

UKRAINE - DIPLOMATIC MOVES AS FIGHTING RAGES

by our Eastern European Affairs correspondent

The leaders of People's China and Belarus have expressed their "extreme interest" in a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine at a summit meeting this week. French President Emmanuel Macron says he's going to China to call on Beijing to "help us pressure Russia" to end the war and the Russian foreign minister says his country will not allow the West to blow up any more gas pipelines.

Meanwhile, Russia has halted oil supplies to Poland via the Druzhba pipeline a day after Poland delivered its first Leopard tanks to Ukraine. The Polish energy company says it was prepared for such a situation and that deliveries to its refinery can be made entirely by sea. "Only 10 per cent of the raw material came from Russia, and we will replace it with oil from other directions," Daniel Obajtek, the CEO of the Polish refiner, said.

Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko told Chinese president Xi Jinping that his country "fully supports" Beijing's peace initiative during talks covering economic and trade co-operation in Beijing this week. Lukashenko said Belarus firmly supports

the one-China principle, supports China's cause of peaceful reunification and opposes any acts that interfere in China's internal affairs, adding that both sides should firmly support each other on issues concerning their core interests.

Lukashenko said Belarus fully agrees with and supports China's position and its proposals for the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, which is of great significance for defusing the crisis. Both sides vowed to uphold jointly the international system with the UN at its core, and to oppose hegemony and power politics in all situations, including unilateral sanctions against other countries.

At the same time Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in India for the G20 ministerial council meeting, said the Russian Federation's energy industry will rely in future on dependable partners such as China and India. He said his country was "shocked" over the lack of punishment for those who instigated the Nord Stream attack and called



• Key talks in China: Alexander Lukashenko and Xi Jinping in Beijing

for a "fair and swift investigation" into the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines that many believe was carried out at the behest of the USA.

Back on the front the tide of battle now seems to be turning in favour of the Russians again. The strategic city of Bakhmut in Ukrainian-occupied Donbas is almost completely cut off by the Russians. In what looks like preparations for the abandonment of their positions, the Ukrainians are blowing-up all the bridges in the city to slow down the Russian advance.

Bakhmut is a strategically important transport hub for the supply of the Ukrainian forces in the Donbas. Russian control of the city would be a key step towards the complete liberation of the Donetsk People's Republic.

The Russians are

now also poised to retake the key railway hub of Kupiansk, a city in the Kharkov region that it was forced to evacuate last September. The Ukrainians have responded with a number of largely ineffectual drone attacks on military targets

in Russia and Belarus, whilst Russian special forces continue a manhunt for a Ukrainian sabotage squad that crossed the border this week and fired at a civilian car in the Bryansk region killing two men and wounding a 10-year-old boy.

FUND

Our lay-out man is still in hospital but the good news is that Ray's comfortable and waiting for his operation. We're gradually getting back on course as our volunteers fill the gap to keep the *New Worker* going in his absence. Thanks for all the get-well-soon messages which were passed on to Ray when he rang the Centre and many thanks to our Richmond & Kingston comrades who have donated £3,000 to the *New Worker* special appeal "to assist with the current printing crisis and recognition of our support for Ray". Don't forget you can now call or text us on: 07497 393263 – but remember calls from landlines to mobiles may incur extra charges.

We haven't had time to sort out the post yet but the final tally for the February fighting fund will appear in next week's paper. In the meantime 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

A Windsor Knot

Rishi Sunak may not have achieved much during his tenure in No 10 over the last five months but the 'Windsor Agreement' that resolved the long-standing dispute over Northern Ireland's post-Brexit relations with the European Union was no mean achievement for the Tory leader, who had to ride rough-shod over the protests from his Unionist allies in the north of Ireland and amongst his own back-benchers.

The agreement was given a diplomatic and highly symbolic blessing by King Charles and Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, over tea at Windsor Castle last week. But the donkey work was done by Sunak's team, who together with their Irish and Brussels counterparts managed to settle the dispute over the movement of goods between the European Single Market and the UK to the satisfaction of all the players with the exception of the northern Irish bigots and Boris Johnson.

Johnson, who clearly hoped to exploit the issue to pave the way for his political come-back, predictably says he cannot support this new Brexit deal. The Democratic Unionists are equally sceptical, claiming the new agreement may undermine Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom. But Sinn Féin Vice-President Michelle O'Neill said: "I rarely find myself agreeing with a British prime minister but access to both markets has to be grabbed with both hands."

The Irish government, the rest of the EU and the majority on both sides of the House of Commons have welcomed the Windsor Framework. More importantly, as far as the British ruling class is concerned, so has the White House.

The Remainers are, naturally, hoping that this will create a new and favourable climate to greater co-operation with the EU. Regardless of who wins the next general election, they're working in their think-tanks and their less-than-secret conferences for some sort of associate status with the EU that would create the climate for a second referendum and a return to full membership of the Brussels club.

They say Brexit isn't working but that's not true. There have been problems, but these were almost entirely due to the short-sighted policy of the Johnson government that placed all its bets on replacing the Treaty of Rome with a 'Treaty of Washington' that would create a colossal trans-Atlantic free trade area. It was a pipe-dream that depended entirely on Donald Trump getting re-elected. And we all know what happened next.

What Johnson should have done – and what Sunak should do now – is to reach free trade agreements with our other major trading partners – such as China – and ending the sanctions regime against Russia that has pushed energy prices to breaking point. There is an alternative to slavishly imposing sanctions at the behest of the Americans. Sunak could pursue an independent economic policy to revive the ailing British economy. We could return to the 'golden era' of trade with China that existed when David Cameron was at the helm. We could access cheap gas from Russia if we stopped supporting the US sanctions regime.

But Sunak won't. Neither will Starmer. The bourgeois consensus that all the leaders of the mainstream parties reflect is that British imperialism's future can only be guaranteed by American might – and that can only be secured by doing the USA's bidding.

It may work for them, but it doesn't work for us. Socialism is the only answer to the crisis, and we have to put it back on the working class agenda now!

Russia suspends nuclear arms pact

by Fan Anqi

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the suspension of Russia's participation in New START, the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the USA, in his State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly on 21st February, a move that experts saw as an urgent call for a return to normalcy in its ties with the USA and a signal of intensified confrontation between Russia and NATO.

Explaining his move, Putin said that "in the conditions of today's confrontation, it [the pact] sounds like sheer nonsense" but stressed Russia was not withdrawing from it.

The Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) treaty, signed in 2010 by then US President Barack Obama and then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. The agreement also includes a comprehensive on-site inspection to verify compliance.

Days before the treaty was due to expire in February 2021, Russia and the USA agreed to extend it for another five years.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that the treaty has played a key role in maintaining global strategic stability, enhancing international and regional peace and achieving the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

People's China notes the differences between Russia and the USA on the issue of compliance and hopes the two sides will properly resolve their differences through constructive dialogue and consultation to ensure the smooth implementation of the treaty, Wang said.

Following Putin's announcement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that despite the decision to suspend its participation in New START, Russia will continue to comply with its quantitative limits, and

will continue to exchange notifications with the USA on the launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

The ministry called on Washington "to show political will and make good-faith efforts for general de-escalation and the creation of conditions for the resumption of the full functioning of the treaty".

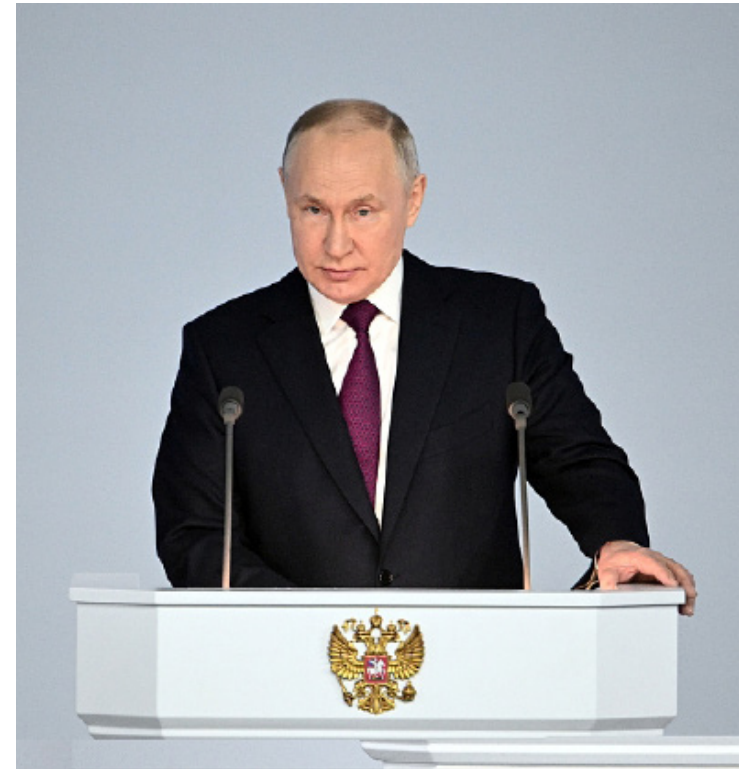
The significance for world peace of the New START treaty is that it has a verification mechanism that will, to a certain extent, increase arms control and prevent a nuclear arms race,

a withdrawal – that shows Russia's self-restraint as a responsible global power," he added.

The Russian president's declaration drew extensive concern over world nuclear safety. Western observers said the move would increase Russian-US tensions over the Ukraine conflict.

"If the USA conducts tests, then we will," Putin said, adding that Russia must "understand how New START would take into account the arsenals not only of the USA, but also of other NATO nuclear powers: the UK and France."

Whilst US President Joe Biden keeps fanning the



• Putin

enhance stability amongst world nuclear powers, and avoid unpredictability or miscalculation, says Zhang Hong, associate research fellow at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

There isn't a communication channel for this verification mechanism between Russia and the USA, however, which makes the pact itself unfeasible. Under such circumstances, Russia's decision was in fact sending the USA a message urging the return to normalised bilateral relations rather than endless smearing and hostilities, Zhang explained.

"As Putin has stressed, it is a suspension rather than

flames on the battlefield by promising another military aid package worth \$500 million to Ukraine, Russia is responding to the Western military pressure in this way, observers noted.

With the escalation of the conflict between Russia and NATO, we see an all-round confrontation on the battleground, not only a regular one but one with a growing risk of nuclear war, Zhang warned. "As France, the UK and other European countries lose their diplomatic independence and joining the USA, the security mutual trust between Russia and Europe is also showing a widening crack."

Global Times

Workers' Notes

Almost Slave Labour

by *New Worker* correspondent

Friday 24th February was National Artist Day in Thailand and the Feast Day of Saint Ethelbert of Kent. Both passed unnoticed in the UK – much like the Trade Union Congress's annual Work Your Proper Hours Day (WYPHD), which was also on the same day. The event is part of the TUC's "battle against long hours and excessive unpaid overtime". This, as we will see, has not been a great success.

The TUC say that this is the day that workers actually start getting the wages they are due because of the huge amount of unpaid overtime carried out by a significant part of the workforce.

The TUC made the rousing call to "encourage workers to finish their shifts on time". It also politely asked managers to "encourage and support staff by setting reasonable workloads and putting in place workplace policies to protect against burnout". In detail, the TUC called on workers to "try to take a proper lunch break and leave on time".

The TUC pointed out that: "Nobody minds putting in longer hours from time to time – staying late occasionally to get an urgent order out or a vital report finished," but warns that: "The trouble is when unpaid overtime becomes a normalised part of work. Working time then squeezes family, friends, hobbies, sports and involvement in the wider community." In too many jobs unpaid overtime is the norm, not the exception.

The TUC quantifies this by saying that 3.5 million people (about 12.5 per cent of the workforce) carried out unpaid overtime in 2022, averaging 7.4 unpaid hours per week,

about an extra working day, resulting in £7,200 per year of unpaid wages. The TUC blames staff shortages in many industries, which result in an increased work intensity and pressure to work longer days.

The new General Secretary of the TUC, Paul Nowak, said: "Public sector workers put in more than eight million hours a week of unpaid overtime. They can't keep going on gratitude alone. Staff are becoming burnt out and leaving their professions.

"The first step to fixing the recruitment crisis is to give our public sector staff the pay rises they have earned – and that they need to keep them out of foodbanks. This will help us hold on to the people keeping our schools, hospitals and other vital services running.

"Ministers must also set out plans to speed up recruitment to fill vacancies, so that the existing staff are not left working unpaid overtime to fill the gaps."

Trade unions rarely prioritise specific demands for better staffing. At the local level in the private sector many workers welcome the chance of overtime, either for life's little luxuries or, increasingly,

simply to make ends meet. When the first Blair Government tossed a few peanuts to keep workers happy, one was a restriction of the number of hours bosses could expect workers to put in. At the time there was unexpected opposition from some shop-floor workers over concerns about overtime.

The TUC complains that one of the biggest offenders is the government, which has benefited from £8.6 billion worth of unpaid overtime from public sector workers who provide more than eight million hours each week of unpaid overtime. This might be however, because public sector workers are better organised than those in the private sector. It is not a problem for insecure workers who simply do not get paid when they get told not to come into work if their work-place is not busy.

The TUC's figures (which cover England and Wales) show that unpaid overtime is worse in London, where 16.7 per cent of employees are involved. It is least common in the comparatively less well-off areas of Wales on 9.6 per cent and the North East with 8.8 per cent affected.

There is little difference

between men and women with both doing the same, but women do slightly less than men with "only" seven hours as compared with 7.8 for men. As for BAME workers: they are less likely to work unpaid overtime than white workers (9.1 per cent for BAME workers compared with 13.1 per cent of white workers), but when they do, they do more 8.4 hours for BAME as opposed to 7.3 hours for white workers.

As far as the occupational breakdown is concerned, the group doing the most unpaid overtime is "Managers and Proprietors in Agriculture Related Services", which is not really surprising as a farmer cannot clock off at 5pm when a new lamb is in the middle of making its appearance. Nearly a third of CEOs complain they work unpaid overtime. Teachers and Vets are both in the list of top 10 professions affected.

All these figures are based on the Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures, which are unlikely to understate the problem.

The TUC also notes that managers and directors also have the same complaint. In very high-paid jobs there is often an unspoken assumption that they will be on call at all

hours. Some of the 'work' they do involves very important meetings that necessitate the consumption of smoked salmon in grand hotels. Workers further down the food chain should be the priority.

As is the custom the TUC blames Brexit for the problem, claiming it is the ending of EU law that is causing the problem – but this year's WYPHD is the 19th such.

Workplace laws in Britain are excellent on paper but they have long been disregarded or unenforced, often due to gross underfunding that prevents essential inspections taking place. It is telling that even the Institute of Directors does not think it worth the effort to repeal the EU laws on which the TUC places so much faith.

Mind the Gap

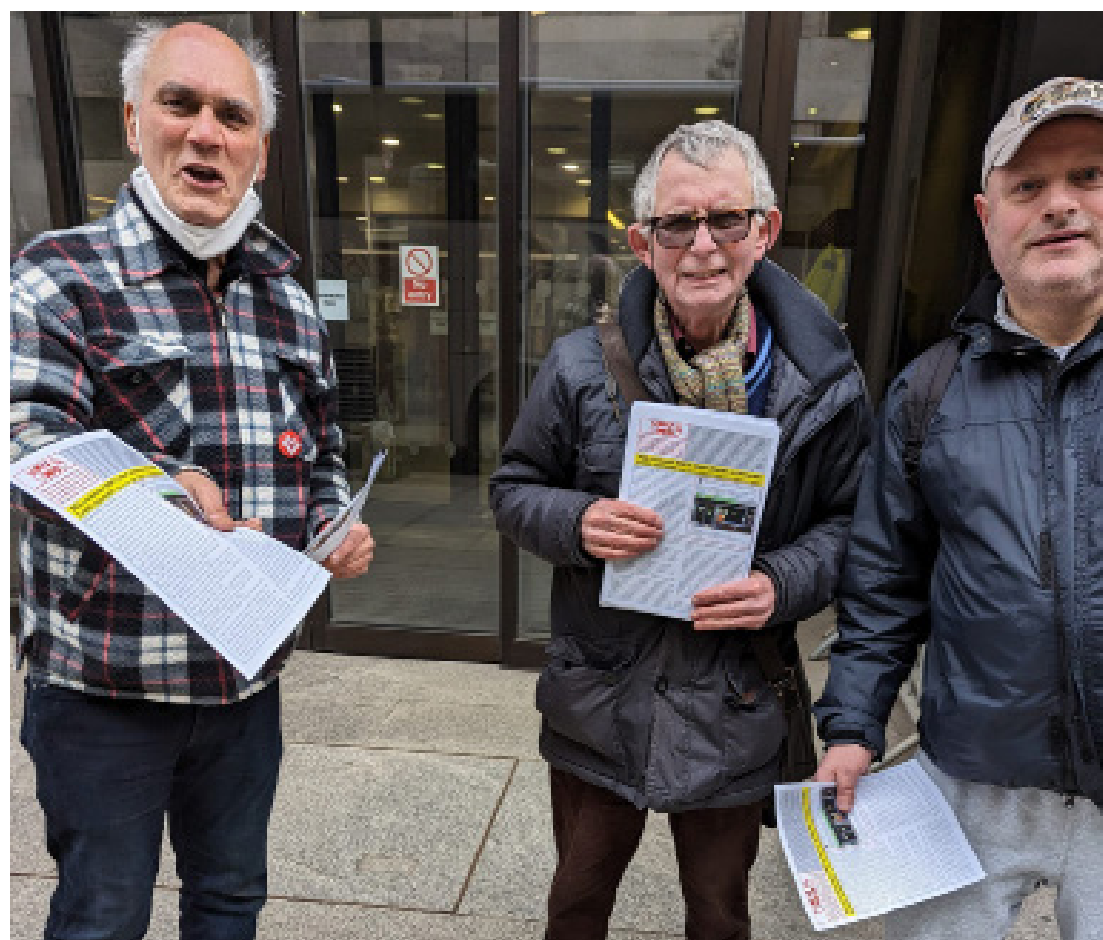
The TUC also designated the previous day, Thursday 23rd, as Women's Pay Day, which is the day when the average woman stops working for free compared with the average man. As with all averages, that milestone hides a multitude of differences. In some regions and industries that milestone has yet to be reached, with women effectively working for free for even longer.

At present this gender pay gap for all employees currently stands at 14.9 per cent, or in other words working women must wait 54 days, or nearly eight weeks, before they stop working for free on Women's Pay Day this year.

Last year the date was the 25th February, so we are making progress. Since 2011 the gender pay gap has fallen by an average of just 0.4 percentage points per year. The TUC notes that at this current rate of progress, it will until 2044, 21 years from now, to achieve pay parity between men and women. Fabianism at its best.

The gap is worse for older women aged 50–59, who have the highest pay gap of 20.8 per cent and work the equivalent of 76 days for free, until Thursday 16th March. Those over 60 are slightly better off with a gender pay gap

continued on page 4...



• Veteran campaigner Gerry Downing on the street with the Kilburn unemployed workers group picket of the DWP HQ in central London last weekend.

...continued from page 3

of 18.4 per cent, which means they work 67 days of the year for free. In contrast, it is next to non-existent for workers under 21 and is a tiny 3.9 per cent below 29 years of age.

This gap widens when babies come on the scene, and older women suffer from caring for older relatives as well as children and grandchildren.

The situation is worse in the South East (excluding London), where the gap is 17.9 per cent. Regional differences reflect in the types of jobs and industries that are most common in different regions.

Gender pay-gap reporting was made compulsory for large companies in 2017, but there are still big gender pay gaps in many industries. Pointing out something does not automatically make it better. Sectors dominated by female workers, such as education and healthcare, still have major gender pay gaps, largely due to women being in part-time jobs or in lower-paid roles.

Whilst the UK average is 14.9 per cent there are wide regional differences, from 17.9 per cent in the South East to 8.5 per cent in Northern Ireland. In Scotland it is 10 per cent and in Wales 12.3 per cent. The other regions in England range from 13.8 per cent

on the North West to 17.5 per cent in the East of England.

Taking an occupation perspective, the gap is lowest in Accommodation and Food Services. No doubt this is due to low wages generally and so should be not be seen as a great triumph for the feminist cause. In Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Transport, Public Administration, and Real Estate, amongst others, the gaps are below the average of 14.9 per cent, whilst it is above that level for the higher-paid sectors such as Construction, Professional, scientific and technical. In the larger sectors of education, health care and social work, the gender pay gap is 22.2 and 14 per cent respectively. It is worst of all at 31.2 per cent in finance and insurance.

Although these matters are important, the struggle for better wages and conditions should not be diverted into narrow cul-de-sacs. Whilst it matters that male and female plumbers get paid the same, and that proper child-care provisions are made, we should not get entangled in disputes over who gets paid what in the Boardroom. It doesn't matter if workers get sacked by a White Oxbridge man or a Black woman from a redbrick business school – a fact that is all too easily forgotten in certain sectors of the labour

movement for whom “equalities” is the be all and end of everything, even if it means equal poverty for all.

Paul Nowak pointed out: “Working women deserve equal pay. But at current rates of progress, it will take more than 20 years to close the gender pay gap. That’s just not good enough. We can’t consign yet another generation of women to pay inequality.”

He added: “It’s clear that just publishing gender pay gaps isn’t working. Companies must be required to publish action plans to explain what steps they’ll take to close their pay gaps. And bosses who don’t comply with the law should be fined.”

A major issue is childcare and parental leave, which would help to narrow the gap. Nowak concluded: “We need ministers to fund childcare from the end of maternity leave to support working parents – along with better wages and recognition for childcare workers.

“And both parents need to be able to share responsibility for caring for their kids. Dads and partners need better rights to well-paid leave that they can take in their own right. Otherwise, mums will continue to take on the bulk of caring responsibilities – and continue to take the financial hit.”

Hard Times

by New Worker correspondent

The Labour Research Department (LRD) has warned that as a result of inflation and the rest of the economic crisis, pensions are at risk.

The main trade body for pension providers, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA), has warned that many hard-pressed workers are cutting down or stopping their voluntary pension contributions.

Given the decline of the state pension in recent decades, this will be a false economy.

The old “defined benefit” schemes (when employers guarantee adequate funding) have been replaced with “defined contribution” (DC) schemes, which are less well funded and more dependent on the ups and downs of the stock exchange.

Although employers now have to offer and contribute to workplace pensions, it is a voluntary scheme which employees can either opt out of or reduce how much they themselves contribute.

According to Government figures, the monthly opt-out rate for newly-enrolled members is usually about 10 per cent. It rose briefly to 13 per cent in the summer of 2020, but has generally been stable during the pandemic and recent inflation.

The PLSA reported late last year that one in five pension schemes, 19 per cent to be precise, saw savers asking about reducing or completely stopping pension contributions. At the time, the PLSA said, there seemed to be few signs that savers were actually doing that because the auto-enrolment scheme depends on ‘inertia’, which means (like changing bank accounts) few people actually depart because they have to fill in forms to do so.

In another more recent survey, one in five schemes reported that the number of members stopping or reducing pension contributions was rising. It pointed out that temporary opting-out for just three years before being automati-

cally re-enrolled will lead to a serious reductions in retirement income: a 30-year-old could have £1,500 less each year in retirement unless they paid increased contributions in later years.

Under the Tories’ 2015 “pension freedoms”, members can withdraw their cash at any time from the age of 55 upwards. At the time the then London mayor, Boris Johnson, joked that people could blow their savings on expensive sports cars, then later be “living in rusting Lamborghinis and eating tins of dog food”.

Some people have indeed done that and will regret not taking Johnson’s joke more seriously.

As a result of the decline in the value of the State Pension in recent decades, occupational and private pensions are increasingly important.

The PLSA’s Retirement Living Standards for 2023 are that a “minimum” post-tax income is £12,800 for a single person and £19,900 for a couple. The State Pension is £9,627.80 maximum for a single person. But the PLSA’s minimum is very basic. To secure a “moderate” income level at present, for more financial security and flexibility, the post-tax income figures are £23,300 and £34,000 respectively. The PLSA’s “comfortable” level needs £37,300 and £54,500 respectively.

The minimum levels allow you to spend £54 per week on food but not run a car, and to allow for a week’s holiday in the UK, and a long weekend as a bonus. You are allowed to decorate a room of your house by yourself every year, but it says nothing explicitly about paying gas and electricity bills.

The PLSA notes that the effective pension rate for retirees is about 20 per cent, almost double the official general rate.

Being an organisation for pension companies and pension fund trustees, the PLSA does not make the call for improved state pensions. They could easily be improved were the working class to mobilise around demands for a proper level of taxation on those individuals and companies well able to pay-up.

20 years ago this week in the New Worker

STUDENTS and schoolchildren throughout the world took the lead in anti-war protests last Wednesday. In Britain thousands left their classrooms – some to stage local protests and some to descend on Whitehall to tell the Government that they should demand peace. There were organised protests in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Milton Keynes and Cambridge as part of the Stop the War campaign and the worldwide Student Action Day. In the USA, students and pupils marched under the

slogan “Books, not bombs”. Hundreds went to Downing Street and Parliament. In Birmingham about 350 pupils walked out of Queensbridge School – and other schools – to take part in a march through the city.

Many have risked heavy penalties, especially those seen as organisers. About 60 children left Fortismere School, in North London, at break-time on Wednesday and marched to Westminster.

One sixth-former said: “We just walked out of the school at break-time. “There are now about 60 of us from our school. More would have come, but the teachers locked the gates after we left.”

Deputy head teacher, Martin Henson, reacted angrily. “It is irresponsible and dangerous to do this,” he said. “The organisers are sixth-formers but many of the children who have gone with them are younger.

They should be in school. “They have whipped up a frenzy over this and will be in a lot of trouble when they get back. Whoever organised this across the schools was fantastically irresponsible.”

Stop the War Coalition estimates the number of schoolchildren in Whitehall at about 500. The young people gathered in Westminster expressed alarm at the numbers that would be killed if a war begins.

In Leeds, two boys were suspended from Prince Henry’s Grammar School because the head teacher said they were inciting others to walk out.

Chancellor Gordon Brown last week announced that the Treasury was ready to fund the war and spend “whatever it takes”. He has already set aside £1.75 billion but is now prepared to fork out even more. Then he made the ludicrous claim that this would not affect funding for schools and hospitals.

Winners and losers in new Brexit deal on Ireland

by Ekaterina Blinova

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has struck a deal with the European Union bringing an end to a long-standing debate over the post-Brexit Northern Ireland Protocol. Does this deal mean Sunak's triumph?

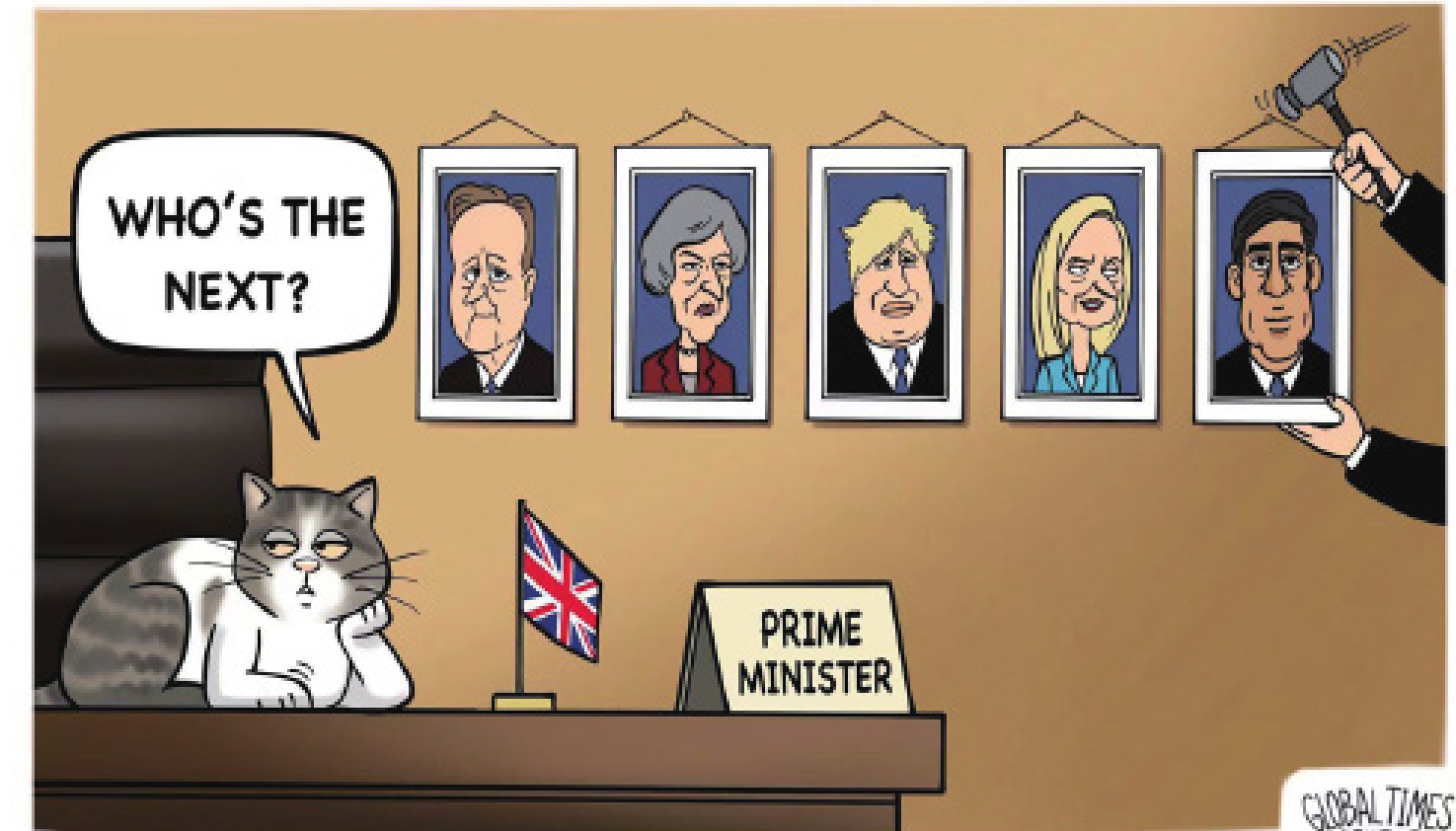
"The short answer is that there is very little about this deal that could not have been decided upon earlier," says Dr Roslyn Fuller, director of the non-profit Solonian Democracy Institute thinktank and author of the book *Beasts and Gods: How Democracy Changed Its Meaning and Lost Its Purpose*, first published in 2015.

"In particular, the separation of goods into those destined for Northern Ireland and those destined for the Republic would have been easy to achieve. Goods shipments are tracked quite closely these days and a great deal of this work is automated.

"The only real innovation seems to be the Stormont Brake, which gives political parties in Northern Ireland an avenue to involve themselves in the regulatory process going forward and thus rather cleverly shifts the onus for doing so onto them."

The European bloc and the government of then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson crossed swords over the Northern Ireland Protocol on many occasions, with No 10 arguing that the agreement undermined the UK's sovereignty. Johnson sought a fundamental renegotiation of the deal whereas the European Commission insisted that the protocol is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement and cannot be reconsidered.

The protocol in question aimed to avoid the reconstruction of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which had been removed by the Good Friday Agreement. It was therefore agreed that Northern Ireland would continue to follow EU rules on product standards to prevent checks along the



border. Instead, checks were forced on products coming to Northern Ireland from England, Scotland or Wales to adhere to the European bloc's rulebook. This has prompted concerns that a new border had in effect been created in the Irish Sea, separating one part of the UK from the other.

Food shortages and red tape caused by a combination of factors including post-Brexit rules and COVID19 measures prompted riots and disorder in Northern Ireland in early 2021. Northern Irish Unionists argued that the protocol was weakening the UK's integrity and pushing Belfast into the arms of the Republic of Ireland. For their part, Irish nationalists insisted that it was Brexit and not the protocol that should be blamed.

It appears that the so-called Windsor Framework agreed by Prime Minister Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has replaced the old Northern Ireland Protocol and, seemingly, untied the Gordian knot that the Johnson cabinet had attempted to cut altogether.

"EU leaders have sensed that Sunak is much more pragmatic than his predecessors," says Mark

Garnett, a politics professor at Lancaster University and author of *The British Prime Minister in an Age of Upheaval*. "They would always have reached a compromise like this if the British side had not been the prisoner of Brexit extremists. It is therefore a 'triumph' for common sense rather than for Sunak personally."

In accordance with the newly-reached deal, a reported 'green lane' removes any sense of a border in the Irish Sea for goods staying within the UK; goods will travel as normal without red tape or unnecessary checks. Northern Ireland will now benefit from the same VAT, food and drink and medicines as the rest of the UK. And, most importantly, the new Stormont Brake means the UK can veto new EU goods laws if they are not supported by both communities in Northern Ireland.

Even though the deal appears to be a win-win, there are issues that could prompt opposition in Northern Ireland's political circles, as well as amongst hard-line Brexiters, says Garnett.

"Although the EU has moved considerably, Sunak has accepted the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in certain

matters relating to the single market," he said. "That's a concession which many on his own side (and in the Democratic Unionist Party) will find difficult to swallow."

On 27th February, the US conservative press quoted Jim Allister, leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice, who claimed that he would expect the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to reject the deal secured by Sunak and von der Leyen. At the same time, the DUP may face difficulties whilst selling the deal to their wary electorate, according to the media.

Meanwhile, the UK Conservatives remain divided, with voters wondering as to why it took so long to sort the mess out. "Some key figures have accepted that a compromise was the only way out. Others treat Brexit as a kind of religion, and will continue to cause Sunak difficulties," noted Garnett.

But "very few politicians and political parties are anti-free trade in this day and age, so it was always a storm in a teacup," says Dr Fuller. "The entire international apparatus has focused on removing barriers to free trade for decades. It's not really a compromise if everyone wants what is ultimately the same thing – for trade to

flow everywhere with as few obstacles and regulations as possible."

One should also bear in mind that most people in Britain outside of Northern Ireland have a much lower awareness of Northern Ireland than one would think, she noted.

When it comes to Northern Ireland and the issue of its unity with Britain, "the deal may slightly defuse the possibility of a referendum on Irish reunification for the immediate future," she continued, adding, however, that "that depends a lot more on the outcome of the next election in the Republic of Ireland."

She highlighted that Sinn Fein – an Irish political party that is active throughout both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland – "remains in a very strong position here and it is hard to imagine them coming to power and not strongly pursuing reunification. Although they have diversified their political platform, to fail to prominently pursue reunification would still be very counter to expectations should they attain power".

Sputnik

Taiwan: One country, two systems

by Lan Xinzhen

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Kuomintang regime, defeated in the War of Liberation, retreated from the mainland to the island of Taiwan, creating the division between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits.

The Democratic Progressive Party, the current ruling party in Taiwan, refuses to recognise the 1992 Consensus reached by the mainland and Taiwan that both sides belong to one China, and even tries to deny it. Its separatist push for 'Taiwan independence', plus interference by foreign anti-China forces, has worsened relations across the Taiwan Straits.

The pursuit of 'Taiwan independence' will lead to a dead end as the mainland will definitely not allow Taiwan to remain separated. In what way, then, will the mainland achieve reunification with Taiwan?

The answer to this question was presented by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping 40 years ago in the early 1980s: peaceful reunification and One Country, Two Systems.

In his remarks delivered at the meeting marking the 40th anniversary of the release of the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* on 2nd January 2019, President Xi Jinping reiterated that the vision of peaceful reunification and One Country, Two Systems is the best way to realise China's reunification. "We do not renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures. This is to guard against external interference and a tiny number of separatists and their activities for 'Taiwan

independence.' In no way does it target our compatriots in Taiwan," he added.

The *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* was issued on New Year's Day in 1979 by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature. It was a declaration of the mainland's policy for peaceful reunification. The message emphasised the centrality of the one-China principle, called for a halt to military confrontations, and proposed cross-Straits visits, transportation and postal services, as well as economic and cultural exchanges.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, Xi has made a series of important remarks on upholding One Country, Two Systems in light of new developments.

Visionary policy

The concept of One Country, Two Systems is based on the premise of one China: There is only one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and the seat of China's Central Government is in Beijing. This is a fact recognised by an overwhelming majority of the world's nations as well as the premise for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question.

The Chinese Government is firmly against any words or deeds designed to split China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It opposes 'two Chinas', 'one China, one Taiwan' or any attempt that could lead to 'independence of Taiwan'. The Chinese people on both sides of the Straits all believe there is only one China and espouse national reunification. Taiwan's status as an inalienable



• A not so warm welcome for US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Taiwan last year...

part of China has been determined and cannot be changed. 'Self-determination' for Taiwan is out of the question.

Then comes the co-existence of two systems. On the premise of one China, socialism on the mainland and capitalism in Taiwan can co-exist and develop side-by-side for a long time. This concept has largely taken account of the actual situation in Taiwan and practical interests of compatriots there. After reunification, Taiwan's current socio-economic system, its way of life, and economic and cultural ties with foreign countries can remain unchanged. Private property, including houses and land, as well as business ownership, legal inheritance and overseas Chinese and foreign investments on the island will all be protected by law.

One Country, Two Systems guarantees Taiwan a high degree of autonomy. After reunification, Taiwan will become a special administrative region (SAR). It will have its own administrative

and legislative powers, an independent judiciary and the right of adjudication on the island. It will run its own party, political, military, economic and financial affairs. It may conclude commercial and cultural agreements with foreign countries and enjoy certain rights in foreign affairs. It may keep its military forces and the mainland will not dispatch troops or administrative personnel to the island. On the other hand, representatives of the government of the special administrative region and those from different circles of Taiwan may be appointed to senior posts in the Central Government and participate in the running of national affairs.

Proved workable

The concept of One Country, Two Systems was put forward to settle the Taiwan question, but it was first applied in Hong Kong.

On 1st July 1997 the Chinese Government resumed the exercise of

sovereignty over Hong Kong and the Hong Kong SAR was established. Under the policy of One Country, Two Systems, the previous social and economic systems remain unchanged in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, different from the practice under the British colonial rule that a governor was appointed to administer Hong Kong without local people being consulted, now the head of the SAR is elected by the widely representative Election Committee and appointed by the Central Government. After its return to the motherland, Hong Kong has survived the 1997 Asian financial turmoil and 2008 global financial crisis and still remains prosperous, proving that the policy of One Country, Two Systems is workable.

Anti-China forces once tried to undermine the policy's practice. They cultivated pro-independence elements and incited violence to destabilise Hong Kong. The unrest over proposed amendments to Hong Kong's extradition law in 2019

seriously damaged the rule of law and order in Hong Kong. In response, the Central Government took powerful actions, promulgating the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong SAR. The law took effect in June 2020, restoring the stability of the region.

The sharp contrast between the chaos caused by the agitators in Hong Kong and the external groups behind them and the restored order proves that in developing democracy in Hong Kong and the external groups behind them and the restored order proves that in developing democracy in Hong Kong, we must abide by the principle of One Country, Two Systems and the Basic Law of Hong Kong SAR and act in an orderly manner, in line with local realities and in accordance with the law.

Only by continuing to implement the policy of One Country, Two Systems fully and faithfully and supporting Hong Kong in developing a democratic system that conforms to the region's constitutional status and realities as a local administrative region under the direct

jurisdiction of the Central Government, can we deliver benefits to the Hong Kong people. Since the policy proves suitable and workable in Hong Kong, the Central Government will stay committed to it.

Besides Hong Kong, Macao, where the One Country, Two Systems policy is also carried out, has also achieved unprecedented prosperity since it returned to the motherland in 1999.

The implementation of the policy in Hong Kong and Macao provides valuable experience for it to be applied in Taiwan in the future.

The Chinese Government conceived a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question as early as the 1950s. In May 1955, Premier Zhou Enlai said at an NPC Standing Committee meeting that two alternatives were open to the Chinese people for the solution of the Taiwan question: by resorting to war or by peaceful means. The Chinese people would strive for a peaceful solution wherever possible, he affirmed.

In April 1956, Chairman Mao Zedong put forward thoughts for Taiwan-related policy-making such as "peace is the best option"; "all patriots are of one family" and "it is never too late to join the ranks of patriots".

When talking about the Taiwan question in his report delivered at the 19th CPC National Congress in October 2017, Xi underlined the importance of upholding One Country, Two Systems.

"Resolving the Taiwan question to realise China's complete reunification is the shared aspiration of all Chinese people, and is in the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation. We must uphold the principles of peaceful reunification and One Country, Two Systems, work for the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations, and advance the process toward the peaceful reunification of China," he said.

Beijing Review

Guantanamo Bay: Against the will of the Cuban people

by Pedro Ríoseco

On 16th February 1903, the then president of Cuba Tomás Estrada Palma betrayed the ideas of José Martí and the Cuban Revolutionary Party he helped to found by signing the cession of the Caimanera territory to the USA to establish a naval base against the national will.

Thus, 120 years ago, the Estrada Palma government ceded an area of 117.6 square kilometres of the national territory for the Guantanamo Naval Base, which has remained occupied ever since against the will of the Cuban people.

The Agreement for the Coal and Naval Stations arose from the imposition of a constitutional amendment for Cuba, approved by the US Congress and signed by President William McKinley in March 1901, which became known as the Platt Amendment, whilst the Cuban territory was occupied by the Cuban army.

The Platt Amendment was an eight-article appendix to the Army Budget Bill, approved by the US Congress and imposed on the first Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, drafted by the Constituent Assembly of 1901, under the threat that Cuba would continue to be militarily occupied if it was not accepted.

Article 7 of this Amendment established the cession of portions of Cuban soil to locate US naval stations "to enable the United States to maintain the Independence of Cuba and to protect the people thereof, as well as for their own defence".

Even more insulting was Article 3, which "granted the United States the right to intervene militarily in the Island when life, property or individual liberties were endangered (in its judgment)".

The Amendment also warned the Government of Cuba that: "The United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban Independence, the maintenance of a Government adequate for the protection of lives, property and individual

liberty and to fulfil the obligations which, with respect to Cuba, have been imposed on the United States by the Treaty of Paris, and which must now be assumed and fulfilled by the Government of Cuba."

Also, in Article 6, they took advantage of the geographical error in the Treaty of Paris of referring to Cuba as an island and not an archipelago, to provide that the status of the Isla de Pinos (present-day Isla de la Juventud) would be determined in a future agreement with the USA.

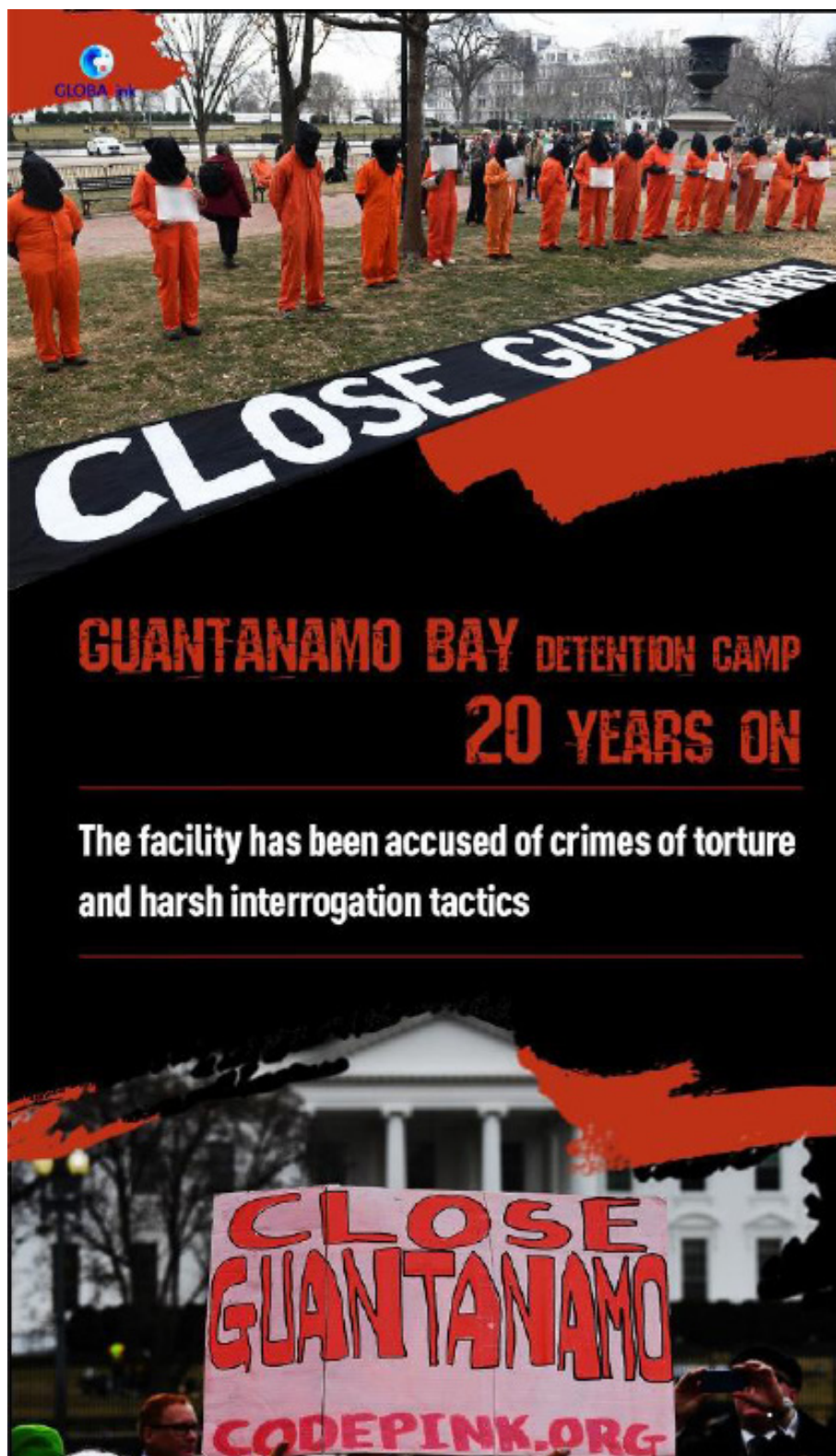
Estrada Palma, after Martí's death in the field, remained as Delegate of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) and was appointed agent abroad of the Republic in Arms in the Assembly of Jimaguayú.

He remained in the USA until long after the occupation of the island by the US Army. During this period, one of his few public actions was the unilateral, irresponsible and unconsulted decision to dissolve the PRC in December 1898, when he considered that the objectives that gave rise to its creation had been fulfilled.

In open collaboration with the Americans during the occupation, Estrada Palma advised Cuban Generalissimo Máximo Gómez to dissolve immediately the Liberation Army without monetary compensation and told him that his efforts to obtain the recognition of the military's salary before President McKinley had been useless.

He suggested that the Mambises (independence fighters) be employed as labourers in the sugar mills, a solution for which he was already in negotiations with the landowners of Cuba.

Máximo Gómez flatly refused to disband



the Independence Army without monetary compensation, and replied in a letter: "Reasons of public order, of high politics, of morality, made me decide to oppose and continue to oppose that our soldiers, who have been giving so much proof of abnegation, return to their destroyed homes, to their barren fields, without a penny in their pockets ..."

With the approval of the USA, Estrada Palma became a candidate to the first Cuban elections and won them, elections in which his only opponent was the Major-General of the Cuban Liberation Army and last president of

the Republic in Arms, Bartolomé Masó, who finally withdrew due to the lack of electoral guarantees.

Tomás Estrada Palma was president of the Republic of Cuba from 1902-1906, being elected in the first elections held under American supervision. He governed with extreme austerity, but with absolute servility towards the interests of the US Government.

Near the end of his term, he decided to seek re-election, for which he used the force of power and fraud, which motivated the followers of the opposition Liberal Party to take up arms. When he realised

that the popular revolt threatened to overthrow him he asked the US government to intervene. Shortly thereafter, he resigned from the Presidency to facilitate the handover of the country's destiny to the USA, which occupied Cuba for the second time.

The return of the land occupied by the US Naval Base in Guantanamo has been a permanent demand of the Cuban Revolution since 1959. It has the support of the Cuban people and the international community. It is a thorn in the heart of the homeland.

Granma

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Life in Britain immediately following the Second World War was influenced by great political and social changes.

The nation's debt had reached 270 per cent of GDP and there was an acute balance of payments problem. Much of the transport and energy infrastructure urgently required investment. Food was still rationed, and millions of new homes were required following wartime destruction. Times were hard but there was a new spirit of hope and a growing demand for something better. Troops returning from the front, along with their families, were no longer prepared to put up with the conditions that had existed in the 1930s. Their eyes had been opened by their wartime experiences and a growing class consciousness was reinforced by the achievements of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin.

It was against this background that Clement Attlee's new Labour government was forced to act for fear of revolutionary demands in the country. Basic industries, including coal mines, steel works, the railways and utilities

were taken over by the state. A National Health Service was set up, which along with social care was designed to provide protection from the cradle to the grave. Large estates of modern, comfortable council houses were built, and many people believed that socialism was just round the corner. So what has gone so terribly wrong?

The post-war policies did little to challenge the power of the bourgeois establishment. No attempt was made to set up a workers' state or a dictatorship of the proletariat. The measures taken were Keynesian in nature and amounted to little more than temporary reforms to satisfy public demand and provide essential capital investment that the financial institutions were unable or unwilling to provide.

When the NHS was established the drug companies were not taken over to control costs. When industries were nationalised workers were not represented on the governing boards.

On the international front, the Labour government became an enthusiastic supporter of US imperialism and the cold war. They sent troops to fight the Malayan independence movement and took part in the brutal aggression against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Over the decades since those times the Tories have systematically brought us almost back to square one. Industries have been privatised and the NHS undermined. Most of the council houses have been sold off and much social provision has been lost.

Labour has stood back and failed to re-nationalise

important industry or reverse the cutbacks. Sir Keir Starmer, acting like a dictator, has abandoned almost all the true socialist principles of the party and silenced his opponents by banning his former leader.

So where do we go from here?

The Labour Party appears to be becoming more like the Democratic Party in the USA. It pretends offer a democratic alternative but sings from the same hymn sheet of naked imperialism. It should be guided by a progressive trade union movement. Unfortunately, weak right-wing unions are unwilling to rock the boat and the TUC has about as much fight as a lame, toothless tiger.

The people have had enough of falling wages, useless austerity, endless wars, NHS cutbacks and foodbanks. An answer is to join the New Communist Party and fight for real socialism.

We cannot give up on the Labour Party. The front-line of the class struggle is clearly within its ranks and it is a component of the Labour movement. Those genuine socialists within its ranks should receive our full support whilst the anti-working-class snakes in the grass must be opposed and exposed. Only Marxist Socialism has the strength of purpose, scientific theory and effective strategy to overcome the capitalist crisis.

John Maryon
Suffolk

Dear Comrades

Some comrades who consider themselves of the left, and even revolutionaries, hold that NATO is not an aggressive alliance. Some even say of NATO that "it is a defensive alliance". This strengthens the hand of a large layer in the Labour and trade union bureaucracies that blames Russia in Ukraine, saying that Russia is the aggressor there, an aggressor that violates the right of Ukraine to self-determination and is bent on plunder. There are different strands inside this viewpoint, but it all serves the official line of the capitalist government

which makes it an obligation for us to say: Russia out of Ukraine!

Comrades will wonder why the gutter press demanded from Mick Lynch that he should 'stop parroting Putin'. Answer: The capitalist press wanted Mick to say: "Russia out of Ukraine". A profound and thorough debate is needed in the Labour left, in the general left and particularly in the trade unions. See how the British strikers, in their hundreds of thousands, do not blame Russia for the insane price rises. They blame the capitalists and their governments of profiteers, billionaires and warmongers all.

I say that outrageous energy price rises in Europe are not down to Russia's 'invasion'. They are down to the Western sanctions on Russia. A fact continually occulted by, or denied in, the government's propaganda.

With much violence and duplicity, the US-NATO alliance (and discreet allies) took military action to blow up the two Nord Stream gas pipelines, accusing Russia of course. Combined with the US-NATO-EU sanctions on Russia, this inhumane action starves Europe of cheap energy. Quite an aggressive action therefore, if anything, and not a defensive one! A violent action of US competition against its European competitors. It is no good to say that the USA and NATO are separate because they are de-facto the same thing, with world subordinates attached.

The destruction of the pipelines is an act that costs the lives of ordinary people; all those who already died and will continue to die from unfulfilled basic needs, their deaths as in the pandemic presented as acts of god. No-one is totting up those deaths, rest assured, but we will get hourly and daily reports on all deaths that can be attributed to Russia.

The blowing-up of the pipelines was an act of war aimed at empowering the already rich and powerful of the world, at the costs of the multitudes. An act that brings aggressively the

European bourgeoisies to heel, to be sure they stay 'on side' in the world war that the USA and NATO prepare against Russia and China.

Russia is surrounded by US-NATO-EU nuclear-capable bases. This is accepted by now, but no general conclusion is drawn from it nor from the similar nuclear-surrounding of China.

See how long it took before one got to know that the "defensive Alliance" was putting nukes on the Russian border just a few days before the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, laughing at Russia for taking part in negotiations and accords.

In December 2022, the Chambers & Partners' site commented on how Ukraine is being run under Zelensky. It said: "The government is interested in handing over publicly owned assets to effective private owners for future investment and development." Is it Russia doing this? Isn't the aggressor in Ukraine the counter-revolution of the privatisers, investors, developers and private owners being handed over 'publicly owned assets' under the Pentagon-controlled Zelensky government? This matter is not all military, it is about class too. It is not Russia that goes for privatisations in Ukraine. Quite the reverse indeed, as Russia protects the Donetsk People's Republic that has started re-nationalisations.

Comrades should come to the meetings of the International Ukraine Anti-Fascist Solidarity Campaign (IUAFS) to develop those ideas further, build their own confidence and create a movement that resists all-pervasive anti-Russian propaganda.

The IUAFS says: "Defend the Donbas and Crimea working class against the imperialist war on Ukraine to drag these areas back into the Western sphere."

Repudiate the slogan 'Russia out of Ukraine'. All this would do is surrender Crimea and the Donbas to Western powers only glad to balkanise Ukraine for each to swallow the bits, Yugoslavia style.

Put resolutions through your Union and Trades Council. And Labour branches - if you can!

Rejoice in the support that Russia and China provide to Syria, Iran, Venezuela and other countries.

Look for the IUAFS in the anti-war demonstrations and meetings. Ask this paper for more.

Marie Lynam
North London

Diary

UNTIL 31 MARCH

Victoria and Albert Museum: Ospaaal: Solidarity and Design: Cuban posters supporting Third World movement. Cromwell Road, London SW7

UNTI 21 APRIL

Working Class Movement Library: Shirley Baker Photographing Salford. Exhibition. Wed-Fri afternoons.

WCML, 51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX

FRI 3 MAR

Cuba Solidarity Campaign: Fundraising social for Viva La Educación. 19:00-22:00, St Andrews Community Centre, Handsworth B21 9RE £5/£10.

SAT 4 MAR

Korean Friendship Association: No to War Exercises! Picket 15:00-16:30, Picket of south Korean puppet embassy, 60 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AJ

SAT 4 MAR

Free Julian Assange Campaign: Pickets: 12:00-14:00, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, London, SE28 and 16:00-18:00, Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, London SW1

MON 6 MAR

Battersea & Wandsworth TUC: Strikers Hardship Fund Benefit. 19:30, Clapham Grand, 21 - 25 St Johns Hill, London, SW11 1TT

SAT 11 MAR

NHS SOS: Act now to save our NHS! National Demonstration. 12:00, Assemble at Warren Street Tube, Tottenham Court Road, London, NW1 3AA.

WED 15 MAR

National Education Union: Save our Schools demonstration 12:30, Assemble Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London W2 for march to carnival in Trafalgar Square.

SAT 18 MAR

Marx Memorial Library: Book Sale. 11:00-15:00 MML

SAT 18 MAR

Stand Up To Racism: Resist Racism. Demonstrations in Cardiff, 11:00, City Hall, Glasgow 11:00, George Square, and London. 12:00 BBC, Portland Place.

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.

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

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Scottish Political News

by our Scottish political affairs correspondent

Nicola Sturgeon's bombshell resignation has now been followed by the departure of Deputy First Minister John Swinney, who announced this week that he will stand down as a Scottish Government minister after almost 16 years. The veteran nationalist led the party from 2000-2004 before serving in a variety of Cabinet positions following the SNP breakthrough election victory in 2007.

Scottish Tory deputy leader Meghan Gallacher naturally said that Swinney had jumped before he was pushed. "He knows that a new first minister will mean a reshuffle, which would have led to his sacking" she said. "The fact that the deputy first minister, one of the SNP's most senior figures, felt he had to resign before he was sacked shows how bitter and divided the leadership contest has made this Nationalist government."

Meanwhile the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon has seen a great increase of interest in spiritual matters. There has however, been no great increase in church attendance amongst those giving grateful thanks for her departure or even from those seeking spiritual comfort for their tragic loss.

There has never been so much outpouring of theological bile since 1904, when the rump Free Church was involved in a ferocious court case over the ownership of its property after the majority of the Free Church had voted to merge with the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church.

Most of the current furore revolves around is wannabe SNP leader Kate Forbes, the Scottish Government's Finance Secretary and a Free Church member who has been roundly attacked for well, being a Free Church member who is opposing things all Wee Frees oppose.

It has not been one way. She seems to have come out of these attacks surprisingly well and won the sympathy vote from other religious groups because of these 'liberal' attacks. The bile actually encouraged an ecumenical spirit from Catholics and from some of the Muslim community, who are deserting their man Humza Yousaf. Not only has Yousaf tied himself in knots over the Gender Recognition Reform Bill (he is the only candidate supporting it), but he has also come under fire for his earlier stand on gay marriage, which in theory he supported.

In early 2014 he missed an important vote on the measure, the only minister to do so. This, he said, was due to an emergency meeting with the Consul of Pakistan about someone on death row for blasphemy. It now turns out however, that this meeting was arranged no less than 19 days earlier so that he could avoid upsetting the leadership of the Glasgow Central Mosque (which is not a noted bastion of liberal forms of Islam).

It has to be said that all the runners in the SNP leadership race are doing a better job at demolishing the SNP's record than the opposition parties have done in years. Not only have the two women candidates attacked the Gender Recognition Bill, but Ms Forbes has said she will be more supportive of the oil and gas industry, thus reversing a policy favoured by Nicola Sturgeon that was foisted on the SNP by the Greens.

All three candidates have criticised the Green Minister for the Circular Economy for her mis-handling of the proposed bottle return scheme. Forbes said it would cause "economic carnage" because it was not ready to be implemented and must be halted for a rethink.

Yousaf says it should be postponed for a year, and the third contender demands it be re-designed or simply scrapped.

Who is likely to come out top of the contest? Humza Yousaf led in an online poll conducted by the SNP-supporting *National* that attracted no fewer than 600,000 (six times the SNP membership) votes before

being pulled last week whilst complaints about "irregularities in voting" are investigated.

A more reliable one put Kate Forbes ahead amongst the SNP membership.

The *Scottish Sun on Sunday*, however, asserts that Humza Yousaf will come out on top after it commissioned Billy Bowler, the Psychic Goat of Jedburgh, who selected his picture from the two others perched on circus boxes.

Another way to take the pulse of the nation is real-life elections. The first by-election of 2023 has taken place in the Dyce, Bucksburn & Danestone ward on the outskirts of Aberdeen. Caused by the death of a sitting Tory councillor, the four-member ward was one in which the SNP topped the poll, but this time round Labour came first (up from third place last year) after an epic eight-round count to secure a majority. This result does not mean any great shifting of the tectonic plates of Scottish politics but it's not good for the SNP.

In The Council Chambers

Further down the political hierarchy, in the council chambers normal political warfare continues.

In Dumfries and Galloway, the SNP council leader resigned after budget plans tabled by the opposition Tories (who are the largest single party) were approved. The ruling minority SNP/Independent group (from which Labour recently resigned) wanted to raise the council tax by 6.5 per cent. Whilst rejecting

Labour's budget of a five per rise, the Council approved of the Tories six per cent. All over a 1.5 per cent difference.

In Edinburgh, the budget meeting resulted in the resignation of a Labour councillor who objected to his party rejecting the budget proffered by the SNP and Greens. Scottish local government has some strange coalitions and Edinburgh is one of them. Whilst the SNP is by far the largest single party, Labour, with 12 councillors on the 63-member council, runs the city with Tory and Liberal-Democrat support.

The offering from the SNP and Greens involved a 20 per cent increase in Council Tax, with discounts for houses in the lower band to sweeten the pill that the lawyers deem unlawful. Meanwhile, the Green part of the Budget looked suspiciously like an attempt to hire a few Green Party members to write climate change reports. At one stage the Greens voted for the Tory budget proposals simply to knock the Labour one off the table, whilst the SNP supported the Lib-Dem budget that supported two important measures of ending the "no compulsory redundancy policy" and supporting outsourcing, which the SNP deploras.

In the end the Lib-Dem budget won the day because everybody hated the other offerings more. Councillor Scott Arthur, the Labour councillor who resigned, accused his ex-colleagues of ignoring warnings from unions about the threat to jobs from the adopted Budget.

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A British artist's journey through Beijing

by Kang Caiqi

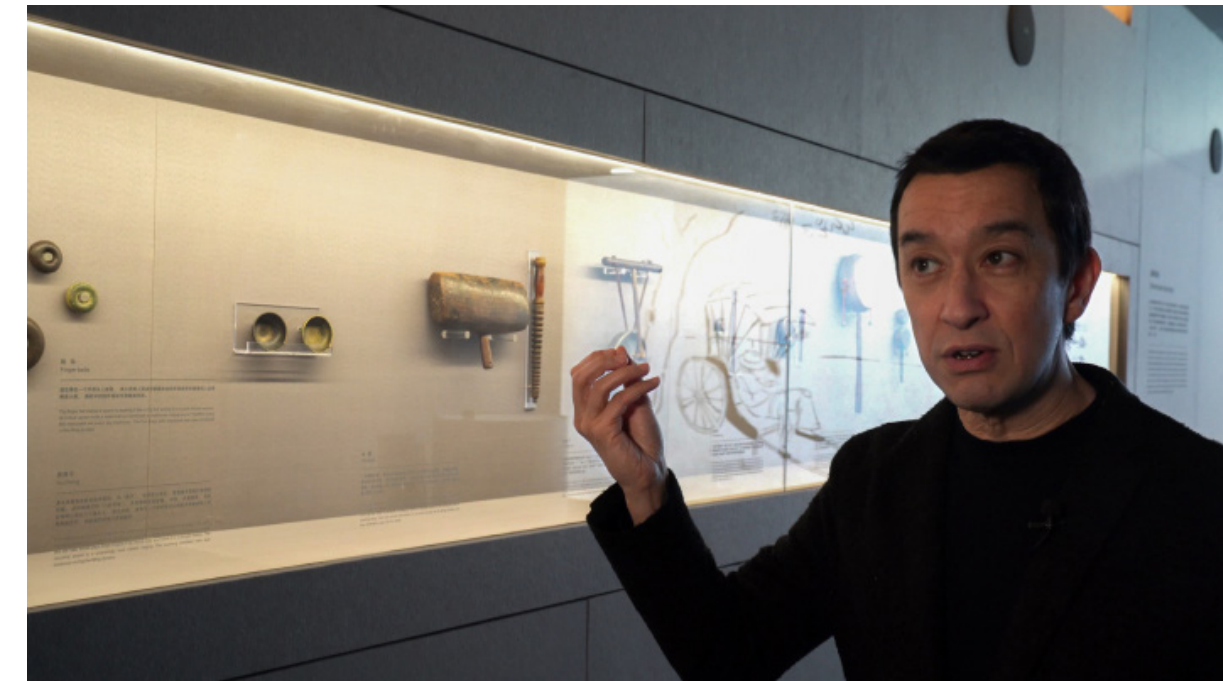
Strolling through the hutongs, Beijing's network of traditional narrow alleyways, one can easily get lost in their unique history-laden atmosphere. Amongst the capital's thousands of old lanes, Shijia Hutong stands out for two reasons: its innate cultural value and the fact that it houses Beijing's first hutong museum.

Walking into the alleyway's courtyard No 24, visitors are greeted with decorations reminiscent of the early 20th Century. The 1,000-square-metre Shijia Hutong museum, which welcomed its first visitors in 2013, consists of eight exhibition rooms, with the displayed items showing hutong life as it was decades ago. The *Memory of Time* room holds more than 300 recordings capturing the sounds of old Beijing as curated by Colin Siyuan Chinnery, a British artist whose own family once upon a time happened to reside in this very courtyard.

Born into a family of scholars, Chinnery has diverse life experiences: a child actor starring in a martial arts film, a computer science dropout from Scotland's Edinburgh University, a student at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, a fellow with the British Library, lead vocalist in a rock band – despite all these experiences, he decided to settle down in the field of art.

The sound of the city

Being half-British and half-Chinese, Chinnery traced his roots back to Beijing, his mother's



• Colin Siyuan Chinnery at Beijing's Sound Art Museum

hometown, to conduct research on Chinese culture.

"I was thinking of making a history of Beijing using only sound," he says. "Sound can take you back to a different time in your life, reminding you of feelings experienced in that particular moment. It's really like re-living the past with all your emotions." This understanding came from a project he undertook in 2005, titled *Sound and the City*, which invited well-known artists from China and the UK to explore life's acoustic ecology.

"What we did during this project was to ask people what their favourite sounds were and then record them," he said. To his surprise, this one simple question led to a rich discussion about personal memory, urban change and even history.

"The sounds people mentioned were mostly ambient sounds from the past, like the bell of the Telegraph Building (a landmark along Beijing's renowned Chang'an Avenue) or the chime of a taxi's meter; they were the sounds of society on the daily basis.

"It's natural for us to neglect them. Even if they disappear as the

city develops, when we hear them, out of the blue, they can still trigger feelings of nostalgia."

In the process of collecting the sounds, Chinnery realised that many of Beijing's symbolic sounds, such as the chants of street vendors hawking their wares and the sounds of the gongs candy vendors used to attract children whilst travelling from hutong to hutong, could only be heard in staged performances rather than in their original cultural environment.

"Like a gong, each percussion instrument makes a specific kind of sound, and each sound is the epitome of a trade in old Beijing, which could be selling a craft, an object or a service. In the past, when hearing that particular sound, one immediately knew what it represented. These sounds were advertisements," he explained.

Instead of purely recording the target sounds, Chinnery aimed to replicate the full-sphere surround sounds. So, a challenge arose: locating the sources and filling in the blanks. For example, to collect the sound of camel bells, which used to indicate the arrival of winter in the capital – because

the coals for heating were carried into the city by camel train, he rented a herd of camels and brought them into a large open space. "I could have shaken a camel bell myself in the studio, but I wanted to fully capture the subtle sounds in their entirety, like those of the animals breathing and their footsteps," Chinnery explained.

"I collected and organised a lot of memorable sounds of Beijing this way, creating an ever-larger database of people's relationships with sound."

The *Sound and the City* project gave the artist the opportunity to communicate with many people: "Sound is immediate. It's about experience. It's about life itself. So if you frame it the right way and contextualise it the right way, you can speak to many people."

Soon after the project had wrapped up, Chinnery realised simply recording sounds of the past was no longer enough for him. "As a contemporary artist, I am committed to the present moment, so I am exploring sound as a medium to create interesting projects, which can bridge the gap between the old

days and contemporary society," he elaborated. "I think we have to be sensitive enough to the present to really face the future."

Located in the heart of downtown Beijing, next to Qianmen Street, a famous pedestrian street for shopping and sightseeing, the Dashilan area has a commercial history spanning more than 600 years. Today, it features an emerging commercial and cultural complex called Beijing Fun, a prime example of urban revitalisation in the capital's ancient centre. In 2018, Chinnery created an acoustic public art installation at this junction of history and modernity. The whole installation delivered a distinctively immersive and sensory experience: As people sat down on the public benches, the sounds of old Beijing's street vendors would swarm in from all directions, generating a surround-sound time-travel effect and engaging people in the dialogue with spatial history.

"My project originated from the city, so I wanted it to give back to the city. Our cities are becoming more and more functionality oriented, and culture and life are becoming more and

more separated. If we can pay more attention to the interesting sounds surrounding us, we might be able to better appreciate life's details," Chinnery said.

A sound approach

Chinnery's auditory journey has been an ever-evolving process. What Chinnery tries to construct is a sound archive. He is a co-founder of the Sound Art Museum, which is located in Songzhuang in Beijing's Tongzhou District, the capital's sub-centre, and went into trial operation on 5th February. His projects at the museum not only convey the sounds of old Beijing, but also the sounds of nature, dialects and music from different Chinese regions.

He teamed up with scholars of ancient Chinese languages to reproduce the pronunciation of some extinct languages based on remaining manuscripts. "So far, we've figured out what several extinct languages used in areas of today's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region sound like; and we've made them heard again."

The sound archive can offer references for historical research. "I want to offer a new perspective for people to perceive the world – by hearing and listening," he said.

Beijing Review

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India's Red Books Day

by
Nitheesh Narayanan,
Sudhanva Deshpande
& Vijay Prasad

ONE hundred and seventy-five years ago, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels celebrated the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* on 21st February 1848 and then watched as Europe's peoples rose up against one monarchical system after another.

The text seemed to anticipate the Springtime of Nations, which included the attempt by the French people to redeem the promise of their 1789 Revolution, whose promise had been squashed by the restoration of the monarchy. "A spectre haunts Europe", the *Manifesto* opens, and indeed the ghosts had appeared on the streets to dress themselves in republican ideas – and to some extent even socialist ideas (although the rest of the sentence in the *Manifesto*, "the spectre of communism", was truer in theory at that time than in practice).

The *Manifesto* was not read widely when it was first published, mainly because it was censored in country after country and because the Communist League – which had commissioned the text – fell apart during the uprising and then disbanded in 1852.

The *Manifesto* had a second life in the 1870s as a consequence of Marx's own increasing prominence in the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) and due to his writings on the Paris Commune (1871). The growth of the German Social Democratic Party and the trade union movement in the decade of the 1870s provided the social basis for the circulation of a new German edition of the *Manifesto*, published in 1872. By the next year, nine editions of the *Manifesto* appeared in print in six languages.

It is now one of the most widely circulated

texts, one of the most regularly read books by Marx (given the difficulties associated with reading *Capital*, Marx's most important book). The *Manifesto* has been translated into almost all Indian languages, with the first translation being into Bengali by Soumyendranath Tagore (in *Ganavani*, the weekly paper of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, edited by Muzaffar Ahmad, and serialised between 1926–1927).

A few years ago, the Indian Society for Left Publishers decided to hold events on 21st February, the date of the publication of the *Manifesto* in 1848. The plan was to hold public readings of the *Manifesto* in the various Indian languages, since that date – February 21st – is also International Mother Language Day. The idea was to hold a Red Books Day on that date and make this a broadly cultural activity to 'rescue the collective life' on a secular and socialist basis.

Not long after the idea had been proposed, publishers from around the world expressed an interest in being involved in Red Books Day. So, when it was first held – in 2020 – already writers, publishers, booksellers and others joined in from south Korea to Cuba. The epicentre for Red Books Day in 2020, as in 2023, was in India, where during that year thousands of people read the *Manifesto* across the country. This year, in 2023, it is estimated that over a million people joined in to participate in Red Books Day from China to Mexico. An idea of the Left publishing houses in India is now being rooted into the international calendar of the Left.

During the planning for Red Books Day 2020, the first such activity, the Indian Society of Left Publishers convened meetings of publishers from around the world. These convenings led to the creation of the International Union of Left Publishers (IULP),

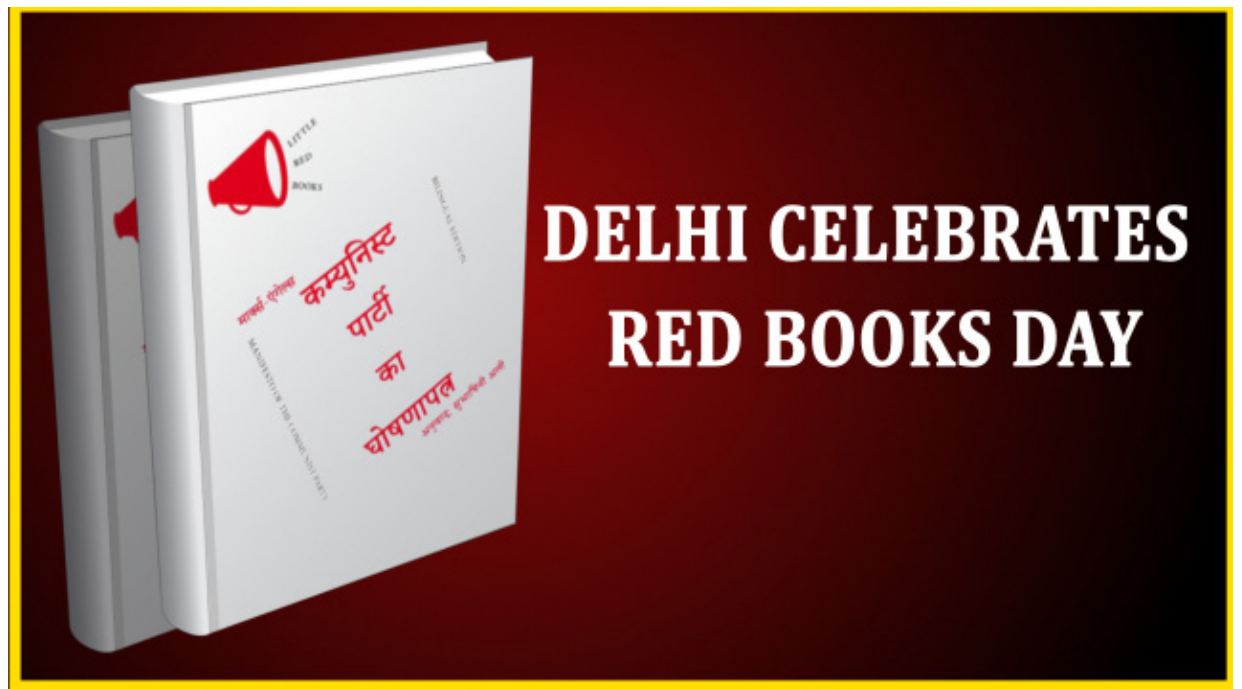
which now includes over 40 publishers. The IULP was formed not only to promote Red Books Day, but to provide a platform for Left publishers to defend ourselves from attacks by the right-wing, to promote rational and socialist ideas, and to share our books between each other. Over the course of the last four years, the IULP has been able to produce several joint books (including of the

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) made a call in January to build Red Books Day, a call taken up with enthusiasm across the Party and the mass organisations. Public readings took place before large audiences; but equally importantly small groups gathered to read and discuss Red Books of various kinds. The library movement in Kerala adopted Red Books Day, having held

Pondicherry around Marx's writings on religion. The books chosen for the collective reading in Maharashtra varied by district.

In the run-up to Red Books Day, the Young Socialist Artists collective in India began collecting various types of art and disseminating it. These art works were shared widely on social media, emphasising that Red Books Day is about more than just books,

Whilst there were events in countries that had participated in Red Books Day from 2020 – such as in Nepal and Cuba – there were also new participants in countries such as Malaysia and Mexico. The president of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel, tweeted about Red Books Day, and the leaders of several socialist parties on the African continent read the *Manifesto* in public.



writings of Che Guevara and to commemorate the Paris Commune). These joint books are published in various languages, from Romanian to Indonesian, on the same day. We have released statements to defend our authors and to defend our publishers when they have come under attack. The core of the work of the IULP – to which all members of the Indian Society of Left Publishers belong – is to promote the work of Red Books Day.

Despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic – when Red Books Day went online in 2021 – the enthusiasm for a day such as this has grown astronomically. For now, the epicentre remains in India, with readings conducted across the country of the *Manifesto* (as it was its 175th anniversary) but also of other Red Books.

discussions during the Indian Library Congress about the project and then executing it through the network of public libraries in the state. Cultural workers sang and acted, whilst hundreds of thousands of people lifted their spirits with rationality and the promise of socialism.

A week-long Red Book literary festival was held in Kannur. Teesta Setalvad, the author and activist, inaugurated the event. The festival featured a Red Books Day talk, various discussions on red books, a young writers meeting, seminars and other events. Pondicherry saw a wide range of gatherings, from drivers and street vendors to working-class women, reading the *Manifesto*. Bharathi Puthakalayam initiated a discussion across Tamilnadu and

but also about art, music and other forms of collective culture. In Assam and Karnataka, Navyug Prakashan and Kriya Publications were instrumental in organising events. Telangana held readings on Bhagat Singh's life and ideology.

Campuses across India enthusiastically celebrated Red Books Day with talks, art performances, film screenings and book exhibitions, amongst other activities.

The final event in India was held at May Day Bookstore in Delhi and featured a variety of programmes, starting from reading of the *Manifesto* in various languages and concluding with a street play of Janam, which lasted until late at night. In many places, the programmes were also linked to International Mother Language Day.

Socialist forces are now seized with the idea that Red Books Day must be part of their routine, with 21st February being an important date in the calendar of the Left.

It was remarkable to see Red Books Day exceed the circuits of those affiliated to the IULP or to the Left currents already in our networks, and to see those far outside our ranks adopt this day as their own. This is precisely the objective of a day such as this – to become an integral part of public culture and to struggle to establish rational and socialist ideas as the ideas of society. By the end of the decade, we estimate over 10-million people will participate in Red Books Day.

**People's Democracy
(India)**

Greece: An accident waiting to happen

by *New Worker* correspondent

Greek railway workers walked last week in a 24-hour protest strike that brought the national rail network and the Athens metro to a complete standstill. The strike was called to protest against the chronic neglect of Greece's railways by successive governments that the workers rightly say was the ultimate cause of the catastrophic train crash on 28th February.

That evening a passenger train smashed into a goods train on the Athens-Thessaloniki line in Greece. Some 350 passengers – many of them students returning from a carnival – were

on board the train that crashed head-on into a freight train at Tempe in northern Greece. At least 46 people were killed and dozens more injured in the country's deadliest rail crash on record.

The Transport Minister has resigned, and a station manager has been charged with manslaughter and negligence, whilst judicial inquiry has begun to try to establish why the two trains were travelling in opposite directions on the same track.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) has expressed "its sorrow for the unprecedented fatal train accident in Tempe and its sincere condolences to the families of the victims. It calls upon its members and friends to participate

in the blood donations held in the towns where the injured are being hospitalised.

"We demand that there be a full investigation into the causes of this tragedy, that nothing be covered up!

"The tragedy in Tempe was not something that came as a bolt from the blue.

"There have long been indications that a very dangerous situation has developed in rail transport, both for passengers and for workers. There were numerous warnings from workers that it was only a matter of time before a serious accident occurred, which were apparently ignored by the government and the company.

"This is confirmed by the complaints about

the poorly maintained network, about shortcomings and gaps in safety systems, staffing and critical infrastructure such as signage. These are precisely the issues raised just a few days ago by the statement made by the trade union grouping of railway workers supported by the KKE, with the shocking prediction that 'we will not wait for the accident to come to see them shedding crocodile tears while making ex-post observations'.

"Therefore, this is not 'bad luck', but a crime that was bound to happen, having causes and culprits.

"The company bears enormous responsibility. In its statements, it provided no answer as regards the details and causes of the accident, or even the exact number of

passengers on the train. However, it receives €50 million a year from the state as a subsidy.

"All of the above are the result of the policy pursued over time of so-called railway liberalisation, state underfunding, the fragmentation of the railway system into many parts and the privatisation of the former TrainOSE (Hellenic Railways Organisation now owned by the Italian state railways). This is a criminal – as is demonstrated – policy that bears the stamp of all the New Democracy, SYRIZA and PASOK governments to date. In the framework of this policy, workers have been made redundant, flexible working conditions and intensification have

been imposed on those who remain, while the Italian company has been heavily subsidised.

"These responsibilities cannot be absolved by the resignation of a minister, nor can they be hidden behind the Prime Minister's statements about human errors.

"This policy, which all the other parties loyally follow, has led to tragic accidents in other EU countries too. Therefore, no-one has the right to pretend they did not know about the situation.

"The necessary conditions for safe and modern rail transport are sacrificed on the altar of this criminal state policy and investor profits since they are systematically treated as a cost. The struggle against the above is literally a matter of life and death!"

For real human rights

by Roberto Morejón

Cuba warns about attempts to turn the UN Human Rights Council into a platform aimed against countries refusing to bow to the geopolitical interests of powerful states.

Once again Cuba is present at the work of the Council, this time at its 52nd session, an opportunity in which Havana calls attention to the pressures of the USA and others on that body.

This is not the first time that Cuba has bluntly raised the plans of certain countries to take the current Council back to the conduct of the defunct Commission on Human Rights, which was finally closed in 2006

because of those practices.

Cuba is right to highlight the manoeuvres in the Council to transform it into a spearhead against countries harassed by the USA, whose administrations insist on presenting the power of the North as a paradigm in human rights.

Underpinned by this artifice, the USA usually attacks Cuba for alleged transgressions of citizens' freedoms.

In the land of José Martí, however, the full exercise of these freedoms is advocated and the principles of universality, indivisibility, objectivity and non-selectivity in the treatment of individuals are respected.

Paradoxically, Washington does impinge on the prerogatives of Cubans by maintaining the intensified blockade

and applying additional punishments by including it on the list of those who, it alleges, sponsor terrorism.

In this sense, Rodríguez Parrilla was emphatic in Geneva when he reiterated a permanent demand from Cuba and the countries of the South to stop politicising the issue of human rights.

As the Foreign Minister of Cuba said, it is necessary to break down pressures and unilateral visions, and to benefit respectful and constructive dialogue as well as co-operation.

It is to be hoped that the USA and other countries of the industrialised North will listen to voices such as those of Cuba so that the atmosphere of the UN Human Rights Council is not vitiated.

Radio Havana Cuba

Israeli riot police turn on democracy protesters

by Ed Newman

Israeli police have used tear gas, water cannons and stun grenades to disperse protesters against highly-contested plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right cabinet to reform the Zionist regime's judiciary.

The violence broke out after hundreds of demonstrators blocked roads and chanted anti-Netanyahu slogans in central Tel Aviv and other places across the occupied territories as part of "Disruption Day" protests on Wednesday.

Mounted police tried to stop demonstrators breaching barricades in Tel Aviv, with footage showing the regime's forces dragging protesters off the road as

demonstrators called out "shame" and "we are the majority and we are out on the streets".

The police, for the first time since protests began some two months ago, fired tear gas, stun grenades and water cannons to disperse demonstrators, adding that at least 11 people sustained injuries in clashes with police whilst 39 others were arrested at the mass rallies. In one video widely shared online, an Israeli cop was seen to kneel on the neck of a protester to subdue him whilst several others held him down.

Following the police break-up of protests in Tel Aviv, the Israeli regime's opposition leader Yair Lapid informed the press that he had left the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in order to join the protests, with Netanyahu accusing him of sowing anarchy.

Protests have taken place across the occupied territories since Netanyahu's

controversial move to reform the judiciary. Opponents argue that the legal changes threaten the independence of judges and weaken oversight of the ruling cabinet and parliament. They say the plan will undermine the rights of minorities and open the door to more corruption.

Opponents also say the judicial overhaul is meant to help Netanyahu avoid the repercussions of his ongoing corruption cases, including bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

Netanyahu, however, has called the protesters "anarchists", claiming that they cannot come to terms with last November's election results, which helped him stage a comeback as prime minister. The embattled premier also alleges that the reforms are required to curtail the jurisdiction of the sitting judges, whom he accuses of having too much power.

Radio Havana Cuba