

# Taking Action for Palestine!

by our Arab Affairs correspondent

Imperialist leader Joe Biden vows to continue providing “ironclad” support for Israel as the Zionists press on with their genocidal war against the Palestinian Arabs of the Gaza Strip. Intense street battles continue in Rafah, in the south of the Palestinian enclave, as Israeli troops advance into the city packed with terrified civilians. Meanwhile the Arab League summit meeting in Bahrain has ended with the Arab leaders calling for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel until the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Back in The Hague the International Criminal Court has applied for arrest warrants for Israeli war criminals including the Israeli prime minister as well as a number of Palestinian resistance leaders, while the Iranians publicly mourn the loss of President Ebrahim Raisi who died in a helicopter crash along with his foreign minister and six others last week.

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim Kahn KC, says he has



requested arrest warrants from the court’s judges for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, along with some top Hamas leaders. Kahn said that the charges against Israel’s premier and defence chief are for the crimes of “causing extermination, causing starvation as a method of war including the denial of humanitarian relief supplies and deliberately targeting civilians in conflict”.

“We submit that the crimes against humanity charged were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Palestinian civilian population pursuant to State policy. These crimes, in our assessment, continue to this day,” said Khan in reference to Netanyahu and Gallant.

Meanwhile Israel continues to take heavy losses in the Gaza Strip while failing to achieve any of the goals it set for the war on the Palestinian enclave. The Zionists have failed to crush Hamas and the other Palestinian resistance movements. They have failed to free any of the remaining prisoners held in resistance hands. Half a million

Israelis fled to Cyprus to escape the conflict. Fighting across the Lebanese border has forced some 70,000 Israelis out of frontier settlements in northern Israel and over 1,500 Israelis have been killed and 10,590 wounded in the current round of fighting that began last October.

This week three Western countries, Ireland, Norway and Spain, announced their recognition of the State of Palestine. Israel has predictably denounced the move, which they said would “fuel extremism and instability,” and recalled its envoys to the three countries in protest.

But the Communist Party of Israel and the communist-led Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash), which has four seats in the Israeli parliament, has applauded the three Western countries’ historic recognition of Palestine.

“The recognition sends a message to the Israeli government and its American supporters that a large global majority rejects the Israeli occupation and Israel’s war of destruction in Gaza,” they said in a joint communiqué. “This wave of recognition of

Palestine should not be seen as a diplomatic crisis but as an opportunity for peace. It signals to Israel that if it turns toward peace and co-existence alongside an independent, sovereign, and equal state of Palestine, it will live in peace with the region and with the world.”

The Palestinian government, which administers the autonomous zones in the occupied West Bank, has special status observers’ rights at the United Nations and it is recognised by 143 of the 193 members of the world forum, including People’s China, Russia and India.

At the moment only eight members of the EU recognise the State of Palestine – Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden. Malta, along with Slovenia, recognises the concept of one and they too may soon recognise the Palestinian state. Though the Americans and their lackeys have repeatedly blocked the Palestinian bid for full membership of the UN this decision may trigger a wave of recognition in the Western world that has blindly supported the Americans and Israel in the past.

## FUND

Election Time! Politicians on TV talking all sorts of nonsense. People on the street making all sorts of promises...this is why we’ve got to get our communist weekly out. Supporters raised £670 for the *New Worker* fighting fund this week. Many thanks to the Southall comrade who gave us £200, the south London supporter who sent in a score and the Notts reader who gave us £50. The May appeal now stands at £2,493. We need £1,007 to hit our target for the end of the month.

While hundreds of thousands take to the streets to demand justice for the Palestinians and an end to the carnage in Gaza Starmer & Co say nothing. While working people search for jobs that don’t exist or wait for months or even years for operations the union bureaucrats do nothing. While those who claim to lead us churn out the usual platitudes reserved for election time the ruling class sits back confident that none of them, whatever rosette they wear, is ever going to seriously challenge their wealth and privilege.

There is an alternative. Help us put the communist answer to the crisis back on the workers’ agenda by maintaining and broadening the circulation of the *New Worker*. Help us in the fight for peace and socialism. Help us keep up the fight, come what may, by sending in your donations to the *New Worker* fund. All donations to the fighting fund help keep our presses rolling. Big or small it all counts. Please send yours to: New Worker Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the ‘New Worker’.

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

INSIDE	
LAOS	.. P5
PALESTINE	.. P10
ASSANGE	.. P10
ISRAEL	.. P11
XI & PUTIN	.. P12



# THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

## Singing in the Rain

**Rishi Sunak vowed to “fight for every vote” as he called a snap general election for July during a downpour outside Downing Street on Wednesday. He certainly needs to, given the 20-point lead Labour currently has in the opinion polls.**

Harold Wilson, the man who led Labour to victory four times in the 1960s and ‘70s, once said that a week is a long time in politics, so anything can happen in the next six weeks. But at the bookies Sir Keir Starmer is the odds-on favourite to take Sunak’s place, so barring a miracle it looks like curtains for Sunak on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July.

The Tories’ dismal performance at the local elections in May and the drubbing they got at the Blackpool South by-election doesn’t augur well for them in the future. They lost more than half the local council seats that they were defending, and though Sunak tried to boost Tory morale by claiming that the seven to nine per cent swing to Labour wasn’t enough to give them an overall majority few believed him.

One of the reasons for the Tory collapse is the rise of the Faragist Reform Party. And even though Nigel Farage isn’t standing for parliament this time round his new platform will almost certainly take hundreds of thousands of votes away from the Conservatives. Few disaffected Conservatives will ever vote Labour, many will turn to Reform, the Greens or the Liberal-Democrats, while disaffected Labour voters – particularly in the northern “Red Belt” that went Tory over Brexit at the last election – may easily return to the fold now that Britain is out of the EU.

Starmer’s problem will be in getting the Labour vote out given his lacklustre manifesto that barely differs from the Conservatives he claims to oppose. A few crumbs to the unions; some meaningless pledges on the health service and housing, and a promise to renationalise the railways in some form. That’s all it is.

Starmer & Co stand for little apart from personal ambition and slavish support for American imperialism and what they believe to be the dominant section of the British ruling class. But unlike the Tories they face no serious challenge from within the labour movement. Labour’s army of local government jobsworths and the legion of trade union bureaucrats that run the big unions and the TUC will go along with the “New Deal” while many others on the street simply want to see the back of the Tories.

Few will turn to the left posers and the other charlatans on the fringe of the labour movement who say they are “communists” or “revolutionary socialists” while standing on utopian or left social-democratic platforms that only garner part a protest vote.

Within the Muslim community some will support George Galloway, who is defending the Rochdale seat he won for the Workers Party of Britain in February, and others who are also standing on independent pro-Palestinian platforms. This will, no doubt, draw votes away from Labour in some constituencies, but whether this will cost Starmer any seats remains to be seen.

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his colleague, Diane Abbott, are another matter altogether. Both are outstanding Labour MPs victimised by the Starmer clique for daring to speak up for the Palestinian Arabs. They have the support of their constituency parties. If they stand as independents, then we must support them.

# A Shot Across the Bows

by John Miles

**Rumours abound that the UK and France will escalate involvement in Ukraine’s proxy war on Russia. And Defence Secretary Grant Shapps has admitted that the British government has given the Ukrainians permission to strike Crimea with UK-supplied weapons because it considers the peninsula part of Ukraine.**

The Putin government has warned of significant consequences. More than a month out from a horrific terrorist attack outside Moscow the Kremlin has made clear it will not allow civilian life to be threatened on Russian soil.

The Kremlin conveyed its stance this week amid concerns that NATO-aligned countries will escalate their involvement in Ukraine’s war against Russia. French President Emmanuel Macron has discussed sending French troops to assist Kiev’s embattled armed forces, while rumours have spread that the UK may provide weapons and even technical advisors to enable a Ukrainian attack on the Crimean Bridge.

Russian officials met with diplomats from both countries, threatening severe consequences.

“I can tell you both of them were taken out behind the woodshed and given a huge whoop-ass beating by the Russians,” says American documentary film-maker Regis Tremblay, who now lives in Crimea in the Russian Federation.

“They were told in no uncertain terms that if their

missiles – and I’m talking about those Storm Shadow missiles from the UK and France and the ATACMS missile system from the United States – if they are used to attack deep into Russia, and that means Crimea, they will meet with a devastating retaliation,” said Tremblay on Sputnik TV’s *Critical Hour* programme this week.

“It will be worse than anything they could imagine, and they not only told them that we’re not talking just about Ukraine, but ‘beyond’. Those were the exact words that were used in the Russian media today... I think this is a very definite shot across the bow, finally, by Russia to issue a warning to the United States, the UK and France and anybody else who’s thinking of using these kinds of weapons in the Russian Federation.”

Tremblay said the conflict in Ukraine is viewed by Russians as an existential threat. Russia has long had an antagonist relationship with NATO, fearing an attack by the Western alliance for decades during the Cold War. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw an invasion from Nazi Germany that killed some 27 million Russians but ended in defeat for the Third Reich, while the French met a similar fate when their emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, marched into Russia in 1812.

Russia’s history has taught the country to take all threats seriously, said Tremblay. “It’s been stated very clearly that the policy of the United States and, therefore, of these idiotic, crazy European leaders, is the strategic defeat of Russia,” he said. “The Russians understand exactly

what that means.

“Last month they reelected their president overwhelmingly with 80 some percent in favour of him being returned to office. It’s a major statement that the Russian people understand exactly what is going on... the Russian people clearly understand what the agenda is and how serious it is.”

Discussion then turned to the 2022 destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline. The attack is widely assumed to have been carried out by the USA in order to sever a key economic link between Moscow and Berlin.

A cryptic assurance by President Joe Biden that he would “bring an end” to the Nord Stream project in the event of an escalation of the Donbas conflict has been seen as implicating the USA in the act of environmental terrorism. America’s allies in Europe have consistently declined to investigate the source of the attack.

“It’s an indication of guilt,” said Tremblay, responding to news that Sweden has ruled out support for an international probe of the incident. “They don’t want it to come out in any kind of formal international investigation. It’s really disgusting.

“This policy and foreign policy of NATO and the United States is so fractured, it’s so idiotic, it’s so sophomoric that it’s hard to believe it’s really happening because the stakes are so high... It’s a crying shame that the rest of the world is openly not condemning the United States and NATO for this obvious war crime that was committed against the Russian Federation.”

*Sputnik*





# Workers' Notes

## Capitalism at Work in Glasgow

by New Worker correspondent

**The Annual General Meeting of the Lloyds Banking Group took place at the Armadillo in Glasgow earlier this month. Largely due to inertia this correspondent has a very modest small shareholding as a result of the demutualisation of the Leeds Permanent Building Society in the 1980s which allowed him to observe how British finance capital works, or pretends to work, along with about 300 others knocking about in a 1,120 capacity auditorium.**

Founded in Birmingham in 1765, Lloyds Bank Group is now one of the largest banks in the UK. It has the widest geographic coverage having swallowed up the near bankrupt and older Bank of Scotland (HBOS) in 2009, which by then included the Leeds and Halifax building societies. Until recently it owned the Trustee Savings Bank and presently owns Scottish Widows – all of which contributed to the increased £5.5 billion profit made last year. Much of this goes to private shareholders, including £9.90 to this one. It was bailed out in 2009 in the aftermath of the financial crisis when the Labour Government bought a 43.4 per cent stake as a reward for saving the failing HBOS. That shareholding was finally disposed of in 2017 to ensure that private investors can reap benefits of taxpayers' money.

Lloyds says it's selflessly devoted to "Helping Britain Prosper" by lending money to help build "affordable housing" and supporting sustainability by investing in net-zero businesses.

Unmentioned is Lloyds' investment in fossil fuels or arms companies such as British Aerospace. These matters were helpfully raised from the floor by a succession of protesting shareholders. The Chairman, Sir Robin Budenberg, had

hardly begun his speech when a young lady near me stood up and denounced Lloyds for supporting genocide in Gaza saying the Chair and all shareholders had blood on their hands. She was soon firmly removed by the stewards, clearly well briefed, but after a few more words from the Chairman another soon took her place to add that Lloyds was the eighth largest investor in arms companies.

These protests did not go down well with the shareholders. The sixth and seventh protestors were fortunate to be removed by the stewards before irate local shareholders got their hands on them. Incredibly one angry shareholder actually shouted it was good to support genocide. Another yelled that investing in Shell was great because it was good for dividends.

Due to the fiddly electronic voting I regrettably voted to give the directors a pay rise. But my 539 votes made very little difference to the 39,404,320,770 approval to 1,488,085,791 against (96.36 – 3.64 per cent). This 3.64 was the second largest dissenting vote and it is the customary way for small shareholders to register their dissent. The top 25 shareholders hold over 50 per cent of the shares, so the voting was a bit of a farce. On my last visit to the AGM, in 2018, this was 21 per cent.

After the CEO and another director gave their equally pious speeches about how diverse and green they were the shareholders were allowed their official say.

One grave issue raised by a local councillor was that of the removal of a mobile bank serving Bonar Bridge in Sutherland which means the golf club will have nowhere to deposit the proceeds of its nineteenth hole and the church collection will go unbanked. The Chair told him to use the Post Office which the councillor said was rubbish.

Another aged shareholder complained that Lloyds should force builders to construct smaller houses so that he could downsize. Yet another suggested abolishing the Human Resources department to save money which could be devoted to keeping branches open.

In responding to all these points Sir Robin was remarkably skilful in politely avoiding giving an inch, making a single

commitment, or giving a single straight answer whatsoever. No wonder they made him Chair.

A bigger issue is the long-standing HBOS Reading Branch scandal. This began in 2007 when it became clear that many small businesses which were supposed to be assisted by a unit of the bank devoted to helping them over rough patches were in fact being asset stripped by corrupt managers in conjunction with dodgy outside "turnaround" consultants who charged huge fees for their "services". Bankrupt companies (including a pornographer) were sold at low prices to their mates, resulting in people losing their homes.

Six HBOS officials were jailed for the £248 million fraud, but only after long delays, and after regulators and high-ups in the bank ignored the claims. Some alleged victims have not received compensation they think is their due.

However Lloyds claim the matter has been settled, and those continuing to claim were in fact owners of companies beyond redemption and were not victims of fraud. A spokesperson for these businesses said that the Lloyds' black horse belonged to Dick Turpin and claimed that banking with Lloyds had the same effect on customers as the PTSD experienced by soldiers who saw their comrades blown up.

The Chair seemed to be well acquainted with the complainant and his arguments and told him to report this to the police or the regulators. The complainant then accused them all of being totally corrupt. Again, the other shareholders were generally not impressed about the fraud allegations. It is difficult to know who is most at fault: the grand or the petty bourgeoisie. Large financial institutions generally like to settle things quietly rather than allow them to be dragged on in public. It is just possible that this is like the Jimmy Savile affair when just about anyone who was ever in the same room as him sought compensation after his nefarious activities had been exposed.

Another speaker, an ex-employee no less, claimed that Lloyds would need up to four billion rather than the allocated £450 million to deal with potential claims over commission for car

purchase loans. He also claimed he was sacked from Lloyds for whistle-blowing on a rogue trader and that his boss who was sacked for activities could have brought down the bank in 2015.

Despite the Chair's optimism, it was clear that British capitalism is in deep trouble. At the 2018 AGM shareholders were welcomed with a choice of seven varieties of tea and Danish pastries, freebies of pens and chocolates along with the full Annual Report and a very agreeable lunch with three fruit juices on offer. This time it was only plain biscuits, no freebies and merely a packed lunch consisting of a chicken sandwich, a chocolate biscuit, an apple and a bottle of water. Times are indeed hard...

## Closures

The day after the AGM *Which?* reported that 6,000 UK bank branches have closed in the past nine years, resulting in 33 parliamentary constituencies, including two in London, without a single branch. On that day eight more Barclays branches closed.

The consumer magazine accused the banks of "seemingly engaging in a race to close branches" after the government announced plans in 2020 for laws to protect access to cash that would potentially make it more difficult to shut a branch if alternative provision was lacking.

Two-hundred branch closures are scheduled for the rest of 2024, including 50 from NatWest, 43 from Lloyds, 28 from TSB, 26 from Halifax, 20 from Royal Bank of Scotland and 14 from Barclays. In all 60 per cent of the branch network has been lost. Unite is the main union involved. But the mega-union which incorporates the former banking staff union has, with few exceptions, been largely silent on the issue.

*Which?* says the next government should commit to delivering at least 200 banking hubs in the first two years following the election. These would be run by Post Office staff where customers of almost any bank could do their business. However, the Post Office's record is hardly encouraging.

Meanwhile the trendy Metro Bank says it's cutting 1,000 jobs, or a fifth of its workforce, to cut

costs – or as they say these days to allow for "transitioning to a more cost-effective model". It is also stopping seven day opening.

Two weeks ago TSB announced it was cutting 250 jobs. These were not front-line workers affected by its branch closures, but those engaged in the fraud department.

Unite regional officer Andy Case said "the decision by TSB to cut 250 roles is a grave mistake. Through extensive negotiations Unite has been able to substantially reduce the number of jobs at risk. However, that isn't sufficient, the union is pressing TSB to urgently reconsider its damaging bank branch closures plan". At a time when customers are increasingly concerned about financial fraud and often need support from a local bank branch this is the wrong course of action".

*We conclude with a round-up of recent and forthcoming strike action, which while not great set piece battles are still important skirmishes in the class war.*

## Transport

Essential workers at the GXO Logistics base in Feltham, West London are taking strike action which could bring life in London to a halt from next Tuesday.

GXO Logistics transport essential supplies such as Costa Coffee and Whitbread's beer to various chains including Premier Inn – which is bad news for thirsty guests who will have to make do with water or go elsewhere to quench their thirst. This strike will last until the middle of June.

The action involves both warehouse workers earning slightly over £12 an hour and HGV drivers who get less than present market rates despite the company having a £7 billion revenue.

Unite regional officer Lui D'Cunha said that "our members play a key role in GXO's operations. GXO knows this. It has had every opportunity to make a fair pay offer but has declined to do so."

## Security

At the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) about a

*continued on page 4...*

...continued from page 3

thousand JobCentre security guards took strike action last Monday, which will be repeated on Tuesday and Wednesday next week.

Since December 2022 G4S has had a £211 million contract from the DWP. The employment cost of these workers is £161 million which leave £50 million for shareholders. In contrast a real terms pay cut has seen 90 per cent of them paid just the minimum wage. Eamon O’Hearn, the GMB National Officer, points out that “these workers are spat at, stabbed, hit with bottles and threatened with death while doing their job. Yet 90 per cent of them can barely put food on the table – earning just the minimum wage”. He added that “G4S seems incapable of sorting this out; GMB calls on the DWP to step in and ask where the £211 million they’ve handed over has gone.”

Another group of security workers taking industrial action are those at the central London hospitals of Guys & St Thomas’ where 30 workers are striking in the last week of May until 2<sup>nd</sup> June in search of a 98 pence an hour pay rise. They are also opposing the hospital trust’s refusal to pay for breaks or calculate holiday allowances based on a standard 37.5 hour working week.

Guys and St Thomas’ NHS Trust is refusing to offer any

increase despite their wages being much lower than at neighbouring hospitals such as Kings’ College, where a security officers’ salary starts at £30,000 per annum.

Sharon Graham, Unite’s general secretary said “the trust should be hanging its head in shame. It is completely unacceptable that it is exploiting these workers, who play a critical role keeping staff and patients safe, by paying them much less than security staff at other London hospitals”.

An anonymous striker deplored the fact that “our security management got a pay increase last year, but our salary remains the same, despite our role becoming increasingly more dangerous. We deal with everything, from volatile patients to opening and unlocking various hospital departments. It all comes with a great deal of risk, but that is ignored by the trust. We have had enough”.

Regional officer, George Dodo-Williams, added that “decision makers at Guys & St Thomas’ continue to turn their backs on our members – ignoring Unite’s fair and reasonable demands. Our members have been forced to strike and responsibility for any disruption caused lies entirely at the door of the leaderships’ mismanagement. Industrial action will continue to escalate until the trust puts forward an acceptable offer”.

A third action by security guards, also in London, is being carried out by the small street union – the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) – who are continuing their nearly two year struggle at University College London to be divested of their outsourcing employer and taken back in-house on the same terms as directly employed workers.

### Manufacturing

Over 100 workers at Berry’s Norwich factory are taking strike action after rejecting a 3.5 pay offer which was supposed to be settled last October. This is, of course, an effective pay cut.

Berry is not to be confused with the posh London wine shop but is the trading name of Massmould Ltd, which makes caps and lids for cleaning, personal hygiene, medicinal and food and drink products.

Unite regional officer Mark Walker said “Berry will have to explain to its clients that their packaging supply lines will be disrupted because it is refusing to pay its workers properly out of greed. The strike action will exacerbate existing operational delays, which are a result of skilled staff shortages that are a result of Berry’s deplorable rates of pay”.

Further north 170 British Engines’ workers employed in

# THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

## SUBSCRIBE NOW!

4 weeks: £6; 3 months: £20;  
6 months: £30; annual: £50

Name.....  
Address.....  
.....  
Post code.....  
Cheque/POs, made out to  
New Worker, to: NW Subs, PO Box 73, London  
SW11 2PQ.

Newcastle and South Shields by BEL Engineering, Rotary Power and Michell Bearings are taking strike action having rejected a three per cent pay offer. They will down tools from 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> May. BEL Engineering is a specialist engineering design and manufacturing services company. Rotary Power makes hydraulic motors and pumps, and Michell Bearings produces hydrodynamic bearings.

This miserable offer came after 19 per cent real terms pay cut over the past five years at a time when annual profits have been around the five million mark.

Unite regional officer Anna Lavery said “British Engines’ clients will not be pleased that their supply chains are being disrupted because of the company’s greed. There is still time to avoid strike action but that will require British Engines’ leadership to put forward three acceptable offers”.

**JOIN US!**  
**For peace!**  
**justice!**  
**socialism!**

I would like to join the New Communist Party....  
I would like more info about the NCP....

Name.....  
.....  
Address.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
postcode.....  
phone.....  
Send to NCP, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.



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

**21<sup>st</sup> May 2004**

**THE LEADERS of four giant unions – the Transport and General Workers Union, public sector unions Unison and GMB and general union Amicus – last week met to agree a list of demands for the Labour Party manifesto in the run-up to the general election.**

*They have drawn up a draft document, Trade Union Agenda for Labour’s Radical Third Term, containing policies to “re-energise Labour’s core support and connect with Labour voters in the heartlands”.*

*This was discussed at a closed meeting, to which representatives of all unions*

*affiliated to Labour were invited, along with some left-wing MPs and other Labour affiliates.*

*Only a brief reference was made to the disastrous policy on Iraq, registering deep opposition to the “foolhardy” support of the war. The rest of the document concentrated on domestic policy, especially the involvement of the private sector in public services and continuing privatisation.*

*It calls for dramatic change of direction over public services, pensions, manufacturing and union rights.*

*It acknowledges that public services need to offer more choice to voters, but a future Labour government should call a halt to the “costly policies of marketization and privatisation”, especially the “discredited” private finance initiative which has been implemented to fund all new hospitals.*

*It described these ventures as “costly failures”. While consumers needed choice, introducing competitive systems, which inevitably create incentives to cut standards should not provide it, it says.*

*After the initial seminar leaders of the*

*four major unions went on to address the 200-strong group of trade union MPs – with the clear message they wanted a response in exchange for their donations and sponsorship.*

*Their aim is to produce a common front for the party’s national policy forum in July.*

*Tony Woodward, TGWU general secretary, had made calling such a meeting the core of his platform when elected head of Tony Blair’s own union last summer.*

*Those attending were asked to keep details confidential but with Tony Blair’s authority waning, the unions are seeking to recover some influence.*

*Labour Party membership is plummeting; down by more than 150,000 from the 400,000 when Labour won power in 1997. With an election looming and little money in Labour’s coffers, the unions will be asked to dig deep.*

*Last autumn’s Labour Party conference saw the big unions, by co-ordinating their actions achieve a series of defeats on the party hierarchy.*



# Laos: Building socialism from scratch

by Michael Christopher

When it comes to countries in Asia building socialism, places like China and Vietnam may come to mind for many people, but not too many think of Laos. Landlocked between Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and China, this mountainous country sits in the centre of South-east Asia and has lived through French and Japanese colonialism, civil war, and years of military attacks by the United States.

During the American Indochina War two million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos, nearly equal to all the bombs dropped in Europe and Asia by the Americans during all of the Second World War – nearly a ton of explosives for every person who lived in Laos at the time.

Since the overthrow of the American backed monarchy and the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, the people of Laos have been engaged in a long effort to develop their economy and prepare the basis for a modern socialist future.

## The National Democratic Revolution

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1975, Laos' American-backed King Sisavang Vatthana formally abdicated the throne, much to the dismay, though not the surprise, of his allies in Washington. With the fall of Phnom Penh in Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Saigon



in south Vietnam earlier that year, anti-monarchist protests swept Laos as well. The grass-roots resistance forces of the Pathet Lao – the Lao People's Liberation Army – entered Vientiane, peacefully, but armed. The king understood what the future would bring if he attempted to maintain power, and instead, he voluntarily ended his 16-year reign.

With the stroke of a pen, more than 20 years of struggle and war against colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation, were finally over. Political power was formally handed over without bloodshed to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). As the red, white, and blue flag of the free Lao nation was hoisted over the capital of Vientiane alongside the scarlet banner of socialism, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) was born.

The young Lao PDR inherited what many would have considered an untenable set of circumstances: Around 10 per cent of the Lao population had been killed as a direct result of the French

colonialist and American imperialist wars; a further 20 per cent had been injured or permanently disabled; around 10 per cent had become refugees abroad; and at least 50 per cent had been displaced from their home villages in some form. Life expectancy was just under 46 years old, literacy was below 25 per cent, and millions of unexploded American bombs littered the countryside.

As a result of the exploitation of the colonial period, productive capacity in the country was nearly non-existent; what little was left in the way of infrastructure was largely damaged or destroyed in the wars of liberation – the struggle against French colonialism, and the “secret war” waged against Laos by American imperialism.

During the Communist Party of China's early period in the revolutionary struggle in that country, there was a debate between members who believed China's lack of productive capacity required a period of capitalism first in order to establish the productive base necessary for socialism, and those who advocated an

adapted approach: rather than relying primarily on industrial workers as the leading force, as Russian revolutionaries had, a greater alliance of workers and peasants would be necessary.

Nearly two decades later, of the 19 representatives recorded as attending the first congress of the Lao People's Party (now the LPRP) in Houaphan province, only two were recorded as being workers, with 13 recorded as peasants, and the remaining four being from the “petty bourgeois” class. So, observing the material reality of their nation and following the approach of the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam, the LPRP determined it was necessary to rely on a worker-peasant alliance.

On this question, there was really little debate to be had. Whereas China and Vietnam at least had small industrial bases, Laos had virtually none. The distinct characteristics of the Lao economy – rural conditions dominated by agricultural workers – shaped policy development following the founding of the Lao PDR.

## The Three Revolutionary Campaigns

### I: The Revolution of Productive Forces

After 1975, the LPRP and its General Secretary, Kaysone Phomvihane, led further revolutionary programmes in all areas of Lao society: the productive forces, the scientific-technical revolution, and the ideological-cultural revolution. Beginning in 1979, a reassessment of Lao economic realities began to be developed which would reach its climax at the party congress in 1986.

Formally known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), the reforms of this period were modelled after the New Economic Policy (NEP) formulated by Lenin in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, as well as utilising lessons learned from the experiences in neighbouring Cambodia, People's China, and Vietnam.

The LPRP accepted the economic reality that advanced socialism could not be constructed on a pre-industrial base. It was necessary to develop the nation's industrial capacity, moving away from a war-time footing and towards a productive market-based economy capable of uplifting the whole Lao nation. In his 2015 book, *The Party and People of Laos Choose and Adhere to Socialism*, Mounkeo Oraboun, a former government minister wrote “the economy in the democratic regime of the Lao people is a commodity economy with many parts operating according to the ‘market mechanism with state management,’ which

*continued on page 6...*



...continued from page 5

is the correct view and appropriate to the actual conditions of Laos”.

This revolution of productive forces combined the establishment of state-owned enterprises and increased emphasis on the development of local infrastructure with the development of new agricultural and social policies.

As mentioned above, at least 50 per cent of the Lao population had been displaced in some form during the war. And with a population of only around three million people in 1975 but a total land area of around 236,800 square kilometres, Laos had a population density of only around 12.6/sq. km. This meant that the Lao PDR had an altogether unique opportunity in terms of resettling its population and carrying out widespread agrarian reforms.

With vast amounts of sparsely populated territory, the government was able to resettle whole villages in new areas with land more suitable for agricultural cultivation and industrial development. For communities such as the Khmu and other so-called “hill tribes” that had migrated to the region very recently and settled in the most inhospitable areas high in the mountains, this meant moving to the lowlands where the soil was more suited for farming.

Opposite to the disastrous “emptying of the cities” carried out by the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, the LPRP actively encouraged the development of larger population centres and the coalescing of villages, resulting in many cities and towns across

the Lao PDR only coming into existence after 1975. This made it easier to develop infrastructure projects; rather than attempting to reach isolated communities high in the mountains, they could more easily bring those communities to the lower areas, create easier access via the construction of roads, and in that way vastly improve the livelihoods of the people through the introduction of healthcare, education, centralised administration, and so on.

## II: The Scientific-Technical Revolution

In applying the principles of Marxism-Leninism to post-war conditions, the LPRP initiated developments in Laos that would have seemed wholly impossible five decades ago. In effect, the LPRP succeeded in transforming the nation from an oppressed feudal-colonial nation into a developing socialist state without a period of full-fledged capitalism.

The population has more than doubled, to nearly seven-and-a-half million, increasing density to around 31.3/sq. km. The recovery of the population and its urban densification is an indi-

cator of development, but it is by no means the only one. While education is not yet free for all Lao people, the national literacy rate has exploded from less than 25 per cent in 1975 to 87.1 per cent as of 2015—meaning that literacy in Laos has matched or even surpassed the United States, depending on the statistical source one consults.

True to its foundations, the LPRP seeks to improve education and encourage building up the Lao working class into professionals with a strong knowledge base and highly developed skill sets. The first step in this scientific-technical revolution has been to maximise access to education, vastly improve literacy, and begin the process of attracting a return of knowledgeable professionals from the Lao diaspora while simultaneously developing the first generations of new Lao workers at home.

According to a survey conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 2016, the Lao PDR is home to five central hospitals, 17 provincial hospitals, 134 district hospitals, and 983 health

centres, totalling around 1,139 facilities, or one health facility per 6,000 or so people. Even more facilities have been constructed since the survey was conducted. By contrast, the US boasts around one facility per 50,000 or so people.

While the state issues an insurance programme, defraying health-care costs for many people, and access has been expanded since the founding of the Lao PDR, the quality of care and remaining costs continue to be a focus of ongoing policy reforms and development. Likewise, due to the resettlement programmes following the war, the remaining areas with lower access are largely those communities who chose to remain in more difficult-to-access areas in the mountains or chose to return to the mountains rather than remain in new settlements.

As for the reliance on foreign aid, according to one research paper published by the Mekong Institute in 2014, Official Development Assistance (ODA) accounted for only around four per cent of Lao GDP

between fiscal years 2000-01 and 2008-09. This was utilised primarily to cover funding gaps in government-led programmes around agricultural development, health, and education. The share of GDP represented by ODA has declined as Lao socio-economic development continues, indicating the overall development of the nation and its growing self-sufficiency.

And the costs of war continue to suck up national resources. A portion of foreign aid, for instance, is still allocated every year towards the deactivation and removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO) dropped by the Americans during the war; in total, around 8,000 sq. km. of the country remains contaminated by UXO.

## III: The Ideological-Cultural Revolution

The *Phra Lak Phra Ram*, the traditional Lao adaptation of the *Ramayana* – the story of a Bodhisattva named Rama, one of the previous lives of Gautama Buddha – is considered the mythi-

cal origin story of the Lao nation. While it is likely that Buddhism arrived in the region earlier, local legend holds that the great story was brought to Laos by King Fa Ngum, who established the first Lao kingdom of Lan Xang in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Buddhist religion has, and remains, the overwhelming majority within Laos, with each village hosting at least one Wat or temple. However, so-called Buddhist nationalism as has emerged in neighbouring Myanmar is not present, and the Marxist LPRP maintains a policy of religious harmony rather than forced atheism.

Traditional Buddhist and animistic religious and cultural practices exist so closely alongside one another that they often intersect, such as in the prevalence of so-called “spirit houses”. These small house-shaped shrines placed atop pedestals are believed to attract good spirits who will ward away bad ones. They’re so popular that even many Buddhist temples and most family homes have them.

Rather than atheistic persecution, as is often incorrectly associated with socialist governance, the LPRP maintains a policy of religious freedom and actively encourages the robust flourishing of religious and cultural diversity within the nation. No greater example of this exists than the reconstruction of Hai Hin Mixayaram in Phonsavan. The site was destroyed by American bombs during the war and was rebuilt thanks to cooperation between local Buddhist and party authorities.



• The China-Laos railway – opening up new prosperity.



Following the temple's reconstruction, in 2015 the Huge Buddha of Hai Hin Mixayaram was then added to the temple, looking out over the city of Phonsavan and the Xiengkhouang plateau. It symbolises a promise of protection and prosperity and the determination to never allow the indiscriminate terror of war to hurt the people again.

At its core, the Lao ideological-cultural revolution is the social reflection of developments in the Lao political economy. As the building of socialism brings common prosperity, so too does it bring equality for people, regardless of gender, ethnic group, or religious affiliation.

Being a predominantly agrarian society – agriculture still represents 51 per cent of the Lao PDR's GDP, and nearly 80 per cent of the population is engaged in farming – Lao traditional culture remains strongly oriented around one's family and village. In colonial times, this meant unequal rights between men and women, enmity between the various tribes and ethnic groups, and so on. Today, the Constitution of the Lao PDR guarantees religious freedom and equality for all people, regardless of gender or ethnic origin.

By maintaining the closest relationship possible between the government and the people, developing a people's democracy that is direct and responsive to the interests of the entire society, the LPRP continues to strengthen its direct relationship with the public. As in neighbouring China and Vietnam, anti-cor-



• A bumper harvest.

ruption campaigns and efforts to further ensure the broadest possible representation of all people within the democratic system have been a major focus of recent policy reforms.

## Laos looks to the future

Xiengkhouang province perhaps best represents the

cumulative progress and development resulting from these individual policies and the ongoing development of Laos. As mentioned in previous reporting on the Lao PDR, Xiengkhouang province and its geographically vital plateau were host to some of the fiercest combat between pro-independence Pathet Lao forces and the American-backed

Royal Lao Army.

By 1975, much of the province, including its ancient capital, Khoune, lay in total ruin, with massive bomb craters and UXO scattering the once-prosperous landscape. Nearly all pre-war inhabitants of Xiengkhouang were evacuated over the course of the war in order to avoid indiscriminate bombing. As UXO-clearing and

reconstruction began after the war, government-led resettlement brought many families back, as well as introducing many more.

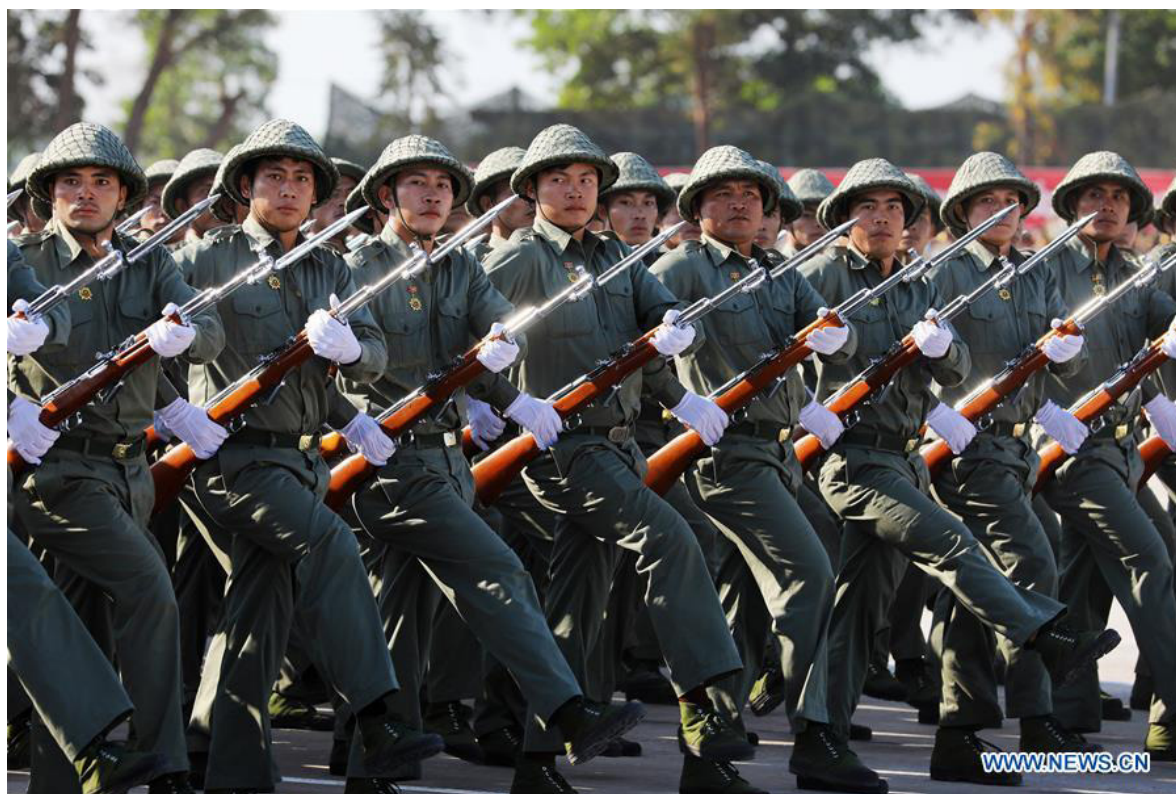
Today, the new capital of Xiengkhouang province is the city of Phonsavan, established after the war. Deactivated UXO are a common sight, used for everything from decoration to construction, and

the highly diverse population of the area includes a sizeable Hmong community.

The Hmong people, being one of the "hill tribes," traditionally live high in the mountains. Their numbers are so sizeable that thousands of Hmong people come to Phonsavan from around the world in order to celebrate Hmong New Year, one of the most important events in the Hmong culture.

Near the centre of the city stands an agricultural co-op, while all around it the land is put to cultivation. The inhabitants of one village, Ban Na Pia near Plain of Jars Site 3, are traditionally farmers, but they've also developed a unique handicraft industry of their own—melting down UXO and turning them into various trinkets for sale. This has earned their locale the nickname "spoon village." The city's nearly 40,000 inhabitants are serviced by four hospitals and countless smaller clinics.

The Lao PDR, as a developing nation, still has a long road ahead in its pursuit of socialism. However, by pursuing socialism without entering a period of full capitalism, building the socialist-oriented New Economic Mechanism, and continuing the development of economic reforms on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, the Lao PDR, with the LPRP at the helm, has accomplished more in the past five decades than would have seemed possible in 1975.



• Lao People's Army at the ready.



## LETTERS

### Dear Comrades

Hello dear friends! We need your help!

As you know, political statements related to military decisions are usually voiced after they have already been made.

This is what happened with the statements of French President Emmanuel Macron. It turned out that when he spoke about “the potential possibility of sending French Foreign Legion fighters to Ukraine” the members of this armed formation were already in Ukraine.

One of the members of this unit was captured by us. This person is Russian-speaking, but this does not prevent him from fighting for the interests of Paris. It is very important for us that every person in France, that every person in Europe will watch his interrogation.

Ordinary people in France and other countries in Europe should know that they are already involved in a major war. However, any conflict has different stages of escalation and today there is still a possibility to avoid a world catastrophe.

We know history including the French anti-war movement. We remember that when the First World War started the Socialist leader Jean Jaurès spoke in favour of peace. He voted against war loans, for which he was shot dead by a French nationalist while having breakfast in a café on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914. Jean Jaurès was a consistent fighter against militarism, colonialism, and war. He foresaw doom, but despite this, he consciously pursued his political line. It is worth noting that he was alone in his struggle. At the time, French public opinion was in a frenzy of patriotism. However, history has put everything in its place and the name of Jean Jaurès is still a symbol of peace and justice.

The founders of the international anti-war cultural association Clarté, writers Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, Nobel Prize winner Jean-Paul Sartre, philosopher Louis Pierre Althusser – these are the names with which France is associated today. Macrons come and go but the French people remain. However, this man, together with his team, can drag our society into a vortex of events so terrible, that neither we nor you can get out of it!

We ask for your support and international solidarity!

We ask you to show this news to all your acquaintances, especially those people who are connected with the press, public authorities, politics, and public activities.

To maintain his power, Emmanuel Macron is ready to throw millions of people into a bloodbath, and we must stop him!

With respect and friendly greetings, survivor of the 2<sup>nd</sup> May Odessa massacre

**Alexey Albu Borotba (Struggle)**

*Borotba is a Marxist movement that is part of the Ukrainian resistance.*

### Dear Comrades

All through the terrible massacre in Gaza by Israeli forces we have never heard from any source about what the “After plan” for the area is to be. Plainly there must be something of the sort somewhere.

From what I can gather from the sparse details given in newspapers/radio/TV etc, Israel has systematically destroyed the infrastructure needed for the people to continue living there – buildings, water plants, university buildings blown up – why the vast unnecessary destruction?

The only thing I can

consider about all this is that it could be part of an Israeli plan for the “Final Solution” to the Palestinian problem. If the people cannot live there any longer and all the population of Gaza are war refugees, they, like the Ukrainians, can go overseas. If we take say 100,000, and the rest of Israel’s allies take the same or more refugees, it will ‘solve’ the problem for Israel and they can incorporate the 125 square miles or so of Gaza into Israel.

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

### Dear Comrades

Xi Jinping’s successful visit to Europe during which he discussed increasing trade, boosting investments and promoting people to people contact through business links, study and tourism came at a very significant time. While China seeks co-operation to achieve sustainable development Washington and Brussels are obsessed with sanctions, trade restrictions and war. Taking their cues from the US administration an increasingly dysfunctional EU is obsessed with trade barriers, Russophobia and an imagined Chinese threat. A dependence upon overpriced American gas supplies is crippling European industry and the situation has been made much worse by the unbelievable incompetence of most EU leaders.

China’s President was given a warm welcome wherever he went. In Serbia, which 25 years ago was being bombed by the NATO war machine during which the Chinese embassy was attacked, he received an enthusiastic ovation from a vast crowd who had gathered to meet him. He was recognised as a statesman who had come in peace to promote friendship and mutual understanding. The two

sides agreed to strengthen their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Agreements were reached to increase Serbian agricultural exports. Among the passengers on new direct flights to Beijing will be young students invited to study in China. Xi referred to an old Chinese proverb “Those who unite in righteousness are friends.”

A high-speed railway is under construction between Belgrade in Serbia and the Hungarian capital Budapest. During Xi Jinping’s visit to Hungary an agreement was reached to elevate bilateral relations to an ‘All Weather Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’. The visit provided an opportunity to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Xi said that China and Hungary have always respected each other, treated each other as equals and pursued mutual benefits.

The imperialists are no doubt horrified and panicked by these examples of mature diplomacy and will stop at nothing to try and prevent such developments. The shocking assassination attempt on Slovakia’s PM, Robert Fico, underlines the dangers of the western supported media sowing the seeds of extremism and hatred.

The Chinese President also paid a state visit to France where he met President Macron and also held tripartite talks with EU leader Ursula von der Leyen. No doubt Ukraine was on the agenda as the West would like China to drop its principled policy on the issue. France is a close ally of the USA and Macron lacks the tough pragmatic independence of Charles de Gaulle

*continued on page 9...*

## Diary

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

#### UNTIL MON 30 SEPT

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

#### SAT 25 MAY

Korean Friendship Association; Report back from DPRK 14:00–17:00, and lecture on Juche. Chadswell Centre, Harrison Street, London, WC1H 8LD.

#### SAT 25 MAY

Free Julian Assange Campaign: Protest 13:30, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, London SE18 16:00–18:00, Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, London SW1. Also: Wed 29 May: 15:00–17:00 Australian High Commission, Strand, London WC2B 4LA.

#### SAT 25 MAY

Care4Calais Scotland: Fund-raising concert. 20:00–21:30, RCGG King of Glory, 77 Craigentinny Road, Edinburgh EH7 6QJ. Tickets £10 at [www.tinyurl.com/care4concert](http://www.tinyurl.com/care4concert)

#### SUN 26 MAY

Solidarity Action with a Palestine Action Prisoner: Demonstration. 13:00–15:00, Marsh Gate, Doncaster Prison, Doncaster DN5 8UX. Bring drums and pans so we can make some noise!

#### 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](mailto:islington.museum@islington.gov.uk) for free ticket.

#### THURS 30 MAY

Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers: The Role of the Law in the Struggle for Palestinian Liberation. 18:30–20:30, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E1 5QJ. Hybrid meeting. Book: <https://tinyurl.com/Haldane-30May2024>

#### SAT 1 JUNE

Stand Up to Racism: Stop fascist Tommy Robinson. Counter-demonstration, The Strand, London WC2. Details TBC.

#### SAT 1 JUNE

Socialist History Society: John Merrick on Raphael Samuel and People’s History. 14:00 after AGM. In person, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU. Book on SHS website.

#### SUN 2 JUNE

CND: Meet survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ. Details TBC.

#### 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 8 JUN

Stop the War Coalition: War, peace and Palestine – trade union issues. Conference. 10:30–16:30, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA.

#### WED 12 JUN

RMT: 17<sup>th</sup> Garden Party for Cuba. 18:30, Maritime House, Old Town, Clapham, London, SW4 0JW. Tickets £20 from [bit.ly/RMTCuba24](http://bit.ly/RMTCuba24)

#### 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: 40<sup>th</sup> 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 22 JUNE

Jarrow Rebel Town Festival. 11:00 Parade, assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Followed by social at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32 3LX.

#### SAT 29 JUN

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

#### SAT 29 JUN

Stand Up To Racism: National Demonstration Against Deportations to Rwanda. London Details TBA.



...continued from page 8

which will limit progress on a number of issues. The EU needs to wake up and understand two important things. Firstly, we now live in a multipolar world. Secondly, we realise that it has been conned and weakened by US imperialism

**John Maryon**  
Suffolk

### Dear Comrades

FIFA has been urged by international lawyers to uphold its own policy and scrutinize Saudi Arabia's human rights record before picking the kingdom to host the 2034 World Cup. A 22-page document was delivered to FIFA headquarters in Zurich this week on behalf of Mark Pieth and Stefan Wehrenberg of Switzerland and British barrister Rodney Dixon.

They offered to work with FIFA on an action plan and monitoring of Saudi Arabia by independent experts. Their paper calls on FIFA to use its leverage now with Saudi Arabia to comply with international human rights standards that the world soccer body's own policy since 2017 has required of tournament hosts. "It is obvious that Saudi Arabia falls very far short of those requirements," the document states. "Given this, as matters currently stand, FIFA simply cannot properly permit it to host the 2034 World Cup". They cite Saudi Arabia's record on freedom of expression and assembly, treatment of prisoners and migrant workers, and male guardianship laws that limit personal freedoms for women. The Saudi bid must be submitted by July and will be confirmed on 11<sup>th</sup> December in an online vote by FIFA's 211 member federations.

**John Hughes**  
Bahrain Freedom Movement  
London

## Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

### Rishi Sunak's decision to call a snap election in July hasn't gone down well with the SNP.

But Scottish Labour was upbeat at the news. Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: "After 14 years of Tory chaos and failure this is an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. Scotland is crying out for change and that change is only possible with a Labour government led by Keir Starmer that is on the side of working people." Somewhat over-optimistically the Scottish Conservatives called the election a "huge opportunity to defeat the SNP" and end their "obsession" with Scottish independence while the Liberal-Democrats made their usual appeal for "change".

However, in the nationalist camp, First Minister John Swinney says the decision to hold the poll as Scottish schools begin their summer break was the "latest act of disrespect" from the Westminster government. Many would agree with the SNP's new leader when he went on to say that the Conservative government had done "enormous damage" to Scotland. But to claim that "Scotland is protected by the SNP. If you vote for the SNP, you vote for a party that's going to put Scotland first" is

clearly debatable.

At the Scottish government level, the nationalists are still neck and neck with Labour in the opinion polls but when Scots are asked about their voting intentions at a general election it's a different matter altogether. The latest surveys put Labour well ahead of the pack in the general election stakes. Labour is currently around seven points ahead of the SNP which could give them more than thirty Scottish seats – all at the expense of the Scottish National Party.

The Greens also have high hopes. Scottish Greens co-leader Lorna Slater MSP says: "Scottish Greens are ready to go, we will be standing more candidates than ever before on July 4<sup>th</sup>. With Scottish Greens in the room, people can be sure climate justice and social justice will always be on the table."

But having been unceremoniously kicked out of office by their one-time SNP allies the blame game has begun. Thirteen members have been expelled. Their crime was not advocating re-opening the coal mines or the compulsory eating of babies but the even more appalling act of signing the *Declaration for Women's Sex-Based Rights* which includes the deadly phrase "sex is a biological reality". This was part of a statement issued by the feminist Women's Declaration International campaign that asserts that women have a right to maintain the sex-based protections enshrined in the Equality Act and that "women and girls have the right to discuss policies which affect them without being abused, harassed or intimidated".

The Greens' Inquisition has accepted wholeheartedly the complaints of the LGBT Rainbow Greens faction that the statement broke rules prohibiting the undermining of party

policy and "behaviours that constitute a threat to others".

One of those purged complained that "it wasn't a demand that the party overturn policy, merely that people be allowed to speak without being harassed and pressurised".

Robin Harper, the very first Green MSP, who been active since the days when it was the Ecology Party has also left the Greens, citing similar concerns. He says that as soon as he was joined by other Green MSPs, the only thing his colleagues were interested they were in was getting rid of him and preventing him from co-operating with the minority Labour administration.

He told the *Times* that "over the past three years, the Green Party has embarked on a relentless journey into unreality". Apart from denouncing the now discredited gender legislation he deplored setting of an absurd climate change target "that was clearly no more than a publicity stunt"; a recycling scheme designed simply to be different from England and all sorts of other matters which proved that "everything the Greens touch now turns to dust".

Today he works for Gordon Brown's Our Scottish Future, which has damned him in the eyes of his former colleagues.

The present Green co-leader Patrick Harvie moans that with their ejection from the Scottish Government "Scotland risks regressing to the 1950s", which is distressing for one who wants to take the country back to the 1250s.

Meanwhile two hi-tech pay disputes are underway, both under the auspices of Unite. On the lower reaches of the River Clyde, 600 workers employed by Babcock Marine at the Royal Navy's Coulport and Faslane bases are balloting for strike action.

Workers have overwhelmingly rejected

a seven per cent increase, backdated to August 2023, and a three per cent rise for the next pay round effective from this August.

Unite leader Sharon Graham says the membership "at Coulport and Faslane fully deserve a fair pay increase. Babcock Marine is a wealthy company that can easily afford to make a decent offer to its workers".

Further north, at the pioneering British nuclear power plant at Dounreay, more than 500 Nuclear Restoration Services workers went on a day-long protest strike after rejecting a poor pay offer consisting of a one-off £500 payment on top of a

basic 4.5 per cent increase. An overtime ban is in place and other strike days are threatened.

The two 1950s plants are now at the start of a lengthy decommissioning period expected to last until 2036. Industrial officer Marc Jackson says: "Unite has repeatedly told NRS that pay offers which amount to a significant pay cut just isn't going to be tolerated." He also warned bosses that: "We have a growing membership at Dounreay, which is down to the hard work of our shop stewards and NRS need to realise, if they don't already, that we are heading for prolonged industrial action."

### FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

**The Middle "Class"** by Neil Harris. £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**The ruling class, fascism and the State** by Neil Harris. £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**The poisoned well** (an insight into imperialist intelligence work). £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**Communists and the united front** by Neil Harris. £2 plus 50p p&p. (New Worker reprint).

**New technology and the need for socialism** £2 plus 50p p&p.

**Communists in Britain today** £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**Peoples's China in perspective** £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**The case for communism** £2 plus 50p p&p.

**The basis of scientific socialism**, the 1st chapter of *Anti Daring* by F Engels. £2 plus 50p p&p.

**On Stalin** £2 plus 50p P&P (New Worker reprint).

**Stalin & the BRS** £2 plus 50p p&p.

**How we got in the State we are** by Daphne Liddle. £1 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**All in the family** by Daphne Liddle. £1 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**Arab nationalism and the communist movement** by Andy Brooks. £1 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**Killing ourselves to live** by Daphne Liddle. £1 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

**The first 30 fighting years of the New Communist Party of Britain** £2 plus 50p p&p (New Worker reprint).

NCP Lit. PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.  
(cheques to New Worker)

**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**



# We shall return!

by New Worker  
correspondent

Last week over 250,000 demonstrators marched through central London to commemorate the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of over 750,000 Palestinian Arabs, three-quarters of Palestinian population, from their homeland in 1947/8, and the subsequent denial of their right to return. For over 76 years, the Zionist entity has denied Palestinian refugees their right to return to their lands and has entrenched a colonial-settler regime of control that systematically discriminates against Palestinians in all aspects of life. Israel's current genocide is built on the foundations of this



• Waving keys that symbolise the right to return.

project.

Activists from International Ukraine Anti-

Fascist Solidarity regularly join the Palestinian protests to highlight the

links between Western imperialism's wars in Israel, Ukraine and Yemen – the

role of NATO countries in all three conflicts sending weapons and money

and using sanctions to advance the aims of US-led imperialism. Their placards calling for an end to sending weapons and advisors to Ukraine and Israel, and peace talks in Ukraine, Israel-Gaza and Yemen, received an overwhelmingly positive response from the protestors including clenched fists and victory signs.

Ben Jamal, the director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, later said the march was an astonishing demonstration of solidarity. "After 14 marches calling for an end to all UK complicity in genocide, the movement is still growing in size and strength," he said. "Hundreds of thousands attended yesterday, from all sections of society".

## One up for Assange

On Monday WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange won a victory in his ongoing battle against extradition from the UK to the USA, after the High Court in London granted him permission to appeal.

Permission to appeal was to be granted only if the American government was unable to provide the court with suitable assurances that Assange can rely on the First Amendment (free speech) for protection.

The Americans had to prove that Assange, who is Australian, will not be prejudiced at trial due to his nationality, and will be afforded the same protections as an American citizen.

The American side also had to provide assurance that Assange would not be sentenced to death if convicted.

Assange's legal team



criticised the assurances provided by the US government at the hearing, arguing that "based on the principle of the separation of powers, the US court can and will apply US law, whatever the executive

may say or do".

Most of the assurances were "blatantly inadequate," said Edward Fitzgerald KC, representing Assange. However, the American assurance on the death penalty was accepted

by Assange's legal team.

The lawyer said in written submissions that while the assurance on the death penalty was "an unambiguous executive promise," the other assurances do not give

"any reliable promise as to future action".

Assange supporters cheered at the news of the court's ruling. He was not in court on Monday for health reasons, but those present included his wife, Stella.

"The judges reached the right decision... as a family we are relieved, but how long can this go on? The United States should read the situation and drop this case now. Now is the moment to do it. Just abandon the shameful attack on journalists, on the press and on the public," Stella told supporters outside the High Court. According to Assange's legal team, it could be months before the new appeal is heard.

The latest move came after the High Court deferred a decision in March on whether Assange

could take his case to another appeal hearing.

Assange, 52, is wanted by the Americans for allegedly disclosing national defence information following WikiLeaks' publication of hundreds of thousands of leaked military documents relating to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars a decade ago. These included video footage of an Apache helicopter gunship mowing down journalists and children in the streets of Baghdad in 2007.

Assange has been held in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison since 2019. The UK approved his extradition to the USA in 2022, after a judge had initially blocked it due to concerns over his mental health. Assange and his lawyers have subsequently appealed.

Xinhua



# Israeli crisis may lead to coup

Israel faces increasing demands to resolve the Gaza War amid domestic toil. War Cabinet Minister and former general, Benny Gantz, has threatened to resign unless Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepts his plan for the resolution of the Gaza conflict that could lead to Palestinian statehood.

The plan in question involves the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip and the creation of a multinational civilian administration. While Gantz set the deadline for this plan at 8<sup>th</sup> June, Netanyahu claims that acquiescing to these demands would result in a defeat for Israel.

Commenting on this development, Tel Aviv-based international relations expert Dr Simon Tsipis explained that Gantz's plan, if adopted, would ultimately result in the creation of a Palestinian



state – something that the Zionist factions who currently control the Israeli government vehemently oppose.

Netanyahu thus finds himself in quite a predicament as giving concessions to Gantz and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who previously urged Netanyahu to declare that Israel has no intent to

establish military control over Gaza, would cause other Zionist leaders like Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir to pull out of the government coalition, and vice versa.

“This is clearly the biggest crisis in Israel’s history,” says Dr Tsipis arguing that the Israeli government now finds itself on the brink of collapse. He

also highlighted another aspect of the problem: both Gantz and Gallant are former Israeli generals.

“There may be a risk of a military coup, because if Gantz and Gallant – both former generals and former heads of the general staff – if they decide to seize power and call upon their former colleagues, then this move would mean a

military coup in Israel, the ousting of Benjamin Netanyahu by convincing him to relinquish his power,” Dr Tsipis said.

Furthermore, agreeing to Gantz’s proposal would also be problematic for Netanyahu because the former would then likely call for snap elections – elections that Netanyahu would inevitably lose if

no foul play were to be involved.

Thus, whether he makes concessions to Gantz or not, either way, Netanyahu may be looking at the collapse of his government and the end of his political career.

Regarding the forthcoming visit to Israel by America’s National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, who is expected to hold talks with Netanyahu, Dr Tsipis argued that Sullivan essentially represents the interests of the US Democratic Party that currently holds power.

“The Democrats are interested in, firstly, the peaceful resolution of the Israeli war with the Gaza Strip, secondly, in the proclamation of the Palestinian state and thirdly, in Netanyahu’s ouster,” he claimed, arguing that Sullivan would thus try to persuade Netanyahu to agree to Gantz’s plan.

*Sputnik*

# Israelis poisoned wells in 1948 war

by Ed Newman

**The Israeli army used chemical and biological weapons during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, including poisoning wells in several Palestinian towns, original documents stored in the Israel State Archive have revealed. The Israeli daily *Haaretz* (The Land) has published an extensive article about the documents and the involvement of high-ranking officials such as the prime minister and generals.**

While once regarded as only a rumour, these new-found documents reveal that Israeli troops tried to poison wells and contaminate the drinking

water of the Palestinian community in 1948 under Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (David Grün).

Operation “Cast Thy Bread” was a plan to poison wells in Arab neighbourhoods and even some Jewish pockets to drive out the population and expand the Zionist state-in-the-making.

Though partially exposed decades ago, the extent of the operation as well as the involvement of high-ranking officials remained in the dark until now.

The documents show that Israeli political and military leaders and some scholars were partners in the decision, and that they

had even planned to poison the water in Cairo and Beirut, but changed their mind at the last minute.

The *Haaretz* reporter Ofer Aderet wrote that the poisoning was partially exposed decades ago by Arab sources when rumours and oral testimonies were reported in newspapers and books about an attempt by the Israelis in 1948 to poison wells in Acre and Gaza by adding bacteria to the drinking water.

However, the details of Israel’s secret use of biological weapons and poison against Palestinians during the 1948 war has been revealed in a recent article by historians Benny Morris and Benjamin Kedar.

Published by *Middle Eastern Studies*, Morris and Kedar’s research is a rarity because it was published against the wishes of the Israeli security establishment, which has tried for years to block any embarrassing historical documents that expose war crimes against Arabs, such as murdering prisoners, ethnic cleansing and destroying villages. The poisoning targeted dozens of Palestinian wells, including those in Acre and the Galilee village of Ilabun in the north.

Aderet wrote that the plan was to poison wells in abandoned Arab villages, as well as in Jewish locales that were due to be evacuated by

the state-in-the-making. The goal wasn’t mass poisoning, but rather an act of deterrence that would prevent Palestinians from returning to their homes.

Morris and Kedar said that the substance used spread dysentery and typhoid, adding that such diseases spread in Acre. The poisoning started on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1948 with the knowledge and supervision of several officials, including Ben-Gurion, the documents revealed.

The two researchers also said some Israelis objected to the poisoning, most notably archaeologist Shmarya Gutman, who in 1988 testimonies, said he vehemently opposed the operation on moral grounds

and warned that poisoning the water could also harm Jews.

As for Beirut and Cairo, Morris and Kedar also revealed that the Israelis had targeted Cairo and Beirut in retaliation during the first Arab-Israeli war. However, the Israeli agents tasked with travelling to both capitals received sudden orders to stop the operation.

Apparently, the operation was exposed in May 1948 when the Egyptian authorities in Gaza arrested two Israeli soldiers posing as Arabs, with tubes containing typhoid germs in their possession.

*Radio Havana Cuba*



## The key to world peace

by He Yin

**On 16<sup>th</sup> May Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.**

This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between People's China and the Russian Federation. It is an important milestone in the history of both countries. And Xi said that the most important conclusion drawn from the history of these relations is that the two neighbouring major countries must always promote the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, respect each other on an equal footing, trust each other, accommodate each other's concerns, and truly provide mutual assistance for the development and revitalisation of both sides.

This is not only the correct way for China and Russia to get along, but also the direction that major-country relations should strive for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Chinese leader said.

Over the years the two presidents have held over 40 meetings. Head-of-state diplomacy is leading the all-round development of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era.

In Beijing Xi and Putin had a candid and fruitful discussion – a comprehensive review of the successful experience in developing the China-Russia relationship and an in-depth exchange of views on major international and regional issues of mutual interest – charting the course forward for across the board co-operation.

The two heads of state signed a joint statement on deepening their comprehensive strategic



• A warm welcome for Putin in Beijing.

partnership. They also witnessed the signing of a number of important inter-governmental and inter-agency co-operation documents, injecting a new, strong impetus into the sound development of China-Russia relations.

China and Russia will uphold the principles of non-alliance and non-confrontation. They will continue to deepen political trust and respect each other's choice of development path.

In the past three quarters of a century, the Chinese-Russian relationship has grown stronger amidst wind and rain. China and Russia together have found a new path for major and neighbouring countries to treat each other with respect and pursue amity and mutually beneficial co-operation. The China-Russia relationship has become a prime example of a new form of international and good-neighbourly relations between two major countries.

The notable progress in China-Russia relations is attributable to the two countries' commitment to the Five Principles.

First, China and Russia

are committed to mutual respect as the fundamental principle of relations, and always render support for each other's core interests.

Second, China and Russia are committed to win-win co-operation as the driving force of relations, and work to foster a new model of mutual benefit.

Third, China and Russia are committed to carrying forward the torch of lasting friendship as the foundation of their relations.

Fourth, China and Russia are committed to strategic co-ordination as an underpinning of their relations and to steer global governance in the right direction.

Fifth, China and Russia are dedicated to the political settlement of hotspots and committed to fairness and justice.

With the concerted efforts of both sides China-Russia relations have been moving forward steadily, with enhanced comprehensive strategic coordination and further co-operation on the economy and trade, investment, energy and people-to-people exchanges. This has made positive

contributions to maintaining global strategic stability and promoting greater democracy in international relations.

The two sides will take the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the diplomatic ties as a new starting point to further co-ordinate development strategies while continuing to enrich bilateral co-operation to bring greater benefits to both countries and their peoples and contribute more positive energy to world prosperity and stability.

The two countries need to make further structural improvements to their co-operation, and consolidate the good momentum in trade and other traditional areas of co-operation.

Last year, China-Russia two-way trade exceeded \$240 billion, close to 2.7 times that of a decade ago. This is a good indication of the all-round co-operation of mutual benefit that continues to deepen between the two countries.

The two countries need to look for areas where their interests converge, tap into their comparative strengths, deepen the integration of interests, and enable each other's success.

They should make further structural improvements to their co-operation, consolidate the good momentum in trade and other traditional areas of co-operation, support the formation of platforms and networks for basic research, continue to unlock co-operation potential in frontier areas, step up co-operation on ports, transportation and logistics, and help keep the global industrial and supply chains stable.

The two sides should create more highlights for people-to-people exchanges, jointly host China-Russia Years of Culture, strengthen co-operation at all levels to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two peoples.

The two presidents have set 2024 and 2025 as China-Russia Years of Culture, proposed a series of cultural activities that are down to earth, close to people's hearts and popular among them, and encouraged closer interactions at all levels to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

Both sides are willing to continue to strengthen co-operation within the framework of the UN, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as well as communication on major international and regional issues, so as to establish a fair and equitable global governance system.

Both China and Russia are permanent members of the UN Security Council. It is the shared strategic choice of both countries to deepen strategic coordination, expand mutually beneficial co-operation and follow the general historical trend of multipolarity in the world and economic globalisation.

With Russia chairing BRICS this year and China taking over the Chair of the SCO later this year, the two sides will support each other's chairmanship, build a high-quality partnership that is more comprehensive, close, practical and inclusive, and build the unity and strength of the Global South.

As a Chinese saying goes, "A mountain is formed by accumulation of soil and an ocean is formed by accumulation of water". After 75 years of solid accumulation, lasting friendship and all-round co-operation between China and Russia provide a strong impetus for the two countries to forge ahead despite wind and rain. Having reached a new starting point, China and Russia will always remain committed to their founding purpose and jointly shoulder responsibility to create more benefits for their peoples and make due contribution to global security and stability.

People's Daily  
(Beijing)