

R O S E

RADICAL OPTIONS FOR SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

Issue 2: Summer 2024

For Public Ownership and Democratic Control

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EDITORIAL:

Bringing the Scottish Left Together

Kate Ramsden welcomes readers to the second issue of ROSE magazine.

Since our last magazine in January we have had the opportunity to bring ROSE's campaign objectives up to date after Brexit. You can see those in full on the next page.

These have set down clearly the objectives for our campaigning work, and we hope they will provide a basis for many on the left to rally around, even where we have underlying constitutional differences. After all, our focus on the democratic control of the economy and well-funded and well-staffed public services, democratically owned and controlled, surely speaks to everyone on the political left.

As our statement says: "We know that our challenge to capitalism in Scotland requires a broad-based alliance of all those who recognise that the current political structures are designed to defend the status quo and need to be transformed."

Our objectives also set out our clear opposition to private ownership and increasing militarism, both of which we see rising in the EU, and our commitment is to work with comrades across Europe resisting the EU's growing neoliberalism.

This issue reflects these new objectives with a focus on the EU. Articles look at various aspects of EU policy and behaviour. It also includes two new features. First of all a longer centre-page essay.

This issue Coll McCail writes about the EU's approach to immigration in Fortress Europe.

Secondly we have a new opinion piece slot which we hope will provide an opportunity for those across the left to write us a piece of their choice which will challenge our thinking in some way. So readers, get your thinking caps on.

Our issue of course also includes articles on the current political issues facing us here in Scotland. We have long recognised the importance of trade union councils as bridges between trade unionists and community activism, essential if we are to mount effective challenges to the austerity agenda that plays out in cuts to councils and other public services and creeping privatisation. This issue features three local campaigns which have done just that.

We have a piece on the STUC's hard hitting critique of the government's performance during COVID, which formed the basis of its evidence to the enquiry. And of course we couldn't publish a magazine on the heels of the (admittedly limited) turmoil in our Scottish government without an analysis on what this might mean for the independence debate.

We very much hope you enjoy issue 2 of ROSE and we hope you will consider writing a piece for our next magazine.

OBJECTIVES:

Popular Sovereignty & Democratic Control

*The **ROSE Committee** outline the organisations objectives for the future.*

ROSE believes in popular sovereignty, that means that the economy should be democratically controlled. We also believe in well-funded and well-staffed public services, democratically owned and controlled.

ROSE believes that building a challenge to capitalism in Scotland and Britain requires a broad-based alliance of all those who recognise that the current political structures are designed to defend the status quo and need to be transformed.

ROSE believes that the bias toward private ownership, more recently expressed in neoliberal policies, is intrinsic to the EU. That and increasing militarism in the EU make it an impediment to advancing the interests of the working class in Scotland or in the rest of the UK.

ROSE believes that the task of radicals here is to contest this and build support and solidarity with those across Europe who are resisting the EU's neoliberalism. All publications and political activity undertaken by ROSE will reflect this position.

Campaigning Objectives

- ROSE will campaign for the powers that the Scottish Parliament needs to take democratic control of the Scottish economy.

- ROSE supports building an alliance amongst socialists who campaign for the powers that the Scottish Parliament needs to take democratic control of the Scottish economy regardless of other constitutional positions.
- ROSE will actively campaign against moves to align with the EU that limit the capacity of Scotland or Britain to act in the interests of the working class. This is a core element of ROSE's perspective and arguably what makes it distinctive in the Scottish political landscape.
- ROSE will build relationships with all socialist parties, groups and individuals across Europe who support our analysis of the EU.

IF YOU WISH TO SUPPORT OR BECOME INVOLVED CONTACT JOINT SECRETARY VINCE MILLS (vp Mills@outlook.com).

Thanks to those who have supported this issue of the magazine by taking out an advert. If your trade union branch would like to do similar for our next issue, please contact the editor.

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TRADE UNION COUNCILS: Building Bridges to Fight Cuts

Trades Union Councils across Scotland are uniquely placed to be a bridge between trade unions and community groups. They have taken a key role in campaigning against local cuts which, in many cases, threaten core services. Most councils have now set budgets and accepted the Scottish Government Council Tax Freeze. This has meant further devastating cuts in many areas, with likely knock-on effects on Integrated Joint Board budgets impacting on health and social care.

The STUC has recognised the important role of Trade Union Councils and has taken on a liaison role to support and publicise their anti-cuts activities to affiliates and to provide updates to its database of trade union activists. It also plans to compile a list of key messages relating to current budget cuts. These actions were strengthened by this year's STUC Congress, where delegates backed the North Lanarkshire Trade Council's motion calling on the General Council to work with the trades councils across Scotland to fight every cut to local services; and to lobby local councils and the Scottish Government to deliver a Zero Cuts Budget.

In this issue we hear from three trade union councils about their work across trade unions and community groups to fight the cuts to councils and to hold councillors accountable to the communities they serve.

ABERDEEN IS JIST SCUNNERED

Laura McDonald, Aberdeen TUC describes the Aberdeen campaign that has brought together unions and community groups to fight cuts and demand better.

As the Spring of 2022 unfolded, people across the country looked on with fear as their household bills rose and the energy company bosses filled their pockets at the expense of the rest of us.

Aberdeen was no different, and although renowned as an "oil capital" it had long been a city of two halves, where the top fifth of the population were part of the richest in Scotland whilst the bottom fifth were amongst the poorest. A range of local charities ran busy foodbanks and gave children's shoes and winter coats, and those living in Balnagask had 20 fewer years of healthy life than the better off areas.

So it was local trade unionists that brought the community together to demand action on the growing cost-of-living crisis, or cost-of-greed crisis. Rallying in Marischal Square, outside the council headquarters, unions, the St Fitticks Park campaign, local community resource centres, socialists, greens, and many more demanded action. Was it just a coincidence that the incoming council administration set up an Anti-poverty committee? Where some places had rival groups "Enough is Enough", "People's Assembly" and more, Aberdeen activists pooled their resources and forged a single "Aberdeen is Jist Scunnered" umbrella campaign.

City centre stalls with practical information and petitions were well received, but many working class people spent more time in their local communities.

So the campaign went out to the people with campaign days in the “regeneration” areas of Northfield, Torry and Tillydrone, holding stalls and leafletting estates and tower blocks. In the old Tillydrone community centre, an outreach day was held with political discussions on fighting poverty, and stalls giving practical help from Living Rent and Citizens Advice to name but a few. All washed down with cups of tea and sandwiches courtesy of Aberdeen TUC.

As with all campaigns, activity goes in peaks and troughs. But “Jist Scunnered” has given support to those opposing massive council cuts, including the (successful) campaign to reopen the Bucksburn swimming pool, and opposition to closure of six public libraries. When huge cuts were again on the agenda of this year’s council budget, it again was a rallying point for opposition.

It has formed a strong network of local activists capable and ready to offer support to emerging campaigns and take the initiative itself when needed. With foodbanks becoming an entrenched part of life; the disadvantaged being victimised by an inhumane “social security” system, and our society offering young people a bleak future, it won’t be going anywhere soon.

A UNITED FRONT AGAINST THE CUTS

Tom Morrison, Clydebank TUC highlights the importance of community mobilisation and calls on councillors to get off their knees and stand up for their communities.

In the current financial year West Dunbartonshire Council faces a £21 million budget deficit. This is the largest deficit the impoverished local authority has ever faced.

At the point of writing the local authority faces a £17.3 million budget deficit for the upcoming financial year 2023/24. The local UNISON branch reports that it has observed a severe backlash from its members and the community in general who have been crippled by austerity. At the council meeting in late December 2023 where the latest round of cuts and closures of buildings were given the go ahead, residents posed questions to councillors at this meeting while also demanding, in what is becoming a well used phrase, “ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!”

The branch has recognised the importance of sustained local action, with the bringing together of community organisations, trades union branches, and trades union councils when campaigning against SNP, Labour, and Tory budget cuts.

Efforts have been made on the ground to build a united front of trade unions and community organisations, recognising the necessity of mobilising a mass movement to challenge the cuts agenda of the Tory Government and its implementation by local councils of all colours.

The big corporations, such as the energy companies and the supermarkets make super profits, while the gap between the super-rich and the poor continues to grow at an ever faster pace.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Finance can be found instantly for military adventures. The profits of the military/industrial complex soar as public services are hollowed out.

Clearly the money is there, it is just in the wrong hands.

“Finance can be found instantly for military adventures. The profits of the military/industrial complex soar as public services are hollowed out.”

Given the inaction of the politicians, the trade union movement needs to take the leading role. With tens of thousands of jobs lost in local government and services gutted it is long past the time for a militant fightback.

Calls have been made at local level all over Scotland for councils to refuse to implement cuts in services and publish budgets that meet the needs of their communities.

Any action to remove councils who publish no cuts budgets and replace them with Scottish Government administrators should be met with campaigning for Needs Budgets in the local elections that would be required to be held.

Such a campaigning strategy could win wide support and cause a political crisis for the austerity policies of government and the tame councillors who have meekly managed the decline of their communities over the past couple of decades. They need to get off their knees.

TRADE UNIONS FIGHTING FOR THEIR NECK OF THE WOODS

Ben Lunn on how North Lanarkshire TUC is co-ordinating a fightback against cuts and why every union should be part of their local Trade Union Council.

North Lanarkshire Council, like many across Britain, has been given a heavy burden due to numerous cuts to council budgets from both Westminster and Holyrood.

However, many councils have been too eager to pass these attacks onto the communities which they are supposed to serve and provide for.

North Lanarkshire Trades Council (NLTUC) has been outspoken in their criticism of their local council for continuously attacking local services such as school bus provision, the debacle around school support staff, and many other failings. However, in September 2023 NLTUC intensified their campaigning, after the council threatened to close numerous community centres – many of these being the only places which are open to the general public in certain small towns or villages.

A significant boon for this work was the general outrage of community groups from across North Lanarkshire. This was the largest and most intensive public response to anything this decade and was a great opportunity for NLTUC to tie itself closer to the people of North Lanarkshire. The core limitation of the broad public response was that many groups tried to set up their own campaigns independently, in isolation of each other. This is where NLTUC tried to position itself, not to take control of public sentiment, but to use our members' expertise and experience to help guide and advise where we could, to make sure the campaign was effective.

Though the council backed down in the Autumn, we know realistically the fight didn't stop there.

This was confirmed earlier this year, when it was discovered that it was effectively asking the community to decide what gets cut via a public poll. The challenge for us currently is rebuilding the intensity of the Autumn rebellion, and also educating everyone that this is not a unique one-off, but a symptom of a long-term failing of our council which needs to be challenged.

Trades councils have been an important vehicle for the trade union movement, enabling unions to communicate together and learn from each other, but most importantly bridging between the trade union movement and the community as a whole. Due to various factors, trade unions are often not in a position to campaign locally (this is only to describe the circumstance, and not be critical of trade unions).

However, the Trades Council exist because they are a body which represents trade unions within a given area. Meaning activists and trade unionists have an avenue in which to campaign for their communities and the places they live.

The battle in North Lanarkshire is not unique. It is a problem apparent across Britain, because too many councils are not defending the very people who voted for them. Trades councils in every community can be the vessel to coordinate a fight back, and every trade unionist should be supporting their trades council to help get stuck in locally to show we are not some distant barons who only fight for our payslips, but are committed to making life more dignified and worthwhile living.

For dignity in work: Be active in your trade union
For dignity in your community: Join your trades council



NORTH LANARKSHIRE TRADE UNION COUNCIL

SOLIDARITY FROM NLTUC TO ALL COMRADES FIGHTING COUNCIL CUTS

HOW THE SYSTEM LET DOWN THE WORKERS

Here **Roz Foyer**, General Secretary outlines some of the STUC's key messages to the COVID enquiry and the lessons for UK and Scottish governments

Just over four years ago I re-joined the STUC in the role of General Secretary of the STUC. My days in the office were few before the lockdown was announced and the majority of Scotland's workers switched to working from home or had their work suspended or terminated.

Of course, a very substantial minority did not. These were the health care workers, care workers and key workers of many other descriptions whose work intensified as they struggled to keep core services operating.

A total of 12 elements of Scotland's pandemic handling will be examined. Last month, I, along with the relevant affiliated unions gave evidence on the first of these elements, health and social care.

I told the Inquiry that workers in health and social care settings were "abandoned" by government with many making the "ultimate sacrifice". I am on record as saying that these workers, many of them low paid, most of them women, were "left to the wolves" and "left to rot". I do not resile from such language because the facts speak even more loudly than these words.

“Our health and social care workers were often let down by their employers, they were too often let down by politicians, but we must not forget that, ultimately, they were let down by the whole system too.”

The risks they were asked to take and the sacrifices they made were rightly applauded, if not rewarded. However, we now know that many of those risks and sacrifices could have been avoided by better preparedness, swifter and more comprehensive government action and if they had been working within a political economy that invested in services and had decent employment protection at its core.

Last October, the Scottish Covid Inquiry began its hearings in a process that will take at least two years and possibly more. There is no formal end date for the Inquiry, but it is thought likely to last until 2025. Its remit is broad.

Arguably, there was no cohort of workers more failed by government and employers than those in social care. The failures fall in three broad categories. Response failure; preparedness failure; and systemic failure - which includes both the underfunding of care and public services generally as well the undervaluation and disjointed approach to Social Care.

It is impossible in one article to cover the sheer depth and breadth of the evidence we have.

We know from research carried out by Professor Phil Taylor that social care workers were four times more likely to die from covid than the average worker.

We know that out-of-date PPE was issued to health and social care staff. We know supplies were limited; that staff were required to re-use PPE; that many had to buy their own PPE; and that PPE that was provided was often ill-fitting.

Equally, we know that Pandemic planning in Scotland (and indeed the UK) was predominantly focused on influenza-type viruses. This is concerning because the existence of coronavirus was already known about. Such outbreaks occurred in 2002 (SARS), 2009 (Swine flu) and 2012 (MERS). We simply weren't ready as a nation to deal with the challenges we faced and Social Care was on the very sharpest end of that failure.

Low pay and derisory sick pay have long been a feature of the sector. No wonder, then that a problem we frequently faced was of care workers being simply unable to self-isolate because they had no other conceivable way of putting food on the table than reporting for work. Whilst we successfully lobbied for the introduction of the Social Care Staff Support Fund, gaps in coverage and uneven implementation still left many in dire straits.

The truth is that, just as the cost-of-living crisis pre-dated the pandemic, so did our care crisis. The great depression sparked by the international crisis and the disastrous austerity response inflicted massive damage on an already fragmented service.

Across the public sector, the Scottish Government's response to a financial squeeze, much of which was not of its own making, was the so-called 'efficiency agenda' with cuts to public funding and jobs and the thinning of coverage across a range of services.

However this cash diet was described, it reduced resilience and with reduced resilience comes an inability to respond to shocks.

This should act as a warning to all in government and those who aspire to govern. Rather than kowtow to the Tory mantra of public service inefficiency and only being able to provide 'what we can afford' we need an approach which starts from the viewpoint that there are certain things we cannot afford not to do. This includes paying our care workers decently through collective bargaining and a shift change in trade union recognition. It requires funding a service which can provide decent care in normal times while having the capacity respond effectively in a crisis. It must include a root and branch reform with not-for-profit at its core and direct public delivery as a norm.

Moreover, what is true in social care is true in the wider public sector whether it be in NHS funding and resistance to creeping privatisation, in education or of course in local government more generally which has been pared to the bone.

WORKERS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SETTINGS WERE "ABANDONED" BY GOVERNMENT WITH MANY MAKING THE "ULTIMATE SACRIFICE"

Our health and social care workers were often let down by their employers, they were too often let down by politicians, but we must not forget that, ultimately, they were let down by the whole system too.

ES RETTET UNS KEIN HÖH'RES WESEN: Europe, Workers' Rights, and the European question

Fred Bayer is a German-Scottish trade unionist and Executive Committee member of the Aberdeen Trades Union Council. Here he looks at the profound implications for workers' rights of the Humpert v Germany ruling.

In December 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a landmark ruling undermining workers' rights across Europe.

If this is the first you are hearing of it, I am not surprised, inconvenient as it is to all the mainstream narratives around Europe. It is inconvenient to the conservative one, of European institutions as an anti-business bulwark of the "loony left", but also to the left-wing narrative of "Mother Europe" offering reliable protection against the Thatcherite excesses of Westminster. In other words, it highlights the folly of the comforting fairy tale we tell ourselves about what the European project actually is.

What was this ruling? To understand that, we have to take a brief detour to the country of my birth.

Germany has a unique legal status: Beamte, often translated as "civil servants", which it distinguishes from ordinary employees. "Civil servants" is a poor translation, because Beamte encompasses far more public sector workers than we mean by the term. Importantly for this case, they include most schoolteachers and university staff.

Beamte status comes with a number of perks: they can never be dismissed for any reason other than gross misconduct, for example, and are exempt from paying the German equivalents of national insurance.

But in exchange for these perks, they give up something far more fundamental: the right to strike.

Another detour is necessary, to Turkey. Back in 2009, the ECtHR ruled in a case brought by Turkish trade union Yapi Yol Sen that barring public sector workers from striking is incompatible with Article 11 of the European Charter of Human Rights (ECHR), which governs the right to free assembly.

"It highlights the folly of the comforting fairy tale we tell ourselves about what the European project actually is."

Section 2 of that Article does provide an array of exceptions to this right, including notably for "members [...] of the administration of the State". However, the strike in question was called for construction workers, which the Court ruled satisfied neither that exception, nor any of the others. Thus, it seemed, categorical bans on public sector strikes violate the ECHR.

Later the same year, Germany's education union GEW called a nationwide strike over terms and conditions for schoolteachers.

GEW itself had not actively recommended that members with Beamte status participate, but armed with knowledge of the ECtHR's recent ruling, four Beamte teachers decided to participate in the strike anyway. To cut a long story short, the matter ended up in Strasbourg as *Humpert et al v. Germany*.

Most, from the GEW to legal gurus, expected that the Court would find in favour of the applicants based on the precedent set in *Enerji Yapi-Yol Sen v. Turkey*. But it didn't. The ECtHR sided 17-1 with the German government, concluding that Germany's blanket ban on public sector strikes was "proportionate to the important legitimate aims pursued".

The sole voice of protest on the bench was that of Cypriot judge Georgios Serghides, who pointed out that the exceptions in Article 11.2 are intended for restrictions, not for blanket bans. Sadly, his dissent is of no ultimate consequence.

What does this mean for us here?

Based on what had previously been a growing trend of pro-labour rulings in Strasbourg, many here had hoped that the strike-busting "minimum service levels" Westminster is seeking to impose (including on schools and universities) could be fought through the courts. But with Strasbourg approving of a *complete ban* on most teachers striking elsewhere, any such effort now seems vanishingly unlikely to succeed.

This is not to say the Court is completely pointless, instrumental as it was in stopping the heinous Rwanda plan. But if even this relatively progressive institution can get it so catastrophically wrong and side with the establishment against workers, it seems high time to reconsider how we on the left think about Europe.

Dissecting all the ways in which the EU, the Single Market, and the various associated institutions might serve to entrench establishment interests and neoliberal economics would go far beyond the scope of this article.

Such questions aside, though, the fundamental flaw in seeking to rely on a more moderate Europe to "save" us from the havoc wrought by our domestic politics is neatly expressed in the German version of the Internationale:

"Es rettet uns kein höh'res Wesen,
No higher power will save us,
kein Gott, kein Kaiser, noch Tribun;
no god, no emperor, nor tribune
uns aus dem Elend zu erlösen
relieving us out of misery
können wir nur selber tun."
we can only do ourselves.

Just as our rights are not won or guaranteed by an intervening deity or benevolent monarch, they are not guaranteed by the tribunes of our domestic courts nor by those at Strasbourg. Nor, it follows, by distant legislators and administrators. The only people who can secure a better future for Scotland's workers are we, Scotland's workers, ourselves.

Does that mean the European project is pointless and not worth engaging with? Not necessarily. There may well be other compelling reasons to support membership of the ECHR and indeed other European institutions, be it for the UK or an independent Scotland. But the safeguarding of our rights isn't one of them, as *Humpert v Germany* conclusively shows.

AIRY-FAIRY VISIONAIRY

In this **OPINION PIECE**, *Ellen Dalzell*, who specialises in socially constructive mischief as director of Artivism Scotland, takes a whimsical look at Scottish, UK and EU politics and submits that the political left is failing to provide the vision required in Scotland.

There's not much to intellectually credit in staunchly held and never-progressed criticism of the EU. For all the neo-liberal, untransparent, bloody, unaccountable, palm-greased, centralized reasons we all have been aware of for decades there clearly is a long history of valid reasons why one might get a smidge disenfranchised with all of it. A trend that is only furthered by current EU president, Ursula Von der Leyen, truly one of those global leaders worthy of a wax statue stored in a highly flammable warehouse outside the reach of EU health and safety protocols. Or better yet, extensive judicial proceedings regarding her public handling of the war on Gaza. Any day now, no doubt.

In fact, isn't that kind of the new normal now? On a UK stage politics has corroded to such a caricature of itself that having to justify oneself in court as a government representative is an expected part of the top job parcel. Scotland's golden post-ref decade has a distinctly toxic glow in the rearview mirror of a car traveling somewhere between a police station and a courthouse. It sure would be easier to fully give ourselves to self-satisfied condemnation of the European Union as a whole if things weren't quite so pathetic just about everywhere *precisely where we are*.

As airy-fairy lefty snowflakes we know how to criticize. And we know we're on the right left side of history, like, most of the time - and so are our pals, unless they are wrong, which means we can't be pals.

But just being right about what we have criticized sure doesn't feel sufficiently satisfying, especially because it also distinctly feels like being part of the problem.

No matter the government, the nation, the context, finding errors in any of this planet's current self-organizational bodies is not rocket science. We've all read the same books, understood the same socialist concepts, why are we simultaneously bored stiff and not moving forward? Are we done doing irreverent, transformative stuff in the face of overwhelming, fatal meh or is there an actual vision for progressive forms of human government, for living and thriving sustainably?

Scotland's political and social history, the unerasable 'constitutional question' and the mostly underutilised wiggle room created by the devolution era mean that while Scotland is failing to come to a conclusion as to what it owes itself we are simultaneously failing to understand what we owe to the world. Our wee nation's famed enlightenment was mainly gleaned through the savage social perspectives observed on study trips abroad sponsored by Piggyback Colonialism Global & Heirs.

We have been leading forces in carving up whole continents in the process of being who we are today, but despite Scotland's population growth relying on 'foreign' labour and reproductive organs since the Highland Clearances we just don't feel land reform is all that urgent a matter here. If enlightenment means acquiescence to casual suffering, Scotland has invested in that philosophy for longer than necessary.

It is time we get ahead of ourselves. Scotland might be disenfranchised to a near molecular level but our small population-to-land ratio has its advantages. Pilot after pilot programme across the world proves that a Universal Basic Income is both sound and transformative as humanitarian and as economic policy. After a decade-long campaign the EU Parliament voted last year to call on the Commission to bring in an EU minimum income directive. While weaker than a true Universal Basic Income, this would direct all Member States to introduce a minimum income standard sufficient to eliminate poverty within their country.

For Scotland it would mean that the minimum acceptable annual income for a person (working or otherwise) would be around £30,000. Common sense suggests the first non-chicken nation on this planet to fully implement a UBI might as well be one who has the obligation and opportunity to design its own public services from scratch and the intention to do it well.

And while we're at it and the planet is on fire, the only truly ambitious, radical climate targets Scotland set for its government in the last decade came out of the groundbreaking Citizens Assembly on Climate: 105 members, selected by random lottery and weighted to be demographically representative of Scotland's population along age, gender, income, geography and other criteria. They were given access to experts and data, tasked with discussing policies to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. Scotland was the first nation in the world to declare and made clear, strong, ambitious recommendations.

The Scottish government ignored all but one and is currently in the process of throttling the one small exception, tool libraries in each of your neighbourhoods, by entirely underfunding public sector involvement to the point of volunteer burnout and hoping the private sector will fill the public gap.

Despite the core failure to implement, the Scottish government's setting up of the Climate assembly at least proved that assemblies are a much better way to generate insightful, ambitious popular policy unburdened from ego, centrism and hierarchical (ob)structures than the status quo that failed to adapt them. That much needed confirmation of both the efficacy of people-made policy and the necrotizing effects of our current governmental structures can only serve to refocus our perspective.

Scotland's geographic location, green energy potential, level of education, diversity of skills and access to technology make our nation a prime location for a Green New Deal that reaches far beyond half-baked Net Zero thinking.

The EU's own Green Deal compares relatively poorly compared to Scotland's own now-shredded climate targets and even more so in terms of the demands of the Scottish Climate Assembly but this is because it tends to act as a minimum floor of expectations rather than a limit on Member State ambitions and in some areas it has pushed far beyond the expectations of many commentators such as in the implementation of the world's first Carbon Border Tax to de-incentivise polluting imports (something that over 90% of the Climate Assembly participants called for Scotland to do).

Maybe the vision fairy will visit upon our shores if we sleep on the status quo another night but given the whole planet-on-fire situation, Scotland might just run out of rain if we fail to elevate our criticism to systematic, strategic, collaborative action on big ticket items.

BREATHING SPACE

*Support for independence remains high, yet the SNP struggles in the polls. **Stephen Low** examines this seeming paradox and looks at the possibilities presented by the loosening of the grip of the national question on the throat of the Scottish body politic*

If you miss one opinion poll, unlike a bus, there will be another one along shortly. Regardless of pollster, they have been telling a fairly consistent story of declining support for the SNP. After 17 years in power in Holyrood, and a decade of night on complete dominance, SNP fortunes appear to be on the wane.

This decline, it should be noted, is not a response to the abrupt departure of Humza Yousaf and his replacement with the (ahem) fresh face of John Swinney. Rather it seems that Mr Yousaf was encouraged out of the door of Bute House by amongst others, according to some accounts, members of his own staff because he had failed to reverse this trend.

Perhaps surprisingly, SNP travails aren't anything to do with a drop in support for independence. Polling indicates Scotland remains almost equally divided between 'Fanboys for Freedom' and 'Bawheids for Britain' with a small but crucial number of 'don't knows' denying either side a convincing, or usually any, majority. So how then to account for the unsteadiness of the ship of which John Swinney finds himself Captain. Again.

One contributory factor might be that the prospect of independence has receded. The SNP have at every parliamentary election since 2015 promised that a vote for them will deliver another Indyref. They won these elections – but made little to no effort to fulfil this promise.

Indeed sometimes went out of their way to erect barriers; take for example Nicola Sturgeon's January 2020 speech declaring the need for (amongst other things) a constitutional convention to draw up "a new Claim of Right". This Grand Old Duke of York tactic of marching people up the Indyref hill before an election, and then down afterwards had run its course. (And I'd argue, awareness of that was the primary reason Nicola Sturgeon left when she did). The party shows little sign of knowing what to do now. The "independence strategy" motion agreed, after significant dissent from the floor at SNP conference in October lacks both credibility and coherence.

At the next election the SNP won't be able to argue that a vote for them will deliver independence. Equally, opponents will struggle to make the case that they need to be supported in order to prevent independence (a particular difficulty for the Tories for whom unionism is practically their only selling point).

Without the motivational tool of imminent independence, electoral life gets significantly more complicated for the SNP. We've seen a sign of that in the Rutherglen and Hamilton by election. This obviously took place in very difficult circumstances for the SNP, but the scale of the result surprised everyone.

Labour won, not in a seismic victory as Anas Sarwar claimed, more by default. The biggest swing on the night was from 'voter' to 'non-voter'.



(John Swinney, Humza Yousaf and Nicola Sturgeon. Credit: Andrew Milligan/PA)

This scarcely impacted on Labour whose vote dropped by a mere 700. The SNP however, were in freefall, dropping 15 376 votes. Obviously anyone saying ‘If this swing were repeated...’ after a by-election is fantasising, not forecasting. But they aren’t meaningless events either; and this one pointed to an SNP struggling to appeal.

Nor is it the case, that even if they could come up with one, a more sharply focussed Indy offer would provide a quick fix. What polling also shows is that the salience of independence as an issue has also dropped significantly. Independence supporters haven’t changed their mind but many of them are now prepared to put other issues ahead of that – things like tackling the cost of living crisis or getting rid of the Tories. Put bluntly, independence is now *an* issue rather than *the* issue.

This loosening of the grip that constitutional issues have had on the throat of the Scottish body politic might allow for the raising of voices on other matters. A breathing space where track record and policy can feature more centrally in debate about what is and what ought to be happening with present remits and powers.

A space where critiques of ‘actually existing Scotland’ might (finally) get a bit of a hearing; the extent to which current powers have and frequently haven’t been used; and, crucially, what we can do with what we’ve got.

The tide looks like it is going out on Scottish nationalism. Tides of course also come back in, and this one will be no different. One day we will once again be in a situation where the politics of nation will all but occlude the politics of class, (with, once again, passionate voices on either side of the argument denying this is what is happening).

All the more important then to use this breathing space. To prioritise developing and publicising the radical options necessary to face the multiple challenges with which a decaying capitalism presents us. Arguing against those, whatever their flag, content with a social status quo.

“The tide looks like it is going out on Scottish nationalism.”

Vinte e cinco de Abril sempre!

Fascism Never More

As Portugal celebrates in April the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, **Malky Burns**, Scottish journalist and writer, now living in Lisbon describes the background to the popular uprising and its relevance for Portugal today.



(Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon - the 50th anniversary demonstration on 25 April 2024 was one of the biggest for many years.)

Apart from the almost perennial sunshine and the heat, flying into Lisbon has some similarities with arrival at Edinburgh. You are coming to a beautiful and historic capital city on low hills sloping down to the sea, a wide estuary spanned by long and (literally) iconic bridges. One bridge is named for Vasco da Gama who established the sea route around Africa to India and the eastern hemisphere in the 15th century, making conquests and trade and forging the first truly global empire for the Portuguese crown. The other - like its 1960s sibling the Forth Road Bridge, modelled on the Golden Gate of San Francisco - is called for the date of the 'Carnation Revolution', the 25 April (Vinte e cinco de Abril).

This was the day in 1974 when an army-led coup was sprung against Portugal's repressive fascist dictatorship of almost five decades, and turned quickly into a mostly peaceful and totally irresistible popular uprising across the whole nation. People in the streets handing out carnations in celebration, putting pretty red flowers in the barrels of rifles, remains an enduring symbol of the spirit of the revolution.

The primary cause of the revolution was ever-increasing opposition to the Colonial War begun in 1961 against liberation movements in the Portuguese overseas provinces Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau in Africa.

Salazar, who took power in Portugal in a coup in 1926 and established the fascist Estado Novo (New State) in the 1930s, wanted to hold on to the remains of the empire which had been a source of wealth and prestige for the state and its corporate supporters, though not for the people.

In fact, Portugal was the poorest country in Europe, with the highest levels of illiteracy. Many people emigrated, some even walked across similarly impoverished and oppressed Spain, to find what work and life they could in France, Belgium and Luxembourg - where even today there are large Portuguese diaspora. During the dictatorship the remittances of these emigrants was a significant part of the national income.

As the 'roch wind' of anticolonialism blew through the world out of Africa in the 50s and 60s, causing other old empires to tremble and fall, Salazar insisted that Portugal would stand 'proudly alone' ('orgulhosamente sós') against it. But his Colonial War was costly, bloody and only intensified under his successor Caetano from 1968. Conscription sent thousands of young Portuguese unwillingly to war, while desperate poverty in the still mainly agrarian home population grew.

The 25 April revolution changed everything. But it was not just made on one day. The revolution came from underground, undermining the Estado Novo by active resistance. Political parties were banned by the regime and hunted by Salazar's political police the PIDE (Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado) who had informers on every street and even in many families. The PCP (Portuguese Communist Party) in particular, which was formed in 1921, maintained an effective underground organisation which extended throughout Portugal, including in the armed forces. Many - including PCP General Secretary Alvaro Cunhal - were held as political prisoners and tortured in the grim jails, notably Peniche on the Atlantic coast north of Lisbon and Tarrafal in the Cabo Verde islands, one of the West African provinces. There were famous escapes, hijackings and other militant activities. The PCP maintained its strong anticolonial position throughout.

As the situation deteriorated, army officers, many with leftist views, formed the MFA (Armed Forces Movement) which organised and delivered the coup.

In the early hours of 25 April 1974, the MFA took over communications channels including TV and radio stations, and broadcast pre-arranged signals for the uprising. The most famous was the song 'Grandola, Vila Morena' by a banned singer. Troops in a column of armoured vehicles entered Lisbon. The leaders of the coup demanded an end to the Colonial War, abolition of the PIDE and free elections in an ultimatum to Caetano. As the coup gathered pace hundreds then thousands of citizens joined the rebel army in the streets of the capital and throughout the country. From the Lisbon flower market, carnations in season were handed out to demonstrators, and became the symbol of the revolution.



(Carnations are everywhere in Portugal in April - including at school where children learn about the revolution and make their own flowers to decorate the entrance.)

Caetano fled to the barracks of the pro-regime Republican National Guard (GNR) by the ancient monastery of Carmo in the city centre. Although the coup is usually described as peaceful, four people were killed when agents of the PIDE fired on an unarmed crowd in the street. But by the end of the day the regime had fallen, Caetano was on his way to ultimate exile in Brazil, and the MFA - led by the Captains of April - held power.

One of the leftist MFA leaders, Vasco Goncalves, emerged as Prime Minister in a fractious junta and oversaw more than a year of the Processo Revolucionário Em Curso (Ongoing Revolutionary Process). Goncalves, despite counter-coup attempts from the right, nationalised huge swathes of the economy including banks, iron and steel, shipbuilding, radio and tv stations, transport and companies of the Companhia União Fabril (CUF) conglomerate which had grown under the dictatorship. Workers in cities and in the countryside took over workplaces and seized land. A new constitution committed to establishing socialism was written. The process led to the first free elections in 1976 which resulted in a minority government led by the Socialist party.

Portugal still faced many problems - inflation, unemployment, and the return of more than half a million settlers from war-torn former colonies caused an economic crisis. The Socialist government, now in coalition with the centre-right CDS, fell in 1978 after adopting an austerity programme imposed by the IMF. Governments of the right and left have come and gone ever since. Portugal joined the EEC (now the EU) in 1986, benefiting from investment in roads and infrastructure but always hamstrung by neoliberal fiscal constraints.

Fifty years on from the Carnation Revolution, Portugal still has many problems. The health service is underfunded and under pressure from privatisation - including the many private hospitals run by CUF, now owned by the heirs of the original business.

“The process led to the first free elections in 1976 which resulted in a minority government led by the Socialist party.”

There is a housing crisis with monthly rents outstripping the minimum wage of 820€. Average salaries are at the bottom of the European league, only just above Slovakia, Greece, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The most recent Socialist government fell after facing corruption allegations, and a minority centre right coalition has taken its place after elections in March. The rise of the right wing populist party Chega ('Enough') led by former TV presenter Andre Ventura has shocked the political establishments of both right and left, gaining almost 20% of the votes, including many amongst the working class and young people.

Perhaps it was that palpable shock on the left which meant the 50th anniversary demonstration in Lisbon on 25 April 2024 was the biggest seen for many years. Today's inheritors of the Carnation Revolution will need to redouble their efforts now to make a reality of the slogan echoing down the Avenida da Liberdade:

'Vinte e cinco de Abril sempre! Fascismo nunca mais!'

'25 April forever! Fascism never more!'

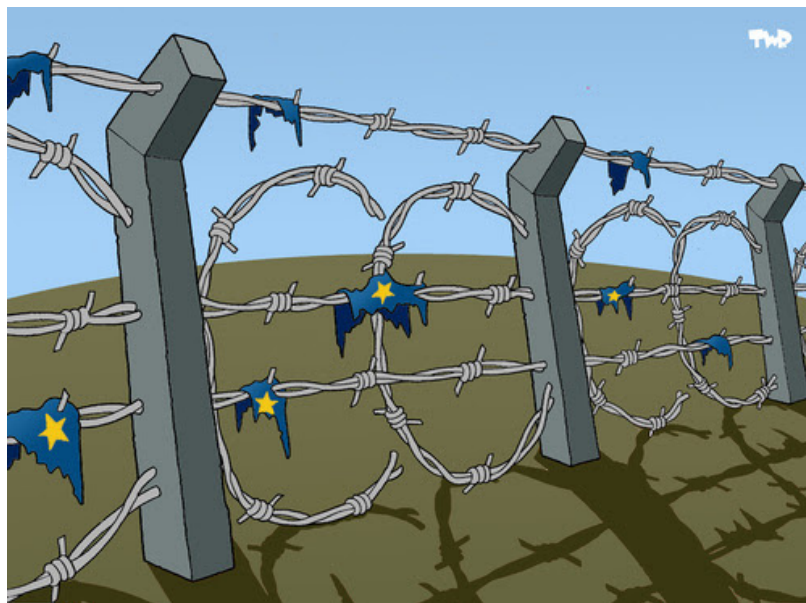
FORTRESS EUROPE

In this issue's powerful **LONG ESSAY**, **Coll McCail** details how the European Union raises the drawbridge to those fleeing Western wars at its borders.

"Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works," said Josep Borrell, the European Union's Foreign Policy chief, last year. "The rest of the world," he went on, "is not exactly a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden."

What did he mean? Where does this supposed "garden" begin and end? Look no further than the northern-eastern tip of the African continent. There, we find a seven-mile-long, 10ft high razor-wire fence surrounding the Spanish enclave city of Ceuta – the boundary between the "garden" from the "jungle".

Facing the Strait of Gibraltar, Ceuta and Melilla, a second former colonial exclave, are the only remaining African territories belonging to an EU member state.



(Credit CAEF)

In June 2022, at least 37 people were killed as they tried to scale Melilla's border fence – a massacre for which there is yet to be a credible investigation. Spanish and Moroccan police fired rubber bullets, used tear gas, and threw rocks that left hundreds injured, while Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanches accused the dead of violating Spain's "territorial integrity".

Waging war on refugees, asylum seekers and those fleeing persecution is inherent to how the EU secures the borders of its "garden".

.Between 2015 and 2021, the EU funnelled €234 million to Morocco for exactly this purpose: To guard against the threat of what Josep Borrell called "invasion".

The boundary between the "garden" and the "jungle", then, is not civilizational. Instead, it marks the reach of the EU's militarised and murderous border regime: also known as Fortress Europe.

History & 'Doorman Deals'

In the late 1980s, the Schengen Agreement relaxed the EU's internal borders. Now, people could move freely all along states that signed up to the deal – without a passport or border controls.

This was quickly followed by the Dublin Convention of 1990 which moved responsibility for processing asylum applications from the nation-state to the country through which the person had first entered the 'European space'.

The Convention insulated Europe's major players with 'entry states' on the EU's periphery, undermining the concept of 'responsibility-sharing' originally outlined in the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention. Dublin became a central part of the 'Common European Asylum System', designed, according to Brussels, to "limit the secondary movements of applicants for international protection between Member States." In clear contravention of the Refugee Convention, this placed pressure overwhelmingly on those states at the EU's southern and eastern borders, fuelling their fortification.

“The boundary between the “garden” and the “jungle”, then, marks the reach of the EU's militarised and murderous border regime: also known as Fortress Europe.”

In 2001, the Convention was derided by the UNHRC as going “against the principles of responsibility-sharing and solidarity” that the EU claimed were foundational to its migration policy. But in the Dublin Convention, the racism inherent to Fortress Europe was clear. Asked in 2018 if his country would open an asylum centre, Austrian Prime Minister Sebastian Kurz replied, “of course not we are not a first-arrival country unless people jump with parachutes.”

The border fences surrounding Ceuta and Melilla – those same border fences where migrants and refugees are now massacred – were put up following the Dublin convention. While Brussels proclaimed the advent of “borderless Europe”, investment poured into its enclosure.

In 1993, just 18 people were expelled from Ceuta and Melilla. By 1995 that figure had risen to more than 15,000. Then, Spain's Interior Minister promised to “seal off the border.”

That is when the EU began to sign 'doorman deals' with the governments of Turkey, Libya, and other African countries. In exchange for aid, these countries would stop refugees at their borders. In 2018, for example, Turkey completed a 764km concrete wall along its Syrian border, closing one of the few remaining routes for those fleeing civil war.

This came after an estimated €80 million funding injection from Brussels. €35.6 million went to the private Turkish company Otokar for the construction of armoured vehicles that patrol the Syrian border. The Turkish arms manufacturer Aselsan was paid €30 million to provide surveillance vehicles for the Greek border.

The EU's foreign aid is increasingly used to strengthen its domestic migration agenda rather than for development, outsourcing migration control to non-member states.

These policies are deadly. Since 1993, they have claimed over 48,647 human lives. Many of these tragedies came after the EU's border forces were integrated in 2005 into an institution called Frontex, which has since ballooned to extraordinary proportions. In 2005, Frontex had a budget of €6 million. By 2021, that figure had risen to €543 million.

Frontex and pushbacks

In 2022, Forensic Architecture - a research agency investigating human rights violations based at the University of London - revealed a 'systematic' and illegal campaign to brutalize and abandon asylum-seekers approaching Greek shores on the EU's southern border.

**“Since 1993,
Fortress Europe
has claimed
over 48,647
human lives.”**

These atrocities were committed with the silent consent – and participation – of Frontex and the EU. An investigation by Le Monde, Der Spiegel, and others found that, in the 18 months to September 2021, Frontex had been involved in pushing back over 950 people in the Aegean Sea.

Let's examine just one of these cases. On March 1st, 2020, 65 asylum seekers were heading across the Mediterranean on an inflatable boat off the Greek island of Lesbos. They were spotted by Frontex guards. Soon, a Lambro-type patrol vessel of the Hellenic Coast Guard attacked the migrants' boat, removing its engine and petrol tank and leaving it adrift. The group was later picked up by the Turkish Coast Guard off the coast of Babakale, Ayvacik.

Indeed, records from Frontex's own database obtained through a freedom-of-information request show at least 22 incidents in which asylum seekers were taken off dinghies, put into Greek life rafts, and left adrift at sea. This pattern led Amnesty International to describe pushbacks as a 'de facto policy' at Europe's borders. Fortress Europe turned the famous blue waters of the Aegean – the same sea that draws millions to Greece and its tourist economy – into one of the world's biggest graveyards.

The Australia Model

For those who survive the crossing, the violence does not stop. The policing of its waters is paired with a network of detention centers and open-air prisons that incarcerate those who reach Europe.

When a fire swept through the Moria camp on the island of Lesbos in 2020 and left more than 10,000 people without shelter, the EU announced its intention to fund five new Closed Controlled Access Centres on the Aegean islands. Completed in 2021, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis described the new Centre on Samos as an “impeccable camp with impeccable conditions”.

EU officials described these five new facilities as a “new generation” of refugee camps. Testimony from Samos says otherwise.

“Everyone is inside their container, nobody comes outside, everyone is depressed and sick in some way – from loneliness, from their legal situation or status, and other problems they have in their lives,” says Medhi, a 23-year-old Afghan. “We refugees are not guilty criminals, we are human, we came here with hope.”

While keeping quiet about it, Europe is effectively following the ‘Australia model’ by outsourcing detention to third countries and doing everything to keep migrants out. Fortified borders are a prerequisite for joining the European Union too. Candidate states must commit to protecting “the garden” from “invasion”. In the case of Albania, the nation’s detention center security must be upgraded. In North Macedonia, the EU has funded the construction of a new detention center. Serbia’s detention center must be upgraded to ‘fulfill European standards’.

In 2020, the European Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum introduced “a pre-entry screening that should apply to all third-country nationals”, formalizing offshore detention. In Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, and Mauritania, the EU has funded the construction of detention centers to further externalize Europe’s borders.

Meanwhile, those who have attempted to plot an alternative path have been persecuted. In September 2021, Domenico ‘Mimmo’ Lucano, the former mayor of Riace in Southern Italy, was sentenced to 13 years in prison by an Italian court.

Riace was a dying town. Between 1945 and 1988, its population fell by 75%. In 2004, Mimmo was elected mayor with a promise to welcome refugees and bring life to his town. Mimmo resettled hundreds of people during his three terms and the Riace model gained worldwide recognition. In 2018, right-wing politician Matteo Salvini used the Interior Ministry to target Mimmo. He was placed under house arrest and charged with the crime of ‘enabling illegal immigration’.

All the while, the Italian navy trained and funded the Libyan coastguard as it carried out numerous illegal “pushback” operations.

A Confluence of Flight Paths from Western War Zones

While the imperialism, economic plunder, and military intervention of Europe and the US create the conditions for mass displacement, Europe’s walls are built even higher.

Almost half the Afghan population is currently suffering from severe food insecurity and every month thousands of children are admitted for emergency medical treatment with acute malnutrition. This humanitarian crisis is the consequence of the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan in 2003. Supported by NATO and the UN, Operation Enduring Freedom acted as the blueprint for a new era of Western military intervention. Where the Western coalition claimed to build nations, they built military bases. In 2022, EU states resettled just 271 Afghan refugees. That’s 0.1% of the more than 270,000 Afghans currently in need of home.

After the US, UK, and their allies illegally invaded Iraq in 2003, those who were not killed were displaced.



(Operation Enduring Freedom begins, 2001)

20 years after the first bombs fell on Baghdad, Western forces have left only a trail of death, destruction, and destabilization – with thousands of troops still stationed in Iraq to “combat Iranian influence” in the region. Depleted uranium used in Fallujah, for example, continues to cause severe birth defects and cancer rates described as “worse than Hiroshima.”

Of those fleeing to safety during the refugee crisis of 2015, Syrians constituted around 65 percent, the overwhelming majority. This was just months after France, Germany, and the UK joined the US-led bombing campaign, ‘Operation Inherent Resolve’.

In Libya, the collapse of the Derna Dam earlier this year has now claimed tens of thousands of lives. Far from a natural disaster, this crisis is intrinsically linked to NATO’s 2011 bombing campaign that left Libya in ruins, the state unable to tend to its infrastructure, and thousands seeking refuge in Europe.

The pattern is clear. For Fortress Europe, the drawbridge must be permanently raised.

The fallacy though is this: The number of those seeking refuge in Europe pales in comparison to the millions displaced by destabilizing European military intervention over the last two decades.

Conclusion

For centuries, the West has destroyed the habitats of humanity, leaving havoc in the wake of its intervention. Now those same governments commit massacres and build prison camps for those who seek shelter from a storm of their making, what Gustavo Petro called the ‘hurricane of capital’ in his 2023 UN General Assembly Statement.

“So much the hatred has grown of the foreign, of the strange, that these prisons have even been built at sea so that these women and men cannot tread the earth of the white people, who still believe themselves to be the superior race and are nostalgic for this. Through their choices in elections, they revive the leader who said so and who killed millions as a result.

“The minutes are ticking on in defining life or death on our planet.

Rather than halting this march of time and talking about how to defend life for the future, we are deciding instead to waste our time killing each other. We have devoted ourselves to war.”

In his denunciation of the rising tide of eco-fascism, the Colombian President echoed the words of Aimé Césaire, who half a century earlier declared that “Europe is indefensible.”

In his seminal work Discourse on Colonialism, Césaire notes Europe’s ‘surprised’ and ‘indignant’ reaction to the presence of fascism on the continent. “They tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them,” writes Césaire, “that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples.”

The contemporary relevance of this analysis is striking. The fascism hiding within Europe’s borders today is the same fascism that is already present at its outer borders. The colonial violence inherent to Fortress Europe cannot be controlled.

The legitimacy this barbarism offers to the far-right cultivates fascism. Unable to justify itself before the bar of ‘reason or of ‘conscience’, Europe ‘takes refuge in a hypocrisy that is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive.’

‘Aberdeen Trades Union Council sends greetings and solidarity to all workers and communities in struggle’



EU RESPONSE TO GAZA GREEN LIGHTS ISRAEL'S SLAUGHTER

*As the death and destruction in Gaza rages on, ROSE editor **Kate Ramsden** looks at the EU response and finds it wanting.*

As Israel's brutal assault on Gaza moved into its seventh month, with no signs of let up for the Gazan people, glimmers of hope about a ceasefire continued to be elusive.

By then almost 40,000 Gazans, including more than 17,000 children were confirmed dead or buried under rubble. Gaza had been razed to the ground by Israel's bombing campaign and international protections for hospitals, UN schools, health workers, journalists, aid workers amongst others had been completely ignored.

Also gone is much of Gaza's heritage – museums, historical sites, some dating back thousands of years. An attempt, it would seem, to erase the history of Gaza and Palestine as part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing.

2 million Gazans have been displaced, most living in makeshift accommodation and tents. Their misery has been compounded by a lack of humanitarian aid.

Israel controls every route into Gaza and throughout the conflict has prevented sufficient aid from entering, depriving the population of food, water, fuel and medicines. Famine and disease has become rife with children dying of malnutrition.

In January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled, on a claim brought by South Africa, that there was a plausible case for genocide by Israel, under the terms of the 1948 Genocide Convention, drawn up after WW2 specifically to ensure that the holocaust – especially the deliberate murder of 6 million Jews - could never happen again.

The ICJ placed conditions on Israel whilst they investigate further. They ruled that Israel must “take all measures” to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid.” These too have been largely ignored.



(South Africa's Legal Team at the ICJ)

In the face of the unfolding tragedy the response of EU member states, with a few honourable exceptions, has been woeful.

From the start the EU, like the UK, has been in lockstep with the US on Gaza. A week into Israel's bombardment, when it was very clear that bombing such a highly populated area could not avoid thousands of civilian casualties, and 1900 Gazans had already been killed, Ursula von Leyen, European Commission President, visited Israel, telling Netanyahu that "Israel has the right to defend itself", thus giving it a green light to continue its assault on Gaza. It took the EU till March 2024, five months into the conflict, to support, as an EU bloc, a UN resolution for "an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire" in Gaza.

Prior to that, whilst a majority of countries voted in successive UN resolutions for a ceasefire, a small rump voted against with several abstentions.

In considering Germany's position, Konečný suggests that they justify their alignment with Israel by their historical responsibility for the Holocaust.

He states, "What is on display, however, is a stunning distortion of historical consciousness. When the memory of the Holocaust is used to downplay or justify mass killing and collective punishment of civilians in Gaza and to silence voices of protest, it is the ultimate betrayal of its historical lessons." (*The EU's Response to the Gaza War Is a Tale of Contradiction and Division – The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*)

This silencing was writ large in April 2024 when Germany detained and deported Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, distinguished Palestinian British war surgeon, who was due to speak at the Palestine Congress in Berlin. Jewish peace activists were also arrested in a clear example of police and state repression.

Ursula von Leyen, European Commission President, visited Israel, telling Netanyahu that "Israel has the right to defend itself", thus giving it a green light to continue its assault on Gaza.

There is no doubt that the EU has been deeply divided on Gaza. Martin Konečný of the European Middle East Project (EuMEP) in Brussels, identified three camps amongst EU member states; pro-Israel, what he describes as "moderate" and those in between the two camps. He includes Belgium, Spain and Ireland amongst the "moderate" grouping but points out that even they cannot be described as pro-Palestinian. Amongst the pro-Israel group, Germany and the Netherlands have continued to provide arms to Israel, despite this breaching these countries' so called "ethical" arms export policies.

Dr Abu-Sittah had recently been appointed rector of Glasgow University, after winning over 80% of the vote. This action by the German government has been condemned, including by the STUC Congress.

Recently the IJC rejected a request by Nicaragua to issue Germany orders to stop selling weapons to Israel. Germany argued a significant decrease in arms sold and claimed they are mainly defensive. However, the ICJ did not throw out the case that Germany is enabling genocide in Gaza so it will continue to be heard in the Court, and other countries who still send arms to Israel, like our own, should beware.

The EU and European governments though, do not necessarily reflect public opinion across many member states. Even in Germany a January 2024 poll showed that 61 percent of Germans said Israel's military action in Gaza was not justified given the many civilian victims.

What may also be relevant to the EU position is that they are Israel's biggest trading partner, with total trade in goods in 2022 amounting to €46.8 billion.

The EU-Israel Association Agreement contains a clause that would allow for a suspension of this trade agreement, and in March this year, more than 200 NGOs across Europe, including Oxfam, called on the EU to do just that, noting that human rights violations in Gaza "constitute a violation of the 'essential elements' clauses which state that the Agreement is conditional upon the parties' respect for human rights and democratic principles." To date no suspension has been agreed.

Most recently, shamed like other western governments by the death toll and destruction in Gaza, and as protests ramp up across towns, cities and university campuses, the EU, like the UK and the US has vowed to increase further its humanitarian aid to Gaza. Of course they know that this will do nothing to end Gaza's suffering; that the answer is to immediately cease arms supplies to Israel. That is what will bring an end to the bloodshed, to Israel's impunity to commit genocide. Anything else is virtue signalling.

“Stopping arms supplies to Israel is what will bring an end to the bloodshed, to Israel's impunity to commit genocide.”



(The National Demonstration for Palestine in Edinburgh, 18th May 2024)

THE EU AND UPSTART IMPERIALISM

Vince Mills, joint-secretary of ROSE, analyses the military alliance between the EU and the US and why cracks are beginning to appear.

It is easy to understand the concerns of those on the left who opposed Brexit on the basis that among other things it might enhance the likelihood of a regressive British foreign policy, assuming that Britain left on a wave of jingoism while still both a member of NATO and addicted to the 'special relationship' with the US, a relationship which it would be kind to describe as 'subservient'. Indeed, since Brexit, Britain's role in the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East, has been to act as the diplomatic thin end of the US wedge.

That is not to say that such subservience was not evident while Britain remained a member of the EU, but there was always a hope, by some, that perhaps the EU was big enough and progressive enough to develop a more independent position in relation to the US, and Britain might be dragged along in its "enlightened" wake.

Unfortunately, the nature and history of the EU and its relationship with US hegemony does not give much cause for optimism on that front. The EU originated in 1951 with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community by six key western European countries, notoriously, excluding the UK. Commenting on that, Bruce Carolan of the Dublin Institute of Technology notes: "...the United States was one of the principal architects of the supranational characteristics of what has developed into the European Union. Specifically, the earliest stages of European integration, which is embodied in the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty, were heavily influenced by US insistence on creation of supranational institutions that could exert dominance over sovereign European governments."

Why the US might have such a close interest in Europe, apart obviously, from its fear of the expansion of the communist bloc in that era, is given an unvarnished exposition by Claire Berlinski in Politico in 2018 in a response to Trump's questioning of the efficacy of NATO. Their interest, she tells us, was part of a grand strategy: "By design, it is led by the United States; by design, it ensures permanent U.S. military hegemony over Eurasia while uniting Europe under the US's protection. The goal of this American grand strategy is to prevent any single power from dominating the region and turning on United States and its allies."



(Joe Biden & Ursula von der Leyen)

Not that the US was able to "design" the political Europe it wanted as easily as Berlinski suggests, in the post war period. As well as the UK's reluctance, the result of a fierce post imperial hangover, France too, although happy with political integration was a good deal more awkward when it came to military partnership.

Nevertheless, and despite Brexit and despite Trump's apparent obsession of making sure European countries pay their dues before the US will allow their soldiers to die in defence of US imperial interests, it could be argued that now in 2024...

... all is going well with the US led coalition that is the EU/NATO alliance.

Indeed, the Ukraine war has accelerated the intensity of that relationship, including u-turns by Germany on energy that had caused Trump's ire. The 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO's core policy document, coming hard on the heels of the Russian invasion of Ukraine described the European Union as a "unique and essential partner for NATO". This was deepened in 2023 with the third Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation "further strengthening and expanding the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU".

However, as well as cementing its relationship with NATO, the war in Ukraine (and perhaps the probable second coming of Trump) has also intensified calls for what the European Council was already committed to and that is that "the EU needs to take strategic action on defence and increase its capacity to act autonomously".

In terms of defence, the EU is guided by the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It was established by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and it allows the EU to deploy civilian and military missions and operations abroad. The EU has launched over 30 CSDP missions since 2003. There are "9 on-going military missions/operations across Europe, Africa and the Middle East", including a Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine, offering specialised training to Ukraine's armed forces.

None of this could be seen as ruffling US feathers until 5th March this year, when EU officials set out their stall on how the EU might improve its defence capacity, with specific reference to a strategy on arms procurement.

One of the objectives of their strategy is to ensure EU governments buy fewer weapons from the US.

The idea of the EU building its own military industrial complex, however tentatively, would surely not play well with an incoming Trump Republican administration nor even a Democratic Party administration for that matter.

“Since Brexit, Britain’s role in the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East, has been to act as the diplomatic thin end of the US wedge.”

There are signs then, that despite its integration into the US world order, the EU may be trying to develop the capacity to act more autonomously in the military sphere. It remains unfortunately the case, however, given the EU's reluctance to support a ceasefire in Gaza, its bellicose stance on Ukraine and the rightwards political direction of travel in several significant EU countries, this is more likely to produce an upstart imperial rival to an ailing US, rather than a progressive beacon for the oppressed peoples of the world.

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Sends solidarity to all Unite members fighting for jobs, pay and conditions.

"It is when the experience of powerlessness is at its most acute, when history seems at its most bleak, that the determination to think like a human being, creatively, courageously and complicatedly matters the most."

*Lyndsey Stonebridge in "We Are Free To Change The World,"
quoted by Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah in his Rector Address at
Glasgow University.*