

**by our Arab Affairs
correspondent**

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THE NEW WORKER

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Gaza: What next?

The Gaza ceasefire agreed this week has brought relief to the long-suffering Palestinian Arabs in the beleaguered Palestinian enclave and hope at last to the relatives of the prisoners held on both sides whose fate hinged on the success of the talks in the capital of the Arab state of Qatar. It remains to be seen if the Israelis honour the agreement they signed up to in Doha. But it's difficult to see how they can go back on their word over the truce that was pushed through on the insistence of an emissary of President-elect Donald Trump who returns to the White House on 20th January.

The deal – a total Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in return for a prisoner exchange – is essentially the one Hamas agreed to last May to end the fighting. Endorsed at the United Nations, the Biden administration and the Netanyahu government both supported it – indeed they said the plan had originated in Israel in the first place. But it was just a ruse to stall for time and divert world public opinion while the Israelis assassinated Hamas leaders and pushed on with their plan to re-occupy the Strip and drive out most, if not all, of the Palestinians Arabs to make room for Zionist settlers.

UN resolutions provide the basis for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. First of all Israel must totally withdraw from all the occupied territories seized in 1967, including Arab East Jerusalem and Syria's Golan Heights. The Palestinians must be allowed to establish a state of their own on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian refugees whose homes are now in Israel must be allowed to return or, if they so wish, be paid appropriate compensation in exchange. And all states in the region, including Israel, should have internationally agreed and recognised frontiers guaranteed by all the Great Powers.

Joe Biden fully approved of Israeli aggression. When he met Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his visit to Israel last year he said "I don't believe you have to be a Jew to be a Zionist, and I am a Zionist". But American support for Israel began long before Biden. When the Zionist state was proclaimed in 1948. When the first Arab-Israeli war began and around a million Palestinians were driven out of their homes to make way for Zionist settlement.

Israel is nothing without America. It is a pawn of the USA. The Zionist leaders strut the world posing as independent politicians – but US imperialism provides the military and economic support that keeps Israel going. The country is an American protectorate and their leaders will ultimately do whatever America wants.

Trump, in turn, loudly proclaims his own support for the Zionist entity. He also wants to keep the oil princes sweet. The section of the US ruling class that he leads wants to maintain the American presence in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf to build a new military bloc to threaten Iran and pave the way for US imperialism's total control of the global energy market. Trump and his cohorts may well believe that an end to the fighting is enough to keep the feudal Arabs on side. But the Palestinians, and indeed, virtually the entire world outside the USA, want to see a final end to the crisis.

As for Netanyahu – he wants to end his days covered in glory as the man who built 'Greater Israel' and brought the Palestinians to their knees. But he's failed on all counts. Whatever happens next this is their victory – not his.

For a strong UK–China relationship

by Li Guanjie

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, has just paid a three-day visit to China to revive bilateral economic and financial talks after a six-year hiatus.

Over the last 14 years with the Conservative Party in power, British policy toward China could be described as erratic. But after Labour returned to office last July, the UK has committed to establishing a long-term and stable relationship with China. During his meeting with President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit last November, the Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, emphasised the significance of a "strong UK–China relationship."

The first step in revitalising UK–China relations is to restore a high-level dialogue mechanism, which is a key aspect of the Labour government's approach to engaging with China. Since taking office, Starmer has put into action the Labour Party's election manifesto commitment to a "co-operate-compete-challenge" policy toward China, placing "co-operation" at the forefront.

The Starmer administration's policy of engagement with China faces considerable pressure from domestic sources as well as from the US government. On the one hand, the Conservative Party maintains a tough stance toward China, having formed a solid anti-China hawkish faction. Starmer's policy toward China needs to withstand the scrutiny of these opposing forces. On the other hand, as the closest ally of the USA, the UK must take into account America's strategic de-

ployments in its engagement with China. When the USA prioritises competition with China, the UK's co-operation with China may appear constrained. Under these domestic and external influences, it is quite challenging for Starmer to develop an independent policy toward China.

The Starmer administration however, is expected to adopt a pragmatic approach toward China driven by UK's national interests. First, addressing the weak domestic economy requires engagement with China. The current top priority of the Starmer administration is to restore UK's economy and society, particularly the 22-billion pounds of government debt left behind by the Conservative Party. Enhancing economic co-operation with China – especially by attracting more Chinese investment – could create additional momentum for UK's economic growth.

Second, stabilising China–UK relations necessitates fostering engagement and understanding with China. If the Starmer administration intends to develop a long-term and stable strategy toward China, it must begin by reinforcing the foundation of bilateral relations through economic and trade ties, thereby paving the way for increased exchanges and co-operation in other areas. Currently, the Starmer government has chosen not to impose tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China, underscoring UK's open attitude and willingness to engage with China.

Third, for the UK to achieve its goals as a 'Great Power', it

needs to engage with China. The UK has always viewed itself a global great power and remains committed to building a 'Global Britain'. Aside from nurturing close ties with the USA and the EU, the UK needs to enhance its engagement with China, as China has emerged as a significant global power with considerable influence. Given the UK's current capabilities, it can't sustain its status as a global power without forging deeper connections with China, the USA and the EU. This reality may also be a critical factor driving the current Labour government under Starmer to reshape China–UK relations.

Both China and the UK should embrace an open mindset toward the world as genuine supporters of free trade. The two major powers have ample opportunities for co-operation on a global scale, as they prioritise national interests and public welfare, address pressing global issues such as climate change and biodiversity protection, and both hold permanent seats on the UN Security Council. The Starmer administration must continue to work to eliminate third-party influences in pursuit of an independent and autonomous policy toward China. Healthy and stable China–UK relations would not only benefit both countries but also contribute to global stability and vitality.

The author is a researcher at the UK Studies Centre of the Shanghai Institute of Global Governance and Regional Country Studies at the Shanghai International Studies University.



Workers' Notes

by New Worker correspondent

Two members of Just Stop Oil, the direct action climate campaign, were arrested last week after they spray-painted the words "1.5 is dead" on the grave of Charles Darwin in London's Westminster Abbey.

The protest followed the news that 2024 was the hottest year in human history, with the average global temperature rising by 1.6 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

One protest organiser, Alyson Lee, told reporters: "2024 was the hottest year on record. We have already passed through the 1.5 degree that was supposed to keep us safe. Millions are being displaced. California is on fire. And three-quarters of all wildlife has disappeared since the 1970s."



• Credit: Jamie Lowe.

Alyson, a 66-year-old retired teaching assistant from Derby, said: "Ten years on from the Paris Agreement, we have already

exceeded the so-called safe temperature rise of 1.5 degrees, and are heading for over three degrees of warming. This rapidly acceler-

ating crisis means huge parts of the world will become unable to support life, resulting in millions of refugees, social collapse and

extinction for countless species."

She believes Charles Darwin would approve of their protest "because he would be following the science, and he would be as upset as us with the government for ignoring the science".

The other protester, Di Bligh, a 77-year-old former CEO of Reading Council, said: "Darwin once said 'it is not the strongest of the species, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change, that lives within the means available and works co-operatively against common threats'.

"Last year was the hottest since modern humans evolved. If we do not work together to rein in the corporations and billionaires driving us beyond our means, humanity will not be able to adapt to what is coming. We are on course to lose everything, and politicians are doing nowhere near enough to prevent it. How many will we have to bury as a result of climate breakdown and who will be left to mourn them?"

Changes at the Top

by New Worker correspondent

The results of the first senior officer union elections for this year have been announced. At the Bakers Food & Allied Workers Union, the incumbent general secretary Sarah Woolley was re-elected unopposed for another five-year term – an increasingly common event that reflects the lack of interest in union affairs at a grass-roots level in much of the labour movement these days.

Unsurprisingly, she said: "I am delighted to have been re-elected unopposed. It is the privilege of my life to be General Secretary of the Bakers Food & Allied Workers Union, and I look forward to working every day for all our members working across the food industry."

There's a bit more life in the Fire Brigade Union however, where the incumbent general secretary, Mark Wrack, has been ousted by his Vice President Steve Wright, who has long been a thorn in Wrack's side.

Before he got the top job in

2005 Wrack had been a member of the Socialist Party, a sprig of the old Trotskyist Militant Tendency, but he soon abandoned them in favour of the 'broad left' fronts favoured by the union factions that run most of our unions these days. Wright, who had once been a Wrack supporter, easily beat his rival by 5,188 votes to 3,436 – on a platform that was supported by independent left activists and the traditional right-wing Labour elements in the fight-fighters' union. The turn-out was a surprisingly high 29 per cent.

The biggest battle yet to come is likely to be in Unison, where it is presently uncertain whether the general secretary, Christina McAnea, will seek re-election after her first term as she already collects her pension.

More surprising was the news that firebrand Mike Lynch is retiring. He's standing down as general secretary of the mighty RMT rail union – a post which he has held since 2021. He is 63 and he's probably now looking forward to the quiet life. In his valedictory message Lynch said: "It has been a privilege to serve this union for over 30 years in all capacities, but now it is time for change. This union has been

through a lot of struggles in recent years, and I believe that it has only made it stronger despite all the odds." He concluded by saying: "RMT will always need a new generation of workers to take up the fight for its members and for a fairer society for all and I am immensely proud to have been part of that struggle." One thing for certain is that the battle for his successor will be a livelier affair than that for the Bakers.

Migrant Workers

by New Worker correspondent

In Norwich, the small street union Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and a similar, more recently formed organisation, The Pan African Workers' Association (PAWA) have been involved in a dispute with Apple Homecare, a local social care company which helps look after aged and infirm people in their own homes. The IWW complains that the owners have not only been forcing staff to work long, back-to-back shifts (up to 10 days in a row), they

are also underpaid, subject to arbitrary wage deductions, suffer delays in getting paid on time and are not being paid for their overtime.

As is increasingly the norm, many of these workers are migrants who are subject to visa restrictions that tie them to their employer just like a feudal serf in order to be able to remain in the country. Their appeal for support was tellingly made in English and Shona, the major language in Zimbabwe.

It has also been discovered that Apple Homecare illegally asks dismissed or departing workers to repay the sponsorship that Apple Homecare incurred when hiring them. Soon after PAWA and IWW supported the workers in submitting a collective grievance against their working conditions Apple Homecare became even more brutal. They have yet to receive their pay for December, a particularly serious matter for low-paid workers.

Needless to say, this is not an isolated case. About a third of workers in the care sector in England are migrants. The Work Rights Centre (WoRC), a London-based charity founded in 2016, does much worthy work on what it describes as "The For-

gotten Third".

It has recently pointed out that the care sector has one of the highest vacancy rates of any major industry. Not many people want a career that involves changing the nappies of octogenarians at 3am on the minimum wage. As a result, successive governments have depended on migrant workers to plug labour shortages in the adult social care sector. Many work on a Health and Care Worker Visa, a recent visa category introduced in February 2022. In December 2023 the visa was tightened up to prevent family members joining the workers, which has caused a fall-off in applicants.

With an ageing population, the adult social care sector is one of the largest and growing 'businesses' in the UK. Over one and a half million were employed in England alone last March. This amounts to about five per cent of the working population. It is estimated to contribute £68 billion to the economy. The trade body Skills for Care state that another 430,000 extra jobs will be needed by 2035.

WoRC recently carried out an in-depth survey of workers in the sector, hoping that the vague

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promises for a Negotiating Body and a Fair Pay Agreement for the adult social care sector will come to fruition.

Interviews with 21 migrant care workers and survey responses from another 71 reveal a grim picture. Fifty-five respondents were dissatisfied with their work schedules. Hours were either too long and all-consuming, or low and unpredictable, which in both cases makes it difficult to survive.

Apart from the poor pay, almost half of those who had to drive between appointments were unpaid for travel time. Unsurprisingly, WoRC's interviewees "reported experiencing a demoralising cycle of financial insecurity, which failed to represent the complexity and social value of their work and made it difficult to imagine staying in the sector long-term".

The law is of little help. Two-thirds reported an alleged employment rights breach in the last 12 months, including health and safety breaches, bullying and discrimination. The real picture is likely to be higher as many migrant workers don't like making trouble. Of those who had suffered, 39 per cent did not raise a complaint with their employer for fear of victimisation. Equally, reporting to external agencies such as charities, advice centres or unions was also seen as too risky.

WoRC argues that the Health and Care Worker visa is a "punitive visa regime" that keeps workers in chains as any complaints made to or about employers risked having their visa curtailed, citing several cases of carers using threats of visa curtailment to silence grievances. It noted that switching employers in such situations is not easy, only 16 out of the 38 who tried managed to find a new sponsor.

This is confirmed by a wider analysis by Violation Tracker UK of companies registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and licensed by the Home Office to sponsor migrant workers. This showed the Home Office granted sponsorship licences to at least 177 companies that have committed breaches of labour law and had been found guilty by Employment Tribunals, the Health & Safety Executive or the National Minimum Wage Enforcement agency. Unfair dismissal was the most common violation, followed by unauthorised deductions from wages and discrimination.

WoRC wants the Government to include migrants' voices in the planned negotiating body responsible for the 'Fair Pay Agreement'. In particular, issues such as driving time, unpaid overtime and the lack of sick pay for short illnesses must urgently be addressed.

It also wants immigration system reform, including end-

ing the sponsorship system. As a minimum it wants the Home Office to give visa workers more time to change sponsors and to ensure that those who suffered exploitation are given the unrestricted right to work to prevent re-exploitation and destitution.

It demands that the Director of Labour Market Enforcement (DLME) and related bodies be strengthened. This will require "adequate resourcing and a decentralised model of enforcement". That is unlikely given the Chancellor's recent demands that Government departments trim their budgets.

WoRC does not have much to say about unions as a solution to these serious problems. Perhaps it has a dim view of them, but it does recognise they are a good thing for workers.

It notes the low level of union membership among care workers: only 17 per cent are unionised compared with 52 per cent of those involved in other health sectors. Those directly employed are best paid, by around £1-3 per hour, but this only includes about seven per cent of the care workforce. The other 93 are privately employed by companies such as Apple Homecare. Nearly 80 per cent of the workforce is female. It is a business with little opportunities for anything resembling a career, little wonder it has some of the highest sick rates.

The reasons for low levels of unionisation are many and vari-

ous. The IWW mentioned above was formed to "fill a gap in the market" as a result of established unions not putting much effort into organising. Unite has a bad habit of organising recruitment campaigns that begin and end with the General Secretary being photographed for the union rag posing beside a smiling new recruit.

To be fair, migrant workers are often difficult to organise for reasons due to their background quite apart from the harsh conditions described above. Most migrant workers come from countries with weak trade union traditions. Others have over optimistic views that if they put up with hardships they will be able to save enough to return to their village and build themselves a huge villa. Experience demonstrates that such illusions can last for decades.

In the cleaning sector, another area dominated by migrant workers, unionisation has been dominated by the IWW and two other street unions. But they've had the unhappy experience of many organisers turning from poachers to game keepers with outsourcing companies hiring activists and using them to thwart unionisation.

That said, Unite has a United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) that "welcomes migrant workers, migrant domestic workers, refugees and asylum seekers into member-

ship". This offers free English, IT and arts lessons in addition to normal union benefits.

Community, the former Iron & Steel and knitwear industry union, also claims to be "proud to stand up for migrant workers' rights and help to improve pay and working conditions" offering legal assistance.

Unison has a Migrant Worker Network for first-generation immigrants, overseas and migrant workers, EU settled status workers and workers who have subsequently naturalised as British citizens or who have indefinite leave to remain. On its website Unison offers extensive advice to migrant workers on practical matters such as securing National Insurance numbers and the importance of getting a payslip.

Unison also claims credit for developing the Northwest region's Migrant Care Worker Charter. This was launched in October.

The charter has seven steps to protect migrant social-care workers, which parts from the usual trade union desirables wants: "Councils to create an ethical recruiter list to stop exploitative employers getting public money." Some NHS Trusts have signed up to it.

The problem is growing. Last year the Royal College of Nursing noted a six-fold increase in the number of overseas care workers being exploited by rogue employers in the past three years.

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

14th January 2005

NEW RESEARCH commissioned by the public sector union Unison has linked the contracting out of hospital cleaning with a lowering of standards – leading to an increased risk of spreading infection.

The report has leant weight to the union's Think Cleaners campaign for more cleaning staff in hospitals, and for cleaners to be taken back inhouse and under direct control of NHS staff.

"Alongside the human suffering, the financial costs of hospital infections runs into billions," said Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

"To underestimate the contribution that cleaning staff

can make to infection control is plain foolish – as the number of cleaners have gone down infection rates have soared".

Hospital Contract Cleaning and Infection Control by Steve Davis, a senior research fellow at Cardiff University, was presented to a breakfast symposium organised by Unison in London on Thursday.

Statistics show that in 2003-4 the number of cleaners in the NHS fell to a low of 55,000, down from 100,000 20 years ago, staff cuts having been driven by contractors squeezing costs to boost profits – reducing numbers, hours and wages.

This in turn has led to recruitment and retention problems, high staff turnover and poor moral, all of which affect the quality of hospital cleaning services.

The report concludes: "There should be an end to the tendering regime, which regardless of whether or not the service is eventually contracted out – puts cost ahead of quality, at the expense of jobs, pay and conditions. Improving the quality of cleaning is likely to be more effective than specific MRSA-related, or

similar virus control measures. Resources would be more effectively directed at areas of more fundamental importance, including education and the improvement of maintenance of hospital wards."

"Let's get back to basics," said Prentis. "Let's get more cleaners back on the wards and around our hospitals and make them part of the NHS infection control team."

"Instead of wasting valuable time and money issuing further guidance on the contracting process the Government should bite the bullet and end contracting out altogether."

Laws passed by the Tory government forced hospitals and other public bodies to contract out many of basic functions. Labour has so far failed to bring those jobs back in house.

Dave Prentis himself nearly died after being infected with MRSA after an operation for stomach cancer. He considers himself lucky to have survived both conditions.

The socialist answer to the energy crisis

by John Maryon

The discovery of fire by our ancestors and its use for keeping warm, cooking food and deterring wild beasts marked a deceive step for the human race. Since those early days our increasing dependency upon accessible, affordable energy supplies has grown sharply. Today no advanced civilisation could survive without access to abundant supplies of energy.

A colossal demand for energy during the industrial revolution saw coal become the key source of energy to produce steam to power the factories and trains. Whole families, including grubby children clothed in rags, toiled in the dark, damp and dangerous mines. For the pit owners, vast profits. For the workers, harsh working conditions that led to an increased mortality rate. Both the new gas street lamps, first installed in Pall Mall in 1807, and the first electric trains of the 1890s required the burning of fossil fuel as the primary energy source. Today in Britain, electricity, a refined energy source, easy to use and clean at the point of use, still relies on fossil fuel for over a third of its generation.

Drax Power Station, located in Yorkshire in an area of rich coal seams, was designed to operate using British coal. Future plans were based upon carbon entrapment technology. Today public funding is used to support its operation using biomass fuel – wood-burning. The wood is imported from America. It is claimed that CO₂ is recycled when new trees are planted to replace those consumed. The station remains as a large emitter of greenhouse gas. Opponents claim that a better long-term option would be to invest in wind and solar power in conjunction with energy storage systems. Britain has been left dependent upon the USA for its vital needs.

Decision-making under capitalism is driven by the requirement for maximum profit



• Electric cars – People's China leads the way.

in the shortest time possible at minimum risk and with the lowest investment. A recipe for disaster. Responsible and sustainable green development requires a long-term approach that is both innovative and ethical and is supported by public investment and control.

Nuclear power is considered necessary as part of a secure energy strategy to provide a constant base load. Early government enthusiasm was influenced by the ability to produce fissionable materials for nuclear weapons. The high risks of nuclear power were exposed in a number of serious accidents that resulted in radioactive contamination. Modern reactors are safer but there is the serious risk from terrorism. By their obvious complicity in blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines we have to look no further than certain Western powers to see who the main supporters of terrorism are. For the future, electricity production by fusion offers great prospects for abundant energy without the problems of nuclear waste disposal.

A major green initiative has seen the arrival of Electric Vehicles. In People's China electric car sales now exceed 50 per cent of total sales. By contrast, Britain lags in this field with many drivers preferring petrol engines. The main reason for this is the lack of a

suitable charging-point infrastructure. For those who can charge up on their driveways and who do not undertake long journeys electric is fine, but if you live in a flat or high density development the search for affordable and available charging points can be a problem. Hydrogen, a viable contender for motive power, has not been seriously considered. With either its use with a fuel cell or by combustion with the only by-product being water it has many advantages. The problems are again a total lack of infrastructure in addition to how it's made (from gas or the green electrolysis method). The socialist countries are in a good position to make a responsible long-term approach. China is looking at wireless charging with electric coils beneath the road surface.

Given the rapid progress in science and technology, the whole world should soon be able to benefit from an abundance of cheap energy. So why are German factories closing due to high energy costs and rationing. And why are people freezing in their homes afraid to turn up the heating. Europe is on the verge of a self-inflicted energy crisis. A bizarre and dangerous situation totally of their own making. Future generations may look back in amazement at the incompetence and betrayal of its leaders. Bismark must be turning

in his grave as Germany, once the powerhouse of Europe, faces de-industrialisation and recession.

Europe's enthusiastic endorsement of Project Ukraine, led by the USA and co-ordinated through NATO, has ended in disaster and tragedy. When the Soviet Union collapsed Western nations promised not to expand NATO to the east. Of course preparations were immediately made to break this promise with a military build-up carried out on Russia's borders. Ukraine formed one piece of the jigsaw but its voters had elected a government that sought to remain neutral. The Western response was to engineer the notorious Maidan coup that overthrew the democratically elected government in 2014. The new regime, which included neo-Nazis, harshly repressed the Russian speakers and committed atrocities such as the Odessa massacre and shelling of civilians in Donbas. Russia had the courage to respond with its Special Military Operation.

The proxy war quickly turned into a war of attrition that the imperialists have lost. Sanctions imposed against Russia with the ultimate aim of regime change in Moscow have failed and dramatically backfired. Following the shutting-off of gas pipelines from Russia and their complicity

in blowing up Nord Stream, Europe now faces a severe gas shortage with soaring prices. Secure long-term contracts for cheap Russian gas have been replaced with a reliance on a limited supply of much more expensive LNG from US shale gas deposits. As a result German industry, once a world leader, has become uncompetitive and is being forced to flee overseas. Inflation and unemployment are rising in Germany and European GDP rates are falling. The people are being forced to pay a high price for government incompetence.

The problems for Germany have been made far worse by its decision to close all its nuclear power stations. The situation has been made worse still by the decision of the Ukraine regime to stop the flow of gas from Russia across its territory. This will reduce imports of gas by at least another five per cent and pose particular hardships for Slovakia, Austria, Serbia and Hungary. Turkstream remains, despite failed attempts to blow it up, the last source for Russian gas supplies apart from Russian LNG. Recently a tanker, believed to be carrying Russian gas, was mysteriously blown up in the Mediterranean. Ironically, at a touch of a button, supplies could be restored via the remaining Nord Stream link and via Poland.

Blinded by arrogant illusions of elitism carried over from the colonial era, Western leaders double-down on one disaster after another. With no thought of peace talks they continue to stoke the flames of war. And it is the ordinary people who continue to suffer from the greed and warmongering of Western leaders.

Whatever the conditions, prevailing capitalism cannot undertake a sustainable and coherent policy for energy. A balanced long-term energy policy is eclipsed by profiteering. It's time for the people to wake up to reality and say enough is enough. Bring on Socialism! Bring on the Revolution!

Capitalism fails and LA burns!

by Cameron Harrison

Apocalyptic scenes have unfolded with fires raging across the greater Los Angeles County area. They have so far left thousands of acres burned and over a thousand structures destroyed – including schools, libraries, homes, shelters and grocery stores – with at least 24 people dead.

Hundreds of firefighters and volunteers are racing to stop the spread. They are challenged by hurricane-force winds blowing embers and an unusually bone-dry winter. As many as 130,000 people are under evacuation orders, fearful of whether or not their homes will still be standing when the blazes are finally put out.

Rising temperatures and decreased rainfall, both linked to climate change, are causing California's wildfire season to begin earlier and end later. The rains that typically bring an end to the fire season are delayed, resulting in fires burning into the winter months. Heavy Santa Ana winds and the threat of electrical equipment catching fire have left upwards of 450,000 residents without power.

Clearly, the climate crisis is worsening at an alarming rate. Extreme weather events, prolonged droughts, massive wildfires, intense hurricanes, and the rapid melting of permafrost and glaciers are all occurring more frequently. The impacts exceed the forecasts made just a few years ago.

Capitalism



• Fire rages in the Altadena area of Los Angeles County, California.

is to blame

The broader imbalance between humanity and the rest of the natural world is exemplified most prominently by climate change. Numerous environmental challenges exist, including contaminated water, air and soil, as well as health problems affecting respiratory and reproductive systems. Continued threats such as higher sea levels, more frequent and destructive weather events, and increased droughts persist with seemingly no end in sight.

The USA over its history has contributed far more to global emissions than any other country – including through the military, which is the single largest producer of greenhouse gases. US fossil fuel giants have been aware for at least 50 years that their intensive extraction would lead to a climate disaster, but chose to play down and misrepresent the evidence of climate change.

They carried out a long-term campaign

against climate action, employing fake science, the harassment of scientists, and sowing 'uncertainty' against scientific consensus through the corporate media and politicians alike.

If anything is clear by now, it's that the system that prioritises short-term profits and private accumulation, capitalism, is not equipped to either prevent or adequately deal with extreme weather events.

While not an exhaustive list, here are a few examples with the latest horrific Los Angeles area fires that demonstrate how capitalism undercuts and under serves people, and our environment, in the service of maximising profits.

Looting the water supply

Amid the apocalyptic fires, about 20 per cent of fire-hydrants were running dry and access to water was scarcely found. Janisse Quiñones, head of the Los Angeles Department of Water

& Power, said that upwards of three million gallons of water were available when the fire started, but the demand was four times greater than "we've ever seen in the system" due to the scale of the blaze. There simply was not enough surplus in the water supply to meet the scale of the disaster.

An illustration of capitalist greed and private ownership of an important public resource, water, highlights how capitalism prioritises private accumulation over human need, even in times of crisis. Instead of ensuring sufficient supplies for the public benefit, the profit motive trumps all. The results are a disaster for workers and the general public.

One billionaire couple, Stewart and Lynda Resnick, own a massive share of California's water system – one that was largely paid for by the general public in the first place. The Resnicks are the biggest farm owners in California. They own 130,000 acres worth of

farmland in the state and nearly half of Americans buy at least one of their products.

With a net-worth of at least \$8 billion dollars, the Resnicks are raking in massive amounts of money as water prices are soaring in California. Their mega-corporation, Wonderful (how ironic), controls a whopping 57 per cent of the Kern Water Bank, the most valuable water resource in a region so critical to America's fresh food supply.

In the Central Valley where the Resnicks have banked water underground, working-class communities, often made up of migrant farmworkers and immigrants, have little access to public water. Char Miller, the director of environmental analysis at Pomona College, told *Forbes* business magazine: "The Resnicks are so dominant and the disempowered communities are at the other end of a scale that is tipped mightily against them. When we put the

food on our plate, we rarely think about the hands that make it and the situation they are in. That's an injustice of unparalleled proportion."

In Texas, another area stricken by drought and accessible water, multi-billionaire Elon Musk is nearly finished constructing a lithium refinery for his Tesla corporation. This facility will demand up to eight-million gallons of water per day. It will be situated 20 miles from Corpus Christi, an area so dry the local water company distributes shower timers at high school football games.

The small Texas town is ringing alarm bells over the project. The residents are anxious about the availability of water for both their own needs and those of a large factory. Especially worrisome, the South Texas Water Authority recently approved an infrastructure deal that will enable Nueces Water Supply to sell Tesla the necessary water pipe rights.

In the cases of drought or rampant fires, both increasing due to climate change, private ownership of what should be public resources – such as fresh water supplies – certainly spells more disaster. Instead of allocating water appropriately, including maintaining a surplus in light of larger and more dangerous fires or increasing droughts, capitalism prioritises the ownership and accumulation of water supplies for private profit.

While the overall impact of privatised water supplies with regard to the fires in Los Angeles County is not yet known, it is certain that the profit motive and privatisation

of what were once public water supplies in California do not at all help the cause.

Fire Department budget cut

In June of last year, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass approved a budget that significantly reduced the funding for the fire department by \$17.5 million dollars. Notably, this was the second-largest departmental cut from the city's budget. While the majority of city departments faced funding reductions, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) actually received a substantial funding boost of nearly \$126 million dollars.

"The consistent defunding of other city programmes in order to give the LAPD billions a year has consequences, and these elected officials do actually have blood on their hands," Ricci Sergienko, a lawyer and organiser with People's City Council LA told the *Intercept* news service. "The city is unprepared to handle this fire, and Los Angeles shouldn't be in that position."

Defunding the fire department along with other essential public services, while only boosting the budget for the police department, creates a dangerous situation as the climate crisis worsens the already devastating fires in the drought-stricken region.

Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said that the reductions in their operating budget have "adversely affected the Department's ability to maintain core operations, such as technology and communication infrastructure, payroll processing, training, fire prevention, and community education".

Underpaid and underfunded

In another damnation of the capitalist system and a government that operates in the interests of the wealthy first and foremost, thousands of federal firefighters are continuously threatened with a \$20,000 pay cut – the next possibility happening in March of this year.

Federal firefighters have fought for years to establish permanent wage increases for a job in which some earn as little as \$15 per hour for often dangerous but essential work. Under the Biden administration's infrastructure law in 2021, 11,200 federal firefighters received a wage boost in 2021 of either \$20,000 or 50 per cent of their base pay. Due to corporate lobbying and Republican obstruction, however, the wage increases were not made permanent by Congress.

"We will lose everybody" if Congress fails to make the increases permanent and firefighters' wages drop by \$20,000, said Steve Gutierrez, a 15-year firefighter and union representative for the National Federation of Federal Employees. "These folks deserve a living wage. The future is going to be a tough road ahead".

"There's so many fire engines just sitting and collecting dust this summer," he told *More Perfect Union*. "There's no one to staff them."

What's more, many of the federal wild-land firefighters aren't even classified as firefighters to begin with. According to *Grassroots Wildland Firefighters*, firefighters such as Hotshots, Smokejumpers, Rappellers, Helitack and Fire Engine crews and others are actually titled as "Forestry Tech-

nicians" leading to a misclassification and lower wages compared with state firefighters.

Compounding matters, President Donald Trump has been no friend to firefighters or their unions. During his first term, he blamed the forest service for "mismanagement" as the cause of wildfires. In 2018, he suggested California should do a better job of "raking" its leaves.

The Republicans were the principal factor for why the wage increases have not been made permanent since the 2021 law passed and instead rely on resolutions each time the Republicans threaten to shut down the government.

Capitalism's drive for the private accumulation of profits over public services is exemplified by incoming Montana Senator-elect Tim Sheehy, a hardline Republican who was the CEO of an aerial firefighting company. In an op-ed for Fox news, he said: "The private sector always has and always will produce new innovations and better results faster and cheaper than the government...The same holds true in wild-fire response. We must embrace this truth."

Prison labour exploited

Nearly 400 prisoners have been deployed by the California Department of Corrections to contain the on-going blazes.

Since the Second World War inmates in California can enter a Conservation Camp Programme, where they live in so-called "fire camps" and are led by personnel from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). The programme saves CAL FIRE rough-

ly \$80 million per year.

Initially, the prisoners are required to fulfil security criteria and participate in a two-week training session. They receive a daily wage of \$5 to \$10 depending on the pay-scale and can earn more when fighting fires. They comprise roughly one third of the firefighters in California. California's dependency on the "cost-effective labour" of prisoners has caused prison reform activists to worry about delays in the adoption of necessary reforms to the criminal justice system.

Why the prisoners are so keen on joining the programme is illustrated by former-inmate firefighter and union electrician, Matthew Hahn. "There is truth to the objections" of inmate firefighting, he wrote in an op-ed. Sending inmates to fight fires is abusive, he said. But: "The reality of why people would want to risk life and limb for a state that is caging them is that the conditions in California prisons are so terrible that fighting wildfires is a rational choice."

At least four inmate firefighters in California have died in the line of duty in recent years however, as the state's fires have grown more aggressive and deadlier due to climate change. It's a dangerous line of work regardless, and the minimal training and lack of good wages and working conditions make it that much harder.

The inmate firefighters are four times more likely to be injured by objects than other firefighters and eight times more likely to suffer injuries related to smoke inhalation. When injured, the inmates do not receive traditional worker compensation, leaving many to face life-long health issues

and complications as a result of firefighting.

Making matters worse, upon being released from prison, inmate firefighters are banned from obtaining Emergency Medical Technician licences, which are required by most of California's fire departments. This is even after completing a minimum of one week of classroom training, one week of field training, and four hours of advanced training per week in the Conservation Camp Programme.

Climate issues are arenas of class struggle

Workers continue to encounter environmental deterioration in their workplaces and communities due to corporate profiteering and climate change. Many workers in various industries are exposed to toxic chemicals, poor ventilation and unnecessary environmental accidents on the job. In fact, this is one of the principal reasons that battery workers at BOSK in Kentucky are organising with the United Auto Workers.

Working-class communities are often used as dumping grounds for industrial waste and access to water is increasingly more difficult – especially in light of the corporate privatisation of water supplies. The costs to fix environmental crises almost always falls onto workers and their communities as the corporations that create them evade the responsibility through lobbying and legal loopholes.

Communities faced with powerful corporations dumping toxic waste into their drinking water sources, as well as privatising them completely for their own profiteering, necessar-

ily confront capitalism head-on. They come up against both the capitalist system and politicians influenced by corporate lobbying in their struggles.

Capitalism is both the major cause and obstacle to solving the pressing issues facing humanity when it comes to the climate. It serves as a hindrance to establishing a clean, sustainable and healthy environment where workers and the general public can directly reap the rewards of nature and our labour. Private ownership and accumulation of vast sums of wealth and resources is simply incompatible with environmental sustainability.

Even the Paris Climate Accord commitments are insufficient in stopping the escalating levels of greenhouse gas emissions and effectively addressing climate change. What's needed is a radical restructuring of our industry, agriculture, distribution and legal system to confront the significant challenges that affect all of humanity.

The climate struggles, such as the devastating fires in Los Angeles happening right now, conflict with the current capitalist model of private ownership and the profit motive. Millions are realising that our collective health and well-being is in direct contradiction to the billionaire class and their greed.

Fixing the challenges posed by increasing climate change disasters requires social decision making based on the needs of society as a whole and the environment on which we depend. Capitalism is incompatible with this and must be done away with.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

In recent days and weeks, Greenland and the Greenlanders have been brutally thrown onto the grand political stage.

The almost 57,000 inhabitants and their large island are being turned into a bargaining chip, a pawn that can be moved around at will on the great chessboard of imperialism.

Under huge media attention, Donald Trump's son made a lightning 'tourist visit' to Nuuk last week and in a well-organised propaganda show in Greenland and from Trump's residence in Florida, it was made clear that the future US president is ready to play his trump card.

Trump did not reject the idea of using economic or military force to get his hands on Greenland. During his press conference, a journalist asks "can you assure the world that while you are trying to get control of those areas [Greenland, Panama], you will not use military or economic force". "No," says Trump. The journalist continues "... and can you tell us a little bit about what your plan is? Will you negotiate a new treaty?"

"No, I can't assure you... you're talking about Panama and Greenland... I can't assure you of either. But I can tell you this: we need them for economic security."

In front of rolling cameras, the future President of the USA – not Putin! – makes obvious military and economic threats against Greenland and the Danish Royal Federation.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's comment? "The US is Denmark's most important ally. Today's discussion does not change that."

It is an unprecedented, absurd and thoroughly neo-colonialist drama that Greenland has been thrown into. The chairman of the Greenlandic government, Múte P Egede, and several Greenlandic politicians have made it clear that Greenland is not for sale. After the Trump press conference Múte P Egede repeated what he also said in his New Year's speech, namely that "Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders". And – unlike Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen – he called Trump's comments "serious statements".

Within a few months, elections to the Greenlandic parliament, the Inatsartut, will be held. The question of independence was already high on the political agenda before the developments of recent days. It is not unrealistic to imagine a referendum in Greenland on independence in the foreseeable future. According to the self-government agreement that regulates Greenland's relationship in the Danish Royal Federation, the Danish Parliament must subsequently approve this.

With the Self-Government Agreement, Denmark officially recognised that Greenland is a nation in its own right under international law. Nevertheless, the mindset of colonialism runs deep in the minds of those in power in Denmark. Some politicians won't even guarantee that they will nod "Yes" if a Greenlandic decision on independence comes to a vote in the Danish parliament.

On a more structural level, Greenland is still excluded from several forums and contexts where decisions affecting Greenland are made. Individual cases such as the outrageous

IUD/coil [involuntary Danish-imposed birth-control] scandal, which Múte P Egede has called genocide against the Greenlandic people, are examples of how colonialism is not a thing belonging to a distant past.

The tone deafness and arrogance of the Danish government makes it more than understandable that independence is gaining more and more importance on Greenland's political agenda. With their attitude and policies, the Danish rulers are themselves jeopardising the Danish Royal Federation.

The Danish state's centuries-long mistreatment of Greenland and the feeling of being looked down upon and exploited that it has caused are now being abused by the future US president and those around him to advocate for Greenland's independence, naturally with the purpose of taking over where Danish colonialism and imperialism ends.

Trump has already labelled Canada to the north as a possible new US state. To the south, he has demanded the Panama Canal back to the USA. Under the guise of fighting drugs and drug cartels, he has escalated his rhetoric against Mexico. And then there is Greenland.

From the vantage point of the ailing American empire, the globe looks like there are a number of states and important facilities around the empire, on its periphery. Could they somehow be connected more closely? Or can the threat of this be used as a bargaining chip when it comes to economic and political agreements?

Seen from the Danish capital, the obvious situation is that if Denmark 'loses Greenland', our small country will also lose almost all foreign and security policy importance in the NATO alliance.

Seen from the Greenlandic capital Nuuk, the difficult situation is that when Greenland is made a pawn in a geopolitical imperialist game about resources, waterways, etc it becomes extremely difficult to choose your own path and defend it.

Greenlanders' right to determine their own future must be unreservedly supported and any form of interference, blackmail and bribery to which they are subjected must be condemned. Whether it comes from the USA or Denmark or anywhere else.

The focus must be on finding ways for Greenlanders to be able to enforce their right to national self-determination in real and practical terms.

Lotte Rørtoft-Madsen
Chairperson
Danish Communist Party
Copenhagen

Dear Comrades

Not only has the Labour Party abandoned its early commitment to building socialism, including public ownership and a redistribution of wealth, it continues to move sharply to the right. In many ways it is now practically indistinguishable from the other bourgeois parties. It has adopted pro-market policies and aligned with the neo-cons in Washington. While allowing public service to fail its leader, Sir Keir Starmer, is one of the keenest supporters of keeping the Ukraine War going and turns a deaf ear to the cries of despair of the Palestinian people.

Capitalism is obviously failing. Britain's latest economic crisis has not suddenly appeared but represents the final stages of a process that has accelerated since the Second World War and is now highlighted by permanent austerity and a total subservience to US Imperialism. Apart from those few glorious years

continued on page 9...

Diary

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

UNTIL APRIL 2025

Townsend Theatre Productions: *Behold Ye Ramblers*. Touring play by Neil Gore. See TTP website for details of venues.

UNTIL 25 APRIL

Wellcome Collection: *Hard Graft: Work, Health and Rights*. Free exhibition. 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

UNTIL 15 JULY

Tate Britain: *Artists Against Fascism and War*. Exhibition at Millbank, London SW1P 4RG.

UNTIL 25 JUL

Working Class Movement Library: *Collectors, The Camera-man, The Poets and the Pits*: Miners' Strike 40th Anniversary Exhibition. Afternoons. WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX.

SAT 18 JAN

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: End the genocide in Gaza. National demonstration. Central London, Check website for starting points.

MON 20 JAN

British Pregnancy Advisory Service: Fund-raising showing of *Zurawski v Texas*. 17:30–21:00, Human Rights Action Centre, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA. Book on BPAS website.

MON 20 JAN

Stand Up to Racism: Protest against Donald Trump's inauguration. 19:00, Parliament, College Green, Westminster, London SW1.

MON 20 JAN

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Camden Council: Stop Funding Genocide. 18:00–19:30, Camden Town Hall, 5 Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE.

SAT 25 JAN

Lakenheath Alliance for Peace: Vigil protesting against US nuclear weapons in Britain. 12:00–14:00, RAF Lakenheath, Brandon Road, Lakenheath, Brandon, Suffolk IP27 9PS.

SAT 25 JAN

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Demonstration opposing flights of US Global Hawk and Reaper spy drones. 13:00–15:00, RAF Fairford, Fairford, Gloucestershire GL7 4DL.

SAT 25 JAN

Scottish CND: Burns Peace Poetry Fundraiser. 15:00–17:00, Quaker Meeting House, 38 Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow G2 4PS. Book on CND website.

SAT 1 FEB

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Annual General Meeting. 09:30–16:30, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 4RL.

SAT 1 FEB

Stand Up to Racism: Stop the Far Right: Oppose Tommy Robinson supporters. Demonstration, Central London. Details TBA.

SAT 8 FEB

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Latin America Conference. 10:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BB. Details and tickets at latinamericconference.co.uk

WED 12 FEB

Socialist History Society: Sheila Rowbotham on Writing about my Life. 19:00, Zoom meeting. Register on SHS website.

THUR 20 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: Steve Silver on Anti-Fascism in the 1930s/40s. 19:00, Online event. Register on MML website.

WED 5 MAR

Socialist History Society: Laleh Khalili on Imperial Politics in the Indian Ocean. 19:00, Zoom meeting. Register on SHS website.

THUR 6 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Rachel Holmes on Eleanor Marx on Clerkenwell Green. 18:00, in person. MML, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU. Book on MML website.

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

...continued from page 8

in the late 1940s when Stalin inspired many working-class people to demand something better, the history of the Labour Party has been one of betrayal and class collaboration. They should have, at that time, raised the Red Flag and opted for full socialism to support the new progressive advances.

Instead, major financial institutions were allowed to dictate financial policy. British industry, starved of investment, was allowed to collapse. The Tories sold off the family silver at a tiny fraction of its true value and Britain has continued to decline as a political, economic and military power ever since.

The betrayal by the Labour Party presents a serious problem for genuine Comrades of the true left. What is to be done? The NCP correctly points out that to abandon the political party that the labour movement created would put the clock back more than a century. The problem is made more difficult due to the lack of political conviction and understanding within the trade union movement.

My feelings are that we should continue to engage with Labour and try to encourage it to return to its founding principles. We need however, to be much more selective in our approach in regard to tactics,

policies and personalities. We need to support those sincere and genuine socialists within the LP but at the same time strongly oppose reaction. We should abstain from electoral support to those individuals who support US-inspired proxy wars, genocide in the Middle East, NATO and further privatisation. They are the enemy in the front line of the class struggle.

We need to look at the greater picture of the left in Britain. It is fragmented, often sectarian and is being eclipsed by the so-called far right. The time is ripe for some important initiatives. The opportunity could be taken to invite all socialist, communists, other left leaning political parties and progressive organisations to hold a joint conference with the aim of establishing a consensus alliance. Its initial purpose would be to agree strategy and tactics for the way forward to creating a socialist Britain. Each representing body would be able to still support its own policies and political priorities while contributing to the unity of the working class. Similar attempts have failed in the past due to the hidden agenda of the fake left. Comrades, how can we encourage the masses to unite while the cadres are pulling in different directions?

John Maryon
Suffolk

Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

The end of the marriage of our former First Minister last week came as no surprise to the cognoscenti within the Scottish nationalist movement. Nicola Sturgeon's world and that of the party's ex-chief executive, Peter Murrell, revolved around the Scottish National Party and the Holyrood political scene that she dominated as leader of the Scottish government. But the gossips said that 'Mr Sturgeon' was the real power behind the throne and that there would be trouble if and when it all ended. And when it did, with both of them under a cloud of police investigations into the SNP's finances, their marriage soon unravelled. Nicola Sturgeon and Peter Murrell had not been seen publicly together for almost two years. Last week they announced their marriage was at an end.

Ms Sturgeon said the decision to end the marriage had been made "with a heavy heart" but "to all intents and purposes we have been separated for some time now and feel it is time to bring others up to speed with where we are. It goes without saying that we still care deeply for each other, and always will." The former SNP leader said the pair would not comment further. That hasn't stopped others trying to score cheap political points though.

Russell Findlay, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, quickly jumped in suggesting that the divorce may be "connected" to the ongoing police investigation into SNP finances. He told the media that the former na-

tionalist leader "doesn't do very much at all without a reason". But he's been branded a "fantasist" by other SNP politicians.

Our new First Minister, John Swinney, has wisely decided not be drawn on Findlay's remarks. "All I will say about this is the end of any relationship is a very sad process and, of necessity, a private process. I think those circumstances should be respected and I've got nothing to say about Russell Findlay's comments.

"I think we should just respect people's privacy. However high-profile people are in life, they've got an entitlement to a private life and I think we should respect people in their space to do so."

Off the Rails

Swinney is on a roll at the moment. The Scottish nationalists are back on track with a nine per cent lead over Scottish Labour, which would leave the SNP still the biggest single party of the Scottish parliament with 53 seats. Labour would be up two with 24, and the Tories and the Faragist Reform party would be neck and neck with 15 seats apiece, with 12 seats for the Liberal-Democrats and 10 for the Greens. But there may be trouble ahead.

The train drivers' union, ASLEF, has been a long-term advocate of nationalising the railways. Now that this has been done in Scotland it is up in arms about one consequence of this otherwise welcome decision. It has denounced the SNP Government for including the rail network in its public sector pay policy.

This, say ASLEF, was carried out without any consultation with the unions. This policy means that Holyrood plans to increase public sector pay by three per cent in each of the next three years, resulting in an overall rise of 9.3 per cent, which is claimed to be a real-terms increase when

compared to the 5.7 per cent inflation prediction. The SNP have made it clear that they will restrict funding to that level. Transport Scotland, however, say ASLEF knew the details of what nationalisation would mean with regard to pay.

ASLEF claim the SNP Government is "cherry-picking" the issues it wants to involve itself in. It points out that the SNP asserts that discussions about toilet facilities for drivers are matters for train operation companies as employers.

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF's Scottish organiser, complained to the Transport Secretary: "It is extremely disappointing and unfortunate that you have used nationalisation as an instrument to attempt to undermine our union

and our ability to freely negotiate for our members without constraint and on the basis of the specific context of the Scottish rail industry."

He also warned that: "We will enter the forthcoming pay negotiations in good faith as we always do. But in so doing we will not be hamstrung by your attempt to artificially game the parameters of those negotiations and we will be prepared to do whatever is necessary to achieve the outcomes that we think are fair and just for our members."

Last year ScotRail was forced to run a reduced service from July to September when drivers went on an overtime ban and only worked their contracted hours. This action secured a 4.5 per cent pay rise.

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No British arms for Ukraine!

by New Worker
correspondent

Anti-fascist activists held court in the heart of Birmingham for over an hour and a half last weekend with placards, banners and flags calling for the British government to end weapons supplies to the puppet government in Ukraine and warning of the danger of an all-out NATO–Russia war. They also carried placards pointing out the financial costs to millions of British citizens of the billions of pounds sent to Ukraine, higher energy charges, and



the extreme levels of corruption in Ukraine itself.

Theo Russell, secretary of International Ukraine Anti-Fascist

Solidarity (IUAFS), spoke about Britain's aggressive role in Ukraine: "A top secret British military and intelligence group, Project Alchemy,

has been set up with the aim of prolonging the war in Ukraine at all costs."

The *Grayzone* website has revealed that

Britain's true goal in Ukraine is to cause a 'palace coup' – read 'regime change' – in Moscow, plans for an underground army to conduct

terrorism in Ukraine and Russia, and to 'disman- tle' independent media outlets reporting the truth about Ukraine.

Many people joined discussions with the protestors and it was clear that they are aware of the higher prices they are paying for everything, the danger of a world war, and the contrast between Western countries condemning Russian military actions in Ukraine while sending more and more bombs and missiles to Israel to kill civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria.

This was the first protest held by IUAFS outside London but it certainly won't be the last!

REVIEW

On the brink of war

Precipice by Robert Harris. Penguin: London, 2024; 464pp. Hbk £22:00; Pbk £9.99.

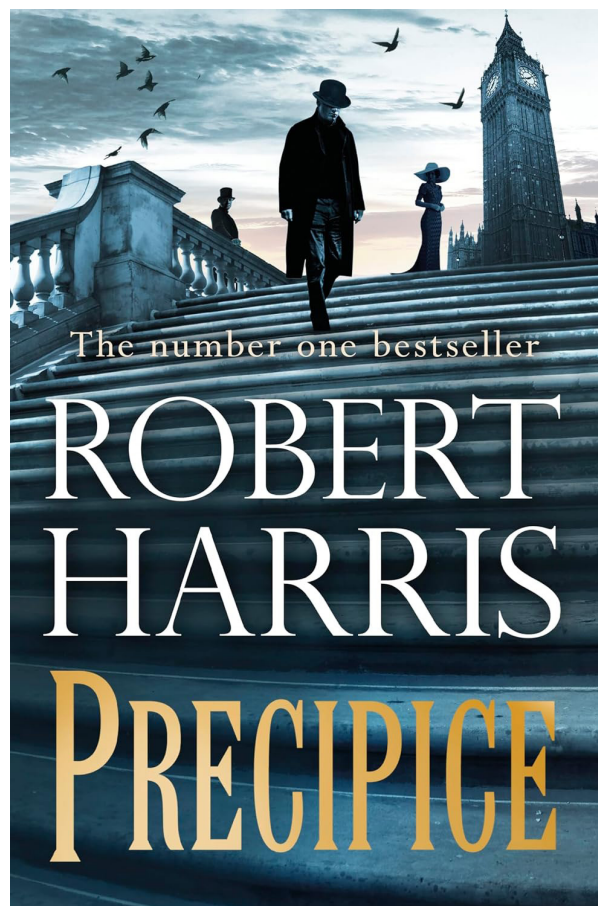
by Ben Soton

In late Edwardian London there were 12 postal deliveries a day; I learnt this from reading *Precipice*, Robert Harris's latest thriller. It focuses on the affair between the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, and the aristocratic socialite Venetia Stanley. It also provides an insight on the *belle époque* of a ruling class heading for Armageddon.

The relationship between 'Squiffy' Asquith and Venetia is by no means a Donald Trump–Stormy Daniels affair – it consists of little more than afternoon drives and the occasional touching of hands. The affair soon arouses suspicion however, when it is discovered that Asquith has

been sharing sensitive government documents with Ms Stanley. The Security Services send Detective Sergeant Paul Deemer to investigate. Deemer plays the role of the honest everyman obtaining a glimpse into a highly elite world and it eventually transpires that the motives of his superiors are far from honest.

Asquith is depicted as a man out of his depth, as well as being in a loveless marriage with his wife Margot. As a result he seeks advice on matters of state from a 27-year-old socialite with almost no knowledge of matters of state. As his government stumbles from one crisis to another, Asquith faces numerous plots and squabbles from those around him. The novel starts with the inability of the Asquith government to deal the reac-



tionary Ulster Unionists who were blocking Home-Rule in Ireland. Meanwhile, as Europe drifts to war new problems emerge, putting the 'Irish Question' on the back burner.

As Britain enters the European conflict, something that it had avoided for a century, new problems emerge. The Government faces problems resulting from the shortage of munitions as well as the mess caused by Churchill's disastrous Gallipoli campaign. The leader of the last totally Liberal Government, Asquith was forced to enter into a coalition with the Tories in 1915 and was later replaced by Lloyd-George as Prime Minister in 1916.

Precipice is as much a coming-of-age novel for Ms Stanley. In Edwardian Britain it was seen as unusual for a woman to be unmarried

at 27. Although nothing sexual takes place between her and Asquith she soon comes to the conclusion that she is being used as a crux for his personal issues and failings as a politician, in other words a one-sided relationship. It is often said that power is an aphrodisiac but in this book Asquith seems to lose what little power he had and he seems as a man reacting to events rather than shaping them.

The author, Robert Harris, has long had a sympathy for elite politicians of the liberal or conservative kind. Notably the Roman Senator Cicero, about whom he wrote a trilogy (*Lustrum*, *Imperium* and *Dictator*). But *Precipice* shows the failings of liberalism as an ideology, least of all its inability to deal with crises...and that's just for starters.

Gagarin Centre: 65 Years of Cosmonaut Training

by Ilya Tsukanov

Created at the dawn of the space age, the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Zvezdny Gorodok (Star City) on the outskirts of Moscow prepared the first cosmonauts for humanity's first small steps into outer space. Here's what makes the centre unique.

The need to establish a dedicated centre for the training of cosmonauts became apparent to scientists in charge of the Soviet space programme in the late 1950s, immediately after the successful launch of Sputnik-1 – the world's first artificial satellite – in October 1957.

In 1959, two resolutions were issued by the government On the Preparation of Humans for Space Flights, tasking the fledgling space programme with the selection of qualified candidates (the choice ultimately fell on Air Force pilots). A gruelling selection process was held from October 1959 to April 1960, with 20 candidates enrolled as the first student-cosmonauts.

Sergei Korolev, one of the fathers of Soviet and Russian cosmonautics, found an ally in Air Force Commander-in-Chief Marshal Konstantin Vershinin, who lobbied the state for the creation of a cosmonaut preparation centre under the auspices of the Air Force.

On 11th January 1960, Vershinin signed off on the creation of Unit 26266 – the initially secret training facility that would forge the first cosmonauts. The future Zvezdny Gorodok,

then known as Zeleny (Green), was situated less than 20 km north-east of Moscow, and was chosen for its proximity to the Kaliningrad (now named after Korolev) Soviet space science city, the Chkalovsky Airfield and the Yaroslavl railway. The first training facilities were prepared in early July 1960.

Just over a year later, in January 1961, the first six potential cosmonauts: Yuri Gagarin,

ering in a new era for humanity. The Cosmonaut Training Centre came to carry Gagarin's name after his tragic and untimely death in 1968.

Zvezdny Gorodok continued to develop, taking advantage of the latest advances in Soviet and global space-related and general scientific progress, and reached a series of important milestones in piloted cosmonautics – starting with the training of the first group of women cosmonaut candidates in 1963, leading to the historic 16th June 1963 space flight by Valentina Tereshkova.

Confirmation of human beings' ability to live and work in space, and the launch of the world's first space station, the Salyut 1, in 1971, created new opportunities and challenges for the Cosmonaut Training Centre. Training for the first space station crews began in 1966.

In April 1967, a decision was made to share the USSR's space achievements with allied and friendly countries, in a programme known as Interkosmos. Czechoslovakia became the third country to send a human being to space in March 1978, and cosmonauts from Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Vietnam, Cuba, Mongolia and Romania followed suit over the next three years. France joined the club in 1982,

Russians, 12 NASA astronauts, 2 European Space Agency (ESA) astronauts and 4 JAXA (Japanese) astronauts.

The Centre contains everything an aspiring cosmonaut/astronaut needs, from medical observation and testing facilities, to an 18 metre, 300 ton centrifuge, the world's largest, Zero-G training aircraft, and mock-up models and simulators of all of the USSR's and Russia's space vehicles, from

programme.

In the 1990s, the Centre took a leading role in training Russian and international crews for work aboard the International Space Station (ISS), launched in 1998 and based on the Mir and Mir-2 modular space station design principle. This work increased significantly in 2009 on, after ISS crews were increased from three to six people. In the second half of 2009 alone, the centre trained 17

Soyuz and Salyut to Mir and Buran.

"It can be said with confidence that our [cosmonaut] flight preparation system is the best in the world. Our foreign colleagues also recognise this," Roscosmos chief Yuri Borisov said in a congratulatory message Saturday marking the Centre's 65th anniversary.

What's next for the Gagarin Centre? Training cosmonauts for the Russian space programme's next steps, from a new Russian space station, and eventually, new manned missions to the Moon, and one day, on to Mars.

Sputnik



• Training simulator at the Space Centre.

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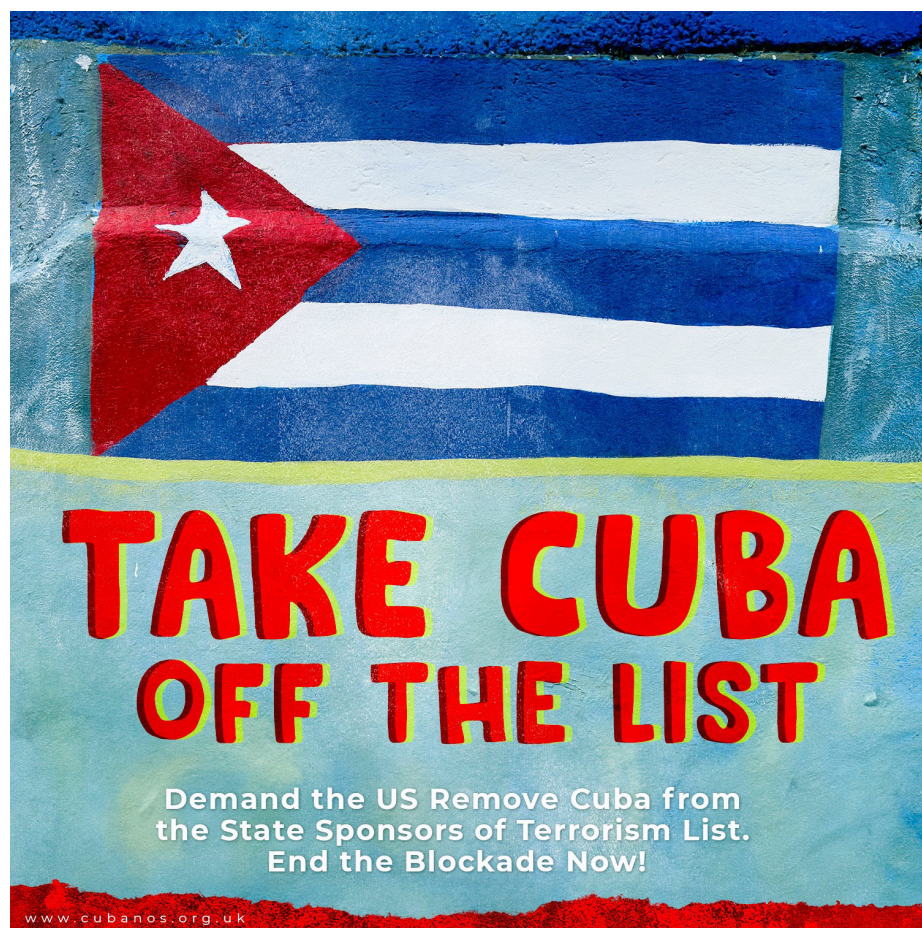
USA takes Cuba off 'terrorist' list

by Catherin López

The US administration of Joe Biden has finally removed Cuba from a list of countries that Washington considers sponsors of terrorism. This unjust inclusion, based on tricks and falsehoods, was adopted by the first administration of Donald Trump as a sop to the extreme right of the Cuban-born émigrés living in the USA. Another US ruler, Barack Obama, had removed Cuba from the American blacklist in 2015 when Washington and Havana began a phase of normalisation of relations.

Trump's successor in the White House, Democrat Joe Biden, supported its restoration despite its inconsistency, rejection and denunciation by Cuba.

Human rights organisations and US Congressmen, as well as governments, including that of Colombia,



have also made requests in this regard. Since his inauguration, Colombian

President Gustavo Petro has asked the USA to put an end to the illegitimate

listing of Cuba, in addition to highlighting the positive role played by Havana in the

Colombian peace talks.

The Cuban government denounced, in international forums and in conversations with counterparts from other countries, the harmful effects of Cuba's inclusion on the "sponsors of terrorism" list. This designation, together with the US blockade, is a heavy burden on the economy, financial transactions, access to credit and trade. For these two reasons, Cuba today faces acute material shortages that affect the standard of living of its citizens.

The application of Chapter III of the Helms-Burton Act, which is the basis for the ability of American citizens to sue in US courts for the expropriation of what they consider to be their property in Cuba, is also aimed at deepening the hardships.

In addition to the two steps mentioned above,

the Biden administration eliminated the list of restricted Cuban entities, which identifies a group of institutions with which US citizens and institutions are prohibited from engaging in financial transactions.

In a swift response, the Cuban Foreign Ministry described the announcements as steps, albeit limited, in the right direction. It recalled the persistence of the blockade and a good part of the dozens of coercive measures put in place in 2017 to tighten it.

For Cubans, it is clear that the clarifications reported in Washington should have been carried out much earlier, as the arguments were numerous, in addition to the fact that the permanence of a cruel policy to suffocate a neighbouring country is unjustifiable.

The Cuban government has just reaffirmed that it will continue its confrontation and denunciation of this policy. But, it added, it remains willing to maintain a respectful relationship with the USA, based on dialogue and non-interference in the internal affairs of both countries.

Radio Havana Cuba

Italian TV show exposes Zionist lobby

by Ed Newman

An eye opening episode of the investigative journalism show, *Report*, aired on Sunday 12th January 2025 by Italy's state broadcaster Rai TV, exposed the high level of lobbying activity by Israeli groups inside the European institutions over the last two decades.

The show revealed how more than 20 Israeli lobbying bodies, including the

Transatlantic Institute, the Brussels-based EU office of the American Jewish Committee, have been increasingly active in luring more than 200 high-ranking EU figures and lawmakers to unconditionally support Israel in exchange for luxurious trips to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and other benefits in kind.

Their support ranges from promoting Israel-EU trade agreements in all sectors, including military

technology, to overlooking the Zionist regime's crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories and other parts of the Middle East.

It was an excellent TV that which has exposed what some of us already knew, the high level of corruption, blackmail and manipulation resulting from the lobbying activity of more than 20 Israeli groups operating inside the EU institutions.

Fulvio Grimaldi, a se-

nior journalist, told reporters: "If Israel is accused of genocide in Gaza, the Zionist lobby groups will persuade EU decision makers that it's not true."

The TV show focused on the 33 Italian EU lawmakers who are members of the Transatlantic Friends of Israel lobby group. This comes as Italy is increasingly falling into political and cultural subordination to Israel.

In Italy, Zionist groups

constantly try to sway Italian public opinion by portraying Israel as the 'victim' and injecting the accusation of anti-Semitism against anyone who challenges the Israeli narrative.

Antonello Sacchetti, an Italian journalist, said: "It must be said that Italy's mainstream media system is closely linked to our lawmakers and political parties, as most of our newspapers depend

on public subsidies. It goes without saying that not one of them would ever dare criticise Israel."

The *Report* TV show revealed that Italy's current foreign minister, Antonio Tajani, is also a member of the Transatlantic Friends of Israel. Tajani, as EU Commissioner for Industry between 2010 and 2014, encouraged Israel to take part in several EU programmes.

Under his co-ordination, trade volume between Brussels and Tel Aviv soared. Tajani has never once condemned Israel for murdering tens of thousands of innocent civilians in Gaza and in the West Bank.

Radio Havana Cuba