

Israel hit: Pay-back time for generals' deaths

by our Arab Affairs correspondent

Hundreds of Iranian drones and missiles rained down on Israeli military targets last weekend. But the Iranian strike – pay back for Israel's deadly attack on the Islamic Republic's consulate in Damascus that killed two generals and seven other military advisors – was not intended to inflict huge losses on the Zionists. It was simply a "limited measure" – a show of force to deter Israel and its imperialist masters from further provocations and demonstrate what the Iranians are capable of these days.

The Iranians gave the West 72-hours notice of their intentions. No hyper-sonic missiles were fired. They only used outdated rockets and drones to test Israel's defences and those of the West that sprang into action in Israel's defence. All in all, around 185 drones, 36 cruise missiles and 110 ground-to-ground missiles were fired on Zionist military and intelligence centres in Israel and the occupied territories. The Israelis say 99 per cent of them, including all attack drones, were intercepted. But some hit military bases including



Israel's intelligence centre located in the occupied Golan Heights, which provided the information for the attack on the Iranian consulate, as well as the Nevatim air base which houses Israel's F-35 fighter jets. The Iranians say both facilities were largely destroyed and left inoperable.

Following their reprisal raid, the Islamic Republic said the matter was now "concluded". But they warned Israel against taking any retaliatory action and urged the Americans to keep out of the conflict.

Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu and his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, have both vowed vengeance. But "if the Zionist regime or its supporters demonstrate reckless behaviour, they will receive a decisive and much stronger response," Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned on Sunday.

On the diplomatic front People's China condemned the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate and supported Iran's right to self-defence. Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China appreciated

Iran's decision on not targeting regional and neighbouring countries adding that "China has noted Iran's statement that its action was limited and was an act of self-defence". Iran had handled "the situation well and spared the region further turmoil while safeguarding its sovereignty and dignity", he said. The current situation is a spillover effect of the escalation in Gaza, the Chinese foreign minister said. The immediate priority is to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2728 to immediately achieve an unconditional and lasting ceasefire, to protect civilians effectively, and to ensure humanitarian aid.

The failure of the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate national rights has been the longest-standing injustice of our time, the root of the Israel-Palestine issue, and the core of the Middle East problem. The direction for solving this issue is to quickly implement the "two-state solution" establish an independent Palestinian state, restore the legitimate national rights of the

Palestinian people, and achieve peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine, Wang said.

Meanwhile the Kremlin is doing its best to prevent the situation in the Middle East

from escalating further, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told the media this week, It would have been possible to avoid an Iranian response to Israel's strike on the consulate in Damascus had the UN Security Council resolutely condemned Israel's illegal actions. But after the top UN body failed to condemn Israel, Iran had to "take retaliatory action," Zakharova said.

She stressed that the US position was the only reason why the UN Security Council was unable to operate properly. "It's important to consolidate the international community's efforts and urge the US to stop sabotaging the work of the UN Security Council in situations where the body should prevent such an escalation as it has the mandate and tools to do so," she stressed.

FUND

This week we raised £810 thanks to a Llandudno comrade who sent in £300, fivers from readers in Somerset and Leicestershire, and £29 from Dagenham comrades for stationery. The running total for April now stands at £3,260. We now need just £240 to hit our target for May Day!

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INSIDE

NIGER .. P5

BALTIMORE BRIDGE COLLAPSE .. P6

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS .. P11

GERMAN BAN DEFIED .. P12

THE NEW WORKER

NO ARMS FOR ISRAEL!

Lord Cameron has come back from Israel empty-handed. The Foreign Minister went there to urge restraint on the Netanyahu government following the Iranian missile and drone attacks that were, themselves, a reprisal for the Zionist bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus that killed 11 military advisors, including two of their top generals. Though the RAF, together with the French and American air force, did most of the work in fending off the Iranian drones, Cameron got nothing in return from Netanyahu apart from demands for more Western sanctions against the Islamic Republic and unconditional NATO support for whatever revenge the rabid Zionist leader is seeking.

Though not surprising in itself – the only people Netanyahu needs to heed are the Americans – it might, nevertheless, be a step too far for the Israeli leader because Cameron was clearly speaking for Joe Biden himself when he landed in Tel Aviv this week.

Biden, or rather the shadowy cabal that pull the strings behind him, must have sanctioned the Damascus attack that started this new round of fighting. Despite subsequent White House denials it's difficult to see why Netanyahu would have opted for such a dangerous escalation without getting the green light from his masters in Washington. Some believe the Israeli leader wants to prolong the war in Gaza to scupper American plans for a new NATO bloc in the region that would include the oil-rich Saudis – and thus considerably reduce the role of the Zionist state in the region. Others that he simply wants the war to continue to remain in office and stave off the corruption charges he will face once his immunity from prosecution is lifted. Maybe he simply miscalculated the response in Tehran and Washington.

The Zionists don't care what the Iranians think but they are certainly concerned at what is going on in Washington. While Biden, who barely knows what day it is, is just a pawn of the 'deep state' – that cabal of the most venal and aggressive elements within the American ruling class is clearly divided about what to do next.

We see this openly discussed in their media. Some still believe in backing Israel to the hilt to create the 'Greater Middle East' that would break up the existing Arab states into smaller, sectarian puppet governments whose rulers would depend on American and Israeli guns for protection. Others say this is simply beyond the reach of imperialism these days and that the only way forward is to cut a deal with the feudal Arab oil princes to buy off opposition on the Arab street and impose a sophisticated surrender peace that would give the semblance of a two-state solution while reinforcing American hegemony over the entire region.

The alternative is an escalating conflict that has already drastically reduced Western traffic through the Suez Canal amid fears of another all-out Middle East war that could disrupt or even cut the oil supplies from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf that the Western world depends on.

British workers have no say in what goes on in the United States but they do have a voice in the unions and on the street. Tell the Labour and union leaders that claim to represent us that British arms to Israel must be halted. We want an end to the war in Gaza and want justice for the Palestinian Arabs. And we want it now!

Assange's prosecution threatens press freedom

by Caitlin Vogus

The American government argues that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be prosecuted because he's a "hacker" not a journalist. So why isn't it satisfied with punishing him like one? While awaiting extradition, Assange has now served five years in Belmarsh Prison – the statutory maximum sentence under American law for conspiracy to commit computer intrusion.

For the past five years Julian Assange has been imprisoned in the UK, where he awaits extradition to the United States on charges related to WikiLeaks' publication of secret State and Defence Department documents that once made worldwide news.

The High Court recently granted Assange another hearing in his case, delaying at least temporarily his extradition to the USA, although not ending the threat to press freedom that his extradition and prosecution pose.

American officials say that Assange's prosecution couldn't possibly harm press freedom because he's a "hacker," not a journalist. If they truly believe that, you'd think they'd be satisfied with punishing him like a hacker. But they're not.

When Assange was first remanded to British custody on 11th April 2019, he was accused of breaking a federal computer hacking law. The USA had indicted Assange on one count (PDF) of conspiracy to commit computer intrusion with whistle-blower Chelsea Manning.

Many have disputed Assange's alleged guilt under that charge. But even if Assange were to be convicted, it carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

That means Assange has now served the maximum prison sentence for his alleged

computer hacking crime, albeit in Belmarsh Prison in London. Yet the USA continues to pursue his extradition and prosecution on charges far more related to journalism than hacking.

After initially charging Assange under just the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, the Americans quickly amended the original indictment to add 17 counts under the Espionage Act. (The US government later amended the complaint again to broaden the scope of the computer hacking charge against Assange, in ways that continue to draw criticism.)

Although officials continue to focus their public comments on Assange's alleged hacking, the Espionage Act charges are based on acts of journalism: speaking to sources, asking them questions, and seeking more information or documentation from them. Under the American government's theory in the Assange case, even just publishing government secrets – something journalists do all the time – would violate the Espionage Act.

That's why news media outlets, press freedom and human groups, and law professors have all agreed that Assange's prosecution under the Espionage Act threatens press freedom. If Assange can be convicted for engaging in acts that journalists do every day, so could reporters at the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News, or ABC – regardless of whether you consider Assange a journalist.

It's also why the Biden administration's insistence that the Assange prosecution is based on hacking, not journalism, falls flat. The Espionage Act charges show that prosecutors are in fact charging Assange based on journalistic acts.

Even the Biden administration's own spokespeople have acknowledged as much, at least in the past. In 2019, Matthew Miller – a former Department of Justice DOJ spokesperson

under the Obama administration – explained that the Obama DOJ had declined to prosecute Assange under the Espionage Act because if Assange could be prosecuted, so could the *New York Times*. But in 2024, Miller, now the State Department spokesperson, responded to a question about Assange's prosecution by emphasising that hacking is not a legitimate journalistic activity.

Statements like that are meant to assure the public that the Biden administration would never prosecute a "legitimate" journalist. But promises not to prosecute conventional journalists are meaningless when the government is claiming the unchecked power to do so. If Assange is successfully convicted under the Espionage Act, those promises will do nothing to stop a future administration, or even this administration, from prosecuting whichever journalists it dislikes.

Even if those prosecutions don't materialise, their possibility still surely chills journalism. Journalists often report on government secrets that can embarrass officials or even reveal their wrongdoing and crimes. It's too risky for them to rely on prosecutors' promises that they won't go after journalists who gather and report the news "the right way" – at least in the eyes of the authorities. The threat of jail time will create an enormous incentive for news outlets and journalists not to publish.

Of course, the Biden administration could put an end to this threat to press freedom in an instant by dropping the case against Assange. If his prosecution is really about hacking, not journalism – as the government has so loudly and persistently proclaimed for the last five years – then it's time for the USA to drop its attempt to extradite and prosecute Assange under the Espionage Act.

Radio Havana Cuba

WORKERS NOTES

The Work Foundation

by New Worker
correspondent

In April 1918 the Work Foundation (WF) was founded as the Boys Welfare Association by an East London based cleric at a time when the British ruling classes realised they would have to take an interest in working class welfare in case they copied the Russian example.

The founding cleric thought that benign employers who provided luxuries such as canteens and toilets could get as much work out of their employees as slave drivers.

Soon changing its name to the Industrial Society (IS), it won royal support to promote class collaboration between bosses and workers. Later, one of its functions was to promote the possibility of careers in industry among university students who would not otherwise consider such options. This correspondent has clear memories of an IS organised tour of a steel works and hazier memories of a visit to a brewery.

After a period of mismanagement the Foundation drastically reduced its employees and it is now part of Lancaster University and maintains its original objective now using trendier language to promote the idea that: “good quality jobs lead to higher productivity, improved quality of working life, improved employee engagement and better workplace health and well-being”. A cynic might think that it is worried that it is bad for bosses to have sick workers as that means they have to pay out sick pay.

Some of the leading lights in the Foundation give that impression. One is Gavin Barwell, a former Tory MP who served as Chief of Staff to Theresa May. Others include

FREE ALL UKRAINIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS NOW!

by New Worker
correspondent

NCP leader Andy Brooks joined other anti-fascist activists protesting in Central London last week in solidarity with the victims of savage fascist repression by the Zelensky regime in Ukraine, and with the millions of Ukrainians driven into exile since the imperialist-backed coup that overthrew the legitimate government in February 2014. Tens of thousands of opponents of the regime that seized power in 2014, including local elected officials, teachers, political activists, journalists and

ordinary citizens, have faced summary executions, beatings, torture, imprisonment and seizure of property at the hands of the Nazi gangs who are integrated into the Ukrainian state structures, while the Western mass media have turned a blind eye.

The demonstrators, members and supporters of International Ukraine Anti-Fascist Solidarity (IUAFS), have campaigned for ten years calling for the British government to end its political, diplomatic, economic and military support for the puppet regime in Kiev. The protestors called for all Ukrainian political prisoners to be freed, for full political



and media freedom to be restored in Ukraine, and for a comprehensive investigation into the crimes of the fascist militias over the past ten years. They also called for an end to the British government's support for Israeli genocide in Gaza and an im-

mediate end to the merciless Israeli military operation in Gaza. Several people stopped to show strong support for the protest, after overcoming their astonishment at seeing such a protest against the Banderite junta in Kiev in the heart of the British capital.

Alan Milburn, the Health Minister under Tony Blair who did much to privatise the NHS and Marvin Rees, the elected Mayor of Bristol who was such a success in that post the citizenry voted to abolish it.

Zero Hours

Such is the background to the publishers, last month of *Zero Choices: Swapping Zero-Hour Contracts for Secure Flexible Working*. The WF has noticed that there are 6.8 million people in “severely insecure work in the UK” of which 1.1 million or 3.4 per cent of the workforce are on zero-hour contracts.

It has also just discovered that zero-hour contracts mean that workers have very few rights and that they do not offer any real flexibility to workers, something many trade unions have been saying for years.

Numbers on zero-hours contracts have increased from 700,000 in 2015 to the present figure of 1.1 million. The worst offender is the hospitality sector where 18.8 per cent are in insecure work, arts, entertainment and leisure comes second with 8.7 per cent, administration and support with 5.1 per cent, health and social care 4.4 per cent, and transport and storage on 3.7 per cent.

The theatrical union, Equi-

ty, say that zero-hour jobs in restaurants, bars and with leisure providers are frequently taken up by their members to supplement their main careers in arts and performance. This means that such workers will not put much effort into fighting for improved conditions if they regard it as a temporary measure before they get their name in bright lights. However many more depend on the hospitality industry as the sole source of income, which ought to be a priority issue for their unions.

Predictably Black workers are 2.7 times more likely than white workers to be on zero-hour contracts: 3.1 per cent of White workers are on zero-hour contracts while 7.3 per cent of Black, African and Caribbean are on them with other ethnic minorities in between. Figures from the TUC show the number of BME workers in insecure jobs more than doubled from 2011 to 2022 from 360,200 to 836,300.

Young workers aged between 16 and 24 are 5.9 times more likely to be on zero-hour contracts than older workers. WF stresses it is not just students fitting work around their studies. Young workers who are not students are 3.6 times more likely than other age groups to be on zero-hour contracts. The percentage of

students who take jobs who are on zero-hour contracts is 27 per cent. The lack of support for students means that work is not a case of extra money for a holiday, but for food and rent for student digs.

Of the 136,000 more workers who were on zero-hours contracts in 2023 compared to 2022, 65 per cent went to those aged 16 to 24 year-olds, this amounts to 10 per cent of jobs in that age group, and they were not only students, obviously a much higher percentage than for older workers.

Alice Martin, the WF's Head of Research firmly declared that the choice about zero-hour contracts is one made by bosses, not workers: “While they may provide ad-hoc flexibility for a small minority of professionals who actively choose this way of working, our analysis suggests that for the vast majority, these contracts represent precarity”.

She warns that starting off in insecure work will have long term impacts as it will make getting a foot on the housing ladder even more difficult.

An Unlikely Hero

WF has found an unlikely hero among employers: the

JD Wetherspoon pub chain who are applauded for having introduced in 2016 an option for guaranteed hours for its 43,000 workforce. This has been taken up by 99 per cent of the workforce with only the remaining one per cent wanting zero hours, a point which refutes claims from such as Deliveroo and Uber who claim zero hours contracts are popular.

Rival chain Whitbread claim the company “does not do zero-hour contracts” but offers contracts ranging from 10 hours upwards weekly. This might be simply a way round zero-hours as the hours offered are so low. But the slave-driving MacDonalds' chain say that when they offered employees the chance to move from zero-hours to fixed contracts only a fifth took up the offer, but it is clear that the “choice” was not all it seemed.

The WF deplores the unsurprising lack of urgency of the Tory Government to do anything about the matter. It wants legislation for guaranteed hours in the form of guaranteed contractual hours for all roles from day one. This could mean fixed hours per week, or on-call work and other roles with periods of varying demand, as so many hours per month or annualised

continued on page 4...

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hours. How much better such arrangements are is a matter of debate, but they look better than nothing.

The WF also wants workers to have a right to flexible working, amended contracts for those working 25 per cent more than their contracted hours that reflects their actual hours. Workers should get a statutory notice period of changes to shifts with the right to compensation for a cancelled shift.

There should be annual reporting on employment data with employers with a workforce of 250 or more to report on key employment data about contracts, to enable better official monitoring of contracts. Compiling statistics does not necessarily solve a problem if there is no interest in it.

Finally the Government should increase funding for labour market enforcement resourcing. This is a somewhat pious hope. The past decades have seen severe cuts to the Health & Safety Executive and fees levied on workers taking bosses to court. While Tory Governments have repeatedly denounced

zero-hours contracts as a bad thing, they do nothing in practice to stop it.

Solutions or Not?

In 2014, the Zero-hour Contracts Bill, a Private Members' Bill sponsored by Gateshead Labour MP Ian Mearns, which sought to limit the use of zero-hour contracts was introduced to the Commons but talked out by Tory MPs. A 2018 Good Work Plan based on recommendations accepted by the Government similarly came to nothing. The only recent measure to improve the lot of zero-hour workers was the 2015, Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act, which forbids employers from stopping zero-hour workers from working for another employer. It later expanded the scope of the ban to all low-wage workers.

Banning zero-hours contracts is very popular even among voters who grumble about train strikes. Even Labour's *New Deal for Working People* includes a pledge to ban zero-hour contracts. But

that need not be taken too seriously as readers are well aware that Sir Keir Starmer is in the habit of abandoning any remotely progressive policy. Sunday's declaration by Marks & Spencer supremo Archie Norman that the UK has "some of the best employers, terms and practices in the world" while opposing plans to crack down on zero-hours or give workers rights from day one are more likely to be heeded by Sir "Keith" than any polite pleadings from the TUC.

The WF hopes to see bosses settling down to setting up Secure Work Taskforces with representatives of employers, trade unions: "to pilot alternative models such as digital self-rostering and bank systems, and negotiated sectoral standards for pay and hours".

It is clear that zero hours contracts are increasing to unsurpassed levels. While zero-hour staff who are employed as workers and are not phoney "self-employed" they are not protected from redundancy or unfair dismissal. What modest legal protection they have is often only on paper. Asking for a rise generally results in being

shown the door.

The insecurity of zero-hour contracts makes it virtually impossible to accrue the two years of continuous service needed for entitlement to important employment rights such as protection from unfair dismissal. Just one week without work can constitute a break in employment meaning the clock counting someone's continuous service. Sacking people for minor or imagined offences is very common to keep people on tenterhooks.

Another side-effect of zero-hours contracts is that irregular income makes it difficult to claim essential benefits. Claiming from the DWP is never easy at the best of times, and a comparatively good week can see the withdrawal of a much needed top up. Irregular work means child care and transport costs can be higher, comparatively economical season tickets are pointless when it is uncertain whether they will be used regularly.

The physical and mental health problems caused by uncertainty are too well known to be repeated here. While workers can adjust to night shifts, over a period being

called out to work at 10am one day and 10pm the next reduces people to nervous wrecks.

In February another report by the Trades Union Congress noted that zero-hours contracts are not temporary but are becoming the norm. Two thirds of workers on them had been on them for over a year, 46 per cent for more than two years and 12 per cent for a decade or more. This was because they were the only jobs going.

The TUC places a childish faith in Labour's New Deal. However it is clear that trade unions, particularly the big three, Unite, GMB, Unison need to be much more active. Taking more action on this question could solve the problem of low union membership among young people in precarious employment who can only turn to independent street unions for help and assistance these days.

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

16th April 2004

Doug McAvoy, the retiring general secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and once an "ardent supporter" of New Labour, last week opened the union's annual conference at Harrogate with a withering attack on Education Secretary Charles Clarke.

For the second year running Clarke refused to appear at the NUT conference, knowing full well that his policies are very unpopular with delegates.

McAvoy said: "It will be conference that is at one with the leadership. The Government will not be able to go on sitting this one out. It will have to relax this childish attitude in its relations with the union.

The main point of disagreement between the union and the Government is the issue of classroom assistants – paid around the minimum wage.

The teachers are furious that the Government has allowed head teachers to use these unqualified staff to take charge of classes.

McAvoy claimed this was Clarke's own policy, backed by Prime Minister Tony Blair. It was contained within the Government's workload reduction agreements.

The union has often complained about the increase in teachers' workloads, especially administrative work, but does not support the policy of introducing more classroom assistants when what is really needed is more qualified teachers.

The conference also renewed its battle against performance-related pay, which has now been extended to all grades of teachers. The extra pay for "excellent teachers" will be limited to 20 per cent of the workforce.

"What a prospect for teachers" McAvoy said, "put more and more demands on them, have more and more and more requirements that they attend courses and they do all kinds of things and go through all kinds of hoops.

The NUT is considering strike action in favour if a significant all round pay rise for teachers, rather than the 2.5 per cent the Government plans to impose on them.

Combating British National Party (BNP) in schools is another major item on the conference agenda.

Delegates reported that BNP supporters had been leafletting outside schools in an effort to recruit. Whenever that happened, it led to increased racial conflict and conflicts within the school.

Treasurer Maureen Skevington warned that hundreds of teaching jobs were at risk. She said 250 jobs were under threat in South Tyneside, which includes the South Shields constituency of schools standards minister David Miliband.

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Winds of Change: Russians in – French out

by Ekaterina Blinova

Russian military specialists have arrived in Niger to provide combat training and deploy an air defence system in the land-locked country in West Africa.

The arrival of Russian military instructors was preceded by a phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abdourahmane Tchiani, the chairman of Niger's National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland, on 26th March.

The two leaders discussed the situation in the Sahel region, emphasising security matters and counter-terrorism activities. The leaders agreed to intensify bilateral political dialogue and step up cooperation in a variety of areas.

"The total departure of France theoretically created a vacuum in Niger's national security and international relations order and spectrum outside the African continent. This kind of vacuum could simply not be allowed to exist," says Akinyinka Akinyoade, a political analyst and senior researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden in the Netherlands.

It is not surprising that Russia agreed to lend a helping hand to Niger against the backdrop of Moscow's increasing influence in Sahel, according to Akinyoade. "Russia had relatively recently been supporting the governments of Mali and Burkina Faso, in near-similar political, military and economic context," the expert said. "Thus in the emerging situation in Niger, it was natural that Russian involvement would happen".

"Niger lies in a geographical zone where climate change has exacerbated food security, thus it relies on imports in many areas of food sourcing. Recently it was in the news that Russia airlifted wheat to the country," Akinyoade said.

Between February 2022 and March 2023, Russia supplied roughly 12 million tons of grain to a number of African countries – despite Western sanctions – as Russian President Vladimir Putin

announced at the plenary session of the "Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World" conference on 20th March 2023.

Upon arrival at the international airport of Niamey, the capital of Niger, one Russian specialist told the media that the contingent will provide training to the Niger Armed Forces and share counter-terror expertise with their Nigerian peers.

The Nigerian state broadcaster RTN also reported on the possible deployment of a Russian air defence system in the country, which the local military personnel will be taught to operate. "The Russian instructors will provide

the majority of the Nigerian population, the Tchiani government demanded that the French military pull out from the region.

France colonised Niger and ruled the country for over 60 years until 1960/ The French maintained their presence in the African country long after. Paris' counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane in the Sahel from 2014 to 2022 saw a considerable French military build in the region.

In 2022 the French military was forced to leave Mali, whose government was angry that Operation Barkhane failed to achieve its objectives. Citizens of Burkina Faso and

end of the status of forces agreement between Niger and the United States. The Americans maintain a drone air base outside Agadez in northern Niger that was built in the late 2010s.

The Pentagon also has three similar drone bases in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Benin. The Biden administration announced in March that it held consultations with Niamey considering the fate of its base.

"All these former colonies have special connection to France in terms of the armed forces structure, regulations, and tactics," says Sergei Eledinov, a Russian expert on

military officer who participated in several peace-keeping operations, explained that while France, the USA and Russia have interests in the Sahel region, it is African countries who have the final word.

Some Sahel countries have chosen Russia as an ally because it can provide assistance in a variety of fields, apart from security and military-technical cooperation. Oumarou Abdurahmane from the Pan-African Party of Niger says Russia a reliable partner for the launch of joint projects to develop uranium and oil fields in the country. And in December 2023 Nigerian Prime Minister Ali Mahamane Lamin Zein said that his country was interested in boosting ties with Russia in terms of trade and agriculture.

Sputnik



• West Africa's new leaders: Tiani (Niger), Traoré (Burkina Faso), Goïta (Mali).

high-quality training for our military personnel to effectively use this system," stated RTN.

"What all the external players and Niger have to deal with is the entrance and role of Russia in the wider scheme of things," Akinyoade said. "The difference will continue to evolve because the landlocked nature of Niger implies that it has to rely on neighbouring countries as part of its food and equipment supply systems and as conduits of imports from outside Africa. The importance of Niger's international partners will wax and wane in this regard."

In the aftermath of the military takeover on 26th July 2023, which was supported by

Niger also expressed their opposition to the presence of French troops.

After pulling out of those countries, France relocated part of its personnel to Niger – whose former President Mohamed Bazoum was considered a loyal ally of Paris.

Despite French President Emmanuel Macron initially resisting Niamey's demands, French soldiers finally left the Republic of Niger in December 2023. The French ambassador and his diplomatic mission were expelled from Niger in September 2023 following a stand-off which saw authorities cut off the embassy's water supply.

On 16th March the Tchiani government announced the

African security issues and founder of Convoy Africa. "But the question is which country is ready to extend a hand of help and offer friendship. Judging from the situation on the ground France's assistance turned out to be a total profanation. After the failure of the French, the US has yet to develop its Africa strategy. That leaves Russia, Turkey, and China as [the Sahel's natural allies]."

According to the Russian expert, Niger's message to Paris and Washington was clear: "Either we will cooperate on some kind of understandable, mutually beneficial basis, or you are simply not welcome here anymore."

Eledinov, a retired Russian

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Baltimore bridge collapse: Profits before people

by Betsey Piette

Six highway maintenance workers died while fixing potholes on the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore when it collapsed after being hit by a massive container ship on 26th March. All six worked for Brawner Builders.

They deserve to be acknowledged by name. Miguel Luna, from El Salvador, was a father of three who had lived in Maryland for over 19 years. Dorlian Rónal Castillo Cabrera, 26, was originally from Guatemala. Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes, 35, living in Baltimore, was originally from Mexico. Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandoval, 34, father of two children, migrated from Honduras. Jose Mynor Lopez, 35, came to the USA from Guatemala 19 years ago. The sixth worker, also from Mexico, was a man named Carlos whose full name has not been released.

Emergency responders rescued two other workers from the water. The bodies of Fuentes and Cabrera were recovered in a pickup truck 25 feet deep in the Patapsco river. The other four have yet to be found.

Maryland state police also reported that several vehicles were on the bridge when it collapsed and likely went into the water. The people in them would be presumed dead, yet there is scant information about this in corporate news sources covering the bridge collapse.



• The Dali and the shattered bridge.

But one thing is certain: All those who died were victims of capitalist greed. Had worker safety standards been followed, this accident could have been prevented.

Out-of-control vessel

The Key Bridge, named after a slave-owner called Francis Scott Key, the author of the racist American national anthem *The Star-Spangled Banner*, was struck by the *Dali*. This 95,000-ton, 948-foot-long cargo ship was attempting to exit the Port of Baltimore shortly after midnight on 26th March. The *Dali*, with capacity to hold 10,000 containers, was sailing under the Singapore flag with 22 crew members.

The National Transportation Safety Board reported that the *Dali* left port at 12:39 am, travelling at about eight miles per hour. Two 5,000-horsepower tug-

boats assisted its passage from its berth, but then pulled away. When power on the vessel stopped working at 1:24 am, the pilot belatedly called for assistance from tugboats in the area and notified the Maryland Transportation Authority (MTA) about a power outage on the ship that left it in total darkness. The ship reportedly tried to drop anchor as it approached the Key Bridge. The MTA rushed to close the bridge to additional traffic but claimed there was no time to reach the workers on the bridge before the collapse.

Constructed in 1977, the Key Bridge was a cantilever-type bridge which lacked “redundant structures” – extra base protection for its essential supporting span columns – that may have lessened the ship’s impact. Yet US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, speaking in Baltimore on 26th March admitted: “I do not know of a bridge that has been

constructed to withstand a direct impact from a vessel of this size”.

Maritime experts say it could have made a difference if the tugs had escorted the carrier past the bridge. “I’m a big fan of tug escorts,” said Joseph Ahlstrom, a member of the Board of Commissioners of Pilots of the State of New York, which regulates the state’s harbour pilots. “If applied early enough and effectively, yes, a tug escort could prevent a collision with the bridge or with another ship or going aground”.

David Heindel, president of the Seafarers International Union, representing American merchant mariners, noted: “One of the things that was hard for me to believe is that they didn’t require tugs on the vessel as it was traversing towards the bridge”.

“Some ports require tugs, depending on the vessel, usually tankers. You see where tugs have to escort ships in and

out of port, especially narrow ports,” Heindel said. “In the end, I think that that may be exactly what happens in the Port of Baltimore”.

Profits v workers’ safety

At \$15,000 per vessel, tugs are upfront costs which a lot of shipping companies don’t want to pay, even when pilots consider them a safety factor while navigating out of a port like Baltimore’s. They could have saved the lives of the six workers.

The *Dali* was chartered by Maersk Line Limited, which had been sanctioned eight months earlier by government regulators for blocking its workers from directly reporting safety concerns to the US Coast Guard and for retaliating against a Maersk worker for reporting unsafe conditions. One of the world’s largest

shipping companies, Maersk operates in 130 countries, employing 100,000 workers and reporting over \$51 billion in revenue in 2023.

Approved by company executives, Maersk had “a policy that requires employees to first report their concerns to Maersk ... prior to reporting it to the [Coast Guard] or other authorities”.

Bridge construction v globalisation

Safety concerns surfaced a short time after construction of the bridge was completed. In 1980, the Army Corps of Engineers warned about the danger created by the lack of procedures in either direction to stop traffic. But even after 45 years of warnings, no law was passed nor policy put in place to mandate that tugs accompany these gigantic freighters out to open ocean water. Despite numerous accidents, the concerns of the shipping industry to cut costs in order to maximise profits were always given priority.

When construction on the Key Bridge began in 1970, container ships were a new phenomenon, adopted in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The growth of container ships – both in numbers and size – paralleled the expansion of globalization – the export of entire production structures from the USA and other imperialist countries to the

developing world. This technological revolution in capitalist production totally transformed international shipping.

Globalisation required bigger and bigger container ships. A 2021 United Nations' report found that cargo ship capacity had increased by 155 per cent from 2006 to 2020. Safety incidents involving large vessels globally increased 9 per cent in 2022.

The *Dali* is not the largest container ship today. The *Ever Given*, notorious for blocking the Suez Canal in March

2021, was 1,312 feet long. These enormous ships can carry up to 10,000 shipping containers. At the time of the wreck, the *Dali* was using under 5,000 of its available containers.

During its massive economic growth over the past 30 years, China has expanded port construction in a planned way to account for the ever-increasing size of carrier ships. In the USA, where the primary concern is to increase the rate of profits, few changes have been made to infrastructure in gen-

eral from the 1980s to today. Despite the enormous growth in the size and weight of container ships – it is much more profitable to send one big vessel than to send more smaller ones – ports and bridges have been left as they were in 1980.

This is symbolic of the development of capitalism which always puts profits before human needs.

What's next for Baltimore workers?

The Port of Baltimore is the ninth busiest US harbour, with cargo including cars and liquefied natural gas regularly passing through. In 2023, the port handled around 50 million tons of cargo, valued at \$80 billion, moving between the USA and other countries. The port processed over 840,000 cars – 70 per cent imported – in 2023.

It is estimated that the port's closure could cost the economy \$15 million per day. More than 20,000 jobs are

directly impacted by the port's closure, with an additional 140,000 jobs dependent on port activity. Port workers may be able to access unemployment insurance, but immigrant day labourers, like the six who died on 26th March, could find themselves with no source of income in the event of an accident – if they survive.

With the Baltimore port shut down for months, and with years needed to rebuild the bridge, it will be the workers who pay the price. It is clear that

the shutdown will lead to mass lay-offs, with Maryland's economy taking a hit.

Workers in the USA have fought and many died for worker safety rules and laws. When safety measures are ignored, as happened in Baltimore, it can be considered murder, but there are too many loopholes in these laws to really guarantee worker safety. What is clear, however, is that the corporations responsible should be made to pay.

Workers' World (USA)

China can deal with every challenge

by Peter Walker

Among the books predicting that China has reached its peak and is in a period of upcoming decline, the first one I remember was by Gordon Chang. This goes back probably over 20 years, and the book was titled *The Coming Collapse of China*. He was even quite specific, saying that by 2011, China would have collapsed. Obviously, that turned out to be dead wrong.

The most recent book is *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China*. It basically says that China is facing a number of very difficult challenges, such as lack of consumer confidence, issues with neighbours, an ageing population, property problems, underperforming state-owned enterprises and others that China may struggle to address.

Let's start with why

I'm confident that China can and will deal with these challenges. First, China's track record speaks for itself when it comes to overcoming challenges. China has lifted 850 million people out of poverty without engaging in any external wars, which is quite impressive.

Anyone who questions China's ability to meet the challenges they face is not looking at history. There isn't any major country on the globe today that has faced the challenges that China

has faced from 1949 up until the present and delivered more effectively. Moreover, over the same period, China has been able to grow its GDP to a level significantly higher than any other major country.

If you look at the underlying assumption between the books that are critical of China, they assert that China's leadership is not going to be flexible, talented or courageous enough to deal with these changes.

However, if you tear apart the way China gov-

erns itself, it's like a very successful corporation. China has a strong leader, and an equivalent of a board of directors to provide oversight. China has people who have advanced meritocratically, based on their education and accomplishments in the outside world. China has a long-term strategic view that gets converted into industrial policy. China has been very effective at prioritising resources and initiatives that are most successful in the marketplace.

Another advantage

that China has is that the best and brightest in China aspire to government service. The people who hold senior positions in government are highly educated, have been tested in various professional settings, and have been successful.

Moreover, from the 24-point action plan that came out of the State Council to the commitment President Xi Jinping has made to a number of visiting CEOs, it's evident that China is serious about opening up its market and reforming.

In addition, the people are behind the Chinese government, and Confucian values provide a level of identity and cohesion to the Chinese people.

While some Westerners say Confucian values are a thing of the past, my experience with young Chinese people in America and China shows that these values are very much alive. Delving deeper into Confucian values, my

favourite is "work hard to get ahead". Self-improvement through hard work and education is prioritised not for individual benefit, but for the betterment of family and society.

In conclusion, China is the country with a proven track record of achieving goals, governance led by high-quality leaders and strategic decision-making that yields results through effective execution. Additionally, China boasts a cohesive, large population that is supportive of national goals. The reality is that the domestic market in China consists of 1.4 billion people. China does not necessarily rely on the rest of the world to develop a strong economy; rather, it needs to boost consumer confidence so that people spend more in China and save less. This is a much easier challenge than attempting to change fundamental behaviour.

Global Times



• 2024's Canton trade fair.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

On the 17th April every year, the Palestinian people commemorate Prisoners' Day, with the aim of reminding the world that there are thousands of sons and daughters of the Palestinian people still detained inside the basements and detention centres of the Israeli occupation, and these prisoners sum up, in their suffering, a people and a land under occupation.

For the Palestinian people there is no issue that can take precedence over the issue of prisoners, which has become an integral part of the Palestinian struggle. The issue of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons can only be viewed as one of the titles of the struggle for the freedom of the people and their salvation from occupation and settlement, which are considered the direct cause of a resistance that has become part of the heritage of a people whose land was occupied and abandoned by the force of murder and terrorism at the hands of Zionist gangs that came invading from all over the world to take Palestine as its centre within the framework of the full partnership between the Zionist movement and Western colonialism.

The policy of arrests is part of the occupation's strategy in dealing with the Palestinian people, and therefore there is no place in its dictionary for international law and no consideration for human rights values. Everyone is a target for arrest, as Israel resorts to detention as a

collective and individual punishment for all of society. It arrests and tortures entire families, including children, women, the elderly, and the sick. The history of detention records more than a million arrests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and among the most recent were the arrests witnessed in Palestine after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, where the number of people arrested exceeded 7,000 cases.

It is not a coincidence that the issue of Palestinian detainees is a central point on the agenda of Israeli institutions that have enacted many laws with the aim of killing prisoners financially and morally. The Knesset [the Israeli parliament] approved the law withdrawing citizenship and residency from Palestinian prisoners, the law executing prisoners, and a law legalising the trial of children under the age of 14, in addition to the law on force-feeding of prisoners on hunger strike to obtain their rights. It approved the law on holding the bodies of prisoners, where Israel is holding hundreds of bodies, not to mention the policy of administrative detention, where security services are given the right to arrest Palestinians and put them in detention centres for years without charge, and the number of administrative detainees is currently increasing. All of these laws and practices rise to the level of war crimes.

According to Palestinian institutions for prisoners, the number of prisoners has exceeded 10,000, including more than 200 children and 80 women, in addition to 56 journalists.

Since 7th October 2023 the occupation forces have carried out a forced 'disappearance' of dozens of prisoners, whose fate remains unknown until now. They also resorted

to a campaign of arrests and abuse against the prisoners, which resulted in the martyrdom of 14 prisoners inside the detention centres as a result of physical torture and medical neglect.

Today, there is no legal framework that regulates the conditions of Palestinian detainees.

The Palestinian is accused and convicted as soon as he is arrested. Experiences of detention over more than 50 years have confirmed that the Israeli courts are nothing but a tool in the hands of the security, military and political institutions, which view every act of the Palestinian struggle as "terrorism" and deal with all detainees as criminals, stripping them of their political status and trying them before military courts and refusing to deal with them as prisoners of war protected by international agreements.

The experiences of people and liberation movements confirm that the occupier and coloniser cannot respond to the will of the people to liberate their prisoners except through resistance. The history of the conflict with the Zionist occupier and the experiences of liberation movements confirm that the resistance option is the shortest option to liberate our prisoners and the most effective option to liberate our land and expel the Israeli occupier from it. Always affirming that the presence of occupation and settlement on our Palestinian land gives our people every right to raise the banner of resistance to regain their freedom, establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, and return Palestinian refugees to their land.

The Foreign Affairs Department of the DFLP presents this message to the parties of the world not only to renew support for

our prisoners or to remind the world that there are Palestinian fighters who were thrown into prisons harsher than Nazi cells, because of their defence of their land and the dignity of their people. Rather, let us renew our call to you for international action in support of the cause of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and to place the demand for their release on the agenda of the popular movements denouncing the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and to make it a daily issue in your movements, positions and speeches, considering that arrest operations are a crime and the occupation must be held accountable.

We also call for the assistance of our prisoners and the Palestinian institutions defending prisoners to invest all the tools of international law to provide protection for the prisoners and to call on the institutions of the United Nations to condemn Israeli practices and stand by our detainees and their just demands, to ensure the application of the Geneva Conventions to the prisoners – to treat them as prisoners of war and to force the Israeli enemy to release all prisoners and detainees.

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

Dear Comrade

Last week the *Guardian* newspaper published an article by Saudi women rights activist Lina Al Hathloul titled: *Saudi Arabia is rebranding itself as a moderate country, but what's the truth? Just ask our female activists*. She said Saudi Arabia is rebranding. Since 2016, when it first announced plans to diversify its economy, it has poured billions into making the

continued on page 9...

Diary

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

UNTIL SUN 26 MAY

Townsend Theatre Productions: *Behold Ye Ramblers*, play by Neil Gore. See TTP website for nationwide venues.

THUR 9 MAY–SAT 31 AUG

Working Class Movement Library: Here We Stand: The Art of International Solidarity. WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX.

SAT 20 APRIL

Free Julian Assange Campaign: Protest: 16:00 at Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, London SW1.

SAT 20 APRIL

Bristol radical history festival: 10:00–16:00, free, M Shed, Princes Wharf, Wapping Road, Bristol BS1 4RN.

SUN 21 APRIL

Stop the War Coalition: Concert for Palestinians under attack. 18:00. Earth Hall, 11–17 Stoke Newington Road, Hackney, London N16 8BH. Book on STWC website.

WED 24 APRIL

Cuba Solidarity Campaign Merseyside: Cuba Vive – medical aid fundraiser. 19:30, The Casa, 29 Hope St, Liverpool L1 9BP.

THUR 25 APRIL

Scottish CND: Nuclear power costs the earth. Webinar, 19:00–20:00. Register on Scottish CND website.

SUN 28 APRIL

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

MON 29 APRIL

CND: Reclaim Our Clyde campaign! 18:00, Unite the Union HQ, 145–165 West Regent St, Glasgow, G2 4RZ.

WED 1 MAY

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

WED 1 MAY

Working Class Movement Library: Frow Memorial Lecture: Ewan Gibbs on Energy Workers and the Transformation of Britain. 18:30–20:00, Old Fire Station, University of Salford Crescent, Salford M5 4NL. Book on WCML website.

THUR 9 MAY

Marx Memorial Library: The Miners' Strike 40 Years On:

State Repression, Solidarity & Civil Defence. 19:00. In person and online. Book on MML website.

SAT 11 MAY

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Join the Day of Action against US nuclear weapons coming to Britain. See CND website for local events. Includes a 14:00 picket of the US Embassy, Nine Elms, London SW11 7US.

WED 15 MAY

Marx Memorial Library: The Miners' Strike 40 Years On: Mining the Archives. 19:00. In person and online. Book on MML website.

SAT 18 MAY

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

THURS 30 MAY

Marx Memorial Library: Reds on the Green: A Walk through Radical Clerkenwell. 18:30 from the library. Register at islington.museum@islington.gov.uk for free ticket.

THUR 6 JUNE

Marx Memorial Library: Energy & A Just Transition. Online panel with trade unionists. 19:00. Book on MML website.

SAT 8 JUN

Derby Silk Mill Rally: commemoration of the 1833/34 struggle against pay cuts. 10:00–16:00, Cathedral Green, Full Street, Derby, DE1 3AF.

SAT 15 JUN

Marx Memorial Library: Book Launch: Paul Preston *Perfidious Albion: Britain & the Spanish Civil*. 15:00 in person at MML and online. Book on MML website.

TUE 18 JUN

Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: 40th anniversary Annual March and Rally. Sheffield. Details TBC.

SAT 22 JUN

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: AGM. 10:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BB. Open to non-members.

SAT 29 JUN

TUC Women Chainmakers' Festival. 11:00–16:00, Mary Macarthur Gardens, Lower High Street, Cradley Heath, B64 5AB.

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

The NCP badge



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...continued from page 8

kingdom appear more progressive to outsiders. Women can now drive and work in jobs they were previously banned from. Vast sums are being invested in futuristic, architectural “giga-projects”, such as the Line – a sprawling, desert super-city – to attract global tourism. And yet, inside the kingdom, its citizens tell a very different story. Against a backdrop of image-building projects, thousands of Saudi citizens, according to some reports, could be being blocked by the state from leaving the country with arbitrary and illegal travel bans. Their crime? Advocating for basic human rights.

John Hughes
Bahrain Freedom
Movement
London

Scottish
Political
News

by our Scottish political
affairs correspondent

Controversy has long surrounded the SNP Government’s series of *Building a New Scotland* papers promoting independence, of which 12 have been published so far. The disagreements are not so much about the content, but over the fact that public money has been disbursed on civil servants’ whose time has been spent on producing party political propaganda.

The papers have included one on *An Independent Scotland in the EU* which claimed that the Brussels bureaucrats will welcome Scotland with open arms because of its “vibrant culture”. A couple of hours watching the BBC Scotland channel will put them right.

However it seems the SNP are wasting their time as well as public money. A paper on how brilliant the marine sector will become was admitted to have cost £14,059 to produce. It has been viewed online just 1,295 times meaning it cost

£10.85 per view. Under Nicola Sturgeon the first paper attracted 78,571 clicks, while another 81,925. Now, under Humza Yousaf’s watch, interest has drastically declined with the three latest on 3,902, 2,860 and 3,168 views. Of course, these figures do not mean they were actually read.

It was not just the Tories who objected to the SNP using public money for their propaganda. On the nationalist fringe Chris McEleny, Alba’s general secretary, complained that “instead of tackling head-on the issues those open to voting for independence may have – the New Scotland series has become a tool used by the SNP to try fool independence supporters into thinking they are serious on the issue. Sadly they no longer are”.

Two Labour
Own Goals

Labour has just lost a Glasgow councillor and a prospective parliamentary candidate after both were denounced for making racist remarks.

First Glasgow councillor Audrey Dempsey was suspended from the party after being accused of making racist comments. She claimed at a Labour Group meeting that “racist attacks on white children and teachers” were on the rise but did not provide any figures to back up the claims. The Scottish nationalist daily, the *National*, then unearthed old social media claims that asylum seekers had been given preferential treatment over Scots. Later it emerged that Ms Dempsey had “liked” a tweet erroneously claiming Humza Yousaf had given a million pounds of taxpayers’ money to Hamas and another calling him the “Pakistani prime minister of Scotland”. After the suspension she resigned

from the party, saying she had raised concerns about the direction of the party and its politics which had been “simply ignored”. She now sits as an Independent on the finely balanced council.

A slightly bigger fish also came a cropper for similar reasons. Wilma Brown, Labour’s candidate for the Westminster seat of Cowdenbeath & Kirkcaldy, once held by Gordon Brown, and presently one of the two Alba Party seats was suspended after “liking” racist and Islamophobic social media posts. She also called the First Minister “Hamas Yousless”. The fact that she is a senior figure in Unison, Chair of the union’s Health Service Group Executive to be precise, has not gone unnoticed. Both the SNP and Alba have denounced Labour’s vetting processes as a result of the latter case.

Glasgow
victory

A modest victory has been secured by the workers of the 13th Note, a fashionable Glasgow music venue, which before closure charged £9.00 for a 33cl bottle of Belgian cherry beer. They were sacked after the owner put the venue into liquidation following a 48-hour strike over low wages last summer which was the first bar strike in Scotland in 20 years.

As a result of the Employment Tribunal decision they will receive the maximum remuneration of 90 days wages for their unlawful sacking which came in the middle of attempts to negotiate a settlement.

Nick Troy, the Unite shop steward at 13th Note, said after Tuesday’s victory: “When it came to sacking us, the company didn’t even have the decency to inform us first – issuing a press release to the media before telling the

workers that they had lost their jobs”.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham chipped in to say that “the ruling is a complete vindication for the workers who unionised in the face of shocking conditions which saw the venue shut by environmental health”. With the support of Unite, the workers are now planning to take over the lease from Glasgow City Council.

Hate crime...

It appears that the people of Scotland have suddenly become nicer to each other. After the first week of the Hate Crime and Public Order Act saw over 8,000 complaints, the second week saw a decline to only 1,832 online cases according to Police Scotland. As with the first week, the vast majority of the complaints were ill-founded.

In the first week only three per cent were crimes. Following complaints from feminists that women were left out the SNP are hastening to bring in a new law to remedy that deficiency by the end of this year. It is not yet clear if the new measure will make it an offence to criticise the performance of the former First Minister.

As soon as Yousaf announced his new law he came under attack from the famed author JK Rowling, for having an “absolute contempt for women and their rights” after Yousaf claimed those who are not legally female could now take advantage of the new law.

However the events of the first week rumble on. One of the people accused of an offence was the First Minister on the basis of a 2020 Holyrood speech in which the then Justice Secretary violently denounced the Scottish legal profession for being too white. It now appears that official transcription

of that speech was toned down to make it sound much more reasonable.

An early bid to repeal the new Act will be made this week. This will also certainly fail but it will provide another opportunity to embarrass Yousaf.

In theory the boys and girls in blue will be happy that they can get back to dealing with murderers, burglars and SNP finances. But the senior officers are too busy fighting each other for these tasks. They are not impressed by the new Chief Constable, the first female holder of the post, Jo Farrell.

Needless to say that is not admitted in public, but Calum Steele, General Secretary of the International Council of Police Representative Associations, formerly of the Scottish Police Federation has admitted the Police Scotland is not a happy ship.

The Deputy Chief Officer has lodged a formal grievance against the Chief Constable and so is not at work. The Chief is under a small cloud for using a police car to take her from Edinburgh to her Northumberland home when a serious storm cancelled trains.

On another legal matter the SNP have effectively raised the white flag. Plans to introduce juryless trails in rape cases were effectively abandoned on Tuesday when the Justice Secretary said that plans to introduce a pilot scheme will be postponed until late 2028. This had been opposed by almost the entire legal profession. The Law Society of Scotland said that the right to a jury trial was a basic human right and that defence lawyers would boycott them. However a new sexual offences court will be established if the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill which is presently creeping through Holyrood becomes law.

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Stop Israeli terror now!

by Theo Russell

Over 80,000 people joined a London-wide protest calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza last Saturday, which ended in a mass rally outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, central London.

Millions of people across Britain have been marching every weekend for over six months now, in by far the biggest mass peace movement since the protests to try and prevent the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. But while our imperialist masters, the global Lords of War, brushed aside those protests, since October 2023 the Palestine protests in Britain and around the world have shaken our ruling class to the core, and put them on the back foot.

Addressing the rally in Parliament Square, former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn told protesters that



• Outside Parliament.

people all around the world were marching. “Let us continue and let the people of Gaza and the West Bank, the refugee camps and the diaspora, know that you are not alone. We are here with you, we will give you our support for as long as it takes until there is a free Palestine for the Palestinian people to live in. Our message to parliament over there is, ‘we ain’t disappearing,

we’ll be here, watching what you’re doing’.”

CND General Secretary Kate Hudson said: “Friends, two weeks ago Israel launched its attack on Damascus, killing 16 people. This was a hugely provocative and illegal attack by Israel, but the way the media and the politicians talk about, it you’d think that it’s Iran that wants to start a wider war.

“But the truth is it’s Israel that wants to start a wider war, not only with Iran but in Lebanon too. Such a conflict would be terrible, how many thousands would be added to the terrible death toll in Gaza?”

“But the greatest toll would be if Israel uses its nuclear arsenal, which could kill hundreds of thousands of people, and affect hundreds of

thousands more through radiation burns and poisoning, miscarriages and birth defects.

“It was Britain which in the past made it possible for Israel to develop its nuclear weapons. It was Britain which supplied 20 tons of heavy water to Israel, with no safeguards against military use.”

All of those taking part last Saturday would never have believed last October

that they would still be marching six months later, with the death toll in the Gaza Strip reaching over 33,000, including almost 12,000 children under 15 and over 8,000 women and girls over 14.

But millions of British citizens, the vast majority of the entire population of the UK, support an immediate, permanent ceasefire. The Tories, Labour and some Unionist parties in the north of Ireland, who call for arming Israel and support Zionist aggression, are the only ones resisting this demand and they are increasingly isolated. But the mass solidarity movement with the people of Gaza and Palestine will continue until Israel’s genocide and collective punishment ends. Then the priority will be to demand a just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict once and for all, with a genuine state the Palestinians can call their home.

Old Town blues

by Ben Soton

The BBC’s latest Monday night drama, *This Town*, is actually set across two towns, or more precisely cities in the 1980s. It covers some of the politics, music and culture of the period featuring the Handsworth riots in Birmingham as well as the IRA bombing campaigns. Also featured are the music based sub-cultures of the period; skins, rude boys and Zulus; whilst the involvement of organised crime gives it an updated Peaky

Blinders feel.

The story centres around an extended family that cuts across ethnicity, nationality although interestingly not class. The Birmingham side of the family, mixed race British/West Indian includes Gregory Williams, a soldier in the British Army (played by Jordan Bolger) and his younger brother, (played by Levi Brown) a college student and aspiring musician Dante.

Meanwhile the Irish-Catholic Coventry side of the family, the Quinns, include Bardon (played by Ben Rose), another

college student and aspiring musician; his IRA father Eamon (played by Peter McDonald) and

alcoholic mother and ex-wife Estella (played by Michelle Dockery).

The series proves that

Michelle Dockery should not be seen as a type-cast actress; she can ably play a working-class alcoholic as well as an aristocrat from *Downton Abbey*.

It opens with a scene from the Handsworth Riots of 1980 and shows the extent of police racism of the period. Many of the scenes are intersected with music from the era as many contemporary bands had their origins in the West Midlands.

Much of the plot centres around attempts by Dante to avoid being drawn into organised crime whilst Bardon struggles to avoid being drawn into the IRA campaign by his father.

The plot is further complicated when Gregory, Dante’s brother, is ordered by his superiors to spy on the Irish side of his family. In this sense the drama reflects bourgeois attitudes of the time that are still around – that being Irish makes you susceptible to “terrorism” and being black makes you susceptible to organised crime. To avoid this both Bardon and Dante, along with other teens form a band as a means of escape amid numerous references to the M6 as a way out of Birmingham. Needless to say the essence of the series is that of individualism versus the community.



Middle East crisis: China stands for peace

US propaganda is increasing its efforts to shift the blame for the escalation in the Middle East onto People's China. On Monday, CNN published an article with the headline directly asking: "Can China play a role in avoiding an all-out war in the Middle East?"

The article said the recent outbreak of tension between Iran and Israel "has raised questions over how much leverage China wields over Iran and whether Beijing is willing to turn its political capital into influence". It pointed out that "reining in Tehran" in the ongoing conflict could prove a thornier task for China, as it lacks the ability to pull economic levers to influence Iran's behaviour due to a lack of "real coercive power in the region".

But China has no intention of seeking "coercive power" in the Middle East. In fact, CNN's so-called "weaponising trade relations," using economic influence for political pressure, is a common tactic employed by the USA. It is petty-minded to judge China's diplomacy from the perspective of the despicable practices of the West says Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University. China doesn't view economic exchanges as a geo-political tool, let alone use them to "rein in" other countries.

CNN is wrong. The key to solving the Middle East conflict is

not "reining in Iran". The responsibility lies with the USA and Israel. The conflict between Iran and Israel started with an Israeli airstrike that destroyed the Iranian consulate annex building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, resulting in 16 deaths and violating the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961. Iran retaliated 12 days later and gave the US and neighbouring countries 72 hours' advance notice. However, CNN is turning a blind eye to these facts.

Not only CNN, but in the recent confrontation between Iran and Israel, Western countries, including the USA, have once again demonstrated double standards. They displayed an ambiguous attitude when Israel's bombing resulted in Iranian casualties and property damage, while "unequivocally condemning in the strongest terms" Iran's retaliation against Israel,

stating that "Iran has further stepped toward the destabilisation of the region".

It is America's pro-Israel stance in the Israel-Palestine conflict that has triggered a series of subsequent military conflicts and spillover effects, including the recent flare-up between Iran and Israel. Therefore, who should play the biggest role in "avoiding an all-out war in the Middle East"? The answer is the USA.

Unfortunately, with its enormous influence, the USA fails to play its due role, but instead adopts a double standard stance. This is the real problem that lies behind the tense situation in the Middle East, says Tian Wenlin, a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

The main key to easing tension in the Middle East lies in the Americans restraining Israel, not China "reining in" Iran. The USA repeatedly demands that

China influence Iran and attributes one of the causes of the tense situation in the Middle East to China's failure to influence Iran as desired by the West. However, the fact is that the root cause of the tension in the Middle East lies in the Israel-Palestine issue, and the way out of this fundamental problem is through a two-state solution, for which the only obstacle is to get Israel to agree, and the one who can truly exert influence is none other than the USA.

The Gaza conflict itself and the conflict between Israel and Iran are likely to continue, said Liu. According to media reports on Monday, Israel's war cabinet remains determined to respond to Iran's attack and reviewed military plans for a potential response, while Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said on Tuesday that Iran will respond to any action against its interests.

Against this

background, it's just for China to call on the relevant parties "to exercise maximum calm and restraint and resolve their differences and disputes in accordance with the purposes of the UN Charter and international law to prevent further escalation". China will continue to play a constructive role in resolving the Middle East issue and help de-escalate the situation. The USA should also bear its due responsibility in the conflicts in the Middle East, rather than shifting blame onto China.

Global Times



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Xi Jinping buries Zelensky's bogus peace plan

by Lyuba Lulko

Western organisers of a conference in Switzerland in June intend to promote Ukrainian president Vladimir Zelensky's "peace formula" to end the conflict with Russia. His "peace plan" calls on the Russians to pull back to their 1991 borders and pay reparations to Ukraine. Needless to say no Russian representatives will be going.

The organisers believed that the countries of the Global South, led by China, were going to join this "peace conference" and de-

velop joint actions to force the Russian Federation to accept their terms. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen threatened China with sanctions for co-operation with Russia while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was sent to assess Beijing's readiness to use its influence on Moscow to join Western efforts to hold this "peace summit" on Ukraine in Switzerland.

But during the visit of a German delegation to China, Chinese leader Xi Jinping told Scholz that Beijing will only support a peace conference recognised by both Russia and Ukraine. "We must cool the situation rather



than add fuel to the fire. We must reduce the negative impact on the global economy and refrain from undermining the stability of global industrial and supply chains," Xi said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also came to Beijing. After the meeting with Lavrov, Xi rejected the "Zelensky peace formula" having thus sent a strong message to the Glob-

al South.

The USA and the EU are China's main export markets, but the West is just as dependent on imports of a wide range of Chinese goods including military supplies. China continues to withdraw from American treasury holdings amid concerns about the issue of sanctions over Taiwan. If the West starts a full-fledged economic war with China, this will entail Beijing's flight from the dollar and the euro. China thus has all the power to crush both these currencies and the global financial system that rests on them.

The West will not be

able to break China's close ties with Russia, and this enables the latter to bypass Western sanctions. Russia and China will implement their plan for Ukraine. If the situation on the battlefield becomes worse for the Ukrainians by June, this plan can be strengthened by involving India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa and other countries of the Global South.

It is already clear what demands Russia is going to put forward. This is the denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine and the consolidation of its territorial gains.

Pravda.ru

Palestine Congress defies German ban

by Jamal Iqrith

The police storm a legal meeting by the Palestine Congress in Berlin that was holding a tribunal on German military aid to Israel. The conference was then banned. The German government also prevented an eyewitness of Gaza atrocities from entering the country to participate in the tribunal – Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta, a rector of the University of Glasgow. But the organisers succeeded in livestreaming the tribunal "against German complicity in the genocide in Gaza" on 14th April.

The first part was ded-

icated to German support for Israeli crimes and Nicaragua's lawsuit against Germany before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in this context. The ICJ's decision in South Africa's case against Israel over allegations of genocide in the Gaza Strip on 26th January was also discussed.

Lawyer Nadija Samour declared that the argument, also used before the ICJ, that Germany is primarily supplying "ammunition for training purposes" to be null and void. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* had shown that this "training ammunition" was used in the Gaza Strip. Samour said the German government is obliged right now

to take the "genocide" seriously and put an end to it before it is too late.

Palestinian-American legal scholar Noura Erakat showed that the goal of the Genocide Convention of 1948 was not the "punishment for genocide that has already occurred," but the "prevention of future genocide". The argument that the ICJ would first have to establish that genocide had actually taken place before measures could be imposed against Germany therefore does not hold water.

Furthermore, Erakat continued, the debate as to whether it is genocide in the legal sense distracts from the Israeli war against the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. Instead, the

key point is that the warfare is "unacceptable" in light of the more than 15,000 children killed and "must be stopped immediately".

Erakat also described it as "racist" that "30,000 Palestinian victims" had not been enough for governments in the Global North to express words of criticism towards Israel, but that they had only protested loudly after the seven aid workers from an international humanitarian organisation were killed.

In the second part of the tribunal, two "eyewitnesses to genocide" reported on their experiences in the Gaza Strip since 7th October. The German-Palestinian medical student Jamila Hamadaqa argued that 50 per cent of

the population of Gaza are minors. While the bombs and rockets were already driving the adults to despair, the situation for the children in the Gaza Strip was "indescribable," she said.

Abdallah Abdelhadi, who grew up in Darmstadt, Germany, and now works as a paediatrician in Gaza, said that 7th October had shown "how important a free Palestine is." Every act of legitimate Palestinian resistance that the population had taken against the occupation had been crushed and punished by the Israeli state, including peaceful forms of protest.

The tribunal concluded with the adoption of

a resolution accusing the Federal Republic of Germany of supporting Israel and demanding an immediate ceasefire. The demands also include extensive reparation payments to the Palestinian people, the immediate cessation of all military, diplomatic and economic support for Israel by the German state and an end to "over 76 years of Zionist settler colonialism and ethnic 'cleansing' of the entire occupied Palestine".

Germany had "learned nothing from its past," said a spokesperson for the Palestine Congress at the presentation of the resolution. "Never again!" must apply to everyone.

Junge Welt