

PANIC SWEEPS CHANCELLERIES OF EUROPE

by our Eastern European affairs correspondent

PANIC IS SWEEPING the chancelleries of Europe as the movers and shakers throughout the Continent scurry around trying to derail the new detente between Russia and the United States which they fear can only be built at their expense. Meanwhile the Trump team has made it clear that they expect the Ukrainians to pay for their past and future protection by giving the Americans exclusive rights to exploit Ukraine's priceless rare earths and other mineral deposits after the end of the fighting.

This hasn't gone down well in Kiev. Vladimir Zelensky is calling for the creation of a pan-European army to counter-balance US influence and Keir Starmer says he's "ready and willing" to send British troops to Ukraine to help guarantee the Kiev regime's security as part of any peace deal.

But Zelensky is being increasingly seen in the Oval Office as an obstacle to Trump's plan to end the Ukraine war and get his hands on the country's mineral wealth. Zelensky should leave Ukraine "immediately" and move to France so as not to impede peace talks with Russia, a source close to Trump has said, according

to the *New York Post*. And last week

Trump openly called Zelensky a "dictator with a four per cent approval rating" who started the war. He'd "better move fast or he is not going to have a Country left" Trump said while his billionaire White House aide, Elon Musk, says the Ukrainian leader is "despised by the people of Ukraine which is why he has refused to call an election".

US President Donald Trump sidelined his European allies when he phoned Vladimir Putin to talk about beginning negotiations to end the Ukraine war. The Russian and American foreign ministers then met in Saudi Arabia for the next steps which include a Trump-Putin summit that may set the seal on a deal to end the fighting.

The peace talks in Saudi Arabia may well become the foundation for a new system of international security. The Trump team is firmly committed to ending the bloody conflict in Ukraine. However, as Vladimir Pu-

tin noted in his telephone conversation with Donald Trump, a stand-still ceasefire along the current front line will not solve the underlying problems that made this war possible.

The talks between the US and Russian delegations in Riyadh were the first such high-level contacts since late 2021. The American side was led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio while the Russian team was headed by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the talks ended on a positive note with an agreement to restore full diplomatic relations to ambassadorial level and an announcement that American investments in Russia, including the energy sector, could be resumed.

There was also common ground on Ukraine. Fox News journalist Jackie Heinrich, citing sources in diplomatic circles, said that the Russians and Americans considered the long-overdue presidential elections in Ukraine a key condition for reaching an agreement.

Both sides believe that Zelensky's chances of re-election are slim and that the final agreements will be signed by another Ukrainian president.

Trump and Putin have now appointed their own special representatives to continue the negotiation process and a full summit, perhaps in Saudi Arabia again, is in the offing.

But the European Union will only be involved in the talks if the lifting of sanc-



London protest for Palestine and Gaza.

tions is discussed.

On his return to Moscow Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told the Russian parliament that "we have begun to move away from the edge of the abyss, where

our relations have been led by the Biden administration. The atmosphere is positive, the intentions are right, we will see how the situation develops further, what steps will be taken".

FUND

The February appeal was boosted this week with a bumper post-bag that brought in £1,820 for the fighting fund thanks to a Devon comrade who gave us £1,000 and other supporters like the veteran Suffolk supporter who sent in £100 and the Hull reader who gave us a tenner. A Southall reader donated £50. So did another from Dagenham. The fund for February now stands at £2,833. We now need £667 to hit our target for the month!

You can help. In fact your help is vital to guarantee the survival of our communist weekly. We must put the communist answer to the crisis back on the labour movement's agenda. We must do our best to get the communist voice heard on the street and in the offices, factories and estates of our country.

Your donations keep us going. 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>

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THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

Between a rock and a hard place

KEIR STARMER'S off to Washington next week to win support for a European plan to send 30,000 British and European Union troops to Ukraine as "peacekeepers" if and when a truce is agreed to end the Ukraine war. Though this force would allegedly be there to guarantee Ukraine's independence its real role would be to preserve the British and European Union's economic interests in a post-war Ukraine that Donald Trump clearly sees as no more than an American protectorate.

The war-lobby that reflects the most venal and aggressive sections of the British ruling class has gone into top gear with Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat worthies all urging Starmer to "stand up" to Donald Trump. The Atlanticists who used to hail American presidents as leaders of the "free world" have closed ranks with those who look to an alliance with Franco-German imperialism to bleat on about "betrayal".

"It's time for Starmer to stand up for Britain and our allies in Europe" says Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey. Former Tory defence secretary Gavin Williamson says that "we cannot let fake news and a false narrative become accepted. That has to be rebuffed at every moment. And if that causes some people offence, well, that's their problem". And Tony Blair's former spin doctor, Alastair Campbell, calls Donald Trump a "pathological liar, a narcissist" who is "concerned only about himself, his wealth and his power" in the *Independent* last week.

None of this is likely to sway those now at the helm of US imperialism. The initiative to start high-level talks between the Russian and American foreign ministers in Saudi Arabia was not the whim of The Donald or a tiny clique of American oligarchs but a decision that reflects the needs and demands of the wing of the American ruling class that wants to cut its losses in Ukraine to enable them to strengthen their grip over the Middle East in their bid to control the entire global energy market.

In reality there never was a "free world" and the "special relationship" the British bourgeoisie upheld was largely a figment of their own imagination. They feign surprise at Trump's moves to build detente with the Russian Federation but the Trump camp made no secret of this in the run-up to the US presidential election last year. The simple fact is that Starmer and the rest of the pack in Europe didn't think Trump would win.

As we've said before secret diplomacy is rarely the best pathway to peace. But both the Russian and American sides are clearly working towards a win-win agreement over Ukraine. If that ends the war with a peace settlement that recognises the rights of the Crimeans, southern Ukrainians and the people of the Donbas to live in the Russian Federation well and good. It will clearly benefit the Ukrainian and Russian people.

Sidelined by the Americans

by Fan Anqi and Zhang Changyue

EUROPEAN leaders held an emergency summit this week to discuss the Ukraine crisis, amid a deepening breach with Washington and growing concerns that the Trump administration could leave Brussels out of any talks on ending Russia-Ukraine conflict. The meeting involved the heads of government of the UK, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary-General of NATO.

The possible sidelining of Europe highlights a major divergence in their security interests, say Chinese experts. The Russia-Ukraine conflict will become more complex, they predict. While fighting continues on the frontline the conflict will become a diplomatic manoeuvre among not only the two parties that are directly involved, but also the USA and Europe.

On Sunday French President Emmanuel Macron called for "consultation talks" and that they would address the tumultuous change in the US approach to Ukraine and the attendant risks to the security of the European continent.

The emergency summit comes after Donald Trump stunned his European allies and Ukraine when he announced he had held a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, without consulting them, and would start a peace process.

US Vice President J D Vance sent another round of shock-waves through the continent during his speech at Munich Security Conference last week, where he reprimanded European leaders, telling them that the biggest threat to their security was "from within" pointing to what he claimed was their suppression of free speech and refusal to work with hard-right parties in government.

Trump's Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg jolted Europe further when he said the European governments' positions would be taken into consideration, but won't be participants, in the peace talks.

"Europe has been so busy recently dealing with these multiple blows that the US dealt

to them, and this summit will try to digest these disturbing developments. The immediate priority for Europe is to secure a seat at the negotiating table for the Russia-Ukraine conflict," says Cui Hongjian, professor at the Academy of Regional and Global Governance at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

However, it is evident that there are also contrasting approaches within the Trump administration. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio insists that Ukraine and Europe "would have to be involved" in any meaningful talks over Ukraine.

Cui says the mixed signals from Washington could be part of a broader strategy: by releasing seemingly chaotic information, the White House may be testing the reactions of various parties, with the ultimate goal of identifying a solution that it deems most suited to its interests. There is a clear disagreement between parties on what peace stands for and what the costs are. What's more, the battle will continue as both sides accumulate bargaining chips for the negotiations.

"The situation ahead could become even more complex: with fighting continuing at the front, there will be a diplomatic manoeuvre involving four parties -- the USA, Russia, Europe, and Ukraine -- playing out behind the scenes," Cui said.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the summit a "once-in-a-generation moment" for national security, and the UK would "work to ensure we keep the US and Europe together", adding the two could not "allow any divisions in the alliance to distract" from "external enemies".

Starmer told the Telegraph he was prepared to put British troops on the ground in Ukraine to safeguard peace. Sweden would also consider contributing to post-war peacekeeping forces in Ukraine says Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson.

"Although the drawing of the European geo-security borders is particularly important to Europe, the US wouldn't want the Europeans there to affect the interests of the US," Yang Xiyu, a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International

Studies, told the media.

Yang believes that the US' potentially shutting out Europe in handling the Russia-Ukraine conflict suggests the emergence of a major divergence between the US and Europe on European security interests, which will bring about a drastic change in the structure of the transatlantic alliance.

"This is a major step in the practice of 'American First' in Trump's foreign policy and will set a precedent of the US possibly abandoning Europe when their interests collide. Europe will now have to think seriously about its strategic autonomy," Yang said.

Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky has told his aides to reject the Trump administration's proposal that would grant the Americans 50 per cent of Ukraine's rare earth minerals. But White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes called the Ukrainian President's refusal "short-sighted". He added that the White House believes that "binding economic ties with the United States will be the best guarantee against future aggression and an integral part of lasting peace".

China supports all efforts dedicated to peace and expects a fair, lasting, and binding peace agreement accepted by all parties concerned, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said while meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart, Andrei Sybiha, at the latter's request on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

China supports all endeavours conducive to peace and backs Europe in playing a significant role in the peace negotiation process, Wang told Kaja Kallas, the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy of the European Commission. And Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told the media that "as we speak, unilateralism and protectionism are rising, and uncertainties and destabilising factors are intertwining with each other. The international community aspires for peace and stability, wants a sound and steady China-EU relationship, and expects China and the EU to play a constructive role in this changing world more than ever".

Global Times

Workers' Notes

All in the Air

by New Worker correspondent

THANKS to the efforts of the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) workers have secured a worthwhile legal victory against blacklisting. The Court of Appeal has ruled that the practice of bargain-basement Ryanair of putting pilots who exercised their legal right to strike in 2019 on a blacklist in order to withdraw their travel benefits constituted a breach of the Blacklisting Regulations.

After BALPA called a strike among Ryanair pilots in 2019 the company threatened to revoke concessionary travel benefits for any employee who took part in the action. In a rare case of Ryanair keeping its promises the airline removed concessionary travel benefits for 12 months, effectively punishing pilots for exercising their legal right to strike.

BALPA and legal firm Farrer & Co successfully argued that Ryanair's conduct amounted to blacklisting under UK regulations designed to protect workers from such discriminatory practices.

The judge declared that: "There can be no real dispute that the natural meaning of the phrase 'activities of an independent trade union' includes organising industrial action." BALPA's General Secretary, Amy Leversidge declared that: "This is a huge win for BALPA and the trade union movement more generally which could not have been achieved without the bravery of the pilots involved and the wider support of the BALPA membership. Thankfully the Court's decision will put a stop to employers making lists of striking employees in order to punish them and we hope that this judgment will make employers think twice before relying on other harmful strike-busting tactics in the aviation sector and

beyond".

True enough, but it says much about the dire state of labour law in this country that it took an expensive court case with five KCs on the pilot's side to obtain such a ruling.

Meanwhile cabin crew working for Japan Airlines (JAL) are up in arms over their current miserable pay offer. Workers based at Heathrow Airport from where the airline flies twice daily to Tokyo rejected an offer that effectively amounts to a mere 1.5 per cent. JAL has proposed a three per cent increase on basic pay while freezing flight allowance, which constitutes about 50 per cent of earnings. Consequently, the net effect is only a 1.5 per cent increase.

With tourist traffic between Japan and the UK booming JAL is highly profitable. In the nine months to December 2024, the company earned nearly \$9 billion in revenues and approximately \$600 million in profits.

Unite's general secretary Sharon Graham said "our members at Japan Airlines are rightly furious at such a pathetically low pay offer. Yet it thinks it can get away with trying to staff its planes with cabin crew on the cheap".

Regional officer Joe McGowan warned that "despite working incredibly hard and helping the company make huge profits, Japan Airlines clearly doesn't value its workers. Our cabin crew members will now be considering all options in response to such penny-pinching behaviour. Everything is on the table for consideration up to and including industrial action".

At the same airport cleaners employed by OCS in British Airways offices are planning strike action. While OCS is a Living Wage Foundation accredited employer it only pays BA workers the legal minimum wage as the outsourcing company only pays the higher "Living Wage" to its direct employees. BA's parent company, IAG, made £1.7 billion during last summer's peak while OCS made operating profits of £28.3 million in 2023.

Thus most of OCS's BA workers only get the legal minimum wage of £11.44 an hour at Heathrow. As a result, some workers, who wear BA branded uniforms, struggle to



Credit – Martin Pope

Palestine Action activists smashed windows and splattered the BBC headquarters in Portland Place, London, with red paint last week in protest against the Beeb's ongoing complicity in the genocide of Palestinians through its entrenched pro-Israel bias. The BBC was covered in blood-red paint to symbolise the Corporation's responsibility for the blood spilled in Gaza and the state broadcaster's role in whitewashing Israeli atrocities through its partial and biased coverage. For years, the BBC has consistently minimised Israel's violence against Palestinians while amplifying the narratives of the Zionist oppressors.

"The BBC's biased reporting isn't a simple case of poor journalism – it's a matter of life and death. By downplaying Israeli war crimes, the BBC is complicit in the genocide unfolding in Gaza," said a spokesperson for Palestine Action. "This isn't just about the news – it's about the role of the media in shaping global complicity. The BBC has blood on its hands, and today's action is part of a wider campaign to hold them accountable. We will not stand by as the BBC sanitises genocide".

pay their rent.

Sharon Graham said "it is rank hypocrisy for OCS to boast about being a real living wage employer when its BA staff are on poverty wages and having to use foodbanks. The Living Wage Foundation should not be allowing race-to-the-bottom outsourcers like OCS to take cover under its good name".

Strike action will take place between the 25th and 28th February. Another regional officer Martin West said "there is still time to avoid industrial action but that will require OCS to put forward a fair pay offer. This dispute will continue to escalate and does reflect well on either OCS or BA – it is in both companies' interests to resolve it".

Just days earlier Unite won a substantial pay award for British Airways staff

at both Gatwick and Heathrow airports. Cabin crew, engineers, customer relations staff and cargo handlers gained a 4.5 pay rise for one year and a year one reward payment of £1,000.

For year two and three the increase is three per cent along with other reward payments of between one and four per cent.

National officer Oliver Richardson welcomed the deal saying "BA remains an iconic airline across the world and our members make every effort in often difficult circumstances to ensure that the service remains world class. This pay award rightly recognises their hard work and I'm pleased that Unite has made sure our members have greater financial certainty for the next three years."

On the rails

RMT has called off three Sunday strikes by Avanti train managers following after Management agreed to talks over a long-running dispute over rest-day working. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said "this breakthrough has

been achieved through the strength and determination of our members, whose industrial action has forced Avanti to engage seriously with this dispute. As a result, strike action has been suspended to allow space for constructive talks".

Another long running railway dispute is over ticket offices. While the rail unions fought off plans to close most of them in England, the struggle to ensure they actually remain open for more than a couple of hours a day continues.

Southeastern is a particularly lax operator. Figures obtained by RMT through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request shows that in the last eight months (June to January), Southeastern's ticket offices were closed for around 70,000 hours when they should have been open. In five stations, ticket offices were open for only one per cent or fewer of their advertised hours, 17 ticket offices were closed for at least half

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of their scheduled hours and 46 ticket offices were shut for at least a third of their advertised hours.

RMT suspects this is a deliberate attempt to reduce reliance on ticket offices, despite the promises made after unprecedented opposition to proposed closures during the 2023 consultation.

Mick Lynch said “our findings show a shocking picture of Southeastern’s failure to open ticket offices as advertised which is a clear breach of their obligations. Passengers, particularly those who are elderly, disabled, or less able to navigate unstaffed stations, are being left without the support they need and will potentially be put off from using the railway altogether”.

He also said that “rail operators once again are trying to undermine essential services and erode public trust in our railways...the government must step in now to protect ticket offices and ensure Southeastern is held to account.”

North of the border nationalised ScotRail is doing the same. The Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) warns that ScotRail’s plans mean railway ticket office hours will be cut by a whopping 2,745 hours a week across the network.

TSSA points out that apart from severely impacting those without internet access, the closure of ticket offices will also lead to more anti-social behaviour on the concourse. General Secretary Maryam Eslamdoust said “ticket office staff do far more than sell tickets—they provide essential support, safety, and accessibility for passengers. ScotRail’s proposals will make rail travel harder for pensioners, disabled passengers, and those with learning difficulties, while also increasing risks for women and vulnerable communities”.

The union has launched a petition calling on Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, to direct ScotRail to abandon the reductions in ticket office hours and commit to keeping stations staffed in the future.

On the Buses

IN THE North-east of England bus drivers are at war with what Unite the union calls a “reign of terror by managers of Go North East. Here staff threatened with dismissal on spurious grounds and suspended and sent home from work

whenever health and safety issues are raised.

Workers have been forced to resign, and management has imposed what one worker described as a “dictatorship” with “my way or the highway” style practices. Workers say this is revenge by management after workers won a well-deserved pay rise after a bitter industrial battle in 2023.

Sharon Graham said “Go North East has a track record of appalling management practices but it has plumbed new depths with this latest reign of terror that has seen workers, including union reps, forced to sign paperwork under threats of dismissal”.

In January seven members of staff who had raised concerns over health and safety procedures were sent home from work and six were then given final written warnings. Two felt under such pressure that they had no choice but to resign. Two were union reps and were instantly “de-recognised” from their elected workplace roles.

When one of the seven returned to work, he raised additional concerns for passenger safety after CCTV on his double decker bus stopped working. His reward for pointing this out and requesting a new bus was to

be sent home. He now faces possible dismissal.

Potential strike action would see bus services in the area grounded for the second time in as many years. The union states that services are dreadful because Go North East cannot attract engineers and that its best buses are being sent to the Go North West’s sister-company who recently won a franchise in Manchester.

Regional officer Dave Telford says “once again, communities are being betrayed by Go North East. Our members live and work in this area and the working conditions they now face are so unreasonable they are considering strike action. Passengers are being put in danger by this approach to safety. This is a dispute of Go North East’s own making, in petty revenge for the workers getting a decent pay deal. And it will have to answer to the pensioners, the parents and the business owners who will be let down when the buses stop running.”

And Finally

TAKING the concept of transport workers to an unfeasible extreme, we

can note that in financially troubled Birmingham bin workers have unsurprisingly rejected a one off non-consolidated cash offer in exchange for a brutal permanent pay cut.

The 350 refuse workers started striking last month over the scrapping of the safety critical Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) role, resulting in pay cuts of up to £8,000 for 150 workers.

The bin crews have already voluntarily accepted cuts to pay and terms and conditions to assist the council after it declared bankruptcy. It now appears that further attacks on jobs and wages are coming.

The Commissioners, sent in by the Tory Government, to oversee massively damaging budget reductions have been blamed for the council’s hard line.

Sharon Graham said “the working people of Birmingham did not create this crisis and should not be made to pay for it. At the moment, the commissioners seem to be blindly imposing the last government’s slash and burn policies against Birmingham and it is just making things worse”. She optimistically added that: “Ministers should now step in. Cutting vital public services to the bone and victimising workers is not what Labour was elected to do.” Where has she been for the past few years?”.

The union’s national lead officer Onay Kasab said “Any confidence Birmingham’s refuse workers had that the commissioner-led reform was about turning a basket-case service into a functional one is gone.

“The service is chronically short staffed but the council has offered every full-time employee voluntary redundancy. At the same time, management continues to throw money down the drain on expensive employment agencies. Recycling is almost non-existent – not because of the strikes but because the lorries don’t work”.

We can expect to see many more such battles by local authority workers in the near future. Birmingham is not the only municipality feeling the pinch and Commissioners sent by Whitehall will be laying down the law.

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

DARENT Valley Hospital in Dartford, Kent, was the first NHS hospital to be rebuilt using the Private Finance Initiative – begun under the Tories and finished in 2000 under Labour.

Since then it has earned a return of 50 per cent per year for investors, according to a report by the National Audit Office.

Four companies involved the PFI project were able to realise £37 million in the year 2003 under a refinanc-

ing deal, which gives them a rate of return of 25 per cent. In other words, every four years the hospital gives back the sum invested in the building, but still has to keep paying back until at least the end of the contract.

Edward Leigh, who chairs the Commons Public Accounts Committee, said: “This has been reasonable deal for the public, but a fantastic one for the private companies”.

Not everyone shares this view. Many people, including the health services unions, believe that the £37 million would have been better used in improving NHS services.

The public service union Unison said that the NAO report shows how much private companies are profiting from PFI.

“The report concludes that refinancing gave contractors THC Dartford and extra £33 million and netted hefty profits, 60 per cent higher than expected, for the firm’s shareholders”.

“The trust was also criticised for not being more stringent when assessing the quality of cleaning and catering services”

Unison general secretary Dave Prentis said the report is proof positive that companies are making obscene profits from PFI deals.

“The PFI consortia have pocketed windfall profits from a refinancing deal which netted them a £37 million bonanza within three years of the hospital opening.

“In 2003 Carillion

sold their £4 million shareholding for £16 million – this is profiteering from taxpayers, pure and simple”.

Prentis said shares in PFI hospitals are now bought and sold on the secondary market by people who don’t know and don’t care about the patients or hospital staff.

“It is clear that Darent Valley Hospital was taken for a ride by the PFI consortium. In exchange for a small share of the refinancing gains, they agreed to extend the contract another seven years to 35 years.

In addition, they might have to pay contractors more than the original cost of the hospital, if they want to terminate the contract early.

by Mick Kelly

ON 20th January Trump stood in the Capitol rotunda promising a “golden age” and vowed to stem the decline of the US empire, which in fact is something he will not and cannot do. The opposite is the case. The economic policies he promotes, such as continued decoupling the US economy from that of People’s China and erecting a wall of tariffs, will accelerate the decline of the United States. Increased military spending for the Pentagon or the deployment of more military forces into the Pacific will not change this.

Over the long run, a decrease in economic power will be followed by a decline of political power. The role of the USA in the world economy is shrinking. In 1960, the USA had about 40 per cent of the world GDP. Today it is about half that, depending on how you measure.

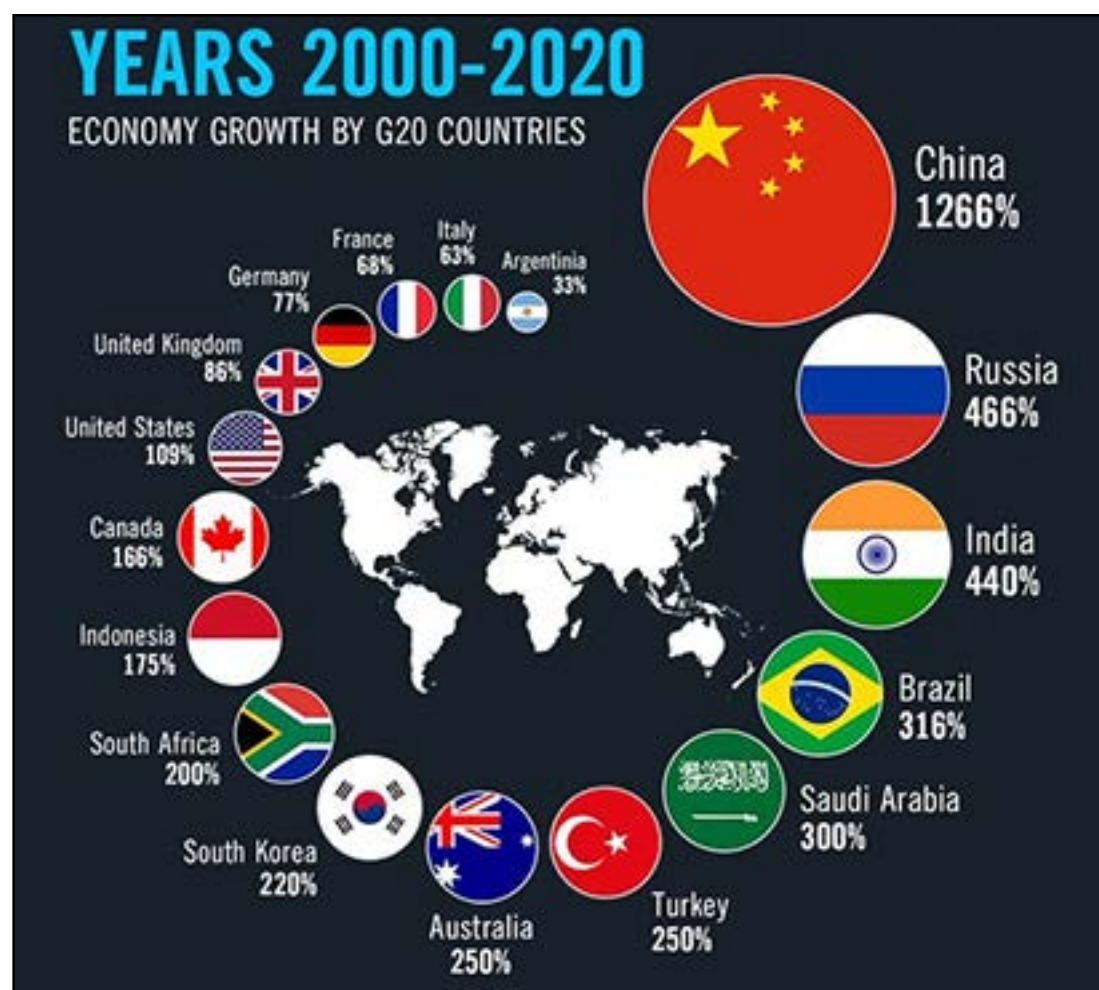
The USA is abandoning projects that put it at the centre of the international economy, such as the World Trade Organisation. The 2017 withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, carried out by Donald Trump days after his first inauguration eight years ago, is another symptom of deterioration. The relative weakness of the American economy is being accompanied by a fragmentation of the world economy.

Looking at statistics from the International Monetary Fund to compare the size of the respective economies, People’s China has surpassed that of the USA. The metric of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), which allows one to compare which commodities and services can be purchased with a given currency, indicates that in 2024 China had about 19 per cent of the world GDP and the USA had about 14 per cent of the world GDP. One could also look at a host of industries, from car manufacturing and ship building to steel and green technologies, and see that the USA is being left behind.

Two issues to consider

We are looking at US policy and plans in the Pacific in general. Two things need to be considered as we try to get a handle on what is coming next.

The declining US empire and the rise of socialist China



First, there is a fair amount of overlap on the China policy pursued by Democratic and Republican politicians. We can have some confidence that Trump will be unmatched when it comes to pronouncements infused with chauvinism and xenophobia, such as he did before, calling Covid the “China virus.” While he may well adopt a more extreme anti-China position than the Biden administration, there is a certain continuity in US policy from administration to administration.

For example, when Defence Secretary Austin was testifying on the 2024 defence appropriation bill at the Senate Armed Services Committee, he stated “this is a strategy-driven budget – and one driven by the seriousness of our strategic competition with the People’s Republic of China”.

The second issue is Taiwan, the great unsolved issue

of the Chinese revolution. The USA has long encouraged reactionary and separatist forces on the island to “contain” China.

Communist Party of China General Secretary Xi Jinping has said “the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family. No one can sever our family bonds, and no one can stop the historical trend of national reunification.” The CPC has also made it clear that separatism will not be allowed to flourish, and the current situation cannot continue forever. Biden said the US would intervene militarily to block reunification, and Trump says socialist China is afraid of him. So, we will see – it is a safe bet that what Xi Jinping says is right – if reunification is “inevitable”.

Trump, trade and tariffs

Countries that enact tariffs generally do so as a

means to protect internal markets for industrial development. Monopoly capitalist powers in decline, like the USA, have a bias towards tariffs as they shield internal markets and out of date industries from competition. For example, China has developed a steel industry that is much more advanced than that in the USA – hence lots of tariffs for China’s steel and steel products.

“tariff man”

The Biden administration kept many of the China tariffs from the first Trump administration and upped some – like those on electric vehicles and aluminium. Now Trump who bills himself as a “tariff man” has vowed to take things to another level – at times talking about 60 per cent tariffs on some Chinese goods, or 25 per cent tariffs, and most recently 10 per cent China tariffs. We will see.

One impact of tariffs will be an upward pressure on prices in America at a time when many of us are tired of inflation. Also, tariffs will not result in a huge number of manufacturing jobs, because of the advances in automation technologies.

There is also a political/military dimension to the aspiration to “delink” the two economies and “protect” supply chains. But it’s worth noting that high tariffs were one of the factors that deepened the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Looking to the future

Current American strategy towards China has several elements, including a massive military build-up – things like more naval spending, more troops and missiles in the Philippines, and Pentagon programmes like the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. There is no reason to think the Trump administration will pull back on this or change direction.

US strategy also includes drawing countries of the Pacific region into hostile alliances, formal or informal, against China. Trump may find that more difficult, largely because a USA under Trump cannot be counted on to honour its commitments – even to its lackeys.

On the balance, it can be said that the USA is on the road to greater conflict with China and the possibility of the USA provoking a major military conflict cannot be ruled out – in fact it would be a likely consequence of where things are heading now.

Progressives, revolutionaries and those of us in the anti-war movement need to stand with China. China has done nothing wrong – it is developing socialism and working for peace. And not surprisingly, China has friends all over the world, including right here in the United States.

We are going to be busy over the next four years. We have an enemy in the White House that will wage an unrelenting war on people at home and abroad, it is our job to make sure that war is not a one sided one.

German elections and the march of fascism

by William Briggs

THE GERMAN elections have caught the attention of the world. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) seem to be about to consolidate its rapid rise. The growing strength of the right has exposed the bourgeois political system as it accommodates itself to what is the re-emergence of fascism in Germany. It raises questions that go beyond the potential outcome of these elections. It raises questions of where fascism springs from, its relation to the crisis of capitalism and of its organic connection to capitalism.

The election itself and the response of the mainstream parties is revealing. For decades there had been a 'fire-wall' to keep the far-right out. The rise of the AfD put that claim to the test. The metaphorical 'firewall' has crumbled as anti-immigration laws have been debated.

The ruling centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has been blamed for opportunistically failing to stand against the right and its anti-immigrant policies. That is true, but anti-immigration politics have been infecting German society across the board.

A panic seemed to seize the bourgeois parties as support for AfD continued to rise. Heading into the election the fascists are set to become the second biggest party, polling at more than 20 per cent of the potential vote.

What has been happening in Germany is not an isolated phenomenon. Economic crisis is driving people to look



Anti fascist protest in Munich.

for answers beyond the mainstream. Populists and demagogues offer quick 'blame the other' solutions. It has been grist to the mill of the far right, the fascist, and fascist-leaning political parties. Across Europe and beyond we can observe the rising strength of the right; Le Pen's National Rally in France, Farage's Reform Party in the UK, Orban in Hungary, Trump in the USA.

The richest man in the world, Elon Musk, is actively working to boost the profiles of these quasi-mainstream expressions of the extreme right. All of this bears out some central observations of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Marxism argues that the rise of fascism is an attempt by capitalism and its state to preserve its power when the crisis of capitalism endangers its continued existence. Fascism does not threaten capitalism, but is used by capitalism, to serve the interests of capital and the ruling class.

Fascism is not a first choice for the ruling class, which far prefer bourgeois rule and bourgeois democracy. That offers the illusion that the system works in the real and best interests of all in society. This has been a potent and winning formula that has helped keep the working class cooperative.

Fascism a weapon of capitalism

Fascism, as a weapon of capitalism, isn't a new 'stage' in capitalist rule. It's designed to be a temporary measure while the system finds a way of regaining some sense of stability. Marxism argues that regulation of capitalism is ultimately impossible, and that the extended and perpetual crises of capitalism lead to its collapse.

Lenin wrote of the decay of capitalism. Imperialism shows this decay clearly. Fascism follows, but it's not inevitable. The only force that can stop this slide

is the working class. It is precisely this knowledge that further drives capitalism and its state and ruling class to seek to cripple the working class, politically and organisationally.

What makes the German election so symbolic is not simply its geographical location or its awful historical significance. There have always been neo-Nazis skulking, plotting and creating a sense of fear in the community. For the past 80 years there have been tiny bands of fantasists. It is when the black shirts and the masks are replaced with suits and urbane patter that we can see the depth of the crisis.

When wealthy capitalists begin funding election campaigns and those campaigns begin to gain a foothold among the broader electorate, then the depth of the crisis is finally evident. The AfD in Germany is closely related to the neo-Nazis in Australia, although the AfD has worked to get some

electoral 'respectability.' Both blame problems on immigration, and call for secure and closed borders. The AfD have worked to make it look reasonable and the AfD has adopted a political framework that can attract money and therefore voters.

The common thread that the growing European fascists have in common with Trump, is the simplistic vilification of immigrants. Finding a scapegoat is a whole lot easier than finding the real cause of what are very real problems.

Society is riven with inequality. Poverty stalks the streets. Homelessness afflicts more and more. Living standards are daily slashed. The rich are becoming obscenely rich. The economy is unstable. Capitalism is on the very edge of an abyss and the state does nothing.

Without an alternative capitalism will not founder.

The working class offers that alternative.

While fascism is rising, so too are the working class, in country after country, on continent after continent. They too often maintain a belief that the political system can be tinkered with and that the economic system can be reformed. They remain largely leaderless.

Even in Germany, where the far right is enjoying such success, the people are on the streets. The accommodation not just by the CDU to the anti-immigrant appeals of the AfD but across the political spectrum has seen hundreds of thousands rallying and marching. The problem is that the protesters are yet to be convinced that the electoral system, that bourgeois democracy, and capitalism itself are at the heart of the problem.

The AfD will poll well. It might be kept from winning a share of the government or being invited into any new coalition. While that is good, it does not take away the problem. It's not just a problem for Germany. The flames are alight across Europe. To say that fascists will not again assume power is a fantasy. It can happen anywhere and in any state. Large and powerful democracies are no guarantee against such a shift.

The political figures sitting in parliaments around the world would rather the status quo of bourgeois democracy was maintained, but the capitalists know that fascism is a useful and possibly unavoidable tool to ensure survival for a system in terminal decay.

**Guardian
Australian communist
weekly**

USA: the case for reparations

by Jim McMahan

THE AMERICAN war of independence of 1776 would have been a good time to bring slavery to an end. Tragically it was not done. Enslavement was discussed a few years later during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. But in the end the slaves were sold out as matters were left to individual states – laying the basis for the divide between North and South.

Slavery was abolished in Vermont in 1777 and thereafter abolished in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey – with conditions attached to local emancipations. But overwhelmingly the enslaved Black people lived on southern plantations.

What helped shape the struggle over slavery at this time was the revolutionary impact of the capitalist production of cotton. In England the production of cotton textiles was going through revolutionary changes with the introduction of spinning and weaving machinery. And then the cotton gin was invented and introduced in the South in 1793.

The cotton gin separated the short-staple seed from the fibre with ease compared to what had been a laborious task. This greatly accelerated the clearing of the land and the growth of large scale cotton plantations.

In 1790 the USA was home to close to 700,000 slaves. But by the eve of the Civil War in 1861 that

number had increased to four million, and almost 2.5 million of them lived in the Deep South. Most enslaved people now languished in the rapidly expanding states along the Mississippi River. And there they worked on cotton plantations where they supplied the voracious demand for slaves under the expanding conditions of the capitalist industrial revolution. Enslaved Black people were being “sold down the river” to Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Twice as many slaves were transported to the cotton frontier as had originally crossed the Atlantic on ships to North America. Families were separated and torn apart. One enslaved child in three was separated from their parents. The separations left deep emotional scars on survivors, the legacy of which remains to this day.

The expansion of the US cotton industry was astonishing. In 1790 the USA produced 1.5 million pounds of cotton a year; by 1825 that had grown to 167.5 million pounds. By 1850 production had expanded to 2.5 million bales of cotton, each weighing about 400 pounds – 1 billion pounds!

80 per cent

Before 1810, slaves in the USA produced only 0.16 per cent of the world's cotton. This rose to more than 80 per cent between 1836 and 1860. Had the South been a separate country in 1860, its gross domestic product would have ranked above that of France, Germany and

Denmark. The banking industry of the USA was closely tied to the enslavement industry, and there was no clear economic division between the enslaved South and the non-enslaved North.

Huge imports of American cotton flooded the port of Liverpool in England. Slave labour made possible the rapid rise of the capitalist system in England which was becoming the leading capitalist country of

geoisie show that England also owes a debt in reparations to Black people in the USA for the bounty of enslaved labour gained by corporate England along with the corporate USA.

always fought

Black people always fought back against their bondage whenever possible. The great Haitian Revolution beginning in 1791 was an inspira-

tion. He was also a political collaborator with John Brown, who in 1859 led the raid on an arms depot at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia which pointed the way toward armed struggle against the violent enslavement system of the racist Confederacy.

It took a great Civil War, the first total war of modern times, to make the revolution

federacy. One-fifth of these fighters died.

Accelerations in the means of production spurred on the class struggle. Advances like the cotton gin and large industrialised plantations with workers regimented and driven to their limits brought great wealth for plantation barons and bankers but nothing but misery for the Black masses. Finally this is what causes social revolution. This is what Marxists call historical materialism. The American Civil War was a military conflict between two social systems – the slavocracy and capitalism.

President Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address in April 1865 acknowledged the debt owed by the United States to the enslaved people, referring to “all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil...”.

This is an acknowledgement of the debt owed to Black people for 250 years of producing the great fortunes of plantation barons and their financial backers. Added to that are generations of Jim Crow discrimination followed by the New Jim Crow era accompanied by the prison-industrial complex and George Floyd-type murders and treatment under state repression, especially the role of the police. The annual US gross domestic product of over 21 trillion dollars has more than enough resources to pay this debt to African Americans!

Workers World (USA)

Black leader Nat Turner captured.



the world. After 1830 there were over 2,000 cotton mills and garment factories in the Manchester region alone.

The backbreaking labour of US enslavement was integrated with the oppressing conditions of ‘free labour’ [wage slavery] in English garment factories – it was these conditions that Karl Marx agitated against.

The profits made by the British bour-

geoisie show that England also owes a debt in reparations to Black people in the USA for the bounty of enslaved labour gained by corporate England along with the corporate USA. Black people always fought back against their bondage whenever possible. The great Haitian Revolution beginning in 1791 was an inspira-

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LETTERS

Dear Comrades

For those unfortunate enough to have to rely on the Western bourgeois media for a balanced view of world events, or even a basic understanding of important political developments, capitalisms economic crisis and the background to current geopolitical conflicts, they may become sadly detached from reality. Hidden by a fog of misinformation, lies and half-truths and behind a wall of prejudice and ignorance they are denied a clear perspective of changes in the real world. As long as the population toils, consumes and is not free thinking the Imperialists can continue to exploit and plunder.

Stereotypes have been created in people's minds of the alternative world that are both absurd and disrespectful. The bleak image of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), described as a bizarre rogue state with starving citizens ruled by a ruthless dictator, could not be further from the truth. Against all the odds, with constant threats, harsh sanctions and trade boycotts the story of the DPRK has been one of remarkable success. Starting from total destruction, with almost nothing left standing, the Workers Party of Korea adopted Marxism Leninism, enriched with the Juche philosophy of self reliance, to

build a modern socialist state. Respect and care for the entire people from the cradle to the grave with free housing and full job security within a new progressive and dynamic society based upon equality and mutual respect.

The international situation is in a process of unprecedented change with the emergence of a new multipolar world order. China's Belt & Road and BRICS are playing a largely ignored role in reshaping and developing the non-Western world to enable it to prosper and to defy US hegemony. As the capitalist crisis deepens, imperialism has entered a period of rapid decline, both politically and economically. The Western media plays a deceitful role in blaming all its woes on others such as Vladimir Putin, People's China or immigrants.

All this shows why it is so important to have a free and independent source of news – such as the *New Worker*. When the big collapse of imperialism comes, it must be the time of the workers. It will be the historic opportunity for the working class to take the reins of power. This is why we not only need to have a powerful labour movement in place but also to educate and inspire decisive action. Not to respond by voting neo-fascist or panic buying of toilet rolls. Meanwhile we must work for the understanding and unity of workers everywhere.

**John Maryon
Suffolk**

Dear Comrades

Anyone who believes that the USA has good intentions towards Russia is either an idiot or insane. What we have at the moment is the classic good cop, bad cop police station approach to those they have in their clutches.

Just as the American good cop is talking about a new era for peace in Ukraine the EU/UK bad cop is ramping up the war rhetoric. Deal with us says the good cop and we'll offer you an easy way out of a war that has landed you with thousands of sanctions and dead soldiers or we'll turn those nasty Europeans on you who will send in tens of thousands of their blood-thirsty soldiers to wreak havoc on your border regions. To believe that there are any real frictions between the USA and Europe apart from the loud shouting going on is ludicrous. These two are one body of multi-intertwined mass murdering gangsters.

They are acting together every step of the way in an attempt to blind Russia into accepting a fake peace deal which will be the prelude to sending in so-called buffer forces. It will give the West, without Russian military opposition, the entry they want into Ukraine. Those buffer forces will then triple in size and go on tripling. The aim being to make politically insecure those very same border regions of Russia as a means of softening them up for easy military advance in a few years time with the buffer army infrastructure solidly in place to make that military incursion a practical option.

In the intervening time the already deeply penetrated Ukrainian state will be no more than a fig leaf, if that. It won't be Ukraine anymore just as the NHS is not the NHS other than its title. The existing land of Ukraine will be in the hands of NATO with St Petersburg and Moscow in their cross-sights. Russia should not fall for this devil's trick and never agree to the stationing of US/EU/UK buffer forces in Ukraine as part of a so-called peace deal. This is no peace deal, it stinks of military adventurism.

**Elijah Traven
Hull**

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

Dear Comrades

I am contacting you on behalf of the International Ukraine Anti Fascist Solidarity (IUAFS), campaigning against British policies in Ukraine since 2014. Since October 2023 we have actively supported Gaza, drawing links between the wars in Gaza, Yemen, Ukraine and Lebanon, with a strong positive response.

Importantly the Global Majority takes very different positions on Ukrainian and Israeli aggression. Apart from small island states, only four African, Asian and Latin American countries (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, French Guyana) have sanctioned Russia or sent weapons to Ukraine.

The BRICS summit was part of the global transition to a multipolar world. As developing countries need an end to the West's bullying, sanctions, spying and bombing, they are building a more democratic, equal alternative world system. British, European and American people want peace and prosperity, not insane costly wars.

Supported by House of Commons warmongers, NATO members inflict sanctions, wars and regime changes on countries that don't obey NATO members' "rules". Thus, far from defensive, NATO is an aggressor. NATO members condemn Russian actions in Ukraine, while giving cover to Israel's genocide in Gaza and bombing of Lebanon, Syria and Iran and remaining silent on the mass deaths, starvation and health disasters in Yemen.

The Ukraine war began in 2014. While Russia spent eight years trying to end the conflict through the Minsk peace process, European leaders used it to buy time to rebuild Ukraine's army. NATO ignored Ukraine breaking ceasefires.

In Kiev in March 2022 Boris Johnson blocked the Russia-Ukraine Istanbul peace deal, resulting in hundreds of thousands of preventable Ukrainian casualties.

Tony Brenton, former UK ambassador to Moscow, told Radio 4 last year "Britain is the most aggressive of all the NATO members in Ukraine. We have more special forces in Ukraine than any other NATO country. We are seen as an absolute hawk up there with the Poles and the Baltic states".

For ten years our war-monger-controlled media only reported the Establishment version of the war, ignoring the thousands, including children, women and pensioners, killed and tortured in the Donbas before 2022, just like the thousands killed in Yemen. In 2022 legendary Aus-

Diary

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 Cameraman, The Poets and the Pits: Miners' Strike 40th Anniversary Exhibition. Afternoons. WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX.

SAT 22 FEB

International Ukraine Anti-Fascist Solidarity: No More British Weapons for Ukraine! Protest 14:00 outside Brixton Underground Station, Brixton Rd, London SW9 8HE. TBA

MON 24 FEB

Stand Up to Racism & Germans living in London: Stop the AFD protest 18:00, German Embassy, 23 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PZ

TUES 25 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: Radical Clerkenwell Re-interpreted. 17:00, Three Corners Centre, The Peel, London, EC1R 0HU

TUES 25 FEB

Global Justice Now: Stand with Colombia: 19:00-20:15 Zoom meeting. Register on GJN website.

SAT 1 MAR

Stand Up To Racism: Fighting for anti-racist workplaces. Conference for trade unionists, 11:000-17:00, London Venue TBA and online.

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.

SAT 8 MAR

Working Class Movement Library: International Women's Day Open Archive Day and

second-hand book sale. 11:00-15:00 at WCML.

MONS 10 MAR – 5 MAY Marx Memorial Library: Marxism and History: Introducing Historical Materialism. 10 Week online course. Book on MML website.

SAT 15 MAR

New Communist Party: Reception to commemorate the life of Karl Marx, 18:00 Party Centre, Clapham, London SW1

SUN 16 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Annual Marx Memorial Oration. 13:30, Highgate Cemetery, Swains Lane, London N6 6PJ.

MON 18 MAR

Liberation: Fenner Brockway Lecture, Central London. Details to follow.

THUR 20 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Mary Davis the Ford Dagenham Women's strike. 19:00, Online event. Book on MML website.

SAT 22 MAR

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Protest: 12:00 Town Centre leaf-letting. 13:00-15:00, Rally, High Level Bridge over Devonshire Dock, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria.

SAT 22 MAR

Campaign for Trade Union Freedom: Rally on the Employment Rights Bill. Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BB.

SUN 23 MAR

Scottish Morning Star Supporters Spring Conference. Scottish TUC, 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow G40 1BP.

THUR 27 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Decolonising Education: learning for the Future. 18.00, Onsite and Online event. Book on MML website.

SAT 29 MAR

Stand Up To Racism: We demand change – Summit of resistance Central London (venue to be confirmed)

THUR 3 APRIL

Socialist History Society: James Crossley on AL Morton: Life in the Radical Tradition. 19:00, Zoom meeting. Register on SHS website.

MON 14-FRI 25 APRIL

Lakenheath Alliance for Peace: Camp protesting against US nuclear weapons returning to Britain. RAF Lakenheath, Brandon Road, Lakenheath, Brandon, Suffolk IP27 9PS.

CONTACT US...

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tralian journalist John Pilger said “14,000 people have been killed in the Kiev regime’s civil war on the Donbas, with many of these attacks carried out by neo-Nazis”. He described the people of Donbas, Palestine and Yemen as “media unpeople”.

Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters pointed out Vladimir Zelensky was elected president in 2019 on the promise to end the war in the Donbas. In 2021 he declared “We will re-occupy the Donbas”.

British people are paying dearly for Britain’s aggression in Ukraine. Sanctions on Russia have raised energy prices, pushing millions into poverty, while UK weapons and support to Ukraine has cost £16.6 billion. The massive censorship of news on Ukraine has shut down social media accounts, with those challenging Britain’s support for Ukraine since 2014, such as rapper Lowkey, branded “pro-Kremlin trolls” or “conspiracy theorists”.

Last May British media claimed Russia and China boosted Lowkey’s social media posts to manipulate British public opinion in favour of the Palestinians. These claims were from the Israeli “social threat intelligence” company Cyabra, led by Israeli army officers. The IUAFS wishes to draw your attention to these connections.

We are all too aware of the pressure on our political representatives not to step out of line on the war in Ukraine.

But please consider that many British people want peace while challenging Britain’s massive support for Ukraine since the 2014 Maidan coup, bringing tragedy for the Ukrainian people.

We will support all MPs who support the wishes of ordinary people. We will continue to ask our large British audience to demand peace and prosperity. We call for: No more weapons to Kiev or Israel; no Russia-NATO war; a secure and viable homeland for Palestinians in Palestine.

Theo Russell
Secretary
International Ukraine
Anti Fascist Solidarity
London

Dear Comrades
Average water bills will go up 7.5 per cent from April. It is the biggest increase for 20 years.

Yet shareholders are still being paid massive dividends and top staff are getting massive bonuses. Indeed in 2024 company bosses’ bonuses rose to £9.1 million. And the service they provide remains appalling. In 2022 there were a total of 301,091 sewage spills.

We need to bring the water companies back into public ownership. They need to be democratically run in order to ensure that the public gets value for money and in order to ensure that the environment is properly protected.

Alan Stewart
Wakefield

Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

MORE BAD news for Labour in Scotland with yet another opinion poll predicting that at the next Holyrood election the SNP will once again top the poll with 35 per cent of the constituency vote with Labour on a miserable 18 per cent, the Tories at 15, Reform UK 14 and the Liberal Democrats on 11. The Greens would have six and Alba a pathetic two. With the separate List vote this would be enough for the SNP to remain in power with Green support resulting in a nationalist majority of seats despite a unionist majority (58 per cent according to this poll) of the popular vote. Though John Swinney is putting the health service above the routine

calls for independence support is still put at 50-50.

Needless to say the SNP rejoiced at these figures. SNP MSP Fulton MacGregor gloated that “this poll confirms what we already know – support for Labour is imploding under Anas Sarwar’s leadership. It’s hardly surprising given Labour’s track record at Westminster, the highlights of which include slashing the Winter Fuel Payment, adopting the two-child cap as their own policy, hiking National Insurance, betraying WASPI women, and sky-high energy prices”.

straining

In response Labour’s deputy leader Jackie Baillie said “Scotland’s public services are straining and our NHS is on its knees due to SNP incompetence, while poverty and homelessness remains shockingly high.

That’s why Scottish Labour will be fighting for every vote between now and next year’s election to deliver the change of government Scotland needs”.

Everybody and their dog blames this state of affair on Sir Keir Starmer with Anas Sarwar being seen as the branch man-

ager rather than Leader of Scottish Labour. It remains to be seen if this weekend’s Scottish Labour Party conference does anything to alter this.

Curiously while the poll was being carried out Labour made another gain in a local authority by-election, albeit at the eighth count. This was held in the Kirkintilloch East & North & Twechar ward of East Dunbartonshire Council. It was the last by-election to be caused by a former councillor departing for Westminster, in this case a Liberal Democrat. On a 26.2 per cent turnout, Labour came first, the SNP declined but still came second, the Liberal Democrat was third, Reform fourth, the Tories fifth, just ahead of the Green. Alba beat the other cranky nationalist party, Sovereignty, into last place, which must count as something of a triumph.

Over at the Alba Party it is fun and games in the leadership contest. It is looking like a two-horse race between the sole MSP, Ash Regan, and former justice secretary Kenny MacAskill who have both secured at least 100 nominations from at least 20 different branches. Both are convinced that the ghost of Alex Salmond is firmly behind them.

The same party’s contest for a Deputy leader took a strange turn when outgoing General Secretary Chris McEleny said he was entering the contest despite being suspended for, among other things, attempting to suspend McAskill.

McEleny supports Regan, claiming that “The party is at a cross-roads. It can decide if it wants to become a completely adversarial party to the SNP or it can continue to build upon the work of wanting to work with the SNP – that’s something I want to do”. That is an odd thing to say in a party largely composed of ex-SNP malcontents.

Local Government News

This is the time of year when local authorities set the Council Tax for the next year. There is something odd about that statement. In theory

the Council Tax has been abolished, because Alex Salmond said it would be in 2005 and the SNP has been in office since 2007.

Instead, the SNP have frozen it, or at least the property valuations (unchanged since 1991) on which it is based. The SNP’s freeze was in theory not compulsory, but most councils made only token increases every year. The latest inaction is to announce they will be launching a public consultation on the tax to keep voters distracted until the Holyrood elections.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities say that the SNP’s Council tax freezes have cost local authorities £800 million a year. This does not greatly worry those who do not depend on local authority services so long as their bins are regularly emptied into the bin lorry, rather than the pavement.

The Institute for Fiscal studies, claim that more than half of Scottish properties are in the ‘wrong’ council tax band. This benefits those with grander properties who have a tendency to vote SNP which helps explain why the SNP are not very keen on implementing their own policy.

Already one council, East Lothian, has taken advantage of the end of the freeze to raise the Council tax by an inflation busting ten per cent, with the Scottish Borders, Fife and Shetland likely to follow suit.

The Labour minority-controlled council won the support of the SNP and sole Green councillor for the rise which will mean annual rises of between £80 for a one bedroom flat up to £351 for aristocrats in their castles.

Council tenants will see a weekly increase of £5.25 in their rent. The council hopes to bring in an extra £9 million and spend it on improved adult social care among other things. Luvvies will be delighted that the Brunton Theatre Trust get an extra £200,000. As with all other public bodies the council moans about the recent increase in the employers’ National Insurance contributions, the SNP Government claim to cover 60 per cent of this rise.

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Cease-fire in Gaza, Yemen and Ukraine now!

by New Worker
correspondent

SOME 200,000 people from all over Britain joined the national Palestine Solidarity Campaign march from Westminster to the US Embassy on the other side of the River Thames on Saturday. This reflected the massive support across the country for self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs, a sovereign state of their own, and a secure life free from hunger and ceaseless Israeli military and Zionist settler violence.

They were joined by anti-fascist activists calling for NATO to end its war in Ukraine and an end to Israel's genocidal wars who received an over-



whelming, 100 per cent positive response from supporters of Palestinian liberation last weekend. Their protest was organised by International

Ukraine Anti Fascist Solidarity (IUAFS), which has campaigned in solidarity with anti-fascists and democrats in Ukraine and in exile since 2017.

Over 100 people, including many media photographers and journalists, filmed or took photos of the IUAFS action, and over 40 joined

the campaigners briefly to have their photos taken with the protesters. The enthusiasm for the IUAFS was incredible and many people thanked us for

linking NATO's role in the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The protesters were most appreciative of the placards declaring that the Global South, the majority of humanity, oppose Israel's war crimes in Gaza and Lebanon, NATO's support for the Banderite gangsters in Kiev, and the ten years long bombing of the people of Yemen.

Members of IUAFS believe that their solidarity actions will still be needed long after an agreement to end the conflict in Ukraine is reached. They point out that Britain and its imperialist allies are already planning networks to conduct terrorism in the future with the eventual goal of destroying and dividing the Russian Federation.

A not so pointless murder

REVIEW

by Ben Soton

We Solve Murders:
Richard Osman,
Penguin, London
2024, 432 pp, Hbk
£22, Pbk £9.99

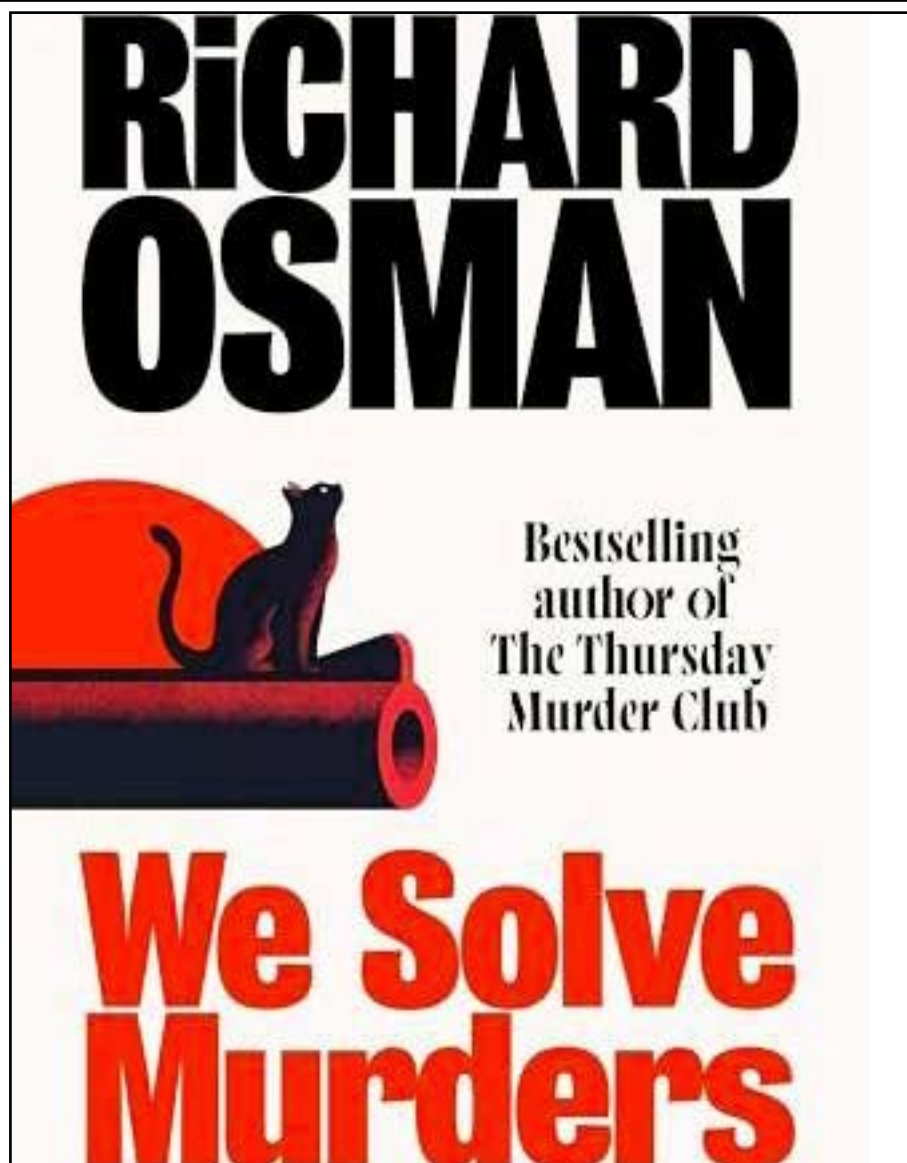
RICHARD Osman is best known as the co-presenter of the television game-show *Pointless*; however in 2020 he branched out into thriller writing with the Thursday Murder Club series. However, the series, based around a group of elderly characters approaching eighty, may for obvious reasons have a limited lifespan. Building on the success of his first series Osman appears to be starting a new set of novels, the first being *We Solve Murders*.

The book's main characters are a retired Met de-

tective Steve Wheeler, now living in the New Forest, and his bodyguard daughter-in-law Amy. Steve lives in the fictional village of Axley, which has strong similarities with the actual village of East Boldre. Its inhabitants are mostly affluent commuters and retirees and Steve spends much of his time solving minor mysteries, such as money missing from the till in a local shop and the odd missing cat. The highlight of his week is the pub quiz.

Amy's world could not be more different. Currently working as a bodyguard for an international best-selling author, Rosie D'Antonio; she inhabits a world where the higher echelons of organised crime meet the super-rich. Is there much difference?

These two very contrasting worlds are brought together after a series of murders and an attempt by the real culprit to either



frame Amy or have her murdered. Amy is forced to ask Steve for help.

It's an odyssey that takes Rosie, Steve and Amy across the world starting in South Carolina and ending at the pub quiz in Axley. Steve eventually solves the murder, bringing the guilty parties to justice. He meanwhile manages to make the transition from the world of a quiet New Forest village to an action-adventure role including private jets, shootings and possibly the opportunity of romance.

The novel reads more like a complicated word puzzle than a novel and the murderer was the character I suspected. Its interjections about teenage influencers, which I still wonder what they had to do with the murder, do not really help. The characters did not immediately spike the imagination in the same way as the Thursday Murder Club series. Meanwhile Osman missed an opportunity to provide Amy with a sufficient back story, which he managed to do with Steve. However characters sometimes take several novels to fully develop. The story ends with the possibility of further books. Let's hope they are better than the first.

Netanyahu's necrophilia: the golden pager

by David Lethbridge

WHEN ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was in Washington recently, he presented US President Donald Trump with a golden pager. The pager was attached to a wooden plaque and inscribed below were the words: "To Donald J. Trump our greatest friend and ally". What is the meaning of this peculiar gift?

It is intended as reference to the deadly operation carried out by Israel in Lebanon on September 17, in which the pagers held by members of Hezbollah would explode and kill them. But the explosions also killed or severely wounded – as the Israelis knew they would – thousands of those who happened merely to be nearby, including many children.

But what kind of person would seek to memorialise and indeed to celebrate the murder and wounding of innocent children and other bystanders and to present such a golden fetish as a gift to another?

Necrophilia is the clinical term for the extremely rare erotic desire to make love to the dead, to have sex with corpses. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm sought to expand the term more generally to refer to all those who took pleasure – a passionate pleasure – in killing and in death.

Here is an example: an American-trained "Contra"



counter-insurgency operative, paid to murder the peasants and workers who supported the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. He said "I love killing. I have been killing for the past seven years. There's nothing I like better. If I could, I'd kill several people a day".

Here he stands before us then, this agent of US imperialism, nakedly telling us of his love, of his desire. He is passionate, this Romeo of death. And he is holding nothing back. He is not bragging or exaggerating. Quite simply, he is speaking the truth: that at a crucial time in the world's history he was eager – as eager as a lover – to destroy a people's hope for liberation and social justice, to drown it in blood, to bring pleasure both to himself and to his paymasters in Washington.

And who now can forget the seemingly endless series of photographs taken at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad in 2004 in the US war against Iraq? The smiling, laughing faces of US soldiers who had forced naked Iraqi men into human pyramids for their own sadistic pleasure, or who had lined the Iraqi men up and, smirking, had pointed with mock disparagement at the nude genitals of their prisoners?

During the Spanish Civil War, fascist general Millan Astray spoke at the University of Salamanca in the course of which he had cried out "Viva la Muerte!" (Long Live Death!). Philosopher Miguel de Unamuno was in the hall and rose to say, at the risk of his own life, "just now I heard a necrophilous and senseless cry". He was the first to use the word in the

way we have been here elaborating.

Winston Churchill too was a prime example of a man afflicted with necrophilia. Not only was he entirely favourable to fascism, but he had a curious and necrophilous habit of killing flies and then lining up their tiny insect corpses in neat little rows.

And how many times has the Israeli state, from its president to its settler citizens to its gun-wielding forces referred to Palestinians as vermin, as parasites, as insects, as filth, in a necrophilous catalogue of the sub-human?

In a certain sense, necrophilia can be seen as the psychological core of fascism. The desire to kill is at the heart of the idea of the master race, or the very similar idea of the "chosen people" – of the view of the Other as inferior, as

vermin, as something to be exterminated. Necrophilia is a structure – a socially and culturally produced structure – that gives rise to a desire to kill.

And hence the golden pager. A fetish from one sociopathic killer to another. Keep in mind that Netanyahu, smiling and grinning and nearly giggling with pleasure throughout his press conference with Trump, has never once shown any remorse or even regret that his genocidal bombing campaign against the Palestinians in Gaza, made possible with US money and munitions, has mutilated and orphaned thousands of children, deprived them so often of not only their fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers, but their legs or their arms. How many children have been operated on without anaesthetics, screaming in

agony because the Israeli state ensured that no medicine, no anaesthetics, would be permitted in their killing zone.

The golden pager is a ceremonial token. It is a reminder of all those who had their hands blown off, their faces burned, their eyes blinded forever, when their devices unexpectedly exploded wounding or killing them and murdering those who were close to them.

In any war there are victims, the wounded and the dead. That is why we must oppose war, all war, and seek to bring the genocidal war criminals before the International Court of Justice.

But the golden pager is a memorial to just how wonderfully clever and how very superior the Israeli state thinks it is as it goes about its necrophilous business eliminating anyone who stands in the way of their plans for endless Zionist expansion.

And yet while Netanyahu and Trump laugh and cheer and toast each other over dinner, exchanging gifts like mob bosses, they forget that the oppressed and the working class everywhere, not least in Palestine, are gathering their strength, organizing and actively engaged in what will be the long struggle that lies ahead. Victory is not guaranteed, but neither is defeat. Together we can yet win.

People's Voice
(Canada)

Billions needed to rebuild Gaza

by Ed Newman

RECONSTRUCTION efforts in Gaza will require more than \$50 billion after 15 months of Israel's devastating war, according to a new assessment by the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank.

The figures come as Arab countries continue to scramble to find a viable recovery plan as an alternative to the mass displacement of the Palestinian enclave's 2 million residents proposed by US President Donald Trump.

The Gaza & West Bank Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (IRDNA), published on Tuesday, calculated that Israel's war on Gaza caused \$49 billion in destruction between 8th October 2023 and 8th October 2024.

Researchers concluded that \$53.2 billion is now needed for the recovery and reconstruction of the Palestinian territory over the next 10 years, with about \$20 billion of the full amount required in the first three years alone.

"Funding will require a broad coalition of donors, diverse financing instruments, private sector resources, and significant improvements in the delivery of reconstruction materials to Gaza in the post-conflict period," the joint report states.

More than half the total estimated cost of rebuilding, or \$29.9 billion, is needed for damaged buildings and other key infrastructure, while funds to replenish Gaza's destroyed residential housing stock form the bulk of that figure – \$15.2 billion.

Housing suffered the most during Israel's 15-month-long attack on the territory, with the report writers estimat-



Gaza in ruins.

ing that it accounted for 53 per cent of the total destruction wrought by Israeli forces in Gaza, amounting to more than 292,000 homes destroyed or damaged.

Another \$19.1 billion is required to make up for social and economic losses resulting from severe damage to Gaza's health, education, commerce and industry sectors, the report estimates.

The researchers also state that 95 per cent of Gaza's hospitals are now non-functional, while the local economy has contracted by 83 per cent.

The IRDNA is a follow-up to the Interim Damage Assessment (IDA) published by the UN, EU and World Bank in April 2024, which estimated about \$18.5bn in damages after just four months of Israel's war.

Years of clearing unexploded ordnance and removing millions of tonnes of rubble also lie ahead as part of the reconstruction efforts.

The report's findings come amid a fragile ceasefire between Israel

and Hamas, with the Israeli military accused of carrying out repeated violations of the truce since it came into effect on 19th January.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also failed to rule out a return to war in the coastal enclave if Hamas does not continue to return all the captives it holds there.

cautioned

The report's authors therefore cautioned that conditions are not yet in place for large-scale recovery and reconstruction work to begin given the lack of clarity over Gaza's future, not least how it will be governed. "The speed, scale, and scope of recovery will be shaped by these conditions," the report states.

Since returning to the White House in late January, Trump has said he would "take over" and "own" Gaza, which involves emptying the Strip of its inhabitants and transforming the territory into what Trump described as the "Riviera

of the Middle East".

As part of this plan, Trump has said he would permanently displace two million Palestinian people. He has pressured both Jordan and Egypt to take in those who are forced out of Gaza.

Netanyahu has expressed strong support for Trump's proposal, and his government announced on Monday that it had formed a special directorate for the "voluntary departure" of Palestinians from the coastal enclave.

alternative

Egypt is leading the way on an alternative Arab-led reconstruction plan that would keep Gaza's population in their homeland. On Monday, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Badr Abdelatty said Cairo is "actively developing a comprehensive, multi-phase plan for Gaza's early recovery and reconstruction".

Crucially, Cairo says the plan would not require Gaza's population to be displaced. Instead, "secure areas" would be established where Pales-

tinians can live, while dozens of Egyptian and international construction firms remove and rehabilitate the Strip's war-torn infrastructure.

That plan may see up to \$20 billion provided by Arab and Gulf states towards reconstruction efforts, the Reuters news agency reported on Tuesday, citing two anonymous Egyptian security sources with knowledge of the matter.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will travel to the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, to discuss the plan before an Arab summit will be held in Cairo on 4th March to potentially finalise the proposal.

Israeli Foreign Minister, Gideon Saar, said Israel was waiting to evaluate Egypt's plan.

But he reiterated Israel's long-held stance that any plan in which Hamas continued to have a political or military presence in Gaza would not be acceptable.

Meanwhile the

World Health Organisation (WHO) says mass polio vaccination will resume in Gaza after the virus has been detected again in the war-ravaged territory. The mass polio vaccination will resume in Gaza on 22nd February, targeting nearly 600,000 children.

No more polio cases have been reported since a 10-month-old child was paralysed in Gaza in August 2024, during Israel's genocidal war, the first case in the enclave in 25 years.

The virus had been found in waste-water samples taken in Gaza in December and January, "signalling ongoing circulation in the environment, putting children at risk," the WHO said.

"The presence of the virus still poses a risk to children with low or no immunity, in Gaza and throughout the region".

A three-day polio campaign will start on Saturday, in coordination with the WHO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).

It is not clear how Israel's ban on UNRWA and closing of its facilities across the occupied territories will affect the campaign. Israel's violations of the ceasefire agreement also limit the amount of medical supplies entering the enclave.

During its 15 months of genocidal war against Gaza, the Zionists destroyed almost all of the enclave's medical facilities, and abducted, injured, or killed medical personnel.

As a result, the enclave's medical abilities to deal with viral or microbial outbreaks are extremely limited, and the WHO's campaign seems to be a temporary solution to a permanent problem.

Radio Havana Cuba