

UKRAINE'S ECONOMY SHATTERED ZELENSKY RELIES ON NATO HANDOUTS

by our Eastern European Affairs correspondent

AIR RAID sirens wailed across Ukraine this week as waves of Russian missiles rained down on strategic targets right across the country. Ukrainian drones attacked air-bases deep inside Russian territory and Ukrainian artillery continues to pound civilian areas in the liberated Donbas whilst fighting rages all along the front as Russian forces battle for control of the strategic town of Bakhmut.

Donetsk communists, whose party has now merged with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), held their founding conference last week, and a young Donbas MP was killed in Donetsk as the result of artillery shelling and rocket attacks by the Ukrainian military.

Maria Pirogova, a 29-year-old MP in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), was killed when the city came under a barrage of Ukrainian rockets and shells. The Ukrainians hit a business centre, a market, the Donbas arena, a sports complex, several shopping centres, a bus station, the cathedral, the local prosecutor's office and

many residential buildings. The attacks left at least eight civilians dead and several wounded.

Maria Pirogova was one of them. Her death was an "enormous loss for all of us" said DPR leader Denis Pushilin. "In 2014, when she was only 21 years old, she began to help people. She gathered things, delivered them herself to those in need, and was not afraid to go to the most dangerous places to help others," he said, praising Maria as the "epitome of kindness" with an exceptional "talent at doing good".

Donetsk has been under heavy artillery and missile fire by Ukrainian forces on an almost daily basis since Russia launched its military operation in late February. Since 2014, when the Donbas conflict broke out in the aftermath of the fascist coup in Kiev, the city has endured years of low-intensity fighting and sporadic shelling by the Ukrainian military.

The war has shattered the Ukrainian economy. The Zelensky regime depends en-

for Russia to end the conflict. The German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, says Europe should go back to its pre-war "peace order" with Russia and resolve "all questions of common security" after the war in Ukraine if President Putin is willing to halt his "aggression" against his neighbours.

This may reflect a more serious approach to the crisis by the leaders of Franco-German imperialism. Or it could simply be a cynical ploy to assuage the growing anti-war sentiment within the European Union. That sentiment is clearly growing.

Tens of thousands took to the streets of Italy last week to protest against the shipment of Italian weapons to Ukraine and the expansion of anti-Rus-

sian sanctions. In the capital, 10,000 or more demonstrators called for an end to Italian involvement in the war. In Milan protesters marched through the city carrying Italian and Russian flags and called for an end to sanctions against the Russian Federation.

Sanctions have hiked up heating bills and fired inflation leading to mass protests and a surge of union militancy in defence of workers' living standards not seen since the 1970s – it's certainly going to be an angry winter this time round.

The next issue of the *New Worker* will be the last before the Xmas break.



• Italians march in Pisa against Italian arms in Ukraine.

tirely on a never-ending stream of imperialist guns and funds that is stretching US imperialism's European allies to breaking point. With reports now saying that at least 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed in the fighting, renewed calls for diplomatic efforts to end the conflict are being heard within the corridors of power in Berlin and Paris.

The Americans, who are using the war to restore their hegemony over Western Europe, remain committed to prolonging the war regardless of cost, but in Europe some seem to be having second thoughts.

France's president, Emmanuel Macron, is now talking about 'security guarantees'

FUND

The December fighting fund kicked off with £582 thanks to bankers' orders from supporters up and down the country. We now need to raise the rest to hit our £3,500 target for the month. And though next week's edition will be the last for the Old Year we still have to maintain our press and print shop and keep our suppliers sweet over the festive season.

We stand with the legions of workers now fighting for higher pay all over the country. We stand with the millions of people fighting for freedom all over the world. We stand with the millions upon millions building socialism in the people's democracies of Asia and the Caribbean. And we stand for peace and socialism and for a better tomorrow for all working people.

There is an answer to the crisis and you can make sure it gets out on the street by guaranteeing the survival of the *New Worker*. All donations, big or small, count. Please send them to: *New Worker* Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the '*New Worker*'.

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

INSIDE

Crisis casts a shadow...p2
New winter of discontent...3

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

An angry winter

A WAVE of strikes is sweeping the country. Rising inflation and soaring heating bills have fired the resistance to austerity and now not a week passes without industrial action of one form or another over pay.

On the left the routine calls for a “general strike” or a “united front” of workers are beginning to have more relevance as more and more working people vote to confront the employers in the fight for a living wage.

The key to victory is unity at all levels from the rank-and-file to the union leaderships but that unity is not easy to achieve. Some years ago a number of public sector unions did combine to co-ordinate their campaigns on pensions, but it broke down when one key player unilaterally reached a settlement with their employers.

There is, of course, the TUC. But its role has been partially eroded by giant unions such as Unite and Unison, who have also done their best to take away what little authority the Trades Councils still have in a union world dominated by the mega-unions of today.

Communists must naturally support all initiatives efforts to strengthen working-class organisations and bring them together in times of struggle to build support for all strikes and to maintain solidarity to speed the day to victory.

Like a Cheshire cat

IN VICTORIAN days the grinning Cheshire cat slowly disappears until the only thing left is his inane grin. These days, with Labour streets ahead of the Tories in the opinion polls, the Blairites are now strutting around bragging that they’ll soon be back in power and that it’s all down to getting rid of the Corbynistas. But this could also be illusory.

Labour’s victory in last week’s by-election was hardly unexpected. With Labour 25 points ahead of the Tories in the opinion polls Labour could hardly fail to hold the City of Chester seat, and that’s what they did last week when they trounced the Tories with a 13.8 per cent swing – one of the largest since the Second World War.

But turn-out was low and the swing was well below Labour’s lead in the opinion polls. The election gurus tell us that it will still give Labour a 30-plus majority in the House of Commons at the next election. But Rishi Sunak still has plenty of time to close the gap.

Starmer and the Blairites clearly believe that they’re going to win over a significant number of Tory voters at the next election – and indeed they may well do so in the northern ‘Red Wall’ seats Labour lost in 2019. But Labour needs more than that to win an overall majority in parliament, and to do so it needs a programme that can actually inspire people to campaign for and vote Labour when the time comes.

There’s not much sign of that at the moment. Labour’s leaders have little to offer workers apart from meaningless platitudes about health, education and welfare, and nothing at all to rally the youth, the young workers and the millions who turned to Jeremy Corbyn in the hope of change only a few years ago.

All Sunak needs to do is get the existing Tory vote out on the day. Labour has to inspire the millions of workers sick of austerity, poor housing and bread-line wages. Shunning the nurses and ambulance crews, the civil servants, teachers, transport and postal workers, all locked in struggle with employers over pay, is a bad start. Starmer ignores them at his peril.

Crisis casts shadow over Black Friday

Friday 25th November was ‘Black Friday’ – the day after Thanksgiving in the USA that traditionally kicks off the Christmas shopping season in America. Now the fourth Friday in November has become a regular fixture in Britain’s retail calendar as a day for pre-Christmas deals and bargains. But this year’s cost-of-living crisis has hit sales in Britain and the European Union.

RETAILERS across Europe usually experience high footfall in the Black Friday shopping frenzy but as this year’s surging prices have eroded real wages and reduced living standards, people tend to stay more cautious about their spending. People such as Lily, who says that she’s had to scale back her shopping plan in light of the high inflation rate.

People “hold on to their money a little bit more” and are “a bit more cautious with what they’re buying nowadays, especially since Christmas is round the corner,” she said.

Inflation in the UK rose by 11.1 per cent in October, hitting a fresh 41-year high. After taking inflation into account, average regular pay fell by 2.7 per cent between July and September, the largest fall in growth since comparable records began in 2001, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Amidst the worsening cost-of-living crisis, consumer confidence in November still neared historic lows after it touched

bottom in September, surveys conducted by the market research company GfK showed.

“Retailers are desperate for some spending cheer but the worry is that it could turn out to be more of a Bleak Friday,” analyst Susannah Streeter at financial services company Hargreaves Lansdown said.

Although spending in the UK was still expected by some researchers to increase by around 0.8 per cent over the Black Friday weekend, including Black Friday and Cyber Monday, this figure masks the impact of inflation on volumes, Streeter said. “Creeping prices mean that we may put fewer items into trolleys and virtual baskets.”

As of Friday noon, shopper numbers at UK retailers were more than 22 per cent below 2019 pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, according to data provider Springboard.

“I would say, at the moment, the challenge facing retailers is probably even tougher than they faced during a pandemic” because consumer confidence and the cost-of-living crisis are so dominant in people’s minds, says Andrew Goodacre, chief executive officer at the British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA).

“We’ve seen retail sales drop in October and September and that will put pressure on Black Friday being as successful as in previous years. The problem of weak consumer demand is a real threat to high streets up and down the country,” Goodacre added.

Across Europe, the outlook is not rosy either. Inflation runs high. The energy crisis may last beyond winter. Recession is on

the horizon. All these are weighing down consumers, dealing a huge blow to household budgets and casting a cloud over shopping events.

“We already started the promotions at the end of October and the beginning of November, because we see that we need a longer period of sales,” says Miha Drganec, sales manager at the Big Bang Electronic Store in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

The outlook for traditional winter sales in the Eurozone is subdued this year and any boost will not be enough to prevent consumer spending from contracting in the fourth quarter, says Tomas Dvorak, a senior economist at economic advisory firm Oxford Economics.

Gloom is also expected to hang over Europe through Christmas. “Consumers are unlikely to splurge during the Christmas sales and are much more likely to get thrifty. Similarly, retailers’ assessment of current and expected business conditions heading into the festive season has been bleak,” Dvorak added.

No quick improvement is in sight. Inflation is expected to decline in 2023 but will likely remain high at seven per cent in the European Union and 6.1 per cent in the Eurozone, statistics showed.

“I think it’s important also to keep your life going but still maybe save on something that is not a necessity, that you do not really need right now. And then hopefully inflation will stop rising, and we can all return to a bit more normal life,” Steffen Nielsen, a customer in Copenhagen, said.

Xinhua



Workers' Notes

A new winter of discontent

by New Worker correspondent

WIDESPREAD industrial action at present seems to involve almost every section of the workforce apart from Santa Claus and his elves. Railway workers, nurses, ambulance workers, civil servants and postal staff are fighting for higher pay and better terms and conditions. Firefighters may soon be joining them.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has rejected as inadequate a below-inflation five per cent pay offer and started balloting its members on strike action.

The union's General Secretary, Mark Wrack, said: "Strike action will always be a last resort. Many firefighters and control staff are desperate. Some are struggling to afford for they and their families to live. It is a dreadful and very serious state of affairs. We have held talks with and written letters to many different parties. But no such pay offer has been forthcoming."

responsibility

He also made the simple point that: "It is the responsibility of fire service employers and governments to pay their staff properly. That is part of their responsibility of running the fire and rescue service. We have been mandated by our members to fight for pay that they can live on and will do that."

Balloting continues until 30th January so there's still time for Management to come up with an improved offer. If not, a strike is inevitable. It will be the first national fire strike since action on pensions from 2013 and 2015, and the first on pay for 20 years.

Cost-of-living raises are urgently needed. FBU officials have had to sign off on

members for them to use foodbanks. This is poor reward for not only working throughout the pandemic but also taking on extra duties including moving the deceased.

Meantime, in Merseyside the FBU is already involved in a local dispute where control members and other staff have already started industrial action in the form of refusing to do any pre-arranged overtime for the next six months.

The main concerns are an imposed reduction in night-time staffing numbers at the Merseyside Fire Control Room from of six to five, and

erally to impose worse conditions on new entrants and "cut the FBU out of discussions entirely".

He concluded by saying: "FBU members are not asking for a lot, in fact the vast majority of the issues which have led us to this point could be resolved at no cost to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority or the public whom we serve. All we are seeking is that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service honour our nationally agreed terms and conditions and enter into negotiation and reach agreement with the Fire Brigades Union

does not address the desperate need to get huge numbers of NHS workers off the breadline.

"Failure to act now to avert these strikes and the blame will rest firmly at the government's door."

foodbank

Jason Kirkham, a West Midlands paramedic, was quoted as saying: "This strike isn't just about pay – it is to save the NHS. The NHS is crumbling, we can't recruit and retain staff as pay is so low. It has got so bad that we



a new duty shift system that means new firefighters have to work under terms which breach national terms and conditions as regards overtime pay.

New firefighters also have to take on new roles that have not been agreed. Apprentices have to attend the workplace outside of core hours to undertake training sessions, assessments, charity days and exams.

Ian Hibbert, the local FBU Secretary, warned that: "Merseyside's continued refusal to abide by locally and nationally agreed negotiation procedures has left Merseyside FBU members with little choice but to take industrial action. Like many workers, our members are suffering through the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, whilst simultaneously having to fend off attacks on our terms and conditions of service, perpetrated by our local fire authority."

He complained that the authority was seeking unilat-

on all issues."

Another group of workers at the end of the 999 telephone who are taking industrial action are ambulance workers.

On Tuesday it was announced by Unite that over 1,600 workers at the West Midlands, North West and North East ambulance trusts will strike on the Wednesday before Christmas.

fight of our lives

General Secretary Sharon Graham warned: "Make no mistake, we are now in the fight of our lives for the very NHS itself. These strikes are a stark warning – our members are taking a stand to save our NHS from this government.

"Patients' lives are already at risk but this government is sitting on the side-lines, dodging its responsibility to sort out the crisis that it has created.

"Ministers can't keep hiding behind the pay review body. They know full well it

have had to open a foodbank in my ambulance station."

The union added it would maintain essential emergency cover for patients.

The previous Wednesday, the other union for ambulance workers, GMB, announced that its members are also prepared to walk out at eight trusts in England and across Wales, with workers in the service at 38 other trusts being balloted. This is in protest at the Government's imposed four per cent pay award. After some confusion they also agreed to strike on the 21st.

Rachel Harrison, the GMB's National Secretary for the service, said: "Ambulance workers – like other NHS workers – are on their knees. Demoralised and downtrodden, they've faced 12 years of Conservative cuts to the service and their pay packets, fought on the frontline of a global pandemic and now face the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation."

She added that: "This is

as much about unsafe staffing levels and patient safety as it is about pay. A third of GMB ambulance workers think delays they've been involved with have led to the death of a patient."

Unison also agreed to strike action on the same day, meaning that only the East of England is unaffected. Nurses, porters, healthcare assistants, cleaners and other NHS workers at the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital and Liverpool University Hospital will also be on strike on the same day.

Due to the Tory anti-union laws Unison is having to re-ballot 13,000 staff working in 10 trusts and ambulance services where turnout in the recent strike vote fell short of the threshold required by law.

to blame

Unison head of health Sara Gorton declared: "The government will only have itself to blame if there are strikes in the NHS before Christmas. Ambulance staff and their health colleagues don't want to inconvenience anyone. But ministers are refusing to do the one thing that could prevent disruption – that's start genuine talks about pay."

In Scotland, Unison is supporting an improved offer for NHS staff whom it claims will see a £2,205 increase for the lowest paid staff and more for those on higher bands. The rejected offers for England and Wales give NHS staff an average rise of 4.75%, with staff guaranteed a minimum of £1,400.

A sombre strike

by New Worker correspondent

LAST WEEK the coffin-makers at the Co-op Funeralcare factory in Glasgow walked out for the third time in a long-running pay dispute. The 50 workers have rejected a below-inflation offer of four per cent pay rise for this year and five per cent for next year.

Willie Thomson, a Unite industrial officer, attacked the "caring, sharing" Co-op man-

continued on page 4...

• The FBU is balloting on action.

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agement by saying: “Bosses at the Co-op Funeralcare and Co-op UK have quite frankly dumped their co-operative values in the bin. They have chosen to subcontract and pay third party suppliers in preference to their workers who are rightly seeking a fair wage settlement.

“As well as ignoring their workers they are also ignoring the voices of politicians after the Co-op was named and shamed at both Holyrood and Westminster parliaments. The Co-op risks significant reputation damage and disruption to its supply of coffins by deliberately taking the decision to escalate this dispute.”

Scrooge

Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham added: “The Co-op seem to be revelling in playing the role of Scrooge this Christmas. Unite’s members deserve a fair pay award yet they have been made an offer which falls three times behind the current cost of living. This is totally unacceptable and our members will have their union’s full backing in this fight for better jobs, pay and conditions.”

Management assert there will be no shortage of coffins and claim that they “recognise that the rising cost of living is impacting our colleagues and we have ensured that the combined base pay and production bonus for roles within the coffin factory remain extremely competitive”.

On the Rails

by New Worker correspondent

ONGOING industrial disputes on the railways are ratcheting up across the networks. Monday saw rail union RMT recommend rejection of a pay offer from Network Rail which, if as seems likely will be rejected, will result in strikes throughout the festive season and threaten the takings of retailers whose sales rocket over the Christmas.

The strike on the 16th in particular will put a damper on the “Black Eye Friday” Christmas parties and corporate binges involving vast amounts of alcohol that makes it the busiest night of the year for ambulance drivers and police.

The rejected offer from the train operating companies involves a miserable five per cent rise this year and four per cent next, no compulsory redundancies for non-management grades before 2025, and a 75 per cent discount on leisure travel for staff and family.

Apart from the low pay offer the package also involved the loss of thousands of jobs and

the introduction of unsafe practices such as driver only operated (DOO) trains.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch deplored Government inaction, saying: “We remain available for talks in order to resolve these issues but we will not bow to pressure from the employers and the government to the detriment of our members,” adding that the strikes were caused “by the government who are running the play-book and the strategy for the railway companies and directing what’s going on”.

Whilst the Tories were predictably angry, Labour’s deputy leader Angela Rayner tamely said the offer was “low” given the current cost-of-living crisis. She took great care not to endorse RMT’s action.

ticket offices

Another related issue involving RMT is that of ticket office closures. To mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities last Friday RMT pointed out that plans for replacing booking clerks with ticket machines will make it much harder for the elderly and disabled to use the railways.

RMT refutes the Government’s nonsensical claims that ticket office

closures are about “getting staff from behind glass screens”, insisting that it is simply about reducing staff numbers.

Mick Lynch pointed out: “Our members are experts in knowing the needs of passengers and they know this ticket office closure programme will be a disaster for the travelling public. There has been opposition expressed from across the political spectrum and the government should see sense and scrap these damaging proposals.”

Rival rail union TSSA, which traditionally represents most booking clerks, is also voting on the same offer but takes a more welcoming view.

Luke Chester, TSSA’s Organising Director, said: “This offer is the best we can achieve through negotiation, and it was undoubtedly improved because of the ballot results and strike action taken by our members, who we applaud. Our members will now have their say on this offer and we are suspending strike action.”

He doffed his cap to add: “our union is pleased that this offer provides job security and certainty for Network Rail staff through to 2025. And we’re proud to have achieved a pay offer which provides for the lowest paid in the company with significant underpinning to ensure that those hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis receive proportionately the most.

“This offer shows what can be achieved when employers and unions are able to negotiate in good faith. It is significantly better than the offer put by the Rail Delivery Group [RDG], which we have rejected. On every issue – job security, pay and conditions – the RDG offer falls short and is shackled by government interference. They need to look at what can be achieved when negotiations are not hindered and come back to the table with an improved offer that allows us to resolve this dispute once and for all.”

Security staff at Eurostar, which links London with Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, may also be coming out over pay, which is as little as £10.66 per hour. The 100 staff are employed by outsourcer Mitie. Mike Lynch commented that “they work long unsocial hours and a multimillion-pound company like Mitie can easily afford to pay them decently for the essential work they do”.

A seasonal tale

by New Worker correspondent

IT IS GOOD to report that one group of seasonal workers are in a position to demand better wages and conditions, by dint of the fact that there is a labour shortage in their speciality. The jobs in question are for Santa Clauses. Obviously not the real one who lives, as we all know, near the North Pole, but those who every year don false beards and red robes to work in department stores and shopping malls to encourage the younger generation into the ways of the consumer society by demanding more goodies than their parents can afford.

According to Stuart Thompson of the Gretna-based Santa School, few people are coming forward to man the Yuletide grotto these days.

dire shortage

He told STV News that: “There’s a dire shortage and I don’t know why. The job may just not appeal to the youngsters, or it’s not a cool thing to do. That’s a worrying aspect.” As result: “I’ve had to say ‘no’ to customers locally and even down south.”

This problem is partly caused by the legacy of Jimmy Savile, which means that the rules for those working with children have been tightened up.

Going through the hoops of the verification can be a deterrent for perfectly innocent people, whilst others suggest fear of catching COVID 19 and a drop in demand for seasonal jobs is another.

20 years ago this week in the New Worker

A DPRK merchant ship boarded by NATO forces in the Arabia Sea threatened to plunge the Middle East and the Korean peninsula deeper into turmoil this week. But the USA has been forced to back down following the strong protests from the Yemeni government and the ship has now been freed.

The crisis began on Monday when a Spanish warship, acting on orders from the USA, intercepted a north Korean freighter, the So San, which had been tracked by the USA after it left the port

of Nampo some weeks ago.

Two Spanish warships patrolling the Arabian Sea south of Yemen as part of the NATO back-up in the region were ordered to intercept the vessel.

When the captain refused to halt, the Spanish frigate fired a warning shot, which destroyed the mast. Spanish marines then boarded the ship, which was then put under US control. The ship was carrying a cargo of cement and several Scud missiles and warheads bound for Yemen.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who was holding talks in nearby Djibouti, followed up with a provocative statement attacking the legitimate arms sales of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK): “North Korea doesn’t like to hear me say it, but they continue to be the largest proliferator of missiles and ballistic missile technology on the face of earth.”

This met with a robust response from the Yemeni Government, which lodged immediate protests with Spain and the USA, demanding the release of the arms shipment that had been ordered by the Yemeni army.

Yemeni Foreign Minister Abubakr al Kirbi said: “This shipment is part of contracts signed some time ago. It belongs to the Yemeni government and its army and is meant for defensive purposes.”

In the DPRK, Rumsfeld’s crude smears were dismissed as a “whopping lie” in a Pyongyang press comment.

“The United States is not entitled to talk about the ‘nuclear threat’ and the ‘missile threat’ ... the US has exported missile technology and lots of missiles to its allies and those countries subservient to it raking up huge profits.”

Levellers and Grandees the Putney Debates

SOME 375 years ago, in October and November 1647, a series of unprecedented debates were held at St Mary's Church in Putney in the midst of the English Civil War. The matter at hand was how the country would be constituted anew after the defeat of the King, central to which were the questions of rights, and of the nature of supreme decision-making power and where it lies.

The debates were organised in direct response to the political agitations of the most democratic elements of the revolutionary New Model Army, the Levellers. Their demands, put forward in the name of the people, were unacceptable to the army elite: Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton and other senior 'Grandees'.

This elite belonged to and represented the rising landed gentry and mercantile classes, whose interests lay in seizing power for themselves and denying the broad masses any share in that power. These political personalities at the head of the army had hoped the debates would settle matters and effectively silence the voice for extending democracy, so that a peace settlement following Parliament's victory over the King could be found that was in their favour.

The Civil War had broken out in 1643 as a result of the clash between the mercantile class and landed gentry with the old feudal order headed by the King over the sovereign power. This clash became manifested as a battle for control between King and Parliament, and with the outbreak of open war, it was fought on the battlefield.

With the victory over the King's forces, the New Model Army, assembled by the Parliamentary forces to wage the war, became the means for holding power over the state. Indeed, it became a claimant to the sovereign power itself. Having removed King Charles from the custody of Parliament in June 1647, the army established its headquarters in Putney, close to the City of Westminster in London, as a seat of power.

Such contradictions between the army and Parliament, and within the army



itself, are what led to the holding of the Putney Debates from 28th October 1647. The last straw was the publication of the political pamphlet *The Case of the Armie Truly Stated* and the Levellers' draft constitution for the country, the *Agreement of the People*.

Cromwell chaired the debates and, along with Ireton and other senior officers, formed one side in the debates. At that stage (before the beheading of Charles I in 1649) this side favoured retention of a monarchy with reduced powers. The other side of the debates were the Levellers, Apprentices and other democratic groupings who put forward popular sovereignty and demanded extended suffrage, regular parliaments and recognition of basic rights, such as equality before the law.

On the right to vote, leading Leveller Colonel Thomas Rainsborough said: "... really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly ... I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the

poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under..."

Ireton, for the Grandees, retorted: "For my part, I think it is no right at all. I think that no person hath a right

to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom, and in determining or choosing those that shall determine what laws we shall be ruled by here – no person hath a right to this, that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom..." – by which

he meant property. Suffrage should be restricted to land-owners.

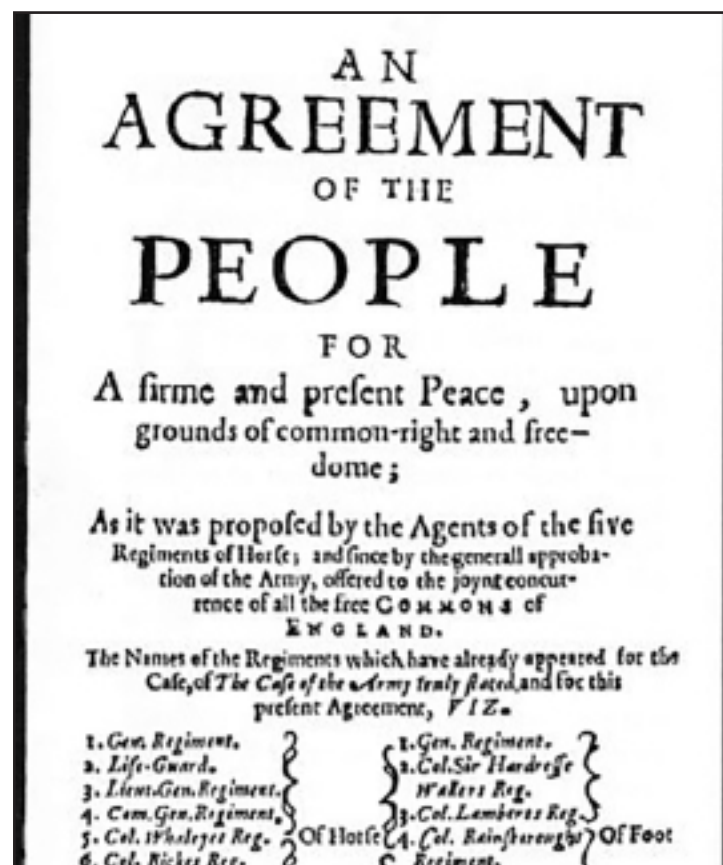
The democratic conception expressed by the Levellers was grounded in their doctrine of natural rights, an early expression of the modern definition of rights as held by all people by virtue of being human. Ireton, Cromwell and the rest of the Grandees vigorously opposed this doctrine, because they knew it led to the end of themselves as embodying the supreme power at that time. Indeed, the Levellers' great contribution was to uphold neither monarchic nor parliamentary sovereignty, nor army rule, but that sovereignty should be vested in the people.

They declared inalienable rights such as freedom of conscience and equality before the law. Their notion of freedom was profound in the context of their time, including within it the right to participate in decision-making. To the new ruling clique, this threatened their very existence, and so in response they raised the spectre of "the mob" and "anarchy". Fearing the consequences of the debates treading on increasingly dangerous ground and undermining their authority, the Grandees suspended the debates on 8th November. The escape of Charles from Hampton Court Palace three days later set the seal on this period of open discussion.

Hobbes, who was writing his *Leviathan* at the same time as these events (published just four years later), gave as the starting point of his political theory the "war of all against all" that he claimed arises out of human self-interest. An absolute and indivisible sovereign power was necessary to prevent the always-simmering state of civil war from boiling over. At the debate, Ireton likewise asserted that the need for strong government arises out of the need to maintain order.

Hobbes's new conception, which came to underpin the arrangements eventually found in the constitutional monarchy after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688, located

continued on page 6...



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the sovereign power in a symbolic person of state, representing a Covenant or agreement enacted between the ruling elites, the people and the state itself. The crucial feature of this conception is that the people hand over their ability to speak in their own name by this Covenant. It served to provide the veneer of legitimacy, purporting to represent the collective will, whilst in reality representing the interests of the new ruling class via its artificial person of state, the monarch.

This artificial person of state is the form of democratic personality given rise to at that time, which arose out of conditions of civil war, to manage the contending powerful interests whilst suppressing the popular voice, to halt the continuing battle of democracy. It is this system that still exists in the present, but which is now in utter crisis. Today, this personality reveals itself as anything but democratic. The mask is off, and indeed, the ruling elite barely follow their own constitutional theory, if at all. Pragmatism now dominates, and increasingly open rule by police powers.

For the first time, the Putney Debates elaborated a demand for sovereignty not to lie with Parliament or any other force, but with the people. That was defeated at that time. In a sense, the call was ahead of its time. Those radical democratic forces who gave the call were unable to bring into being such a form of democracy.



• Col Rainsborough.

But that battle of what the content of democracy is and what form it should take opened up at that time. The powerful forces at that time, which were in the ascendancy, had to resolve that battle in a way that kept the people out of power.

It is noteworthy that Lenin, in speaking of the significance of the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, said that this revolution undertook the task of completing the democratic revolution that got underway in England in the 1640s and the two subsequent decades. So this is very much the call of the times today, a call echoing through the intervening centuries, and especially the watershed moment of the Russian

Revolution that is still in the making: for a directly democratic voice where people, speaking their own name, directly form their collective will, so that the supreme decision-making power is directly exercised by the whole polity. The modern world requires modern arrangements that give voice to the people and enable the people to be the decision-makers, so taking the democratic revolution that began with the Civil War through to completion. Only in this way can society recognise the rights of all, bring the enormous productive forces under control, and direct the economy to meeting the needs of the people.

Workers Weekly

Deliveroo goes Down-Under

by B Curphey

BRITISH FOOD delivery platform Deliveroo announced on the 16th November that it was going into voluntary administration in Australia, claiming that “achieving a sustainable position of leadership in the market is not possible without a

the company they work for becomes insolvent.

It is not far-fetched to suggest that one of the “challenging economic conditions” informing Deliveroo’s decision to shut down its Australian operations may be the promise of greater regulation. The writing has been on the wall for quite some time

exploitation of Deliveroo couriers as a key reason why Deliveroo cannot be allowed to simply leave without paying up: “Deliveroo has always been the outlier of the gig industry in Australia, railing against reform supported by Uber and DoorDash to level the playing field for companies while lifting



disproportionate level of investment which would have highly uncertain returns”.

Advisory and investment firm KordaMentha has been appointed as the administrator for Deliveroo Australia and will now decide what Deliveroo’s creditors are owed. These creditors include the 15,000 workers who deliver for Deliveroo as couriers. Deliveroo Australia’s couriers, like almost all gig workers, are classified as independent contractors, not as employees. This means that they are not entitled to basic protections, including the Fair Entitlements Guarantee (FEG), a government programme designed to help employees recover unpaid wages when

now – better regulation of the gig economy is crucial. It is something that has been promised both by the federal Labor Party at the last federal election, and Victorian Labor ahead of the Victorian state election that was held on 26th November, the Fair Work Commission even decided that one Deliveroo contractor ought to be classified as an employee.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) announced on the day of the shutdown that it is “seeking an urgent meeting [with] Deliveroo’s administrators on workers entitlements and data protection.” It has represented gig workers working for Deliveroo throughout the COVID 19 pandemic. They cite the appalling

standards for workers under deadly pressures.”

It now wants to ensure that the company does not get away with their “sudden and cowardly” departure, leaving workers with no job and thousands in unpaid wages. Deliveroo’s 15,000 workers were not even given notice of the shutdown, which happened in the middle of a work day.

Other delivery services such as DoorDash have been quick to get former Deliveroo workers to sign up. But more gig work is a band-aid solution to a much bigger problem. Some commentators fear that this may be the beginning of the end for the big food-delivery companies and that more closures are on



• Henry Ireton.

the horizon.

Even if these companies continue to exist, which they almost certainly will in some form, they cannot be allowed to continue misclassifying, under-paying and exploiting their workers. Anthony Albanese's Labor government has proposed reforms to enable the Fair Work Commission to consider cases that relate to "employee-like" situations, where it is currently limited to considering matters that relate to employees and those who seek clarification about whether they are an employee or a contractor. This could usher in a new era of regulation for gig work.

The gig economy is not, however, an issue that can be tackled meaningfully on a case-by-case basis. Ultimately, as the TWU has already recognised, gig workers are workers and the gig economy is a union issue. Work must be done to empower gig workers to organise and bargain with the big platforms to ensure that fair pay and conditions are implemented and enforced. This includes safe conditions of work and data protection for users of delivery apps.

The solution is not, as one columnist in the *Sydney Morning Herald* asserted, for individual consumers to stop using delivery apps. This kind of argument diverts responsibility away from the companies who engage gig workers. It is Deliveroo, and not the users of its services, that bears responsibility for the conditions of its workers. It is Deliveroo, and ultimately other companies like it, who must be held accountable.

**Guardian
Australian communist
weekly**

• Protesting against the evils of the gig economy in Melbourne

by Mike Wu

NORMAN BETHUNE is a well-known figure in the history of Canada-China relations. But there is another legendary figure: Dorise Nielsen. The first Member of Parliament from the Communist Party of Canada, she went to China in her later years to support the Chinese people's socialist construction, until her death in Beijing in 1980.

Dorise was born in London, England in 1902 and settled in Saskatchewan in 1927 to work as a public-school teacher. Dorise initially did not concern herself with politics, until the Great Depression broke out in 1929.

During the Depression, Dorise saw with her own eyes how workers, farmers, the ill and the old struggled under capitalism. In 1933, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) held its first convention and approved the Regina Manifesto, which described capitalism as an unjust and inhumane system that concentrated power and wealth in a small elite whilst leaving most people in poverty.

Two events convinced Dorise to join the Communist Party of Canada. In July 1936, she had heard the Party's General Secretary Tim Buck speak during the CCF provincial convention. She was deeply impressed by his charisma and his call for the working class to unite and defeat the establishment of Liberals and Conservatives. One year later, Dorise helped raise money to send the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion to Spain and met Norman Bethune on his cross-country tour in support of Republican Spain. By this time, she had joined the Communist Party.

In Saskatchewan during the 1940 federal election, the Communist Party initiated a popular front called the United Progressive Movement that included members of the CCF and other reformers and populists.

Dorise Nielsen: Ground-breaking Communist MP in Canada – People's Hero in China



Dorise was the United Progressive candidate in North Battleford, which she won by defeating Liberal incumbent Cameron Ross McIntosh. She had made history by becoming the first communist MP elected in Canada and North America.

After the federal government banned the Communist Party in 1940, Dorise joined the Labor-Progressive Party, which was the Party's legal political organisation. As the third woman elected to Canada's Parliament and the first

to still be raising young children whilst holding political office, Dorise worked on behalf of women and children. She was the first MP to support public day-care, arguing that: "It is being tied to all the multitudinous tasks of home and family that robs women of the opportunity to compete with men, not her inferiority." She knew that only when a socialist economy lifted the burdens of childcare and housework from the shoulders of individual women would they have equal footing with men.

Dorise worked to promote public health-care, pointing to the number of infant deaths and the high mortality rate from tuberculosis at the time.

After losing her seat in 1945 and despite the difficulties of the Cold War, Dorise continued fighting for peace and feminism. Dorise helped found the Congress of Canadian Women, attended the 1948 Women's International Democratic Federation Peace Congress in Budapest and helped found the Canadian Peace Congress.

Travelling under the alias Judy Godefroy, Dorise moved to the People's Republic of China in 1957 to teach English at Beijing Foreign Studies University. As the only Canadian in Beijing, she became the link of friendship between China and Canada.

Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s – including during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, policies which went terribly awry during socialist construction – Dorise continued actively to work in China. She worked in factories and farms and helped to compile English-Chinese dictionaries and public school textbooks. In 1962, Dorise became a citizen of the People's Republic of China.

For health reasons, Dorise left the Beijing Foreign Studies University in the late 1960s and began working as an editor at Foreign Languages Press. There, she helped translate works by the leaders of the People's Republic of China, important Party and government documents, and books reflecting the contemporary conditions and traditional culture of China. When the Communist Party of China started to consider economic reform soon after Richard Nixon's visit, Dorise suggested the importance of developing education and technology. She also helped with programmes for Chinese students studying abroad.

Dorise died in Beijing on 9th December 1980. In recognition of her long service to China, a memorial service was held at Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery. In her eulogy, the director of the Foreign Languages Press noted that Dorise Nielsen "had a deep love of China and Chinese people, she lived a very simple life and was never extravagant, her feeling for the socialist construction was profound".

**People's Voice
Canada**

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Racist bigots believe that some races are born superior and others inferior. They of course always believe they are part of the former.

Racism can take several forms, such as prejudice, discrimination, segregation and genocide. It may not be just a matter of colour or physical difference but may be imposed for political reasons by legislation as under fascism or used by imperialism to divide and rule.

Racism is not natural or inevitable. All over the world people from different races, cultures and religions live and work together. They may fall in love and have families with beautiful children.

Racist ideology has been used by the capitalist class to justify its colonial plunder. The horrors of Apartheid will be long remembered. Indigenous people were regarded as a lower order of human being that were physically and mentally inferior without culture or moral sense.

Today, a cornerstone of imperialist strategy is to stir up trouble and create tensions between different peoples, which they may then exploit to foster regime change.

All socialist countries have overcome such problems as racism, chauvinism and religious sectarianism that were inherited from capitalism.

Meanwhile, with imperialism facing terminal crisis and its component reactionary regimes struggling to maintain themselves against mounting public discontent, racism

still survives. Capitalist failure has to be blamed on something or someone. In Britain, since the Second World War, and at various times the Irish people, those who they referred to as "coloured", the Russians and now increasingly Chinese people have been demonised. Those world leaders who have opposed imperialism, such as the presidents of Iraq, Libya, Syria, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Russia and China, have been the subject of propaganda attacks. And nearer home, working class champions such as Arthur Scargill were vilified.

The USA was built upon lands taken from its Indigenous population using the labour of slaves kidnapped from mainly Africa. Strong racist attitudes were fostered to justify genocide and exploitation on a grand scale. Popular songs and children's nursery rhymes unashamedly endorsed racism, the effects of which still exist to this day. In 'Cowboy and Indian' films the native people, with their own cultural and ethical standards, were usually portrayed as ruthless savages by the lawless gunslinging occupiers.

All this is in sharp contrast to the progressive policies to support ethnic minorities in the Socialist countries.

The last Soviet census, taken in 1985, identified 128 ethnic groups with many different languages all living in harmony. People's China today is home to 56 ethnic groups. Government policies designed to ensure equality have been introduced to encourage regional au-

tonomy whilst promoting respect for faith and customs. Imperialist dreams of provoking violence and unrest in remote regions of the northwest have faded as poverty has been eliminated, the standard of living increased, infrastructure developed, and a new quality of life made possible. All cultures are encouraged to flourish, and life expectancy has doubled.

**John Maryon
Suffolk**

Dear Comrades

We treasure your views. Even as our country [Sri Lanka] falls into the global cesspool as part of the trash of globalisation.

Capitalism, socialism, fascism as political parties and ideas and as principles are all very well. But the fact is that capitalism in the form of dedication to money-making as the goal of persons in the modern system has happened. Freedom is the freedom to make money. Naturally politics as a way of life is not excluded.

I teach youth. I have seen the rising tide of recognition by young persons that the best way to make money is politics. It is clear.

Shouting about corruption only entrenches these thoughts. So the best and brightest do take to politics. I have seen in Asia and Africa that this is true. And especially accepting the populist process. These young politicians call it capitalism, socialism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservative and so on. However this type of politics is basically what us in the older generation call corruption. Our chains are always of our own fashioning!!!

**Dr Darin Gunsekera
Wiros Lokh Institute
Colombo
Sri Lanka**

Dear Comrades

I read the article *Bourgeois Democracy and Fascism* by J Sykes [NW:2186, 25 Nov 2022] with a great deal of interest. Like some others, I have always re-

garded the USA as fascist or semi-fascist or quasi-fascist. I am not sure whether I agree with the analysis presented by J Sykes.

If the USA is not actually fascist, it certainly came very near to being fascist in the 1940s and '50s with the jailing of the leaders of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) in 1948, the Taft-Hartley anti-union law, the execution of the Rosenbergs in 1953, and McCarthyism. What needs to be explained about McCarthyism is that it was not simply directed at communists, actual card-carrying members of the CPUSA, but against those perceived by the authorities to be communists or communist sympathisers. In reality, many of the people accused of being communists were just a bit left-wing or even liberals. Many people lost their jobs, some Hollywood actors and directors were blacklisted and never worked again, and some people were even jailed.

Today some states in the USA still retain anti-communist laws from the 1950s. US citizens are banned from travelling to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and DPRK citizens are banned from entering the USA!

I think we need to take into account that it is now over 100 years since Mussolini's fascists first appeared on the streets of Italy and it is over nearly 90 years after Dimitrov made his classic analysis of fascism at the Comintern congress in 1935. Since then fascism may have mutated and taken on different forms.

In my opinion we are increasingly confronted by liberal fascism, whereby you have the increasing censorship of social media by the state and the cancelling or suppression of any opinion that does not conform to the thought of cynical post-modernist liberalism.

**Dermot Hudson
South London**

Diary

FRI 9- SUN 11 DEC

Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp: Paices Hill, Aldermaston, RG7 4PW.

SAT 10 DEC

Arise: Solidarity, struggle, socialism: Rally. 10:00, Conway Hall 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL. Register at www.mstar.link/arise22.

TUE 13 DEC

Korean Friendship Association: Online meeting to remember Chairman Kim Jong Il and the 105th anniversary of the birth of Madame Kim Jong Suk. Online 18:00 by Skype and Telegram.

SAT 17 DEC

Friends of Korea: DPRK's National Defence. Hybrid seminar 14:00, NCP Party Centre, London and Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83688570664?pwd=ckFGQ0xRVVdGS-DZESFRyenFRam-lkZz09> Meeting ID: 836 8857 0664 - Passcode: 824132

THUR 12 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Screening of Barry Gardiner's film on fire and re-hire. 19:30, In person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book via MML website.

WED 18 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Book launch: Alexander Buzgalin and Andrei Kolganov 21st Century Capital: post-Soviet Marxist reflections 18:30, Online. Book via MML website.

FRI 27 JAN

Soviet War Memorial Trust: Holocaust Memorial Day, Act of Remembrance 10:45 for 11:00, Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park (Imperial War Museum), London SE1 6HZ

FRI 27 JAN

Haringey Education Aid for Cuba: fundraiser with live Cuban music

19:30, £12:00 book on Cuba Solidarity Campaign website.

SAT 28 JAN

Latin America Conference 2023: 10:00-17:00, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD Tickets £10/ £8 at <https://bit.ly/LA23ticket>

MON 30 JAN

Marx Memorial Library: Engels and the Housing Question 150 Years. On Panel Discussion. 19:00, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book on Eventbrite.

THUR 9 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: The Energy Crisis. Panel discussion. 19:00, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book on Eventbrite.

THUR 23 FEB

Marx Memorial Library: Inflation & the Developing Economic Crisis. 19:00, in person at MML 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1R 0DU and online. Book on Eventbrite.

WED 22 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Thomas Kuczynski' on his New Edition of Marx's Capital Vol 1. 19:00. Online. Book via MML website.

TUE 28 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Book Launch Lessons in Organising: What Trade Unionists Can Learn from the War on Teachers. 19:00, in person at MML and online. Book on Eventbrite.

SAT 8 JULY

Durham Miners Gala

SUN 3 SEPT

Burston Strike School rally: Church Green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk.

NOV

Cuban Film Festival, Glasgow

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

AS ANOTHER year passes let's turn from the latest headlines to take a broader look at the events of the last 12 months.

Looming large on the Scottish political scene throughout 2022 were the questions of ferries, run (or not) by the state-owned Caledonian MacBrayne. Those that are in service on the routes between the mainland and the western islands are well past their best before dates and as a result keep breaking down, with the replacements often suffering the same fate. Islanders complain that the tourist trade has been badly damaged and food shortages have been reported. It was claimed that 27 per cent of the sailings to and from the Isle of Arran had been cancelled, but most islanders keep on voting SNP so the nationalists must be doing something right.

The two uncompleted ferries at the Port Glasgow Ferguson Marine Engineering Limited yard that were commissioned in 2014 are still a source of controversy. Whilst it is uncertain whether they will ever see service, one certainty is that the bill is still mounting, with the original £97 million bill now expanded to reach £350 million or more. We await with interest the results of an ongoing parliamentary enquiry – but as always in these cases vital paperwork seems to have gone missing or never made in the first place.

This, however, was not the greatest 'achievement' of the SNP's industrial strategy. That honour goes to the £568 million worth of guarantees given to dodgy Indian businessman Sanjeev Gupta to purchase the aluminium smelter and related hydro-power plant at Fort William. He claimed he would create 2000 jobs, but only 50 actually materialised. He was also given a £7 million loan to purchase a Lanarkshire steel works, which has still not been repaid. Instead, the SNP government have been busy chasing-up homeless people for £33 million they were forced to spend on temporary accommodation.

This year, 2022, was

the year of the 2021 Census in Scotland. This was postponed, allegedly because of the pandemic but in reality just to be different from the rest of the UK. The results of this decision to postpone were distinctly unimpressive. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the overall turnout in March 2021 was 97 per cent. In Scotland the return rate was 79 per cent until another £6 million was spent on an extension to the deadline that resulted in a turnout of 89 per cent. This was still below the low target of 90 per cent (in 2011 the completion rate was 94 per cent), making the results useless. Had it gone ahead in 2021 the UK-wide publicity would have boosted participation, but that would have been too simple for the SNP.

Amongst the bright ideas from the SNP was that to defeat COVID 19 (after it had been around for two years) by cutting the bottom off 2,000 doors in schools to improve ventilation, a suggestion which caused ridicule from the Fire Brigades Union amongst others.

One major matter causing ructions in nationalist ranks, and beyond, is the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is designed to make it much easier for people to change their gender legally without a doctor's say so. Its first reading at Holyrood saw an unprecedented six SNP MSPs vote against it and another two abstain. There was even the amazing spectacle of an SNP minister actually resigning on a point of principle. The only women's groups supporting the measure are those in receipt of grants from the SNP government.

The year began with the demise of Solidarity: Scotland's Socialist Movement, which was run by Tommy Sheridan. But it was rather difficult to tell as it had been inactive for years apart from social media postings about Glasgow Celtic.

The major political event of 2022 was the municipal elections in May. The SNP predictably maintained their largest party status with 453 seats out of a possible 1,226. Labour secured 282, the Tories 214, Liberal Democrats 87, Greens 35, with 149 Independents along with single councillors representing the Rubbish Party, the British Unionist Party and the West Dunbartonshire Community Party. Due to the STV [single transferable vote] voting system only

two councils had a single party in control: SNP's Dundee and Labour's West Dunbartonshire. Later the defection of a single SNP councillor in North Lanarkshire allowed Labour to resume a minority administration. The election also saw Alex Salmond's Alba Party stand in 111 seats in a futile bid to establish some sort of nationalist presence amongst the nationalist community – but it came to naught and Alba lost all its 13 incumbent councillors.

In March the SNP Finance Secretary Kate Forbes produced a 10-year National Strategy for Economic Transformation that annoyed just about everyone in Scotland, including SNP members who noted that the policy was based on present day devolution and assumed that independence was dead duck. The SNP also got themselves tied in knots over energy policy. The old "Its Scotland's Oil" slogan has been ditched to please the SNP's Greens allies in Holyrood, but many senior figures are furious, particularly with the recent rise in energy prices.

The champagne that was bought in to celebrate the nationalisation of Scotland's railways in April remained unopened when it was speedily discovered that previously planned cuts were still to be implemented by the new management.

Another SNP success story is its quango Social Security Scotland (SSS). Its running costs have reached £195 million whilst complaints against it are mounting, up 400 per cent since it first saw the light of day in 2018.

Events in Ukraine provided the SNP an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to NATO despite them disliking nuclear weapons. For Nicola Sturgeon the most important matter was being able to criticise Alex Salmond for hosting discussion programmes on Russian TV. At the start of Russian military action Sturgeon

claimed that nuclear weapons only inhibited action by imperialist powers.

No review of Scottish politics can ignore the death of the Queen at her Balmoral estate. Unsurprisingly her passing did not generate a great upsurge in republicanism. As in London, tens of thousands queued through the night for the Edinburgh lying in state. Both Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon have sworn to uphold the new King and the Protestant Religion. In Glasgow some Celtic supporters spray-painted derogatory messages in the east end whilst nearby council houses flew Union Jacks at half-mast.

Another important event and non-event was the predictable ruling in November by the Supreme Court that Holyrood did not have the power to call a second independence referendum. Sturgeon should have read the 1998 Scotland Act that brought Holyrood into being. As a result the 19th October 2023 will be a normal working day. It is early days yet but grumbles within the SNP membership about their leader's strategy, or lack of it, are growing. They moan that no campaigning was done in 2022 and that only a couple of very thin policy documents were produced that were denounced by nationalists as much as by opposition parties.

This review could also have mentioned that state of the health services, but the lengthening waiting lists and staff shortages are the same on both sides of the border.

Finally, if Nicola Sturgeon is uncertain about what the future holds for her or the SNP she should spend £12 and get a tarot reading from her sister Gillian, who took up fortune-telling as side-line only to be mocked by those who have no fear of the spirit world. 'Mystic Gill' has, perhaps wisely, now given up the ethereal to concentrate on her make-up business.

FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

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In search of a better life

by Lương Thu Hương

THE LIFE STORIES of Vietnamese migrants who are seeking better lives in the UK are vividly told in a new book published by the Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House last month. *Hành Trình Từ Thần: Ghi Chép Từ Nước Anh* (Death Journey: Notes from England) is the first book by journalist Đào Duy Bình.

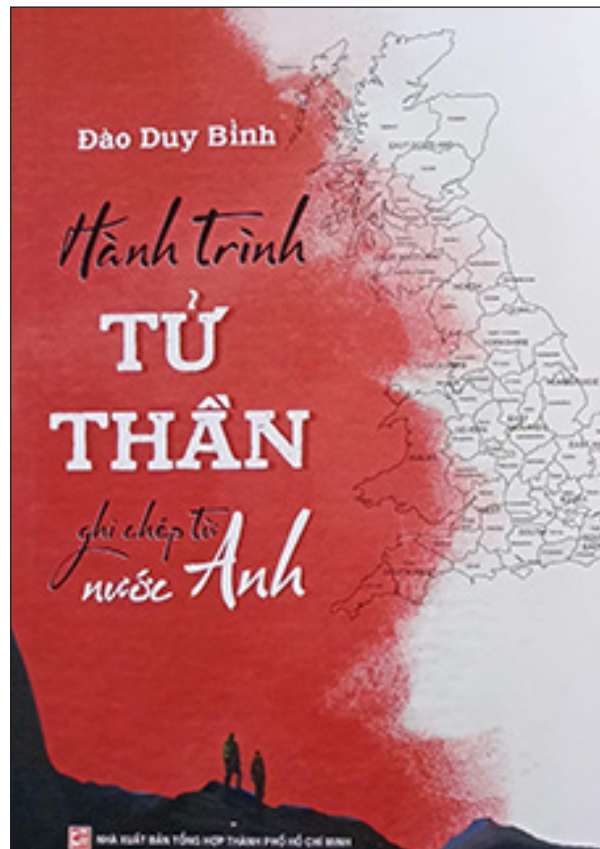
It starts with the tragedy on 23rd October 2019 that shocked the world, when the bodies of 39 Vietnamese citizens – 29 men, eight women and two 15-year-old youths – were discovered in a refrigerated container in Essex. It ends with another tragedy on 7th May 2022, when human remains identified as four missing Vietnamese men were discovered in a burned-out mill in Oldham, Manchester.

The 224-page book vividly depicts in detail the journeys fraught with pain, danger and even humiliation that each victim has gone through to seek a better life.

It narrates deeply and authentically the emotional and even surprising lives of specific Vietnamese immigrants who have arrived in the foreign land in various ways or hiding in containers crossing the sea, living deep in Calais forest in the north of France to wait for the opportunity, sneaking into containers to cross the border or crossing the English Channel on overloaded rubber boats.

Behind the pictures they post on Facebook, the money sent home, or attractive offers that say “it’s easy to make money here”, are the fates of Vietnamese nationals doing various manual jobs to make ends meet, in nail shops, as cooks, waiters, dish washers, or even illegal marijuana farming.

Readers can sympathise with their heartfelt



aspirations on facing sickness, loneliness, abuse, confusion and unfulfilled dreams. In such difficult situations, compatriotism has shone through.

Death Journey: Notes from England is not only the investigative reportage of a journalist, but also a reliable sociological document, providing case studies for specialists and those who are concerned about one of today’s global issues – migration and integration.

Đào Duy Bình has been working on the book for 12 years and travelled to the UK four times. He has observed, listened and carefully recorded what he has seen along the way. He has also met and talked with the characters and interviewed many related authorised agencies.

“I wrote this book from the bottom of my heart, to say two words ‘thank you’ to express my admiration for the sacrifices, the industriousness, suffering, and constant dedication to the family, relatives, compatriots... of millions of Vietnamese immigrants around the

world,” Bình wrote in his book.

“*Death Journey: Notes from England* takes readers on emotional journeys, but is full of real-life stories, sympathies, warnings, perspectives and unanswered questions about a journey that should not have been taken on the way to happiness for each of us,” commented journalist-writer Dương Thành Truyền.

Bình, 49, was born in the central province of Quảng Bình. He graduated from the Faculty of Literature and Journalism, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. He completed the Migration and Integration programme organised by the German Foreign Ministry in 2015.

Bình has been working for *Tuổi Trẻ* [Youth] newspaper since 2003 and is currently its editorial secretary. He has written many articles, such as *Người Nhập Cư và Giấc Mơ Đức* (Immigrants and the Germany Dream), *Mưu Sinh Ở London* (Making a Living in London), and *Người Đi Tìm Bóng* (Shadow Seeker), amongst others.

VNS

George Johannes: freedom fighter and communist

by Theo Russell

COMRADE George Johannes, a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress (ANC) and for several years the New Communist Party (NCP), passed away in Rome last week. He was 78. He will be greatly missed by many comrades who knew him in the NCP.

He was a member of the NCP for several years when he lived in exile in the UK and later served at the South African High Commission in London from 1998–2005, first as Political Counsellor and then as the Deputy High Commissioner. During this time he was also Director for UK, Ireland and Benelux Countries with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

George was a frequent visitor to Scotland, before and after the end of apartheid, and Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is home to the George Johannes Collection archive.

George joined the ANC in 1970 and his varied roles included: journalist with Radio Freedom in Angola and Zambia; Administrative Secretary of the Department of Information and Publicity in Lusaka; Chairperson, ANC Youth Section, London; Member of Editorial Board of the ANC’s official journal *Sechaba*; member of the Regional Political Committee of the ANC UK Region; Administrative Secretary of the ANC Office in London; and ANC representative at the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) in Budapest.

In 2007 George became Deputy Head of Mission in Berlin, to

where he was posted. In April 2009 he was posted to Bern, where he became South African Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the Holy See (the Vatican), and in February 2021 he met Pope Francis himself.

After leaving the diplomatic service slightly more than a year ago, George continued teaching at a Pontifical University in Rome. He

30 years – and father of my children Charlotte (grandchildren Jack and Zuri) and Daniel Johannes.

“We lived through the crucial years of struggle, and life was often tough. Banu, his wife and son Liam, 12, live in Munich. Sad news and he will be missed.”

Many in the NCP have fond memories of George, whom they recall as a warm, humorous and charismatic



died on 30th November 2022 at the Generalate House of the Missionaries of Mariannhill in Rome, where he had been staying with the community of Mariannhill priests and brothers from November 2021. The congregation has its foundation in South Africa.

George’s former wife, Jan, wrote that: “He was living, and died, in a home for priests in Rome.

Comrade George, my former husband – we were together for over

• George Johannes. A much liked and valued comrade.

The NCP badge



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The fight-back begins

by B Arjun

BRITAIN'S working class are hitting back against the mismanagement of the economy. Moving into this winter, the UK has been hit by a wave of strikes, involving action by more than a million workers in the public sector led by the major trade unions.

Strikes have halted train services, rubbish collection and port shipments around the country. The country is witnessing the biggest walkouts of the year. The unions are moving closer to co-ordinated action. Britain hasn't seen this kind of explosion of industrial action, in so many walks of life, in decades.

better pay

Demands for better pay in the face of soaring inflation – at 11 per cent, the highest rate in 40 years – and a more than 80 per cent jump in energy prices have led rail, port and postal workers, university lecturers, school teachers and nurses to come out onto the streets. The Trades Union Congress argues that on average workers earn less than they did in 2008 – the longest period without an increase in earnings for 200 years.

The rail workers' union has announced four 48-hour strikes over the Christmas and new year period. About 40,000 staff from Network Rail and 14 train companies are set to strike work. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) has joined the industrial action and is asking for industrial actions in multiple sectors.

The UK's biggest unions, with 2.7 million members in total, are calling for synchronised actions.

The postal workers union has announced

strike action up until Christmas Eve. According to the CWU (Communication Workers' Union), Royal Mail's financial problems were due to "gross mismanagement and a failed business agenda," leading them to cut about 10,000 jobs. The management is holding the workers to ransom for taking legal industrial action against a business approach that is inimical to the interests of workers, customers or the future of Royal Mail.

School teachers in Scotland took part in their first national strike for almost 40 years after dismissing the latest pay offer as an "insult" because it is only a 5.07 per cent increase.

The nurses are on strike because of the mistreatment meted out to the profession under the pressure of a lobby that wants to privatise the much-acclaimed NHS. Their pay has stagnated and not kept up with the inflationary trends in the economy.

leaving

This has resulted in more staff leaving the NHS, adding to the working hours and extra shifts for the nurses in service. Brexit is also responsible for low staff strength at the NHS hospitals as a lot of European nurses left. Despite the stupendous work put in by the health workers during the COVID 19 pandemic, the right-wing government has failed to reward them and has done little to raise their morale. All that the nurses are demanding is a pay rise that is five per cent pay above inflation. The neo-liberal ideology and the upswing in the fortunes of the far-right have all added to aggravating the plight of the working classes.

The UK is in a recession. Its economy is projected to shrink by



• Rail workers take action.

over two per cent and not return to its pre-pandemic size until the end of 2024. According to the official estimates, real household incomes are likely to plunge by more than seven per cent, falling back to levels last seen in 2013–2014. More than half a million people are projected to lose their jobs.

The far-right ideology with its fake populism and insentience on cultural exceptionalism has done more harm to people's interests by polarising society and then making people sacrifice the problems at the workplace at the altar of nationalism and communalism. Difficult times are ahead for Britain's workers. The

struggle is likely to intensify because the Tories, traditionally least sympathetic to the cause of working people, have already said that due to the ongoing economic stress it will be hard to satisfy the workers' demands. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned of a "profound economic crisis" with "difficult decisions to come" – clearly indicating that it will be difficult to make a more generous pay offer to public sector employees.

overlook

The Bank of England that caters more to the interests of shareholders and billionaires has advised the government

to overlook the demands of the working classes. Its argument against pay hikes is that it will lead to a "wage-price" spiral and further boost inflation as the employers will pass on the burden to the customers.

adversely

Britain's central bank has been quick to advise on workers' pay but rarely informs the government how increased defence spending is adversely impacting the economy and well-being of the people.

Despite the economic turmoil, the Tory government says that it will commit spending of three per cent to the military sector, up



• Postal workers on the picket line.

from the current 2.2 per cent level. Earlier, former prime minister Liz Truss's government had announced that defence spending by the end of the decade would see a massive increase, doubling annually to £100 billion compared with £48 billion now.

The need for defence spending is felt due to the elite penchant for strategic over-reach. They first go and create problems around the world and then they talk about enhancing security. For example, Russian president Putin has alleged Royal Navy personnel involvement in the recent attacks on the pipelines in the Baltic Sea. The West has put counter allegations against Putin, accusing him of blowing up his own pipelines in order to escalate the conflict. Whatever the truth, the fact is that British foreign policy lacks strategic autonomy and its elite is over-zealous to serve American interests.

blaming

As expected, the corporate media is blaming the workers for creating inconvenience to the public due to the intensification of the struggle in Britain. The fact is, however, that the current struggle in Britain is helping change the narrative that over the years has defined workplace conflict as some form of aberration or residue of antiquated industrial behaviour. The neo-liberals had branded organised labour as a relic of the past. The issues of industrial relations were discounted or considered to be insignificant to the current world of work. The good news is that the working classes have hit back.

People's Democracy (India)

Italians take to the streets against NATO's war

by Ed Newman

THOUSANDS of Italians held protests against the high cost of living and energy prices in Rome last weekend. Calling for the suspension of shipment of weapons and money to Ukraine, the demonstrators took to the streets of the Italian capital on Saturday in a protest organised by the USB union (Unione Sindacale di Base) with the support of political parties and different social organisations.

“We are on the streets to tell Meloni and her government, which is a continuation of the Draghi government and the requests of the European Union, that it changes its course,” said Pierpaolo, a USB union member.

“Recently the government has once again allocated money for the war in Ukraine, instead of

putting money into social spending, health, education and pensions. We say that it is necessary to end the war. It is necessary to stop financing Ukraine and it is necessary to end the sanctions against Russia,” he added.

From the beginning of the Ukraine war, former Prime Minister Mario Draghi's administration introduced measures that made it possible to send weapons to Kiev without seeking parliamentary authorisation for each shipment. Last week, Italy's ruling rightist parties withdrew an amendment that would allow the government to continue sending weapons to Ukraine throughout 2023.

Luigi de Magistris, the USB spokesman who took part in the demonstration, said the protest is a march of the unions based in Rome against the policies of the Meloni government



and the neo-liberal powers. The demonstration is “against the government's economic manoeuvre that hits the poor and middle class and doesn't even support the companies that

produce and create jobs”, said de Magistris, the former mayor of Naples.

The Italian parliament has passed a resolution authorising the government to continue to help Ukraine,

including via military aid, throughout 2023. “The Italian Constitution says that Italy must stay out of wars and we do not consider it fair that money is invested in sending

weapons to countries that are in conflict. We ask that this money be redistributed to the people who have the most difficulties,” said Michele, another USB Union member.

Support for Ukraine has been a contentious issue within the ruling coalition, with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni positioning herself as a staunch supporter of Kiev. Italy is supporting Ukraine amidst an economic crisis, a cold winter expected in the country and the rampant poverty.

Moreover, there seems to be an open wedge between parliament and the Italian people. The latest polls show that more than half of Italians advocate peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and only a third are okay with their country supplying weapons to Kiev.

Radio Havana Cuba

Strike paralyses French railways

PASSENGERS were stranded when French railway workers walked out last weekend.

France's state-owned railway company cancelled more than half of its services last weekend because of a nationwide strike by rail conductors. The French train operator SNCF imposed the drastic service cutbacks as nearly 10,000 conductors went on strike on Saturday demanding better work conditions.

“It is a strike that we did not see coming, neither we nor the unions,” said CEO of the SNCF Jean-Pierre Farandou.

The cancellations have severely affected rail traffic between France and Switzerland as only one out of every three trains was seen running. Trains to Switzerland and Italy were cut by two-thirds, trains

to Germany were cut by half and all trains to Spain were cancelled, SCNF said.

According to union leaders, the walk-outs are meant to draw more attention to rules requiring that members work three weekends per month and sleep away from home for more than 10 nights per month. The conductors' union had two meetings with management without progress before the strike. Other unions joined in support, filing strike notice for both the Christmas and New Year weekends to put pressure on the SNCF.

Meanwhile, the SNCF management said it would hold “new meetings” with trade unions and workers next week.

Over the last three months, France's major unions have staged several mass demonstrations in Paris and hundreds of other locations across France to call for higher salaries amidst the soaring cost of living.

Radio Havana Cuba

West behind riots in Iran

by Yadira Cruz Valera

IRANIAN Foreign Minister Hosein Amir Abdollahian has denounced a plot by hostile countries to encourage riots and cause a civil war which, he said, revealed the true intentions of the West towards the Islamic Republic.

After repeated accusations of the participation of the USA, Israel and their European allies in destabilising attempts, the Iranian Foreign Minister said that foreign interference reached its peak in the last eight weeks.

Abdollahian denounced the terrorist groups that launched attacks from 76 different areas in Iraqi Kurdistan and noted that Iranian forces acted according to international

law and the UN Charter to protect the integrity of its borders.

He also condemned the interventionist comments made by some officials in the USA, Israel, France, UK and Germany, concerning alleged human rights violations in Iran, pointing out that none of these governments had the moral authority to talk about the issue.

Protests began on 16th September after the death of a young woman, Mahsa Amini. The event turned the Islamic Republic into the target of Western attacks and served as an excuse to tighten sanctions and step-up media harassment.

Amini, 22, was taken to a police station for inadequately wearing the hijab (the compulsory veil for women in Iran), where she passed away due to an already present condition, according to the forensic report.

Her death was the spark to promote a “colour revolution” or soft coup with feminist tones, using the interventionist strategies by

the USA and its allies to overthrow governments not aligned with its policies.

More than 50 police officers and security agents were murdered during the riots, whilst 15 civilians were massacred in the Shah Cheraq Mausoleum in Shiraz last month, in an operation for which ISIS claimed responsibility. But behind the sectarian ‘Islamic State’, the Iranian government claims, are the hands of Israeli intelligence and the CIA.

Prensa Latina

New attack on Belgrade communist centre

BACK IN October, the headquarters of the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia (NCPY) in the Serbian capital of Belgrade was vandalised by fascist gangs who smashed the communist centre's windows and daubed neo-Nazi and

anti-communist slogans on its walls.

They've now made a second raid – smashing windows and spraying death threats on the walls. One slogan read “Reds, we will slaughter you” signed with a Celtic cross, a well-known neo-fascist symbol.

The NCPY believe the attack was carried out by members of ‘Club 28’, a neo-Nazi skinhead gang, as act of revenge for the fact that the Communist Youth (SKOJ) publicly exposed the plans of the group to organise a neo-Nazi festival in Belgrade that hundreds of neo-Nazis from Europe and the USA were supposed to attend. For this reason, SKOJ Secretary Alexander Đenić received personal threats.

The NCPY has denounced the stance of the Serbian police who have failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of these attacks, despite the fact that they are known to the authorities.

The NCPY and SKOJ are organising a large anti-fascist protest rally in Belgrade on Saturday 17th December. If the attacks continue the Serbian communists will call for the resignation of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Bratislava Gašić, and organise demonstrations until he retires from that position.