on boosting domestic demand.

It is the wealthy USA that continues, as a matter of economic policy, to run budget deficits with apparent little regard for the colossal debt interest burden that is created. How can it continue to do so and what are the risks?

A major factor has been the dominance of the petrodollar as a leading trading and reserve currency.

*continued on page 9...*

## 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.

## UNTIL 31 MAR

Martin Parr Foundation: *Photographs from the Miners' Strike 1984–5*. Paintworks, 316, Arno's Vale, Bristol BS4 3AR.

## SUN 11 FEB

Stand Up To Racism: Fighting for anti-racist workplaces. Conference 12:00–16:30, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BB.

## MON 12 FEB

Labour CND: Celebration of the life of Alice Mahon, ex Halifax MP. 18:30–19:30 online. Contact [labourcnd@gmail.com](mailto:labourcnd@gmail.com) for registration.

## THUR 15 FEB

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: The secret US-UK nuclear weapons agreement. 18:30 Webinar. Register on the in CND website.

## FRI 16 FEB

Strike Map: Launch of a reprint of J. T. Murphy's 1917 *The Workers' Committee*. 19:00 Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU

## FRI 16 FEB – SAT 16 MARCH

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.

## TUES 20 FEB

Free Assange Campaign: Picket of High Court, London detail TBA.

## THUR 22 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: Andrew Feinstein on Armaments and Global Trade. 19:00. Hybrid event. Register on MML website.

## SAT 24 FEB

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

## SAT 2 MARCH

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

## WED 6 MARCH

Marx Memorial Library: Mary Davis on The Labour Government of 1923–4: a constitutionalist takeover of a working class party. 19:00. Hybrid event. Register on MML website.

## SAT 9 MARCH

Essex County Association of Trades Councils: Essex and the 1984–85 miners' strike. 10:00–15:00, Friends Meeting House, Chelmsford CM1 2QL.

## SAT 9 – FRI 22 MARCH

ScreenCuba: Festival of Cuban cinema. Garden Cinema, 39–41 Parker Street, London WC2B 5PQ. Details at [screencuba.uk](http://screencuba.uk)

## SAT 9 MARCH

1984–85 Miners' Strike commemoration, Doncaster. Details TBC.

## THUR 14 MARCH

Marx Memorial Library: John McDonnell MP on The Labour Governments 1974–76: challenging the rights of capital. 19:00. Hybrid event. Register on MML website.

## SUN 17 MARCH

Marx Memorial Library: Annual oration at Karl Marx's grave at Highgate Cemetery. 13:30, Highgate Cemetery, London, N6 6PJ

## THUR 21 MARCH

Marx Memorial Library: Ravi Raham on *Global Labour and Peripheral Capital*. 19:00. Hybrid book launch. Register on MML website.

## SUN 25 MARCH

Scottish Morning Star Supporters: Conference on military and social spending. 12:00–16:00 STUC 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow G40 1BP.

## WED 10 APRIL

Marx Memorial library: Albano Nunes on the Portuguese Revolution 50 Years on. 19:00 Online lecture. Register on MML website.

## SAT 13 APRIL

Marx Memorial Library: Booksale. 11:00 at Library.

## SUN 28 APRIL

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

## WED 1 MAY

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

## CONTACT US...

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<http://londoncommunists.blogspot.com/>



...continued from page 8

Everyone has needed and used dollars. This has effectively enabled the US to print more dollars and issue more debt bonds which have been purchased due to their relative high security. It is however a growing bubble that could burst at any time.

The USA has been able, up to now, to maintain an unfair trading advantage and also exploit its dominant financial position by trade wars and sanctions against any perceived honest competitor. In doing so it has crippled even its most grovelling allies as the full effects of those reckless actions take place. It has never attempted to tackle its debt crisis by using fiscal measures. While spending very little on crumbling infrastructure it nevertheless supports an enormous military expenditure of well over \$886 billion during this year.

Accumulated interest payments on unpaid debts have been met by a process of printing more dollars and selling more treasury bonds. Inflation is a factor that can reduce the real value of debts but it is one that is directly related to the financial risks of recession, falling income levels and a deepening of the general crisis of capitalism.

Important global changes are underway. International trade, including, oil and gas sales, is increasingly being carried out using local currencies which reduces the dominance of the dollar. US hegemony is being challenged and already investors are starting to reduce their US bond holdings. A day of reckoning is coming that will see the end of US control, domination and interference to suit their own ends. A new era of honest trade will ensure that the world is able to develop freely. If the new conditions embrace socialism all free people will rejoice.

John Maryon  
Suffolk

# Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

**It has been said that it was unfortunate that Nicola Sturgeon's appearance at the Edinburgh part of the COVID inquiry came too late for the Oscars ceremony as she could have got one for bursting into tears just in time for the lunchtime BBC News. Tory Scottish Secretary, Alistair Jack, suggested that Sturgeon could "cry from one eye" if she wanted, but it was clear that her distress was real, as what remained of her reputation was destroyed under the forensic questioning of Jamie Dawson KC. Even the very few remaining former Sturgeon loyalists think the waterworks were on behalf of those who died in the pandemic.**

Louise Slorance, the widow of a civil servant who died from COVID when hospitalised with cancer said ministers were putting more "effort into hiding mistakes than acknowledging them and taking the learning forward."

Sturgeon's troubles are unlikely to be confined to camper-vans and missing SNP funds. The Scottish Covid Bereaved group's lawyer, Aamer Anwar said "Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister became Scotland's master of spin" and "projected a daily image of sincerity in wanting to do right by the people of Scotland during the pandemic" but her "carefully crafted image" had been "shattered by her own hands".

He warned that "My clients have asked me to consider asking for a criminal investigation into the actions of the former first minister and others, we will carefully consider our next steps once the evidence is completed today".

Before that the Scottish Information Commissioner, David Hamilton, is starting a new investigation into the mass deletion of public records.

Needless to say Sturgeon was not the only senior politician who deleted pandemic social media messages, but she was the one who had previously publicly promised on Channel 4 TV to keep them for the inquiry. As a former lawyer, albeit a not very successful one, she knew fine well what the consequences would be if she was caught.

Her predecessor Alex Salmond denied her claims that regular deletion was long-standing Scottish Government policy.

Another curious fact that has recently come to light is that on the 19th March 2020, during the closing stages of the Alex Salmond trial, Sturgeon got one of her minions to buy a cheap disposable mobile phone on Amazon for £20 which she then put on her expenses.

Earlier in that affair she revealed both existence and content of 2017 and 2018 Whatsapp messages with Salmond in which they discussed the allegations, so her record keeping seems to depend on what issue is being considered. Much of that would not matter much in the eyes of public opinion if the outcome of her policies had been any better than those administered by Boris Johnson south of the border, but they weren't. The death rates were broadly similar, but some absurd policies were planned such as sawing off the bottom of school fire doors to improve ventilation.

Sturgeon must have been told not to use her catchphrase "I cannot recall" but her best line was her claim that that she did not delete her WhatsApp messages, but they "weren't retained".

The Covid inquiry has also opened up a can of worms about how the SNP

Government goes about its business beyond the immediate events. The paper trails for the awarding of the contract for the infamous two ferries and the manner in which funds were used to rescue the Highland aluminium smelter are equally unclear.

All is not lost however, some of Sturgeon's messages survive in the phones of recipients. One was with her advisor discussing how to arrange a fight with Johnson to make Sturgeon look good, just at the time when she was denying she was fixed on anything but handling the pandemic.

The National Clinical Director was also caught out denouncing opposition MSPs for doing their job and asking questions when he should have been providing the information. He remains in post despite many calls for his resignation.

While the present First Minister Humza Yousaf was Justice Secretary during the first part of the pandemic he became Health Secretary in the later, less serious stages when Sturgeon crony Shona Robison tired of standing in the background at Sturgeon's epic media briefings. He does not come up smelling of roses. He described former Labour MSP Neil Findlay as an "arsehole" and a "twat" for simply asking perfectly straightforward questions about the management of care homes.

Scottish Tory leader Douglas Ross has demanded that Yousaf refer himself to the standards watchdog for breaching the ministerial code about claiming at one stage to have kept all his messages.

It may be for these reasons that on Tuesday he tried to win back sympathy by telling us about the sad time in 2016 he spent a whole day on his sofa without eating after his first wife left him and because he thought that he was failing in his job as Transport Secretary.

Tuesday also saw the SNP come under fire from the bean counters at the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) who accuse the same Shona Robison, who is now Finance Secretary and Deputy First Minister of fiddling the figures in her last budget.

At the time she claimed that she was increasing spending on health, but on closer examination it is, in fact, a real terms cut.

The IFS say the figures reveal a 0.7 per cent real-term cut for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care portfolio compared with Robison's claim that she was giving a 1.3 per cent increase over that period.

If she was going to keep her NHS promise, the IFS say that would only come as a result of unannounced cuts in other areas as the overall budget is so tight.

Only if Westminster increases NHS spending would things improve via the Barnett formula. The IFS also say that the SNP's claims to be supporting local government are also not entirely accurate. In theory there was an increase of 6.2 per cent, but this amounts to just 1.8 per cent in real terms.

The IFS says the situation is "likely to be even tougher than these figures suggest" as a result of inflationary cost increases and the impact of pay rises.

IFS Associate Director

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David Phillips said "The Scottish Government has argued that comparing its latest spending plans for one year with its initial budgets for the next year, as we think is better, is problematic. It says this ignores the fact that plans stated in the next year can change too. And yes, they often do. But plans are plans, and at present the latest stated plan is to spend less on health next year than was spent this year."

There's a crisis of confidence within the nationalist community. In-fighting, a humiliating police investigation into finances – and now the COVID inquiry has only added to the SNP leader's woes as he struggles to revive his party's flagging fortunes in the run-up to a general election that most expect to be called in the autumn. But despite a swing to Labour the nationalists still lead in the opinion polls.

The SNP looks set to hold the majority of Scottish seats in the Westminster parliament according to the latest Ipsos survey of voting intentions with 39 per cent. Scottish Labour follows on 32 per cent and the Tories come a poor third on 14 per cent. If a general election was held now the SNP would retain 40 seats in the House of Commons, Labour would win 13 (up from two they currently hold) with just two seats for the Lib-Dems and the Tories.

# Gaza: Stop the Genocide!

by New Worker  
correspondent

London comrades joined over the 200,000-strong march through central London in solidarity with the Palestinian people last weekend while thousands of others took part in similar demonstrations throughout the country.

The march came in the wake of the interim ruling against Israel by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that found South Africa's case – that "Israel .... is engaging in ... genocidal acts against



the Palestinian people in Gaza" – to be plausible, it also found evidence of the risk of further acts of genocide to be sufficient for the court to order interim measures to prevent such acts. But the Sunak Government has shamefully downplayed the ruling's significance and urgency to join the Americans and their other lackeys in suspending funding to UNRWA, which plays a crucial role in providing essential services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza and elsewhere across the region.

## Transatlantic Civil Servants' Statement on Gaza

***More than 800 officials in the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union have released a public letter of dissent against their governments' support of Israel in its war in Gaza.***

**It Is Our Duty To Speak Out When Our Governments' Policies Are Wrong**

Recalling that:

We have the duty to respect, protect and uphold our constitutions and international and national legal obligations which our democratically elected executives have committed us to;

We are expected as civil servants to respect, serve and uphold the law while implementing policies, regardless of the political parties in power; that we have done so for our entire careers;

We have been hired to serve, inform and advise our governments/institutions and we have demon-

strated professionalism, expertise, and experience that our governments have relied on over the past decades of our service;

We have internally expressed our concerns that the policies of our governments/institutions do not serve our interests and called for alternatives that would better serve national and international security, democracy and freedom; reflect the core principles of western foreign policy; and incorporate lessons learned;

Our professional concerns were overruled by political and ideological considerations;

We are obliged to do everything in our power on behalf of our countries and ourselves to not be complicit in one of the worst human catastrophes of this century; and

We are obliged to warn the publics of our countries, whom we serve, and to act in concert with transnational colleagues.

We publicly reiterate our concerns that:

Israel has shown no boundaries in its military operations in Gaza which has resulted in tens of thousands of preventable civilian deaths; and that the deliberate blocking of aid by Israel has led to a humanitarian catastrophe, putting thousands of civilians at risk of starvation and slow death;

Israel's military operations have not contributed to its goal of releasing all hostages and is putting their well-being, lives and release at risk;

Israel's military operations have disregarded all important counterterrorism expertise gained since 9/11; and that the operation has not contributed to Israel's goal of defeating Hamas and instead has strengthened the appeal of Hamas, Hezbollah and other negative actors;

The ongoing military operation will be detrimental not just for Israel's own

security but also regional stability; the risk of wider wars is also negatively impacting stated security objectives of our Gaza: Stop the Genocide! r governments;

Our governments have provided the Israeli military operation with public, diplomatic and military support; that this support has been given without real conditions or accountability; and that when faced with humanitarian catastrophe, our governments have failed to call for an immediate ceasefire and an end to blockages of necessary food/water/medicine in Gaza;

Our governments' current policies weaken their moral standing and undermine their ability to stand up for freedom, justice, and human rights globally and weaken our efforts to rally international support for Ukraine and to counter malign actions by Russia, China and Iran; and

There is a plausible risk that our governments'

policies are contributing to grave violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and even ethnic cleansing or genocide.

We therefore call on our governments/institutions to:

Stop asserting to the public that there is a strategic and defensible rationale behind the Israeli operation and that supporting it is in our countries' interests;

Hold Israel, like all actors, accountable to international humanitarian and human rights standards applied elsewhere and to forcefully respond to attacks against civilians, as we are doing in our support to the Ukrainian people; this includes demanding immediate and full implementation of the recent order of the International Court of Justice;

Use all leverage available – including a halt to military support – to secure a lasting ceasefire and full humanitarian access in

Gaza and a safe release of all hostages; and

Develop a strategy for lasting peace that includes a secure Palestinian state and guarantees for Israel's security, so that an attack like 7 October and an offensive on Gaza never happen again.

**Co-ordinated by civil servants in:**

**European Union institutions and bodies**

**The Netherlands  
United States**

**Also endorsed by civil servants in:**

**Belgium  
Denmark  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Italy  
Spain  
Sweden**

**Switzerland  
United Kingdom**



# Chávez gone but his legacy continues

by Roberto Morejón

**With the legacy of Hugo Chavez Venezuelans continue to resist the adversities derived from US sanctions, now in the process of reactivation.**

Chavez, a military man of the new type, began his first mandate on 2nd February 1999 and from the very first moment he demonstrated his strength and commitment to the people on the podium and in informal conversations with his compatriots in the political trenches.

Chavez initiated a new era in Venezuela that embodied the hopes of millions of citizens and traced the path towards the longed-for social justice and sovereignty. Chavez succumbed to cancer in 2013 but the spirit of the Bolivarian revolution he led carries on.



President Chávez nurtured a national ideology during his four terms of office. It would be a path of successes, disappointments, adversities and actions against the reactionary opposition that sought to overthrow the government by any means

— with one of them posing as “president” even taking the oath of office in a square among a handful of followers with the support of Washington.

But the man who put an end to four decades of right-wing government returned to presidential

palace with vigour after the defeat of the counter-revolutionaries in 2002.

Chavez, the promoter of the new constitution, paved the way for Nicolás Maduro, who also had to face the US penalties, causing the deterioration of the economy and the standard

of living of the Venezuelan people.

In the last few days, the forces of law and order have arrested some thirty people accused of being linked to anti-government conspiracies.

The process coincides with the revelation of a

secret report, obtained by the Associated Press news agency, of a covert operation of the DEA, the US Drug Enforcement Administration, to “fabricate” alleged links between the Venezuelan government and drug trafficking.

Vice President Delcy Rodríguez warned that if the United States intensifies the economic aggression against Venezuela, the country would respond, first of all by cancelling flights for the repatriation of Venezuelan migrants.

In these tense times consultations have begun across the country to prepare for new elections. Like Chavez, Maduro is open for dialogue with the all political forces in the country but he will not yield an inch in the defence of Venezuela’s national sovereignty.

*Radio Havana Cuba*

## The blood and lives of imperialism’s servants

by Vsevolod Rozumny

**Palestine and Yemen, Ukraine and Myanmar, Iraq and Syria – all current conflicts in the World tend to escalate and expand geographically. Everywhere the countries of the imperialist centre participate in them – America, Britain and the British Commonwealth, France, Germany and the rest of the European Union.**

Undoubtedly, the essence of the escalation and expansion of these conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East is to overcome stagnation and revive the economy of global capitalism in general, and in particular, to bring super profits to the main arms manufacturers and the United States,

Britain, France and the rest of the European Union in general.

When supplying modern weapons systems to conflict zones, the participation of highly qualified personnel of specialists in the maintenance of such equipment is inevitable. First of all, this applies to personnel managing and maintaining air defence systems, electronic warfare and missile weapons.

So in Ukraine local personnel cannot fully work with the latest Western weapons systems which differ from the old Soviet weapons and arms produced later in Ukraine that they’ve been used to. Because of this it is necessary to maintain these systems by representatives of the supplier countries, some-

times by entire crews.

We can already see that during the conflict in Ukraine, personnel working with new Western weapons are becoming a legitimate and priority target for influence from opponents of the Kiev authorities.

It should be emphasised that while the Zelensky regime can import the latest weapons and trained personnel from these arms suppliers it cannot ensure the safety of these personnel.

It is practically undeniable that the personnel that come with the latest weapons systems that have been sent to Ukraine are not only volunteers or mercenaries but also serving officers and men from NATO armies as well as

civilian specialists of the arms manufacturers.

These people were sent to the conflict zone solely on official duty. On 16<sup>th</sup> January of this year, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation reported an attack on the temporary deployment of foreign troops in Kharkov. Sixty people were killed – most presumed to be French others could be mercenaries and regular military personnel and civilian specialists from the United States, Britain, Germany and other parts of the European Union.

This tragic example shows the full extent of the irresponsibility not only of the Kiev authorities, but also of the French authorities, who send their citizens to the conflict zone for the

sake of the super-profits of the arms corporations. In connection with the above, the peace-loving public of the West has the right to demand:

A halt to the practice of sending military personnel and civilian specialists from the United States, France, Britain, Germany and other EU countries to conflict zones!

Stop all arms supplies to Ukraine from the EU. Do this immediately to reduce tension in relations with the Russian Federation. Stop following the lead of the USA and Britain and demonstrate the genuine independence of the European Union. Europe should not be drawn into a spiral of conflict, sacrificing its citizens in favour of its trans-Atlantic partners!

Immediately and unconditionally cease fire in Gaza, Ukraine and Yemen!

Convene a global peace conference as proposed by the Bangladesh Workers’ Party!

The arms barons and the magnates of the military-industrial complex will not stop sending citizens of France, Germany, Italy and other countries to conflict zones if the peoples of the World continue to be silent and obedient executors of the will of a bunch of greedy and immoral super-rich who buy the blood and lives of their servants with money.

***It’s time to stop this race to barbarism and madness!***

*Red Square Molotov Club*

# Russians foil terror attack in Crimea

Yet another Ukrainian terrorist act has been prevented by Russia's security service. Three people have been detained in Crimea accused of planning to blow up a car belonging to one of the representatives of the Crimean authorities on the orders of Ukrainian intelligence.

As the Ukrainians suffer one front-line failure after another, the focus of the Kiev regime has shifted towards attacking civilians and local authorities on Russian territory.

Now the FSB, the Russian federal security service says it recently foiled a terrorist attack organised by the Ukrainian secret service (SBU) against one of Crimea's leaders.

"In Crimea, the Russian FSB detained a group of people consisting of Russian citi-

zens V A Bondar, O V Shevchenko and V V Ananiyeva. The group was assigned to blow up a car belonging to one of the Crimean authorities, by the order of the SBU in Simferopol. The detainees have confessed to it," the FSB said.

The suspects had a radio-controlled improvised explosive device (IED) made from a modified German-made anti-tank mine with a 1.9

kilogram hexogen-based charge.

They were also in possession of a radio transmitter, a tripod for placing a mine launching device, a mine fountain stabiliser and a remote fuse with a phone connection.

Bondar, one of the detainees, said that the mine had been kept in a cache in a garage.

"The mine remains in this garage with a

remote control. It was intended for an attack on a motorcade [carrying one of Crimean leaders]," he said.

The prisoners face charges of terrorism and the illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transport, shipment or carrying of explosives or explosive devices.

In December, FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov said that following Ukraine's military fail-

ures Kiev began to send spies and saboteurs into Russia, as well as to establish contacts "with those on our soil, in order to harm us in the rear".

Meanwhile the Deputy Chair of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev says he thinks the Ukrainian capital will move from Kiev to Lvov in western Ukraine. His conclusion is based on

the fact that a new US-AID-Ukraine project for the construction of a railway connecting the EU and Ukraine has Lvov and not Kiev as its end-point.

In December 2023, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and a major Ukrainian railway company signed an agreement for the construction of a 75 km section of Western European standard gauge rail track. The new line will be part of a larger trans-European project, the Mediterranean Corridor, which will run from southern Spain to Lvov.

Medvedev said business sometimes reacts to unravelling geo-political developments more quickly and pragmatically than politicians, and much can be understood from the project details and their reasons.

*Sputnik*



# Beware imperialism's war on Iran

**Will the escalation in bombing by US and British warplanes against people in Syria, Iraq and Yemen lead to a regional war with Iran?**

Despite declarations from President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin that they seek no war with Iran, every day the genocide in Gaza continues brings that war closer. Every bomb and rocket the US Air Force launches against the region expands the war.

The leaders of American and British imperialism will claim they are "retaliating" for attacks

on ships or the killing of three US soldiers. The corporate media will blame "Iran-backed terrorists." The truth is otherwise.

US air and naval bases surround Iran. Don't believe a word from Biden, Blinken and Austin regarding war. Refuse to believe the corporate media. They lie.

They form the Executive Committee of US imperialism, which leads all of the capitalist countries that exploit human labour and plunder natural resources around the world. That's why there are 800 American bases in at least 80 countries. That's why US warships

police the world.

The imperialist ruling class dominates the military, financial, media and communications arenas to enforce its exploitation worldwide. Whenever this domination is challenged, there is no crime they won't commit to protect and increase the profits this system produces, including waging war.

It was telling that many solidarity messages to the Lenin Centennial held in New York on 21<sup>st</sup> January focused on imperialism. According to Lenin, imperialism means war.

The International Court of Justice found

the charge of genocide against Israel plausible. An American federal court found charges of US complicity with genocide plausible.

That means that the Axis of Resistance, the anti-imperialist forces in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran, have not only the legal right but the responsibility to obstruct Israel's genocidal acts. And to obstruct Washington's genocidal complicity.

The Ansarullah government of Yemen, for example, says Israel must cease the genocide or Yemen's fighters will harass ships using the Red Sea to supply Israel. Because

the Yemenis are trying to stop genocide, the US and Britain are bombing them.

Because other forces in the Axis of Resistance have fired on American bases in the region, the Pentagon targets them. And the US military threatens Iran with war.

The US is on the verge of a war of aggression against Iran. The imperialists also target Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. Biden and his cronies threaten to sacrifice millions of people in the Middle East and thousands of US soldiers to protect and expand imperialist

profits worldwide, as well as to allow Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Israel, despite all its killing, is losing the battle to conquer Palestine. Washington has lost much of its remaining political capital in the region. Israel and the US ruling officials are trying to reverse these losses by employing ever greater force and destruction.

The lesson for the multinational working class in the United States is to prepare for a prolonged battle against the imperialist ruling class of the USA and its allies. To start out, don't believe a word the US officials say.

*Workers World*