

DEVASTATION IN MIDDLE EAST LIFT SANCTIONS ON SYRIA!

by our Arab Affairs correspondent

INTERNATIONAL emergency services are rushing to the Middle East following a devastating earthquake that toppled thousands of buildings across the Syrian-Turkish border this week. Thousands have died and many more were injured in the quakes that shook the region. Many others remained trapped under the debris in cold and snowy weather that is hampering the rescue teams.

Chinese and Russian teams are joining Arab and Iranian efforts to save lives and provide assistance to the stricken areas, and the Syrian Red Crescent is calling for the suspension of the imperialist blockade to help the country recover in its hour of need.

The Syrian Health Ministry says additional ambulances and mobile clinics have been dispatched to the affected regions and the Syrian government has appealed for help to UN members and international organisations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organisation (WHO), said the rescue operations are “now a race against time” and that the chance of finding more survivors diminishes with every passing hour. The WHO is dispatching crews

and supplies to the affected area.

Many countries have offered assistance with the rescue efforts. Russia has sent over a hundred emergency response specialists, who will work around the clock in the affected areas. But Syrian efforts are hampered by the sanctions imposed by the USA and the European Union.

lift the siege

That’s why the head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Khaled Hboubati, is calling for the lifting of the siege and economic sanctions imposed on Syria to help the country face the repercussions of the devastating earthquake.

“We need heavy equipment, ambulances, and fire-fighting vehicles to continue to rescue and remove the rubble, and this requires the lifting of sanctions on Syria as soon as possible,” Hboubati said. The number of victims is likely to rise, and a number of buildings are still at risk of collapsing.

“The results of the earthquake are catastrophic, and our volunteers are ready, but we lack equipment”, he said. “The rescue process is exposed to many obstacles, the first of which is the lack



• A Chinese rescue team on its way from Beijing.

of mechanisms for saving people, in addition to the sanctions that are the main obstacle to reach these mechanisms.”

A plane carrying the first batch of Iranian humanitarian aid landed at Damascus International Airport on Tuesday, carrying blankets, tents, medicine, food materials and other things that might be needed in the affected areas. Later, two Iraqi planes packed with humanitarian aid on board opened a humanitarian ‘air bridge’ between Damascus and Baghdad whilst an Iraqi convoy took to the road to rush desperately needed fuel to the earthquake victims.

co-operate

In Turkey the first Chinese civilian assistance force has already started to help. The team of eight earthquake relief experts from the Ramunion Rescue Team is led by He Jun, who said they would use advanced radar

life detectors, demolition and rescue equipment, and a search and rescue dog for the mission. “We will co-operate with local teams and other international rescue forces, to rescue life from rubble as quickly as possible,” He Jun said.

Founded in 2008, Ramun-

ion is a professional rescue team specialising in emergency response to disasters and accidents. Its members have taken part in a total of 287 international and domestic rescue missions, including earthquake relief missions in Nepal, Pakistan and Indonesia.

FUND

The February appeal has at last begun with £580 in the bag boosted by £150 from a Southall comrade. So let’s have a spring offensive of our own to hit our £3,500 fighting fund target by the end of the month.

As Cuban medical teams help combat disease in Latin America rescue squads from People’s China rush to help the Syrian and Turkish people recover from this week’s devastating earthquakes. Another world is possible but its not the world of the European Union or the sick society of the United States. In the West workers live in chaos, poverty, crime and violence. But in the people’s democracies a new life is being built with working people at the helm.

That’s why we must keep going. But we can only do it with your help. All donations, big or small, help keep our presses rolling. Please send your donation 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

Zelensky in Wonderland

THE BRITISH government rolled out the red carpet for Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday, who addressed Parliament, held talks with Sunak and had an audience with King Charles that was a Ukrainian PR dream. The British government promised to supply the Ukrainians with more heavy weapons and to provide more training facilities for their fighter pilots in Britain so that Ukraine could achieve a “decisive military victory on the battlefield this year”. Well, that’s what Sunak says. But what does it all mean?

Very little it seems, given the parlous state of the British armed forces these days. A few Challenger tanks are hardly likely to change the balance of forces on the Donbas front as the entire Ukrainian army fights to stave off the advance of what is still only a Russian expeditionary force.

Sunak, like Boris Johnson before him, may like to pose as a world leader and the greatest friend of Ukraine in Western Europe. At the end of the day, however, the only power that counts in NATO is the USA. Zelensky’s fortunes, and indeed his fate, will be decided by the amount of military assistance that Washington gives him.

The Americans call all the shots in Kiev and they’ve backed Zelensky to the hilt so far. Whether they will in the future depends on Biden’s long-term war aims – and those can still only be guessed at.

Russia’s war aims have always been public. The Russians are fighting to defend the Crimeans and the people of the Donbas whose republics have chosen to join the Russian Federation. Russia is fighting to defend the anti-fascist Ukrainians whose parties have all been banned in Ukraine and whose leaders are either languishing in some Ukrainian dungeon or living in exile in Moscow.

The Ukraine conflict has, however, exposed the limitations of US power. Imperialist sanctions have not brought down the Putin government. The Russian army has not been defeated (all its withdrawals in Ukraine were voluntary and for tactical reasons). Sweden and Finland have not joined NATO – largely due to the Turkish veto.

US imperialism has, of course, achieved some of its objectives. It has ensured the survival of their puppet Ukrainian regime. It has sunk, in more than one sense, the Russian Nord Stream 2 pipeline that the USA feared would make Germany dependent on Russian natural gas, and made Western Europe dependent on much dearer American supplies. It has restored US hegemony over all their European allies – with the help of their willing tools in France, Germany and the UK.

Biden is, after-all, just a figurehead for the American ‘deep state’ – what we would call the ‘Establishment’ – that reflects the entire spectrum of bourgeois opinion. Their internal discussions – the rows between the ‘hawks’ and the ‘doves’, and the speculation of retired generals and diplomats – reflect the divisions within the American ruling class.

So, the Americans may have enough now to call it a day. Some believe that speculation in the mainstream US media about a ‘partition’ of Ukraine that would meet most of Russia’s demands reflects genuine divisions within America’s ruling circles. Others think that it’s merely disinformation designed to wrong-foot the Kremlin before their spring offensive. That certainly seems to be the view of most Russian commentators.

None of this need trouble Sunak because he wasn’t in the loop in the first place. At the end of the day, like all British post-war leaders, he will just have to do as he’s told.

Balloon hysteria: the product of a broken system

by James Smiths

OVER THE last few days US politicians and the media have been foaming at the mouth at what they called a “Chinese spy balloon”. The balloon, used for scientific metrological purposes, had passed over US airspace and was ultimately shot down on President Biden’s orders off the coast of South Carolina, despite the administration having previously stressed there was no need to do so.

The designation of the balloon as a ‘spy’ balloon was one created by officials and relayed by journalists, and never one based on actual empirical evidence. Despite this, the assumption successfully established itself as conventional understanding, showing the power of the USA to readily manipulate global discourse with the goal of smearing China. As a show of protest to the events, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken cancelled his upcoming trip to Beijing.

The ‘spy balloon’ saga is a deliberately orchestrated act of political drama by the USA with the goal of purposefully weaponising fear, paranoia and mass hysteria to discredit China. American politics, both at home and abroad, is driven by the covert weaponisation of such drama in a highly aggressive and hysterical manner, unparalleled throughout the world. In doing so, US politicians and public figures on both sides of the spectrum readily smear each other with highly defamatory and exaggerated allegations, as well as whipping up covert fear, paranoia and conspiracy theories.

As some examples of how this works domestically, Democrats accuse Donald Trump of collusion with Russia, Republicans push claims that the 2021 election was rigged. What is notable about this behaviour is that in each incidence there is seldom any evidence to support the claims that are pushed, yet they still become conventional understanding in the respective political camps. What it also goes to show is that US political polarisation has become inherently worse in recent decades. The country has become more divided and as such, the scale of dramatised political conflict has only increased.

Beyond domestic politics, however, this weaponisation of fear and paranoia has been a long-standing trait of US foreign policy. It has, however, been less notable as foreign affairs are subject to an elite consen-

sus that’s relayed through the media. Washington deliberately ferments mass hysteria and paranoia to create support for its foreign policy goals, and the US public as a rule tends to follow this manipulation. Usually, this involves depicting a particular country or ideology as a critical threat to the security and values of the USA, and again there is often an absence of evidence to go with it.

While the term ‘McCarthyism’ comes to mind, the most explicit example of all is the claim that Saddam’s Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction” and was a critical threat to the USA. Now, the USA has designated China as ‘the enemy’ and therefore mass paranoia is cultivated pertaining to all things China within the USA, usually used selectively as part of the USA’s economic war against the country. For example, a thinktank recently published a report claiming that Chinese-manufactured fridges and other household consumer products could be engaging in “espionage”!

These claims often follow a very dubious ‘guilt by association’ logic and are used to legitimate sanctions in the name of US protectionism.

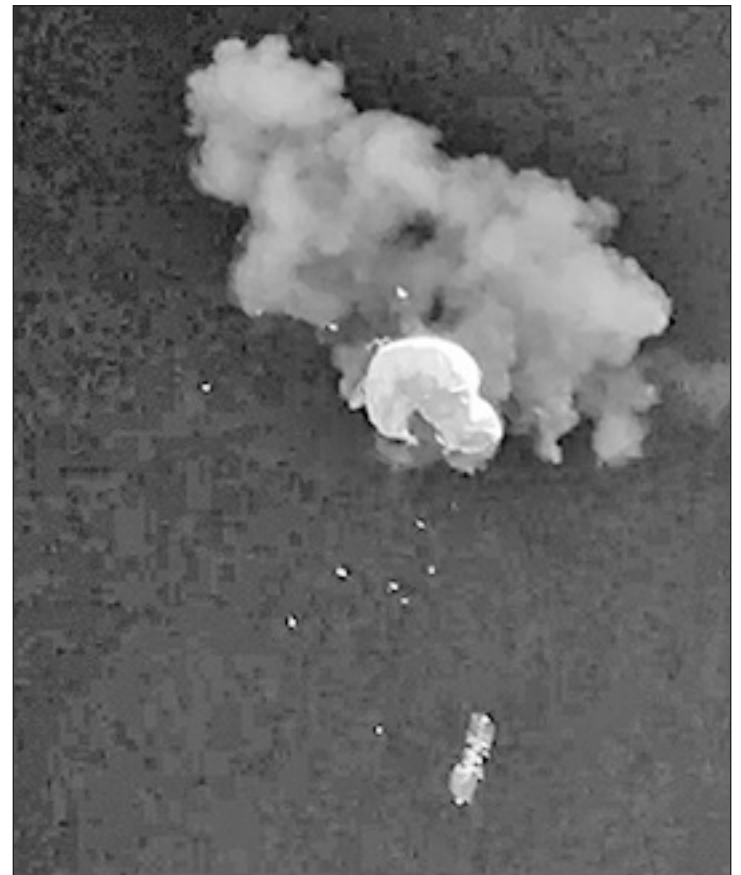
The ‘spy balloon’ saga is not just a product of foreign policy choices however, but a

dangerous by-product of how growing domestic polarisation is leading to greater foreign policy destabilisation. In other words, the toxicity of the US domestic scene is preventing the administration from taking a pragmatic, stable and reasonable approach towards China because it is obliged to ‘appear tough’, its decision making is therefore fundamentally irrational. Once the news of the balloon was published, the usual mass hysteria was amplified by US politicians, which subsequently gave the administration no alternative but to take a ‘tough’ approach. This meant cancelling diplomacy and a showy final shoot-down.

The end product is that despite Blinken talking of so-called “guardrails”, it is the USA who is destabilising the bilateral relationship at the whim of domestic political pressures, and it is precisely this reason why all engagement the USA has pursued with China has not had any practical effects, and why such meetings are often followed or pre-empted with sanctions.

In conclusion, the toxicity of US domestic politics is proving to be a dangerous destabilising force. The USA is lock-stepped into a paranoid, aggressive and uncompromising approach to China, and there is no way for the Biden administration to escape it. This is a testament to how US-style democracy, utilising mass drama, hysteria, misinformation and smear tactics, is an inherently dangerous and unstable system that is exporting its problems to the rest of the world.

Global Times



• Balloon shot down.

Workers' Notes

Whilst Monday saw another major round of strikes take place in the NHS, this week we devote much of our space to industrial disputes that involve at least an element of outsourcing in them.

Outsourcing battles

by New Worker correspondent

OUTSOURCING has helpfully been described by the website *Investopedia* as: “The business practice of hiring a party outside a company to perform services or create goods that were traditionally performed in-house by the company’s own employees and staff. Outsourcing is a practice usually undertaken by companies as a cost-cutting measure.”

That is fine so far as it goes, but it is also common in the public sector when local and central government and their agencies do the same thing.

Whilst *Investopedia* even-handily discusses the pros and cons for businesses, it does not worry much about the impact on workers.

But that is hardly the point, it is all about saving money – or more precisely, diverting it from the working class to the undeserving rich. All the disputes described here are in the public sector.

In the public sector outsourcing is a hidden form of privatisation.

Margaret Thatcher knew what she was doing when she introduced compulsory tendering in the NHS. It provides private contractors with the opportunity to profit from the more lucrative aspects of public service, the promised improved services and cost

savings never materialised, but the reverse happened. Taking over and running an NHS hospital laundry service usually means a multi-national corporation becomes the employer of the previous workers. It does not normally have

paid workers who often need to live long distances from their workplaces.

When London’s bus services were privatised in 1994–95 this move brought considerable hardship to bus drivers as many had taken advantage

The RMT has launched a petition making just such demands, which can be found at: <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/bring-london-subtube-cleaners-in-house>.

This has been a long-running dispute. Last June RMT

strike action.”

TSSA members also involved in the dispute over pay and pensions suspended striking on the same day, however, saying “Discussions with the company have been significant and serious” but warning that: “The company should take note however, that we reserve the right to reissue our notice to take action at any time with 14 days’ notice.”

It is not only in London that RMT is involved in outsourcing battles. Further north it is fighting on behalf of outsourced out-sourced gateline and revenue workers (sounds grander than a ticket inspector) employed by Carlisle Support Services (CSS) on Northern Trains (NTL).

Addressing an RMT branch at Wigan recently, Lynch said: “The scourge of outsourcing has already fuelled in-work poverty and eroded terms and conditions for hundreds of thousands of workers.” He wisely noted that: “Many industries have used this model to get workers on the cheap and rail companies are now no exception and want to extend the use of agency workers over full-time employed staff.”

Subcontracting drives down pay so: “We need to send a message to train operating companies that this model designed to create a cheap workforce is unacceptable to all of us.”

Time gate

The RMT is demanding a £15 hourly minimum wage that in addition protects existing differentials, a reform of the “Time gate” system which will see an end to members losing their hard-earned annual leave.

In addition, it demands that contracts of employment reflect normal rostered hours of no more than 336 hours annually for non-casual employees.

As in London, it demands that all CSS staff on the NTL contract receive equal leisure travel facilities on NTL to the directly employed NTL staff.

It also insists on all CSS staff on the NTL getting a contract to receive a minimum of six weeks’ full sick pay, then six weeks’ half sick pay, and CSS to increase employers’ contributions to the staff’s pension fund.

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to invest in new equipment or buildings, just collect the profits from the contract that before too long will depend on workers being paid less than before.

The fact that outsourced services in the NHS are provided by people with NHS logos means many NHS patients are unaware of what has happened. The main victims of outsourcing have been low-paid workers such as cleaners, cooks and security guards, but computer teams have also been taken over.

On the Rails

by New Worker correspondent

LAST WEEK Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, announced that another 800 sub-contracted cleaners working on Transport for London (TfL) sites would become entitled to free transport on TfL services. They work on MTR Crossrail and on London Overground operations. They now join 5,000 sub-contracted cleaners at TfL who have secured the same rights. These came only after long struggles.

Given the high bus and tube fares in London, this is a major development for low-

of free public transport offered by the then London Transport to live in John Betjeman’s Metroland and take a free tube to their central London depot. Having lost their status, they had to stump-up for long journeys to work, a wrong that still grates.

To return to the present, Mick Lynch, general secretary of transport union RMT, welcomed the move, saying: “This is another step in the right direction by the Mayor of London and we’re calling on him to extend it to all TfL sub-contracted workers. Sadiq Khan’s welcome action stands in stark contrast to the Tories who earlier in the week forced legislation through the House of Commons that would remove these workers’ right to strike. Instead of attacking cleaners, the Tories should be following the Mayor’s lead and ensuring all rail cleaners have free travel.”

He added: “The Mayor needs to do more too. Labour nationally has committed to oversee the biggest wave of insourcing of public services for a generation when it’s elected. London’s Mayor is already in power, so we’ll be stepping up our campaign for Sadiq to tackle the scourge of outsourcing in TfL, starting by bringing London’s Underground cleaners in-house.” Such a touching faith in the Labour Party.

denounced TfL officials for secretly renewing a £450 million contract in March using ‘Chair’s Action’ between meetings. When it was belatedly discovered, Mick Lynch attacked the decision, saying: “This is deeply shocking and raises serious questions about TfL officials and the functioning of the Board. Who is running TfL? The democratically elected Mayor who is chair of TfL or the Commissioner of TfL who the Mayor appoints? It appears to us that unelected officers are now in charge of the capital’s transport system.”

Last Friday night maintenance workers on the new Elizabeth Line held a 24-hour strike.

short-changed

Rail for London Infrastructure, which employs the workers, offered four per cent but workers at MTR – the outsourced part of the Elizabeth Line – received an 8.2 per cent increase this year and Docklands Light Railway (DLR) staff got almost 10 per cent. Lynch said: “It cannot be right that maintenance staff doing essential work keeping the Elizabeth Line running are being short-changed. The employer must make a decent offer on pay that reflects the vital work our members perform in order to avoid future

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On other fronts

by New Worker correspondent

LAST MONTH Sir Keir Starmer, who imagines he is Prime Minister in waiting, announced that he has abandoned yet again one of the many promises he made when campaigning for the Labour Party leadership.

Starmer assured Sky TV viewers that he would seek to use the private sector in the NHS more “effectively” than the Tories. He elaborated by saying: “Outsourcing of some issues and functions I don’t think has been very effective. Let me be clear, we’re not talking about privatising the NHS, we’re talking about using the private sector effectively.”

This directly contradicts his election pledge to abolish the use of external private providers.

Keep Our NHS Public argued this was an unpopular move and that: “Labour must decide where it stands on the NHS – is it with profiteering big business or with the people?” That will be an easy choice for Sir Keir.

Security

Outsourcing was one of the issues exercising the security guards employed by Bidvest Noonan belonging to the small street union the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) at University College London (UCL), who joined in the massive day of strike action on Wednesday 1st February.

In addition to a demand for a £15 hourly rate (which is the equivalent to that paid in 2002), they are seeking union recognition and an end to outsourcing. In October, UCL attempted to break a IWGB strike by employing subcontracting workers on a lower rate of pay, despite running a £90 million yearly surplus.

This was condemned by the University and College Union (UCU) and the IWGB as an intimidatory strike-breaking tactic and as a violation of UCL’s theoretical commitment to parity, on account of these workers receiving lower rates of pay.

The IWGB states that commitment to parity of terms and conditions with directly employed staff was won following IWGB strike action in 2019. Whilst this resulted in improved pay, pension contributions, and sick pay and annual leave entitlements, full equality has not been achieved.

Matteo Tiratelli, UCU’s Anti-Casualisation Officer at UCL, added: “Outsourcing creates terrible working conditions for workers on the lowest

grades at UCL, yet UCL management is determined to keep up this discriminatory practice. It is one of several ways in which working conditions are being worsened across the board. All staff at UCL are seeing our pay fall behind inflation, our jobs casualised and rights stripped away, and it is sadly not just staff, but students who are paying the price.”

Yusuf Nur, a striking security guard, says: “I have young children and on the poverty pay I receive as an outsourced worker I am struggling to support them. I’ve been left with no choice but to strike – it’s the only way we can make our voices heard. After bullying, mistreatment and consistent basic errors with paying us our wages and pensions from Bidvest Noonan and neglect from UCL, we must fight for better conditions for each other and our families.”

Merseyside

It is to be hoped that the guards soon follow in the same footsteps of the 670 caterers, cleaners, porters, caterers and other domestic services at the Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust who will be brought back in-house on 1st April this year, when existing contracts end.

Since the Trust was founded in 2019 in a merger, staff in similar jobs had vastly

different terms and conditions depending on whether the services at their hospital were provided in-house or outsourced. Over the last three years, other services such as security and decontamination have already been brought back in-house.

Unison have argued that: “Not only is it beneficial for the community on public health grounds, in that it will allow for improved quality and integration of services, but that, in an area of high deprivation, bringing staff onto better pay and conditions supports the local economy as well as the workers.”

The Trust’s CEO was also all smiles, saying that the decision “delivers on our vision to support communities to live healthier happier, fairer lives”.

Unison expects that: “A move to Agenda for Change terms and conditions will likely represent a significant pay increase as well as improvements to leave and pension offerings.”

Joe Baldwin, chair of the union’s local hospitals health branch, said: “We have been campaigning for a long time for these members to be afforded the same pay and conditions as those of us who work directly for the NHS. This is also about pensions and access to wider opportunities and staff benefits. We are ‘One NHS’ and our members in this service are a vital part of our health service.”

And in London...

UNISON also claims victory in one of the north London borough of Barnet, which for two decades was held up as model of economical outsourcing by the Tory controlled council, who outsourced just about anything that was not nailed down.

Now under Labour control, 330 affected workers presently employed by outsourcing multinational Capita (or “Crapita” to *Private Eye* readers) will be brought back in-house from 1st April.

2012 saw the Tory council hand over much of its services to Capita on decade-long contracts. Capita lived up to its nickname, with a decade of controversies including a multi-million-pound fraud and contracts running vastly over budget.

After the May elections Labour won control of the

council, and although the contracts had already been due to end next year, the council has fast-tracked plans to bring some services back in house.

John Burgess, the union’s Barnet local government branch secretary, declared: “This is good news for staff, good news for residents and good news for the services. I welcome the decision and look forward to welcoming back all the services back into Barnet Council where they all belong.”

He pointed out that after a decade of campaigning, and a start to bringing services in-house: “There are still many issues to address for our members who are being TUPE’d.

“These include workplace inequalities such as staff being paid differently for the same role. Barnet UNISON is already seeking discussions with the council about harmonisation of the terms and conditions of the TUPE’d workforce.”

Another strike involving outsourced workers is taking place in the north-west London borough of Hounslow, whose Parking Enforcement Officers started a strike that could last until 5th March.

Employed by giant outsourcer Serco, who last declared profits of £309.9 million, they are fighting for decent pay.

In the neighbouring boroughs of Ealing and Brent, councils recently conceded a pay rise after strike action. Civil enforcement officers and CCTV operators in Ealing received a nine per cent rise pay increase back-dated to April 2022, with low-paid new starters getting 11.94 per cent, with another eight per cent from next April, and extra annual leave entitlement. In comparison, in Brent, workers are getting a total increase of pay rise of 10.7 per cent from last April with nine per cent to come in April.

Unite’s general secretary, Sharon Graham, said: “Serco and Hounslow council’s refusal to address the scourge of low pay is shameful. The truth is that the London Living Wage is not enough to live on. Serco is hugely wealthy. The Council and its outsourcer have the ability to pay workers more.

“The strike will inevitably mean that parking restrictions across the borough will fall apart. Bosses need to realise the workers have Unite’s total support.”

20 years ago this week in the New Worker

ASYLUM seekers are being forced to sleep rough on the streets and are so “cold, hungry, scared and sick” that in some cases they are becoming mentally distressed, a High Court heard last week.

Keir Starmer QC, appearing on behalf of the Refugee Legal Centre, was outlining the effect of the new laws, which came into force last month.

These laws prevent asylum seekers claiming food and shelter unless they lodge their claim immediately on arrival in this country. But they are also forbidden to work whilst their claims are

being considered.

The Home Office claims the new rules are essential to cut the numbers coming to Britain and to implement Tony Blair’s promise to reduce this number by 50 per cent by next September.

The Refugee Legal Centre is challenging the legality of the new laws. The Home Office has vowed to defend its position. A further 150 other cases will hinge on the outcome of these test cases.

Education Secretary Charles Clarke last week announced that private companies will be invited to run all new state secondary schools.

Local authorities will be forced to seek bids from businesses, charities, religious groups and parents’ groups whenever the building of a new school is proposed.

Until now, only schools deemed to be failing have been threatened with this back-door privatisation.

Private enterprise has also been involved in setting up spe-

cialist city academies.

Clarke, in his planning document, a New Specialist System, makes it clear that he wants to break the dominance of democratically elected local authorities, most of which are Labour controlled.

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), was critical of the plans. “Education should be run for the benefit of children and not for the benefit of shareholders and company proprietors,” he said.

Teachers also reacted angrily to news that independent schools are to be given £60,000 to give advice to state sector schools, to spread their “expertise” to the public sector.

McAvoy said it is a waste of money giving £60,000 to schools who are already handsomely resourced. “It also wrongly assumes that state schools have to learn from independent schools.”

American dream or American nightmare?

by Xin Ping

IT IS NOT a good time, perhaps, for scientists not born American to be famous in the country they now call home. Those of Chinese origin have learned it the hard way.

Last November, Xiafen (Sherry) Chen, a hydrologist and an American of Chinese descent, won an historic settlement of about \$1.8 million from the US government for her wrongful prosecution and subsequent dismissal from the National Weather Service, after years of fighting for her rights.

Justice may have prevailed for Chen, whose life was turned upside down when she was arrested in 2014 for allegedly providing sensitive information about US dams to China. What she actually did was access a database for her work with a password widely shared in her office.

The lack of evidence for espionage eventually led the Department of Justice (DOJ) to drop the charges against Chen in March 2015.

The investigation let the cat out of the bag. The security unit installed by the Commerce Department at Chen's workplace that produced the faulty alert was found "engaged in broad patterns of unfounded, discriminatory investigations aimed at Chinese-American and other employees".

For 'political correctness' in the USA, racial slurs are unacceptable to the public, but not necessarily in algorithms or in some people's minds. Minor conflicts or mere stress could let out the deep-seated fissure between people of different races. And outright racism is even pronounced in the sci-tech sector where fierce competition between China and the USA is underway.

Due to arrogance and ignorance, some US politicians are bent on suspecting China of stealing secrets whenever the latter makes scientific breakthroughs. In such a poisonous environment, the American scientists of Chinese origin have become a target.

The administration of for-



mer US President Donald Trump, for example, launched a so-called 'China Initiative' to combat "China's espionage" and American scientists of Chinese heritage suspected of "stealing" intellectual property and tech secrets from the USA to give to China.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's *MIT Technology Review*, over the three years under the China Initiative, more than 150 defendants were prosecuted in 77 cases. Only 25 per cent of the cases that involved Chinese-American scientists were "convicted".

But enough harm was done, whatever the result

of each case might be. The surveillance of scientists has directly hampered the ongoing research of the Chinese-American scientists concerned. The suspension of funds and grants from the government and even termination from work has brought financial and psychological stress to these experts. Moreover, the misguided and often hostile narrative has hindered their future research with their Chinese counterparts.

In the USA, professionals who are old enough know how toxic McCarthyism was. Many apolitical experts were involved and even purged based on flimsy evidence

when the USA and the Soviet Union were in a Cold War featuring ideological confrontation and all-out competition. But even the arbitrary legal judgment back then is nothing compared to blatant racial profiling nowadays in the USA.

In fact, 88 per cent of defendants in cases brought by the DOJ under the China Initiative were of Chinese heritage. Hardly had any of these scientists thought that they would dream an American dream such as this before setting foot in the so-called land of opportunity.

In terms of distrusting their own people, Trump is certainly not an aberration.

Way before Trump made his way into American politics, Lee Wen Ho, a Los Alamos National Laboratory physicist from Taiwan, was accused of stealing secrets concerning the US nuclear arsenal in 1999.

Lee spent nine months in solitary confinement, only to be eventually acquitted of espionage. The judge apologised to Lee for the "demeaning, unnecessarily punitive conditions" and denounced officials for having "embarrassed our entire nation".

Fast-forward to early 2022, the DOJ dropped charges of espionage against MIT Professor Chen Gang and University of Tennessee Professor Hu Anming without incriminating evidence. But nothing could ever make up for the damage to their reputation as well as human dignity.

The meddling of politics with a heavy racist undertone has generated widespread fear and led to a noticeable exodus.

In 2021, more than 1,400 US-based Chinese scientists switched their affiliation from American institutions to Chinese ones, according to a study by scholars from Harvard, Princeton and MIT.

That figure marked a 21.7 per cent jump from 2020 and more than doubled that of 2011. The walkout of scientists means that many have woken up from their American nightmare.

Throughout much of its history, the USA had embraced scientists worldwide regardless of their backgrounds because it is well aware that it can hardly become what it is today without the best brains in the world.

In recent years however, US politicians have abused the convenient concept of national security to get ahead of its competitors on the path of sci-tech advancement.

It is high time that American politicians stopped undercutting scientific endeavour – for the common good of humanity as well as themselves. Otherwise, the USA will suffer a further brain drain.



• Prof Chen Gang, right, celebrates after victory.

Xinhua

France and the dilemma of electoral politics

by Greg Godels

FRENCH WORKERS currently live nearly two years longer than their counterparts in member states in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), composed of roughly the world's most advanced capitalist countries. Furthermore, they retire with full benefits, on average, nearly three years earlier than their counterparts in the OECD.

Thanks to a rich history of militant struggle for a shorter work-week, a greater share of national wealth, and social benefits for retirees, workers in France enjoy a higher standard of living and a much longer secure retirement than most workers in other countries.

Of course, a better, longer, more secure life comes at a cost; France devotes much more of its GDP to support retirees than other OECD countries. It should be an obvious truth that it costs more to live longer.

The people of France want to keep this system and improve it. They believe that spending more national wealth on the people is sensible and just.

With the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and his corporate backers threatening to raise the retirement age by two years, the opinion polls consistently show that the vast majority of those polled oppose the change.

To bring this opin-

ion to the attention of France's elites, two million people rallied and marched throughout France on Thursday 19 January. In Paris alone, the march extended for two and a half miles.

Rather than bow down to the demands for austerity and competitiveness made by capital, working people in France are fighting to retain what earlier generations have won. They do not see the fate of the elderly as negotiable. Instead, the people defend senior benefits as an act of solidarity and not charity.

never benefit

By delaying retirement benefits for two years and shortening the retirements of French workers, politicians believe that they could save as much as \$150 billion per year. Of course, this 'saving' will never benefit working people.

It is, thievery however, with the stolen na-

tional wealth redirected towards shoring-up the fortunes of the ruling class.

The day after the massive demonstrations, President Macron announced that his administration planned to increase French spending on the military by \$115–120 billion per year over the next six years!

So, the proposed savings will go into the pockets of the armament industry and further increase the tensions in Europe unleashed by the war in Ukraine.

Since the consolidation of nation-states, rulers have used war and the threat of war to rally support. Not only is the war in Ukraine a reckless step toward regional, if not global, war, but the governing cliques are using it to justify their hold on power. Military spending is exploding across the region. Fear of a mythical Russian march to the sea serves the interest of all the



• Protesting against pension 'reform'.

capitalist powers in the Euro-Atlantic area.

As it was in the 20th Century, war is the answer to the collapse of the traditional parties; war is the distraction from the inability of the centre forces to rule effectively; war is the answer given to the masses searching for political alternatives to the misrule of the few.

But if the majority of French voters oppose Macron's initiative, how did he get re-elected? He never hid his agenda from the people. If 60–80 to eighty per cent of the voters oppose his policies, what is the secret of his electoral victory?

Macron's election was the result of the dilemma presented to voters in nearly all of the so-called 'advanced democracies' – those countries organised around mature capitalist economic re-

lations but governed by a parliamentary system with nominally universal suffrage.

Where these countries exist – especially the USA and Europe, but others as well – voters must choose between two ugly options. They can support political parties that have abandoned social welfare for the individualistic, winner-take-all 'justice' of the market. Or, on other hand, they can opt for the bogus anti-elitist populism of the refashioned right.

abandoned

Understandably, many voters have turned against traditional parties that have been won over to 'serving' social justice through the mechanism of private firms, NGOs [non-governmental organisations], foundations and

charitable institutions. The US Democratic Party, UK Labour, German SPD, Italy's Democrats, etc have abandoned their traditional posture of partisanship for the working class and surrendered to the philosophy of 'a rising tide lifts all boats' – the politics that is dismantling the welfare state safety net.

With the traditional centre-left disregarding the working class and with working people slammed by a global shift in wealth distribution, a privatisation and dismantling of public infrastructure, and a radical restructuring of employment away from high-paying jobs, voters are looking for alternatives.

Sections of the traditional right – refashioned to attack indifferent elites, construct handy scapegoats, and offer easy but misdirected solutions – have rushed to fill the political void. Politicians such as Trump, Boris Johnson, Orbán, Le Pen and Meloni have opportunistically capitalised upon the vacuum left by the mutation of the centre-left parties. Their faux-populism captured much of the forgotten working class, desperate for an alternative, any alternative.

As the traditional centre-left lost ground, it raised the alarm of extremism, even fascism. Like the bourgeois parties of the past, the mainstream parties resort to fear-mongering



• Marching against attacks on democratic rights.

rather than a critical examination of their trajectory, their departure from their purported advocacy for the masses. Whether it was touting the danger of the ultra-right or trumpeting the emergence of fascism, the centre-left sought to rally voters around a united front against Trump, Le Pen, Meloni and their king, a solely defensive strategy that, at best, only forestalled the continuing influence of right-wing populism.

It is in this context, following this cautious, defensive strategy, that Macron won re-election. Against the rise of the right-populist National Rally party and its presidential candidate, Marine le Pen, the traditional French parties – including the centre-left and the new left – unconditionally threw their support behind the ‘safe’ alternative. The left neither sought nor received any major concessions from Macron for their votes. Whilst they drew some satisfaction from stopping Le Pen, the left now faces a Macron determined to strip the working class of hard-won gains, ironically a move which Le Pen does not support.

Those on the left who embrace the tactic of unconditional unity against the right as an electoral strategy should take a hard, sober look at how it played out in France. Happily, millions of French citizens are rising to the challenge now posed by rallying behind a ‘lesser of two evils’, a ‘lesser’ that may prove far more destructive of living standards than the ‘other evil’.

As history all too often proves, giving voters something to vote against can, at best, temporarily retard the advance of the false friends of the people. Decades of fealty to the ‘lesser evil’ myth has only spawned an ever more sceptical, cynical, frustrated electorate, desperate for an alternative. Absent a left that stands for something, voters will continue to consider faux-populism as a legitimate alternative.

ML Today

A sign of capitalist decline: tech workers hit hard

by Otis Grotewohl

IN A VULGAR display of capitalist greed, indicative of the system’s state of decay, high-tech companies have laid off more than 58,000 workers since the start of the new year. These figures include the latest announcements from Google parent company Alphabet to slash 12,000 jobs and Microsoft’s recent 10,000-strong reduction.

These new lay-offs in the tech industry are a continuation of major cuts over the last year. According to the tech-job tracker layoffs.fyi, there have been more than 200,000 tech jobs eliminated since the start of 2022. They include 18,000 lay-offs at Amazon in recent months and 11,000 at Facebook parent company Meta in November.

To add insult to injury, many of the Google workers only discovered they were dismissed when their key fobs didn’t work after they arrived at work. Google notified the workers through an email, rather than through personal contact. Meanwhile, corporate spokespeople and human resources representatives of the tech giants can be heard condescendingly telling laid-off workers to “build their resumes”. With mass lay-offs at such a high rate, it is difficult for the displaced workers to be optimistic about future job opportunities.

Oppressed and international workers suffer most

All the workers who have been criminally laid off by the tech bosses are now scrambling to find a new source of income. Black and Brown



• Leaving with the now traditional cardboard box.

tech workers, especially immigrant workers, are suffering the most. Tech workers from other countries, whose citizenship is dependent upon work visas, are suddenly facing threats of deportation.

According to the financial news website Mint, a number of “industry insiders” estimate that between 30–40 per cent of affected employees on temporary work status are from India. Many tech workers from India, as well as China and other countries, depend on an H-1B visa. The H-1B visa is one that allows US companies to employ workers from around the world for specific occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

The laid-off H-1B holders need to find an H-1B sponsoring job

within 60 days or leave the USA within 10 days after losing status. Many of the tech workers living in the USA under the H-1B visas had invited their families to live with them, assuming they were safe, but now their lives are filled with uncertainty.

Consequences of capitalist greed

Under capitalism, bosses constantly seek to expand their profits. Capitalist owners have been using automation and technology to their advantage for decades. Their irresponsible behaviour has led to the annihilation of millions and millions of jobs around the world.

Many occupations of workers, who were once considered irreplaceable, are seeming-

ly becoming obsolete. Communities and neighbourhoods, urban and rural alike, which were once thriving with jobs, are now devastated because of capitalist automation. Since many former industrial jobs have been replaced by tech jobs over the years, many people working in the tech industry thought their jobs were more secure than other jobs. That was a lie they were often told.

algorithms

Several corporations have started replacing managerial staff with electronic devices. Many companies are now collecting data and even evaluating employees through the use of algorithms. Some people are calling this practice, along with other techno-

logical schemes, ‘uberisation’, highlighting the toxic combination of union-busting privatisation and job-killing machinery. Such uberisation of any workplace is done to help company owners and investors rake in profits by reducing costs.

In *High Tech, Low Pay*, Workers World Party chairperson and founder, Sam Marcy, explained how the use of high technology under capitalism can be to the detriment of the working class and oppressed.

Marcy wrote: “High technology, especially in the era of computers and electronics, continues to take quantum jumps. A plant, which just recently may have had 10 years to go, can now become obsolete as a result of the constant revolution of the means of production. The development of not only products and devices but of whole new technologies makes what otherwise would be a well-functioning, long-lasting plant with a stable workforce obsolete, but only in comparison to the new technologies.”

On the flipside, technology can be useful under socialism. When technology is used for human need and not for corporate greed, it can be applied to advance humanity’s well-being. Socialist countries ensure full employment, which allows people to have more leisure time. The Soviet Union and China were able to industrialise on a massive scale, in a short period of time, precisely because they utilised technology to help people, rather than to enrich a wealthy few. It is past time that working and oppressed people give capitalism a lay-off notice!



• Google workers protest sackings.

Workers World (USA)

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

On 2nd February 1943, the cannons stopped thundering in the city of Stalingrad. From 17th July 1942 to 2nd February 1943, the Germans and their fascist allies attacked the city to cross the Volga and take Moscow by the southern front. During these six months of an epic battle the city of Stalingrad was subjected to a deluge of iron and fire, but did not give in. The Soviet troops and the civilian population returned blow for blow to the attackers.

Demonstrating exemplary courage, heroism and a spirit of initiative, the Red Army stemmed the German offensives and managed to go on the counter-offensive. In November 1942 it cut off the rear of the fascist attackers around and in the city of Stalingrad. All Nazi land routes to their troops in Stalingrad were cut off. The conquest of the German military airports in the vicinity of Stalingrad reduced and subsequently prevented the supply of weapons and food by air to the ground troops. During the battle the German air force lost more than 500 wide-body

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

aircraft and 1,000 pilots.

The harshness of the fighting, hunger, diseases and cold exhausted the morale and fighting spirit of the fascist troops. These armies were empowered by the arrogance, impunity and impudence of the 'powerful', but the active resistance of the Soviet troops and the civilian population made them taste decay and death. The living conditions of the fascist armies became more and more appalling. Their fate had been sealed following the victorious counter-offensive of Operation Uranus (19–23 November 1942), thought out and planned by the general staff of the Red Army led with a masterful hand by Stalin.

Insensitive to the enormous losses suffered in men and equipment by his troops in front of Stalingrad, the General Staff and the German Government stubbornly demanded, out of pride and fanaticism, the continuation of the fighting until the last cartridge.

On 7th January 1943, the Soviet General Staff offered the German command a chance to surrender to save the lives of their soldiers.

A waste of time! The proposal was rejected. The German commanders were less interested in saving the lives of their soldiers than in seeing the swastika flying over Stalingrad.

On 10th January 1943, Soviet troops launched the final assault to crush all fascist resistance. The fascists were annihilated by the vigorous Soviet counter-offensive.

On 31st January 1943, General Seydlitz, deputy to Field Marshal Von Paulus chief of military

operations, signed the unconditional surrender of the fascist troops surrounded in and around the city.

On 2nd February 1943, the guns fell silent in Stalingrad. The Red Army took 95,000 German soldiers and their allies prisoner including their leader, Field Marshal Von Paulus, 24 generals and 2,500 officers. In Germany, the swaggering and monstrous Nazi leaders hid from their people the military disaster suffered at Stalingrad. The world that had held its breath during the epic and titanic battle between fascism and socialism could finally breathe.

The German troops were carriers of the racist ideology of hatred. In the USSR in general and in Stalingrad in particular, they destroyed everything that could be destroyed, killed everything that could be killed, looted everything that could be looted. This destructive rage was clear proof that this war against the USSR was aimed at eradicating from the face of the earth all the achievements of socialism.

The city of Stalingrad was completely destroyed. More than 42,000 houses, 124 schools and youth centres, 80 polyclinics, 124 nurseries and kindergartens, three theatres, 13 cinemas, three higher institutes, 100 companies born from the first five-year plan (1928–1933) were destroyed. Amongst these factories were the 'Barricades' and 'Red October' plants. They were the pride of the city. At their inaugurations during the first five-year plan Stalin, in a famous speech, stressed their importance for the victory of socialism in the countryside.

Ten years later in 1953, Stalingrad had recovered from the siege. It had rebuilt three theatres, 13 cinemas, 34 clubs, 105 medical institutions, 100 schools, five institutes, 12 technical schools, more than 100 nurseries and kindergartens. Some 170,000 hectares of trees of different species were planted around the city.

We owe eternal gratitude and tribute to the heroic soldiers, workers and peasants who inflicted a crushing military defeat on the fascist hydra. At Stalingrad, Soviet military science triumphed over Nazi military doctrine.

**Salah Sakhri
Workers' Circle
(Bolshevik) for
communism
France**

Dear Comrades

For millennia great empires have risen and ultimately fallen. Early empires were regional in nature, but later versions were worldwide taking the form of colonial exploitation.

Commencing during the reign of Elizabeth I the British Empire grew rapidly and by the early 20th Century ruled over 400 million people. Following the Second World War anti-colonial movements, supported by the Soviet Union, became more active and unrest started to grow. Mahatma Gandhi led a non-violent campaign that resulted in Indian's independence in 1948.

Today colonialism has gone, but in a number of developing countries various forms of neo-colonialism still continue to exert a malignant hold. In the modern world the USA does not refer to itself as having an empire but has a massive worldwide sphere of influence, domination and control that it uses to exploit and threaten what it regards as lesser dependent nations. In practice the US enforces its evil empire with a mixture of direct military action, veiled threats, regime change, sanctions and bribery.

With over 800 overseas military bases, the USA spends more on its military than the next 10 nations combined. I cannot remember a single time since the Second World War when they have not been involved either in a direct or a proxy war, a conflict which they have

provoked or engineered themselves. The latest example being the tragedy in Ukraine, which they started with a violent coup in 2014 that overthrew the elected government.

The USA may still be the single greatest military power and have the world's largest economy, but it is in a process of rapid terminal decline.

People's China is growing stronger and its economy, despite US restrictions, is expanding rapidly. The days of the notorious petro-dollar are now numbered as increasing numbers of countries abandon it to use either their own currencies or the Yuan for honest international trade.

Outside of Europe, Japan or the Anglo-Saxon countries, most of the rest world is starting to say no to US hegemony. The majority of people and countries in the world refuse to sanction Russia or decouple from China.

Western loans to the developing world usually come with strings attached, such as the establishment of military bases or the breaking of political and trade relations with China and Russia. With the Ukraine issue rapidly becoming their latest and greatest debacle to-date, the USA is desperate to move on and start a war with China, which it sees as the greatest threat to its continued world domination.

The success of China's Belt and Road Initiative has shocked the USA. This imaginative project has enabled increasing numbers of states to take an independent route for environmentally friendly low-carbon development. It offers a consistent and flexible approach that gives optimism and strengthens the case for partner nations to explore diverse trade options.

World domination by the USA and its wealthy imperialist cronies who grew fat by colonial exploitation is coming to an end. Capitalism is well past its sell-by date. Workers are starting to realise this as they fight for fair wages, improved working conditions, a redistribution of wealth, and improved social and medical care. Their struggle is linked to the international class struggle. A fight that unites workers from Syria to Donbas and others still under the yoke of imperialism. Workers of the world unite!

**John Maryon
Suffolk**

Diary

UNTIL 21 APRIL

Working Class Movement Library: Shirley Baker Photographing Salford. Exhibition. Wed-Fri afternoons. WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX

SAT 11 FEB

Homes For All: Rent Freeze Now. Demonstration 12:00, Department of Levelling Up, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1

SAT 11 FEB

International Brigade Memorial Trust: Celebration of Spanish Civil War volunteers from Greater Manchester. 11:00-13:00, Manchester Central Library, St Peter's Square, M2 5PD

SAT 11 FEB

Don't Extradite Assange: Night Carnival. 16:00 March from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Parliament for rally 18:00. Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3DW

FRI 17 FEB

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Student Day of Action. Nationwide day of action calling for universities to disinvest from Israel. See PSC website for details.

SAT 18 FEB

Socialist Labour Party: Chris Williamson and others on Ukraine and Social care. 13:00, Old Post Centre, Newhall, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, DE11 0NX

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.

THUR 23 FEB

Socialist History Society: Gregory Claeys on Utopianism for a Dying Planet: Life After Consumerism. 19:00, Online Zoom meeting. Register on at SHS website.

SAT 25 FEB

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Fundraising social for Viva La Educación with speakers. 14:00-17:00, Sportsman Inn, 57 Mottram Road, Hyde, SK14 2NN. Tickets £20 from Sue Piper on 07981 925881.

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

ON MONDAY First Minister Nicola Sturgeon published her tax returns since 2015 on the SNP's website. The contents are remarkably unrevealing, and as expected they demonstrate that she has only her Holyrood salaries as MSP and First Minister to scrape by on, and that she has saved a great deal of that in a pension fund. Despite being First Minister for nearly nine years, she was in such a hurry to get the information publicised that her bank account details were briefly visible before being taken down and replaced with redacted versions.

This haste demonstrated her need to deflect from the burning issues of the day. Whilst she doubtless hoped that this would prove she was more down to earth and had no dodgy financial history such as the current Prime Minister and most Tory ministers have, this will never be enough to satisfy the also-rans in the ranks of the Scottish opposition at Holyrood nor the nationalists she pushed aside to rise to the top.

The next day her bitter predecessor Alex Salmond, now in the wilderness with his Alba party going nowhere, cruelly thundered that: "Thirty years of gradually building, building, building until we get independence over 50 per cent and then thrown away with some self-indulgent nonsense, which even if it was right, which it isnae, would hardly be tactically the most astute manoeuvre when we're meant to be taking Scotland to its next date with destiny."

The "self-indulgent nonsense" is of course the controversial Gender Recognition Reform Bill (GRRB), which allows for people to change gender without medical approval and that the Westminster government is going to veto. Nicola Sturgeon has announced that she is going to embark on an

expensive court case to prevent the UK government imposing a Section 35 block on what is still a devolved government. But the SNP hope, whatever the outcome, that the case will help rally more Scots to the cause of outright independence.

Soon after the Supreme Court announced that Holyrood had no right to call a second referendum the SNP certainly received a boost to their polling numbers. But whether the gender issue will have the same effect remains to be seen.

Despite Salmond's claims that Sturgeon has thrown away the chance of independence, the opinion polls still hover around the 50:50 mark depending on what day of the week it is.

Some of those in the Sturgeon camp, such as Stirling MP Alyn Smith and Education Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville, want those MSPs who voted against the GRRB and other critics kicked out of the SNP; whilst Joanna Cherry, leader of the 'disloyal opposition' in the nationalist party, says that Sturgeon should "eat some humble pie" on the issue. For her part, Ms Sturgeon has wisely rejected divisive calls for a purge whilst making it clear she has no intention of backing down.

The one thing going for Sturgeon at the moment is that she faces no obvious challenge to her leadership in her party or at the Holyrood parliament. It is noticeable however, that many leading figures, such as her deputy and former Westminster leader Angus Robertson, have been unusually careful to avoid making any statements on the present controversy.

Other Troubles

Other problems are on the horizon, however.

The first is the drinks deposit scheme that is being introduced by their Green allies and denounced as unworkable by former SNP minister Fergus Ewing, the hereditary MSP for Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber. "This scheme, the various Scottish government estimates of its cost, and the regulations themselves are the worst I have seen in 43 years," he pronounced.

The scheme will require drinks producers and businesses selling single-use drinks containers to recycle them. Shops will charge 20p for every drink bought in a container made from steel, aluminium, glass or plastic, to be refunded upon recycling. It will also make it an offence to sell a drink in a container if its producer is not registered with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

Craft brewers, in particular, say they cannot afford the £15,000-£20,000 starting costs for separate storage and labelling, and retailers are up in arms about the space and equipment they will need.

it doesn't

Another matter Sturgeon would rather not have to answer questions about is the new Social Security Scotland agency (SSS). Based in Dundee, it was created in 2016 under new devolved powers and is supposed to deliver £2.8 billion worth of benefits in a more humane and reliable manner than the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Only it doesn't.

The DWP Secretary has just written to his Scottish counterpart Social Justice Secretary Shona Robson saying that Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be his department's responsibility until 2026. This is not due to a Westminster power grab but because the SSS cannot get its act together. The SSS was supposed to take over in 2020 but delays caused by the pandemic clearly are not the sole cause. Other extensions have been

necessary for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) (to March 2025) and winter fuel payments (2023-24).

The SSS has managed to take over some payments however, such as the best start grants for babies and funeral payments at the other end of the life-cycle.

Pam Duncan-Glancy, Labour MSP for Glasgow, deplored the fact that: "The relationship between Scotland's two governments has descended into chaos once again, leaving the SNP's promise to deliver a fairer, functioning Scottish social security system in tatters," and as a result: "Every day that this programme is delayed is another day that disabled people and carers are left at the mercy of a Tory-run DWP."

To add to the discomfort of the SNP the main Scottish teaching union, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), is continuing its strike action. Tuesday marked the first anniversary of the submission of the pay claim for 2022/23, which is still the subject of on/off negotiations.

The next round of rolling strikes will target the constituencies of Nicola Sturgeon and her deputy John Swinney, along with the Education Secretary and the Green education spokesperson. The SNP have offered a five per cent award, saying that the EIS demand for 10 is unaffordable and that no new offer will be made.

Maybe that will take the voters' minds off the saga of council and school funding, the unbuilt ferries, potholed roads and overflowing litter bins...

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Dublin protesters say No to War!

by Theo Russell

IRISH campaigners stood by the people of the Donbas last Saturday in a demonstration outside the British embassy in Dublin to protest Britain's role in Ukraine.

They accused the UK government of sabotaging the peace negotiations last year, prolonging the war with massive arms deliveries, the active involvement of British military personnel in the fighting in Ukraine, and years of training and arming Banderite Nazi battalions and covering up their horrific crimes against civilians in the Donbas and other Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine.

The action was organised by the Truth and Neutrality Alliance with support from the Social Democracy movement and a number of Irish republicans, members of Ireland's Russian community and other anti-war activists, including two who had travelled from England in order to take part in the action.

In a blatant act of political interference, six members of Ireland's secretive Special Detective Unit demanded the names and addresses of some of those in attendance. Undeterred, the protesters remained outside the Embassy for

an hour, highlighting the thousands killed in Kiev's eight-year war on the Donbas and the western media censorship of the conflict.

The Truth and Neutrality Alliance said in a statement: "The war has been going on now for almost a year. The war is the direct and deliberate result of the failure to implement the Minsk agreement and the eastward expansion of NATO.

"Britain and NATO played a key role in that and have continued to up the ante ever since encouraging greater involvement in the conflict, arming one side in it and sabotaging any efforts at peace negotiations, ratcheting up the tension and risking outright nuclear war that will see us all burn, not just Kiev or Moscow.

"Ireland is complicit in this. We have called this protest at the British Embassy due to the ongoing escalation of the war in Ukraine and Britain's role in this as evidenced by the recent decision to send more Challenger tanks to the extreme right-wing regime in Ukraine.

"Since the start of the war the Irish government has moved us closer to being full members of NATO, imposing sanctions and engaging in the training of troops involved in the war. Irish neutrality was



already violated with the use of Shannon Airport by US troops.

"Now the Irish government wants us to participate in a foreign conflict. As part of its commitment to the war, the government has agreed to take in an unlimited number of Ukrainian refugees. We DO NOT OPPOSE refugees coming to Ireland, but the solution to their plight is peace, not more war. They are not to blame for the war, that

lies with all the parties involved in it, which includes Britain, the USA and all the members of NATO.

"Peace means respecting the people of Ukraine but also respecting the right of the people of Donbas and Crimea to decide their own future. Crimea was only incorporated into Ukraine in the latter half of the 20th Century.

"The people of Donbas initially wanted more autonomy and respect for

their culture, under the Minsk Agreement. The failure to implement it, the sabotage by Britain and others of the accord alongside eight years of attacks by Ukrainian forces pushed them towards calls for independence and that must be respected.

"The push for us to join NATO has been accompanied by an unrelenting campaign in the Irish media, with journalists openly advocating war and even

praising the Azov Battalion whilst overlooking all of their crimes. Coverage is one-sided and dissenting voices are not given much if any space at all.

"This occurs at a time when the Irish government is complicit in the blocking of media sources that are critical of their position. Whilst pro-war official media sources from European governments and the Ukrainian government have unfettered access to the airwaves, *Russia Today* is blocked in most European countries. Other non-governmental critical voices are censored on social media and through the use of algorithms to hide their articles from a wider public.

"We call for the lifting of real and also de facto censorship in the media. We call upon the Irish government to cease its support for war and instead argue for peace talks now. We call for a clear withdrawal from our involvement in NATO and the war. There are no humanitarian training exercises. All military training is designed for war, even demining.

"The Irish people are paying a costly price for involvement in the war and the people of Ukraine and Russia pay for that in blood. It is time for peace.

"No to War, No to NATO!"

Cash no longer king in Vietnam

by Seán Nolan

AS DIGITAL payment methods surge in popularity, expats in Vietnam are not alone in embracing the change to cashless transactions.

Gone are the days of 'cash is king'. Cashless payments are changing how we all transact and manage our finances. But

whilst the convenience is clear, is this change entirely a good thing?

The advantages are clear; secure encryption and biometric authentication lowers the risk of theft, and many expats see these payment options as a safer alternative to carrying cash.

Even if you are unlucky enough to fall victim to a pickpocket, you can rest assured that your money is not accessible. For the hapless tourist, unwary expat or tired local, cashless payments reduce the risk of being short-changed, scammed or robbed.

Competition amongst payment providers has also

increased, with companies vying to provide the most convenient and secure digital payment options to attract customers, including expats living in Vietnam.

Many banks now offer internet banking to foreigners and have fully-fledged English-language versions of their mobile applications to simplify the process.

Navigating the local banking system and ensuring all paperwork is in order can still pose challenges for some expats however – hands up if you've ever been locked out of your account because you forgot to send the bank your new work permit?

Despite these hur-

dles, the shift towards a cashless society in Vietnam is inevitable, as seen by trends worldwide.

In the UK, restaurant chains such as Prezzo and Pizza Hut simply do not accept cash anymore and, according to a 2019 survey, in south Korea just 17 per cent of total transactions involved cash.

To become a truly cashless society, international co-operation will be needed to ensure seamless transactions for expats outside the country though, as the competition amongst payment providers heats up, expats can expect even

more convenient and secure options in the near future.

As the world becomes increasingly digital, it's important for expats to adapt and embrace new technologies to stay ahead of the curve.

Whether it's mobile banking, e-wallets or other digital payment methods, these tools make transactions easier and more secure for everyone.

In conclusion, around the world the days of 'cash is king' are over. Cashless payments are coming to take the crown, and will forever change the way we transact and manage our finances.

For expats living

in Vietnam, this shift towards digital payments offers a wealth of opportunities and should be embraced to stay ahead in an increasingly digital, and cashless, world.

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by Michael Rotenshtern
Union of Political
Refugees and Political
Prisoners of Ukraine

SANCTIONS against the Russian Federation have already had a rather long history of their development.

Western sanctions against Russia began in 2014 following the reunification of Crimea and the Russian Federation. They were then submitted to the public of Western countries as a reaction to Russia's actions and as an attempt to force Russia to change its policy regarding Crimea and Ukraine as a whole. The sanctions since 2014 have also had their background in the internal Ukrainian conflict in the Donbas.

A qualitatively new stage in the development of the sanctions policy has come since February 2022, as a reaction to the Special Military Operation of the Russian Federation.

Now they are being served up for the public opinion of the West as a way to put economic pressure on Russia to force it to minimise its actions against the Kiev authorities, ideally to a complete retreat from Donbas and even Crimea.

Consider the other side of Western sanctions, hidden from the public but quite obvious to many.

Thus, the main initiator of the current sanctions is the tandem of the USA and Britain. They initiate sanctions, promote their introduction in other countries (NATO and beyond), and closely monitor their compliance. What do the sanctions bring to Russia and the West?

Russia, which should have suffered severely from the imposition of sanctions because it was maximally integrated into the world capitalist market and into the world division of labour, surprisingly does not suffer!

Russian production and exports are growing, the currency is solid, the commodity famine has not come,

Imperialism today the real objective of the sanctions regime against Russia

the inflow of currency has either not decreased or, conversely, has increased. At the same time, domestic consumption is steadily growing, there is no fuel and food crisis in sight!

The volume of import substitution in production and infrastructure is also growing. And where Western goods and materials cannot yet be replaced by Russian ones, they are easily replaced by Chinese, Turkish and even Iranian ones!

Also, with exports. According to the main positions of commodity and raw material exports, for which Western markets have been closed since 2014, Russia has not lost ground but on the contrary is increasing exports, now to the super-capacious markets of China, India, etc.

Thus, the *New York Times* (NYT) recognises that the economic blockade of Russia has failed. Despite the abundance of sanctions, Russia has increased the volume of international trade.

This authoritative US publication indicates that since the beginning of the special operation in Ukraine and after the introduction of numerous sanctions, Russia has only increased the volume of international trade, which indicates the failure of the economic blockade of the country.

According to the *NYT*, Turkey's monthly trade volume with Russia increased by 198 per cent, India's by 310 per cent, China increased trade volumes

with Russia by 64 per cent, Brazil by 106 per cent and Japan by 13 per cent.

European Union countries are also on the list. For example, Russia's monthly trade volume with Spain increased by 57 per cent, with the Netherlands by 32 per cent, and with Belgium by 81 per cent. The *NYT* points out

plies were reoriented to other countries.

It is noteworthy that at the end of September 2022 the US Congress recognised the failure of the sanctions imposed on Russia, which did not change the policy of the USA and did not cause significant damage to its policy.

That all means that the policy of sanc-

But the main blow to the EU economy came after February 2022, when the EU imposed sanctions against the import of Russian fuel. The cessation of obtaining relatively cheap Russian oil and gas firstly dealt a blow to the developed chemical industry of the most industrialised countries of Europe: Germany,



that in 2020, Russia purchased \$220 billion worth of goods from other countries. At the same time, cars and spare parts, computer equipment and medicines accounted for the most imports.

After the sanctions were imposed, the volume of supplies to Russia fell but some countries were able to increase imports. For example, shipments from Turkey to Russia increased by 113 per cent and from China by 24 per cent.

The article added that before the start of the special operation in Ukraine, Russia was the main supplier of oil and gas to Europe. But then, after the introduction of many sanctions, sup-

plies against Russia has failed. It has not achieved anything even close to its goal: to bring about to an economic crisis in the Russian Federation.

Now let's see what the sanctions have brought for the European Union. Back in 2014, following the EU ban on the import of goods from the Russian Federation, Russia retaliated by introducing counter-sanctions that hit exports from the EU.

This led, of course, to a reduction in sales in the Russian Federation and those productions in the EU that worked for the capacious Russian market. And this is a long list, there is a lot in it – from agri-products to heavy machinery.

France and Italy. Furthermore, mechanical engineering and other sectors of the economy have fallen into a difficult situation.

It caused inflation together with a sharp drop in the value of the euro and a sharp impoverishment of the middle class. The population as a whole now barely make ends meet with ever higher energy prices, rising fuel prices for transport and so on. This has led to a sharp increase in the discontent of the general population.

So what is the meaning of Europe's suffering? After all, sanctions have not brought a sharply negative effect for Russia. Why then continue them?

This is where we come to the true meaning of the sanctions imposed by the tandem of the USA and Britain.

Deprived of Russian fuel, EU countries are forced to buy from US energy corporations at vastly higher prices. French President Macron was outraged that the USA supplies liquefied natural gas to the EU at an inflated price of four times the price they used to pay. Britain also supplies fuel to continental Europe at speculative prices from its fields in the North Sea. Thus, the true beneficiaries of sanctions are obvious!

But the issue of losses for the EU lies even deeper. Due to the sharp rise in energy prices, the outflow of capital from Europe, and the outflow of production and qualified personnel, primarily to the USA, began to increase!

Thus, the current situation has a negative effect on the EU, first of all on its most industrialised countries, even in the long term. But it enriches the USA and the UK.

So, what is the point of sanctions now? It is to siphon the most valuable market resources (capital, industry, personnel) from the EU for as long as possible.

Now, attention please!

The main reason for the sanctions was the conflict in Ukraine. If it ends, it will be difficult to find another pretext for continuing them.

This means that the conflict in Ukraine cannot end as far as its beneficiaries are concerned. It must be maintained, at least in a sluggish state, for as long as possible. And prolonging sanctions as long as possible causes irreparable losses to the EU!

Thus, the sanctions, supposedly designed to stop the conflict, in fact serve to continue it for a long time, possibly for decades!

• Trade with China and many other countries has increased.

PENTAGON strategists face a challenge delivering US state-of-the-art weapons to the Kiev puppet army in time for them to prolong the proxy US/NATO war with Russia. One top general announced an alternate source of killing machines.

As reported on 20th January 2023 by the Voice of America (VoA), General Laura Richardson said: "We are working with the countries that have the Russian equipment to either donate it [to Ukraine] or switch it out for United States equipment."

General Richardson heads the US Southern Command. The VoA article explains that she means Washington is leaning on Perú, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina to deliver some of their Russian- or Soviet-made arms, especially helicopters, to the US/NATO proxy war.

President Joe Biden has promised the USA's own M1A2 Abrams tanks

A double war crime

to Ukraine. Despite their armour and firepower, the M1s have drawbacks. They weigh up to 80 tons, which means it takes a while to ship them across oceans. Plus, they're still in production. And in Ukraine, they might stick in the mud or break down – and who will pull them out or repair them?

Ukrainian troops have to be trained to use and repair them, starting from zero. That means US 'advisers' on the front-lines, engaged in combat.

General Richardson is offering US war equipment to Mexico and the South American countries. The VoA says there are no takers yet and that Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has already ruled it out.

Here's one example of what General Richard-



•The US military seeks Soviet Helicopters.

son's offer means: Washington will ship tear gas, bullets and other weapons

useful for massacring Indigenous-led protests, if the coup government in

Perú ships Soviet-built helicopters to Ukraine.

Examine that offer a

bit more closely: It means the US government, whilst falsely claiming to fight for democracy in Ukraine, will offer weapons to a coup regime that threw out an elected president so that that regime can murder its population.

The VoA explains that besides the strategic gain from this new policy, there is a collateral gain: profits for the US arms industry oligarchs, also known as merchants of death. If the South American countries can be lured away from using the less expensive Russian-made weapons, it opens their market to the US producers.

General Richardson might see the arms trade as a 'win-win' development. The world – and especially the working class – sees a double war crime, one against the workers of Ukraine and Russia, one against the people of South America.

Workers World (USA)

Cuba's mission at the G77

by Melissa King

AS THE new president of the Group of 77 plus China, for the first time in its history, Cuba's objective is unity and co-operation among the nations of the South.

For a year, Cuba will be at the forefront of the political co-ordination bloc that groups countries from almost all of Latin America, Africa and South Asia with the aim of promoting support in international organisations and the defence of common interests.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez says Cuba will promote the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, as well as promote international solidarity after the COVID 19 pandemic.

Cuba will promote South–South co-operation as a more effective instrument, particularly support for post-pandemic

recovery of developing nations.

In addition, it will work for the full fulfilment of the responsibility of the industrialised countries in support, through North–South co-operation and will encourage the advancement of common positions among the members. The Foreign Minister, during the handover ceremony in New York, stated that unity is the watchword for these times and "only by building consensus can we move towards the legitimate realisation of our development aspirations".

He stressed that Cuba will promote tangible financial commitments under favourable conditions and the use of science and technology as engines of sustainable development, taking the G77 in this matter as a starting point. He announced the call to celebrate in Havana this year, a summit on science and innovation as a premise for the development and confrontation of future pandemics.

In climate matters, the island will work to consolidate a solid position of the G-77 ahead of COP28 and will defend the achievement of substantive results on issues of special

interest to the group, such as the fund for losses and damages, climate finance and adaptation, Rodriguez said.

He insisted that the foreign debt, already paid several times in its principal amount, has become one of the main obstacles to development and an instrument of financial looting and economic dependence.

In this context, the Cuban Head of State, Miguel Díaz-Canel, urged through a video message to articulate actions and overcome the obstacles to the real progress of the people. Unity is imperative today and the greatest of all urgencies, he pointed out. He also reaffirmed his country's commitment to work for the development of nations with which Cuba "shares a history of abuses against our peoples, but also common goals and hopes."

He pointed out that the COVID 19 pandemic caused three years of delay in the progress of nations, particularly developing countries, "drowned in debt without fiscal space or access to financial resources to invest in recovery."

The G77 plus China is currently made up of

134 nations, representing two-thirds of the members of the United Nations and 80 per cent of the world's population, although for historical reasons the name has not changed.

Havana Reporter

The calm of Blinken

by Roberto Morejón

FLAUNTING his supposed conciliatory role in the Middle East, the US foreign minister, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, visited the occupied West Bank and Israel last week to call for calm, without the slightest accusation to Washington's main gendarme in the region for the terror unleashed.

Blinken expressed what he called "deep concern" over the escalation of violence in the Middle East, characterised by Israeli repression, although he did not explain it that way.

Blinken admitted that Palestinians face what he called a "shrinking horizon of hope" for a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel.

A day after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, Blinken met in the West Bank city of Ramallah with Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Beyond urging a reduction in tensions, he offered no peace initiatives as Israeli forces continue to take actions in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank that have claimed the lives of 35 Palestinians in January alone.

Whilst Abbas called on the Americans to put pressure on the Zionist regime to stop its crimes, they have limited themselves to vague appeals for appeasement.

Not even President Joe Biden when he visited the region earlier spoke of new talks between Palestinians

and Israelis.

Observers wondered what the results are of the Secretary of State's trip to the area in the midst of the Israeli onslaught, if he has nothing clear to offer.

All the more so, when Netanyahu's new far-right government promised to adopt a tough stance against the Palestinians and to increase settlement construction, considered illegal by the international community.

Moreover, to coincide with Blinken's trip, Israel greeted him with a slew of new decisions to combat what it described as terrorism.

These include the revocation of Israeli identity cards from people suspected of collaborating with the Palestinians and from Arab residents in occupied East Jerusalem.

Both for the above and for the addition of 500,000 Jewish settlers in illegitimate settlements, Israel should be put in the dock. But Blinken calls for calm...

Radio Havana Cuba