

ROSE

RADICAL OPTIONS FOR SCOTLAND AND EUROPE

Issue 4: Summer 2025

BRIAN LEISHMAN MORE THAN TIMID WORDS

RHONA MICHIE EXPOSING THE ARMS INDUSTRY

EDDIE MCGUIRE..... NO TO CONSCRIPTION!

SOPHIE BOLT UNITE TO STOP RISING MILITARISM

And Much More on 'War and Peace' Inside.

For Public Ownership and Democratic Control

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EDITORIAL:

Bringing the Scottish Left Together

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

Perhaps it is only because we know more and see more on our TV and phone screens, but the world certainly feels more dangerous these days, with global-scale threats including war, climate change, nuclear proliferation, cyber threats, and emerging technologies. The genocide in Gaza, the continuing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the civil war in Sudan and numerous other armed conflicts and emerging threats, including the recent tensions between India and Pakistan, have created heightened levels of instability and uncertainty.

In recognition of this, issue 4 of the ROSE magazine has the theme “War and Peace”. It’s a sign of the times that there are more articles about war than about peace. Our contributors look at key areas of conflict across the world and analyse how the drive to militarisation within Europe and the UK, and the increased spending on warfare as opposed to addressing social ills such as poverty, homelessness and health inequalities, impacts both locally and globally; and whose interests it serves.

A chilling piece by Rhona Michie lifts the lid on the arms industry, its drive to profit and its insidious capture of our political and media institutions. We have analyses from Sophie Bolt, Brian Leishman and Payam Solhtalab on three of the current global conflicts, in Ukraine, Gaza and Yemen. All highlight the terrible impact on the civilian population and condemn this UK Government’s role in worsening these crises by either its intervention or its failure to act.

“The drive to war cannot be divorced from the growing inequality that has followed on from austerity and has created so much misery here and across the world.”

An article on the disproportionate impact of war on women looks at women as victims of violence and displacement, but also their roles in supporting war torn communities and promoting peace.

Closer to home we have a long essay by Coll McCail on Fortress Scotland setting out the alarming and growing militarisation on our own shores. An article by Vince Mills addresses the question of whether the increase in defence spending does in fact create economic growth, and a piece by Stephen Low finds parallels with Thatcher’s time as he critiques Labour’s attempts to reshape the economy through warfare.

So that is war. What of peace?

There is no doubt from the contributions that this is a more challenging concept. In his piece Drew Gilchrist looks at the role of the unions and condemns their failure to more fully embrace the peace movement. He challenges them to step up to the mark in promoting solidarity across borders. Arthur West sets out what the Scottish peace movement is doing in the face of financial and business interests invested in a never-ending cycle of war, with all the human cost that this brings.

And as conscription again rears its head, Eddie Maguire takes us back through history to the last time this came onto the domestic agenda, when young people joined together to stand up against it and won.

All in all this issue of ROSE magazine is pretty bleak given the world we live in and the huge profits to be made by global capitalists from the war machine. However, setting out the problems is a necessary pre-requisite for finding solutions and most of the articles also set out what must be done to shift the drive from warfare and militarisation to policies and economic drivers that promote social justice and peace.

That is undoubtedly the challenge for the left, and it cannot be divorced from the growing inequality that has followed on from austerity and has created so much misery here and across the world.

It is all part of the same neoliberal agenda and again highlights the urgent need for the left to stand together in the interests of our class.

We thank all our contributors once again for their thought-provoking analyses and their support for ROSE. We once again encourage our readers to consider writing a piece for us consistent with our vision “for public ownership and democratic control.” We hope you find this an informative and interesting issue that both prompts reflection and offers a way forward for the left.

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EXPOSING THE GLOBAL ARMS INDUSTRY AND THE DRIVE TO WAR

Rhona Michie, Director of Projects and Planning at Shadow World Investigations paints a chilling picture of how the global arms industry operates and how, shrouded in national-security-imposed secrecy, it undermines democracy, the rule of law and good governance while making the world less safe.

At the end of February, Keir Starmer announced a plan to increase military spending by £13.4bn a year by 2027.

Less than a month later, the EU issued a White Paper for European Defense Readiness, enabling spending of over €800 billion to “strengthen the defence industry”.

The UK government praised the EU for “stepping up” in a “dangerous new era” and described its own commitments as a way to bring security and - bonus - a much-needed economic boost.

In the real world, this so-called “economic boost” has meant devastating cuts to UK welfare and international aid. Consequently, military spending will shoot to 10 times that of international aid, and 4.4 times the amount spent on the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero. In the face of the threats of global inequality and climate breakdown, this prioritisation that has been lauded as a security measure will only continue to make the world far less safe.

State-led spending or private broker profits?

The majority of arms spending goes directly to private contractors. In fact, 40% of military equipment spending goes to just ten companies, often through non-competitive contracts. So who exactly will be benefitting from this 'economic boost'? Continued and expanding military spending has supported only 0.83% of the UK workforce but has been transformative for arms shareholder profits.

In order to justify this unsustainable and unproductive growth, the public's consent needs to be manufactured: by emphasising (real or imagined) constant foreign threats to our national security and by fostering a culture that prioritises that national security over the kind of safety that all humans hold equal claim to.

National security interests and profit interests have become so interwoven that it is arguable that government and industry no longer function as separate entities. Private arms companies are allowed unprecedented access to all levels of policy and decision-making.

Government funding for private research, development and equipment costs pave the way for millions of pounds exchanging hands through shareholder profits, arms deals, and bribes. Such arms deals are supposedly scrutinised in the UK to ensure that they follow national and international arms export control laws.

However, in practice, Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) have shown that the UK system is typically a permissive system that allows the vast majority of arms companies open license to export to countries that the UK has a strategic relationship with. These relationships overpower any evidence or concern regarding conflict and human rights abuses that may be carried out using the very same weapons and demonstrates the blurring of lines between government and private interests.

The military-industrial(-bureaucratic) complex

The book *Monstrous Anger of the Guns: how the global arms trade is ruining the world and what we can do about it* refers not just to the military-industrial-complex but extends the concept to become the military-industrial-bureaucratic-academic complex, a term coined by one of the book's editors, Professor Paul Rogers. The expansion of this term is an attempt to demonstrate how pervasive the values of militarism are in our society. Almost any institution with established influence over British society, including the media, has been integrated into a heavily militarised culture, and is complicit in perpetuating it. This culture of "security" is dominated by a small group of individuals, with a culture entrenched in masculinist and white supremacist values.

"40% of military equipment spending goes to just ten companies, often through non-competitive contracts."

The system that fosters this culture is established in such a way that traditional routes of accountability have eroded. Court cases have little sway when verdicts that restrain the government are *ignored* and loopholes are written into the law. Reports from the inside present a grim picture: former FCDO official Mark Smith wrote that decisions were "made behind closed doors" and that all efforts to raise concerns about the use of British arms were blocked. He describes what he experienced as "systemic dysfunction" - but the question is not one about dysfunction, but instead who it does function for. For a select few, the system is working perfectly. For the rest, this modus operandi is just how it's done.

This culture, as Paul Rogers writes extensively, reduces international relations to a narrow focus on defending the realm with no regard to social or ecological threats.

While the arms trade is one of the most corrupt industries on earth (with bribes even approved by the Ministry of Defence themselves) it does not only rely on direct bribery to survive. In all levels of the system, the allure of power and of “belonging to the club” allows a militarised mindset to take hold.

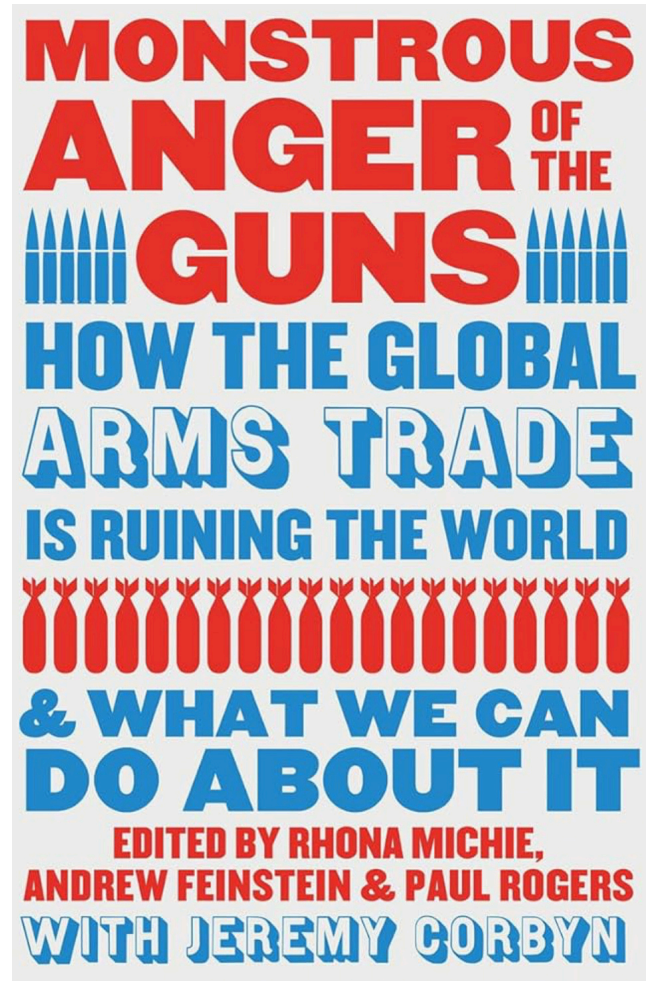
This mindset, when it is embedded into the very fabric of decision-making in society, promotes violent policy agendas and budget priorities. This violence is felt both overseas and at home. Abroad, it translates to an endless array of fighter jets, missiles and guns, often used against civilians and political dissidents. In the UK, regular cuts to disability and welfare, as well as increases in police powers, have become the norm. The result of both is that ordinary people suffer due to political choices they have no power over and have limited pathways to hold decision-makers to account.

So what can we do about it?

It is with this in mind that the *Monstrous Anger of the Guns* was created. As editors and authors, we not only wanted to create an introduction to the arms trade, how it works, and what its impacts were, but more than that, wanted to create a toolkit that could be used to fight back.

“... culture of “security” is dominated by a small group of individuals, with a culture entrenched in masculinist and white supremacist values.”

The book features chapters from a range of activists, campaigners, journalists and academics who work to dismantle the arms trade and the pervasive militarism that underpins it.



Mass protest, industrial action, student campaigns and legal action are all tools we have at our disposal - and they are more effective when they work together.

The goal is to unravel threads of a system that is dependent on our consent to survive. If we can work in coalition with others to build an alternative vision for society, we can withdraw this consent and build towards a more just and peaceful world.

‘Monstrous Anger of the Guns: how the arms trade is destroying the world’ is available directly from Pluto Press or from most independent or other book suppliers.

You can support Shadow World Investigations’ next book project, ‘Making a Killing: How the West Profits from Slaughter in Yemen and Gaza’, online at shadowworldinvestigations.org/support-our-work.

“IT’S ALL WE WERE SKILLED IN ...”

*ROSE member, **Stephen Low** finds an eerie parallel between Keir Starmer’s plans and a song from the 1980s in this critique of the Labour government’s proposals to reshape the economy through warfare*

It came as something of a surprise to be listening to a speech by Keir Starmer and be reminded of Elvis Costello. It is though what I found myself doing as I sat at Scottish Labour Conference in Glasgow.

At face value they really don’t really have much in common; what with one of them bestriding the international stage and being held in huge respect by his peers, and the other being Keir Starmer; and of course Mr C’s dad was a musician rather than a maker of tools.

It wasn’t the contrast in how entertaining each of them is either. In saying that I’m not trying to suggest Sir Keir isn’t much of a singer.

I’ve no idea about his vocal capacity and, frankly, no desire to find out. Elvis though manages a between song patter that’s sharp, witty and often on point about current affairs. No one however, not even those inclined to feel more charitably about the PM than I’m ever likely to, is going to accuse him of being a compelling orator.

No, the comparison came in a manner Tony Benn would have approved of, from the politics not the personalities, as the PM declared his intention that one of Costello’s songs becomes a bedrock of his government’s policy; and with the Strategic Defence Review we see Sir Keir being, uncharacteristically, true to his word.

Readers of a certain vintage may be aware of a Costello number “Shipbuilding”. This is a bleak and bitter ballad written shortly after the Falklands War as Mrs Thatcher’s government were in the process of destroying more of Britain’s industrial capacity than the Hitler’s Luftwaffe had managed.

The song is a sparsely stark depiction of the situation faced by the labour force discarded in that economic reconstruction; being given the prospect of work only by the prospect of war.

“Within weeks they’ll be re-opening the shipyard
And notifying the next of kin, once again.”

It’s a marvellous song. It shouldn’t be a policy. Sir Keir though begs to differ. To a somewhat bemused, and only half full hall, he declared:

“We have to be ready to play our role if a force is required in Ukraine once a peace agreement is reached. And we have to be ready to reshape our economy with industrial policy, to stand up for Ukraine, to stand up for Europe, but most of all to stand up for our security because Ukraine is vital to us.”



The economy then is to be reshaped. Not to tackle inequality or rebuild our crumbling institutions or provide better life chances for our young people – but to ensure that we are capable of sending people to fight on foreign soil to protect something that isn't theirs.

Costello seems to have seen this coming;

"It's just a rumour that was spread around town

A telegram or a picture postcard

Within weeks they'll be re-opening the shipyard

And notifying the next of kin

Once again"

The paucity, and not to say danger of this (ahem) vision is obvious. Preparation for war abroad diverts resources from tackling issues at home – and in terms of generating economic growth it is by far the least effective way of spending public money.

"Mrs Thatcher's government were in the process of destroying more of Britain's industrial capacity than the Hitler's Luftwaffe had managed."

It is a strategy that leaves all of our current crises untackled in pursuit of a new one.

"Diving for dear life, when we could be diving for pearls."

KEY ROLE FOR SCOTTISH TRADE UNIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

*Here **Drew Gilchrist**, of the ROSE Editorial team, highlights why we must link the industrial struggle with the struggle for international peace, and the key role the trade union movement have in bringing them together.*

"History repeats itself first as tragedy, second as farce."

The development of a peace policy is nothing new to the Scottish trade union movement. It has been just over 100 years since the Red Clydeside, when people across Glasgow organised and mobilised the forces of the working class and labour movement for Peace and against the first world war. This was a movement that was not just built by activists like John McLean, Willie Gallagher, Helen Crawford and Mary Barbour, but by organising trade union members in workshops and factories across Glasgow and showing the industrial struggle for better pay, terms and conditions and job security as part of a wider struggle for peace and against the widespread horrors and slaughter of the battlefields in Europe.

It is important to remember however, the official position of the wider labour and trade union movement contrasted the reality of the working class in Glasgow. Shamefully the leadership of the movements supported the calls for war and supported the government and its efforts to increase production of munitions and supply to the frontline in the interest of protecting jobs and full employment.



It is from this dialectical contrast between the leadership of the organised labour movement and the working class as a whole that it was a necessity for workers to fight and argue within their own organised structures and wider society for a policy that would not just protect jobs and pay but also guarantee genuine victories in securing increases in pay, shorter hours and better living standards while simultaneously hindering the efforts of the government to continue the war and ultimately end the bloodshed.

The position we find ourselves in today is one of a weakened trade union movement. We must properly analyse how historically our movement reached this point and what are the necessary steps required to lift the structures out of a managed decline. Scores of pamphlets, essays, articles and books have been written to address these issues. However, what I want to look at is the importance of linking the industrial struggle and the struggle for international peace; and both the challenges that will be faced and the tactics required to bridge the contradiction between the labour movement and the peace movement.

“We must build confidence and gain legitimacy within the working class as a force for social development rather than stagnation.”

The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions has called on the international movement to mobilize its membership to take a courageous stand against the genocide in Gaza and “to deepen the occupation’s isolation and strengthen global solidarity with the struggle of our [Palestinian] people”. Many have answered this call, the dock workers unions in Africa and across Europe have taken action to stop the flow of weapons and disrupt the financial networks that finance the bombing of Gaza. In the face of international organised workers mobilising effectively what then has the British trade union movement done to support our brothers and sisters across the globe?

We have allowed ourselves to be guided by the same ideology and doctrine that was dominant in the leadership during the crisis of 1914, in that we take direction from the owners of weapons manufacturing companies and the government that the increase in production is ultimately good for our membership, neglecting completely our responsibility to organise, agitate and mobilise to protect peace. Is this a purely British phenomenon? Absolutely not. However as we have seen in Belgium recently, when workers mobilised for a general strike against attacks on pensions, an industrial issue, they can also make the link between their government's financial backing of wars in Ukraine and the Middle East with attacks on living standards. Quotes from Belgian picket lines echo this sentiment.

"They claim there's no money left for our pensions, yet they find billions for war while our companies rake in huge profits. It's not that the money isn't there—they just refuse to take it from where it is."

It is this narrative that is key to linking the peace movement with organised workers in the armament sector. To show the link between attacks on democracy, living standards, pay, terms of conditions and job security with international imperialism's drive to war will allow the peace movement to begin the conversation required to build an effective strategy.

The groundwork has already begun in an area of the trade union movement that has somewhat been forgotten. Trades councils have taken up the banner within the official structures of the movement and have successfully been putting across arguments for demilitarisation, cuts to defence spending and for building a program for the redistribution of wealth, the nationalisation of key Industries, and the destruction of the death grip that capital has over the nation.

This development could only come from trades councils as a centre within their localities, where workers across all sectors can come together to build effective programs for the protection of communities against cuts, poor housing and poverty. They act as a crucial link that so far the Palestine movement has needed in order to even begin a conversation with armament workers and their unions.

The key as always for trade unionists is activity; to be active within their unions putting across the arguments for peace as well as in their communities building strong anti-cuts movements and showing necessity for a joined up political, industrial and social strategy. The only way to change the national union positions is to bring the membership along with us, show workers that by fighting to save their communities and organizing within their workplaces, massive victories can be won. We must build confidence and gain legitimacy within the working class as a force for social development rather than stagnation.



“We must address the failure of the trade union leadership to mobilize effectively a wider campaign for social change”

This is what led to the victories of the Red Clydesiders and the success of the Rolls Royce workers in East Kilbride. We must address the failure of the trade union leadership to mobilize effectively a wider campaign for social change. In a word, for Socialism.



As Willie Gallacher, Scottish trade unionist and Communist MP said, “If we are to get peace and freedom and an end to the conditions that promote the growth of armaments and war preparations, then it is necessary to change the whole character of property relations in this and other European countries. If the people are to be saved – and we are for the defence and welfare of the people, first, last, and all the time – then there has got to be formed a Government of the People”.

MORE THAN TIMID WORDS NEEDED TO END BLOODSHED IN GAZA

***Brian Leishman**, MP analyses historical roots of the current situation in Gaza and demands action from the UK government to end the decades long suffering of the Palestinian people, including an end to the arms trade with Israel*

The current humanitarian situation in Palestine needs to be analysed through a historical lens, because the intense suffering being felt by its people started decades ago.

This treatment did not start in October 2023. Indeed, for Palestinians the Nakba – translated from Arabic as “the catastrophe” – has been felt as a collective trauma for decades. From the mass dispossession of the Palestinian people in 1947/48 to the present day, ethnic cleansing has been a constant.

The seizing of land and homes, the forced displacement, the destruction of civic, educational, cultural and religious infrastructure which are all protected by international conventions and treaties to which our country is a committed signatory, are all examples of settler colonialism and Israeli government authorised apartheid that has normalised the removal of the local population through ethnic cleansing.

For decades, the international community has looked away and ignored the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The sheer scale of that suffering experienced by Palestinians in the Nakba of 1948 is hard to comprehend. In 1948, approximately 750,000 people – half of Palestine’s predominantly Arab population – were expelled from their homes and had to flee their communities. Being forced into exile is not a new occurrence for Palestinians.

Over 500 villages were destroyed and those Palestinians that did attempt to return to their homes were blocked from doing so. The truth is that Israel was created through displacement and dispossession, often by force.

Another truth is that the United Kingdom has been an all too willing accomplice in that very process.

Our role as the former colonial power in Palestine, issuing and implementing the Balfour Declaration of 1917, presiding over the dispossession and disenfranchisement of the Palestinian people has incurred a historical debt. A debt which continues to grow the longer we refuse to stand up for the inalienable rights of Palestinians.

“The world has watched on and has failed to stop the barbarism”

From the 1940s to the present day, ethnic cleansing has been continuous. It is the daily struggle as a result of the colonisation of the Palestinian people. The Israeli historian Ilan Pappé described it perfectly when he wrote “Palestine’s blood never dried”.

Pappé was right to highlight that ethnic cleansing has not been about rare instances of extremity as it indeed has been a defining feature of the colonial subjugation of Palestinians each and every day since 1948.



The seizing of land and possessions, the violence, the refusal to recognise culture and basic human rights, the imprisonment without trial, the apartheid and now the blocking of water, food, medicine – and even a fire engine donated by the Fire Brigade Union of Scotland to the people of Gaza when the Palestinian people need it most – are all examples of settler colonialism that sees the removal of the local population through ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Yet still, the international community stands by and allows all this to happen.

Parliament may declare its concern and upset, saying Israel's actions are unacceptable. However, a whole lot more needs to happen than the timid words of condemnation about the Israeli government's belligerent and truculent actions that have inflicted death and destruction.

There has been a shift from Israel – gone are the days of hiding the criminal and inhumane actions its government perpetrated. The annexation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocidal behaviours they have committed have been flagrant and unabated. The world has watched on and has failed to stop the barbarism of Netanyahu's government.

The fragile ceasefire which collapsed in March had been in name only. The killing and attempted eradication of the Palestinian people will not stop, not as long as Israel's murderous actions are supported by Washington DC and while the world stays silent. Meanwhile, Israel has left a landscape of death and destruction in Gaza.

“Leadership and morality have not been forthcoming from our government.”



Leadership and morality have not been forthcoming from our government either. Not when we continue selling arms to Israel. Not when we continue to provide the weapons and intelligence that is being used in the attempted eradication of a people.

Stopping arms sales to Israel, achieving the release of all hostages, brokering an end to the killing with a lasting ceasefire, making sure that life saving humanitarian aid reaches those people in dire need and creating a safe Israel alongside a rebuilt prosperous and free Palestine should be the goals the UK looks to achieve.

And that means a free Palestine that is not an open-air prison shoehorned into a confined area but a real nation with its people free of the relentless Nakba and persecution it has been the victim of for generations.

That means a two-state solution which starts with our government recognising Palestine, stopping the arms sales, halting trade with and banning goods from illegal settlements and reviewing our diplomatic, economic and military relations so that we do not assist or empower Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

NO TO CONSCRIPTION!

*Although the UK Labour government insists it has no plans for conscription, a research briefing on this topic in the House of Commons library and increased military spend has raised fears that it could again be on the cards. **Eddie McGuire**, ROSE member here describes how in 1963/64 young people successfully saw off the threat.*

As the build-up of NATO forces in Europe continues, its member countries are increasing military spending and the number of personnel in their armed forces. Ten of the 32 NATO members already have conscription. Others are set to follow. In June last year the US House of Representatives passed a bill requiring men aged from 18 to 26 to be automatically registered for draft conscription. Just weeks before, Rishi Sunak set out plans to introduce National Service for 18 year old males and females. Will the Starmer Government pursue that plan? In March a Research Briefing was published for the House of Commons Library laying the groundwork for such plans “Conscription and National Service in the UK.”

The media have set this warlike mood – as The Independent put it “Britons face call-up to armed forces if UK goes to war with Russia”. And on BBC News we saw “UK citizen army: Preparing the 'pre-war generation' for conflict”.

Militarisation

Is it possible to resist the militarisation of society, the road to war and the drafting of younger generations into the armed forces? How do we stop militarisation and keep Britain out of war? One answer is that youth are quite capable of not only acquiring the skills necessary to work in a Britain revived industrially and culturally, but of taking a leading role in developing such opposition.

Mass conscription for British armed forces in World War One was introduced in 1916 as volunteering and enthusiasm for fighting fell off. That led to resistance from conscientious objectors and “war resisters”. Conscription ended in 1920 but was fully revived in 1939 at the outbreak of World War Two when there was clearly a threat of invasion.

Postwar, conscription continued with the Labour government introducing peacetime conscription in 1948. Military campaigns against various struggles for colonial freedom continued through the 1950s. Conscripts saw action in Malaya, Cyprus, Kenya, Aden and Borneo as well as in the 1956 Suez Crisis. Conscription formally ended in December 1960. The last conscripted serviceman left the British armed forces in May 1963.

Harold Macmillan, the Conservative prime minister, resigned in October 1963 in the wake of the Profumo Affair, but his party hung on in government until the general election a year later. Whether as a distraction or through real need, their policy discussions during that period frequently cited the armed forces as being under strength – raising the prospect of the reintroducing of conscription.



Alarm

They goaded the opposition Labour Party into appearing to support conscription, pointing to that party's then opposition to nuclear weapons. All of this talk caused alarm among young men who were not minded to be drafted. Britain's commitments to NATO then included contributing 55,000 personnel. Speaking in parliament in the Number of Land Forces debate on 5 March 1964 - in a debate about the size of the army - the Secretary of State for War James Ramsden pointed to the difficulty of providing such numbers.



Referring to the total army strength of 171,588 he said, 'We have got to make good the shortages and especially build up the infantry'. The resolution passed that day called for an army strength of 229,000. Antagonism to the USSR featured in the reasoning, as well involvement in colonial conflicts.

Marcus Lipton, Labour MP for Brixton, saw no problem. He is quoted in Hansard as saying 'If we have to meet our N.A.T.O. commitments and our Commonwealth commitments at one and the same time and give both an equal degree of priority, what we need is 30,000 men a year more than we have at present. Some 370,000 men reach the age of 18 every year, and if it were possible by some easy, simple device to pull 10,000 out of the 370,000 and put them in the Army, the problem from the point of view of the Minister of Defence and the Secretary of State for War would be very much simpler.'

But Emrys Hughes (Labour MP for South Ayrshire, a conscientious objector in WW1 and a critic of his party's policy on war) wasn't keen. He had pointed out, referring to the forthcoming general election, "But then we hear that after the election, when one of the parties is in power, there is to be some kind of gentlemen's agreement, as my hon. friend the hon. Member for Dudley [George Wigg, later a Labour minister and peer] calls it, under which the two parties will unite in imposing some kind of selective service on the people."

Defeating conscription

Is such collusion happening today? We must assume so. On 28 March this year a Research Briefing was published for the House of Commons Library which laid the groundwork for consensus on the issue while not immediately introducing conscription. See [Conscription and National Service in the UK](#) (House of Commons Library site).

Back in 1963/64 just over a year of such talk was enough to galvanise youth into action. A large demonstration, held in George Square in February 1963, kicked off the campaign – and I managed to capture the scene in a photo. By Autumn 1964 we find slogans such as the one advertising a demonstration against conscription, written with a block of chalk on the sandstone wall of the Western Infirmary in Glasgow, which remained there for over 50 years, fading gradually. Chalked by a short lived organisation Youth Against the Bomb which I joined that year, it simply said "No Conscription – George Square Sat October 10." A sizeable turnout filled the central square, a mixture of youth and trade unionists, many with experience of protesting against the presence of American nuclear bases on the Clyde during the previous few years. Similar protests were held around Britain.

That 1964 demonstration was five days before the Harold Wilson Labour Government assumed power. Pressure was kept up and 'conscription' never saw the light of day.

A longer version of this article was published in Workers Journal in July 2024.

“Pressure was kept up and 'conscription' never saw the light of day.”

REBUILDING FORTRESS SCOTLAND

*In this long essay, **Coll McCail**, member of the ROSE Editorial Group looks at Scotland's increased militarisation prior to and under an SNP government and how the current policy of the UK Labour for military expansionism is changing the face of our country even more.*

Last November, Scottish investigative outlet the Ferret revealed that the United States had established its first new military presence in Scotland since the turn of the century. After a £350 million refurbishment, the Royal Air Force (RAF) base at Lossiemouth in the country's northeast now plays host to a US Navy detachment of anti-submarine warplanes. This revelation was the latest in a string of stories that highlight how Scottish sovereignty has been bypassed to aid Washington's foreign policy objectives in the North Atlantic. In 2022, the Scottish government-owned Glasgow Prestwick Airport, previously used as a stopover for CIA rendition flights at the height of the "war on terror," carried out almost a thousand refueling operations for US military flights.

Months before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, one RAF vice-marshal observed that "Scotland is very much the forward base in the UK for maritime operations as we perceive them, with NATO's forward strategy of prosecuting any war which might occur in the Norwegian Sea." Indeed, Scotland's place on NATO's northern flank saw a total of more than forty thousand US military personnel – and ten nuclear submarines – dispatched to the country throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Today, as Washington's new Cold War looks to preserve the power of its waning empire, Scotland's resurgent military-industrial complex – and supplicant domestic political class – once again stands ready to serve.

After World War II, as successive British governments latched themselves to America's bloody drive for global hegemony, Atlanticism was woven into Scotland's story. In 1964, Alexander MacIntyre of Strone designed a "Polaris military" tartan for the US naval officers stationed on the Firth of Clyde.

Polaris, the British state's first nuclear weapons program, was obtained from the Kennedy administration in 1963 and stored at Faslane on Scotland's west coast – though it remained almost entirely under NATO command.

The presence of Polaris brought Scotland into the calculations of a Cold War that often ran deadly hot for the people of the Global South. The price of the submarine-based weapons was discounted in 1966 by \$14 million following Britain's agreement to lease the Pacific island of Diego Garcia to the US military after the ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of the Chagos Islands' two thousand inhabitants.

Faslane, however, was just one part of the military architecture that Malcolm Spaven labelled "Fortress Scotland" in 1983. The white sands of Machrihanish, immortalized by Paul McCartney's ballad "Mull of Kintyre," played host to US nuclear depth charges. The village of Arrochar, a busy destination for Scotland's mountaineers, sat just a few miles from one of the largest weapons stocks in Western Europe. Created on NATO's behalf in 1962, at its peak DM Glen Douglas's 650 acres stored up to forty thousand tons of munitions. Dalgety Bay, a small town on Scotland's east coast, was only cleared of radium in 2023 after radioactive particles from scrapped World War II aircraft were found to have contaminated the area in 1990.

"Atlanticism was woven into Scotland's story."

Today the Ministry of Defence (MoD) owns 64,900 hectares of Scottish land, which is roughly double the combined holding of Scotland's thirty-two local councils. Polaris's successor, the Trident nuclear program, is still based at Faslane and remains dependent on the United States. In September 2024 — months after a Trident missile misfired and crashed into the ocean during a rare test launch — Keir Starmer's new Labour government amended Britain's Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA) with Washington. The clause stipulating that the MDA must be approved by parliament every ten years was expunged. All references to an "expiry date" have been removed "to make the entirety of the MDA enduring," reported Declassified UK. Scotland may no longer be home to thousands of American soldiers, but the role of the world's hegemon in Britain's national security remains as central as ever.



This proliferation of military bases, ammunition stores, and training camps has always sat uncomfortably beside Scotland's place in the popular imagination. Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* becomes a lot less stirring when one considers Caledonia's contemporary imperial significance. The tranquility of the Isle of Lewis is disturbed when one remembers the clouds of bubonic plague that exploded above its beaches during the Churchill government's biological weapons tests in 1953. The northwest coast's rugged beauty is blighted when one is reminded that the Royal Navy dropped three one-thousand-pound bombs at Kyle of Durness as recently as 2011.

"The bonnie, bonnie, banks of Loch Lomond are famed in song," wrote veteran peace campaigner Brian Quail in 2004, "but few who take the high road towards the 'steep steep slopes of Ben Lomond' realise that among the traffic hazards they may face en route are convoys carrying nuclear bombs, which regularly share the same road. Or that they are a few miles from the biggest arsenal of nuclear bombs in Europe — Coulport, a short hike away over the moors to Loch Long." In his song "As I Walked Down the Road," folk singer Dick Gaughan recalled making that very journey:

"I felt so sad just standing there,
In a place I'd once loved well
Now used without permission asked
To house the very teeth of hell
But all those folk who strive for peace
My heart went out to all of them
Their struggle's on, it musn't cease."

Seen in the context of perpetual military expansion, the return of US soldiers to Scottish shores is hardly a surprise. Indeed, it is tempting to understand such developments as a London imposition north of the English border — and sometimes this is the case. With defence remaining under Westminster's control, the Scottish government was not consulted by the MoD about their agreement to station US warplanes at RAF Lossiemouth — not that the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP) voiced any complaint.

There was once a time, not so long ago, when Scottish nationalists sat at the forefront of Scotland's antiwar movement. In 1969, two years after her historic by-election victory in the traditional Labour heartland of Hamilton, the SNP MP Winnie Ewing told the House of Commons that the Polaris nuclear program was "immoral in its intrinsic nature." Four decades later, riding a wave of mass opposition to Tony Blair's illegal invasion of Iraq, the SNP won the opportunity to form its first minority government in the Scottish Parliament. Popular and institutional antiwar sentiment was central to the twentieth-century development of Scottish nationalism. However, these days are long gone.

Since the SNP took power in Edinburgh, its eighteen-year tenure has been marked less by a challenge to the military-industrial complex than by the warm embrace of Western foreign policy. In 2012, the party abandoned its opposition to NATO membership after a determined campaign by the SNP's then defence spokesperson Angus Robertson.

"In the twelve months up to November 2024 alone, £2.5 million of taxpayers' money was awarded by the Scottish government's arms-length funding body to major weapons companies."

hile their antinuclear position was retained, the credibility of the SNP's opposition to Trident was irreversibly undermined by their endorsement of a first-strike nuclear alliance. In March 2022, six months after she called for NATO troops to remain in Afghanistan for "as long as is necessary," then first minister Nicola Sturgeon suggested that NATO should implement a no-fly zone over Ukraine following Russia's invasion, risking catastrophic escalation.

This trajectory was interrupted in April 2023 by Nicola Sturgeon's resignation. Later that year, her successor Humza Yousaf attracted well-deserved praise for his courageous defence of the Palestinian people as Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip began. Yousaf deviated from the Western consensus to call for an end to the bombing and an immediate arms embargo. His thirteen-month tenure, however, was the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, just months after Yousaf left office, Angus Robertson — now responsible for the SNP's upcoming Scottish election campaign — secretly met with Israel's deputy ambassador to discuss "unique commonalities" between Scotland and Israel, including energy and culture.

What's more, as first minister, Yousaf proved unable to sever the Scottish government's extensive public subsidies for arms companies complicit in Israel's crimes. In the twelve months up to November 2024 alone, £2.5 million of taxpayers' money was awarded by the Scottish government's arms-length funding body to major weapons companies, including BAE Systems, Boeing, Thales, and Leonardo. While the SNP claimed to operate a human-rights-based approach to foreign policy, Scottish Enterprise funded thirteen arms manufacturers to the tune of £8.2 million between 2019 and 2023.

The centrality of the arms industry to what little remains of Scotland's industrial base has long seen these subsidies left unquestioned. British military expenditure, according to the MoD, supports some 12,200 jobs in Scotland across nine separate sites.

While the phrase “just transition” is now common parlance among Scottish Government ministers in the context of North Sea oil and gas workers, no such attention has been paid to diversification away from the defence industry — or the worker-led economic alternatives envisioned by the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders of the 1970s. Under the guise of behaving as “a good global citizen,” the SNP has time and again serviced the interests of imperialism, betraying the political currents that brought Scottish nationalism out of the wilderness in the twentieth century.

The last twelve months have revived Scotland’s antiwar movement as thousands have taken to the streets to challenge their politicians’ complicity in the massacre of the Palestinian people.

Tactical discussions have developed on how to form bonds between workers and campaigners to confront the military-industrial complex and initiate a new phase of resistance to war at home and abroad.

For inspiration, we need not look further than a little songbook produced at the height of the anti-Polaris movement. “Paper Hankies” sung to the tune of “Yankee Doodle Dandy” by the peace campaigners of the 1960s, urges Scots to

“Chase the Yankees out the Clyde,
Away wi Uncle Sammy;
Chase the Yankees out the Clyde,
And send them hame to mammy.”



LABOUR MOVEMENT MUST UNITE TO STOP RISING MILITARISM

Sophie Bolt, General Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) describes the UK and Europe’s dangerous move to militarism and calls on the Labour movement to mobilise in opposition.

The horrific conflict in Ukraine has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers, displaced over ten million Ukrainian people and wreaked economic chaos, driving poverty globally. It has also increased the risk of nuclear weapons once again being used in war.

Yet governments in Britain and across Europe are now pushing ahead with huge increases in military spending to fundamentally reshape their economies in order to prepare for another world war.

These massive spending hikes are being justified by the likes of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer who are whipping up international tensions around Ukraine.

In March, as talks to secure a ceasefire continued, both Starmer and British Defence Secretary, John Healey, threatened Russia with Britain’s nuclear weapons, wheeling out a British Rear Admiral to boast that just one nuclear submarine can cause the ‘incineration of 40 Russian cities’.



Just last month, Starmer performed another gratuitous PR exercise, using the 80th anniversary of the defeat of fascism in Europe to peddle war and nuclear weapons as the catalyst to economic growth and prosperity.

Across Europe fiscal rules have been ripped up to create a European Union funding package of €800bn to finance a massive rearmament operation of missile defence, artillery systems, drones and anti-drone systems. In an attempt to downplay the stark dangers of the rearmament programme - rapidly rebranded from 'Rearm Europe' to 'Readiness 2030' - Macron has described it as a 'pacifist approach'. Yet this date of 2030 is a goal by when Europe must be ready to militarily confront Russia.

Meanwhile, Macron's nuclear-sharing proposal for Europe, enthusiastically supported by Poland and Germany, risks French nuclear-armed Rafel jets being deployed on Russia's border.

Macron is presenting his 'nuclear umbrella' as a bid for European independence from US militarism.

Yet these huge increases in military spending – towards Cold-War levels - play right into Trump's hands. As NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has stated, it means that US plans to 'shift towards Asia will be "co-ordinated" with European allies'.

And where is this military coordination with the US taking us? On the one hand, towards a Europe bristling with long-range missiles and nuclear weapons, whilst a constant threat of nuclear annihilation with Russia looms. And, on the other, towards a nuclear confrontation with China, as the US rapidly refocuses its overwhelming military might to the Asia Pacific.

Far from securing peace, such a prospect threatens our entire existence. This massive re-armament programme is based on the same failed strategy of maintaining the US as the dominant super-power, whatever the cost.

In fact, it is this strategy that has led to the inter-connected crises we face today: growing nuclear threats and war, climate breakdown, worsening global inequality and austerity, and the resurgence of the far right.

Britain is totally subordinated to the US war machine to maintain US dominance. From its role in the AUKUS nuclear alliance with the US and Australia against China, to hosting bases for US Missile Defence, to its imminent hosting of new US nuclear weapons, Britain enables the US to project its nuclear and military dominance across the world. So, it is absolutely critical that here in Britain we work to strengthen and unite movements to halt this dangerous escalation of militarism.

Already, in response, new European-wide and international movements are emerging and planning coordinated actions. Large demonstrations have already taken place in Italy and in Germany.

Here in Britain, there is a groundswell of resistance to the lengths to which Starmer is going to secure Trump's approval on military spending. Big majorities of voters support decent levels of benefits over defence spending.

“Britain is totally subordinated to the US war machine to maintain US dominance.”

Trump's 'MAGA' mantra is deeply unpopular amongst the British population and his aggressive 'America First' agenda is exposing the nuclear dangers of Britain's subordination to the US.

Britain's dependence on the US for its nuclear weapons system is creating a perfect storm to challenge the obscene levels of public funding being wasted on nuclear weapons. The ten-year forecast for Britain's nuclear programme from 2023 to 2033 increased by a whopping 62% to £99.5bn in the space of just one year. And according to Madeleine McTernan, Chief of Defence Nuclear at the Ministry of Defence, that figure has already increased by another £10bn.

“Big majorities of voters support decent levels of benefits over defence spending.”

Latest polling shows that opposition to Britain hosting US nuclear weapons has increased from 59% to 61%. This is being reflected in the increasing levels of activism against US plans to station its new nuclear B61-12 bombs, at RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk. There is also strong opposition to the increases in military spending. Large numbers of voters, particularly amongst Labour - at 56% - and Greens - at 67% - support public funding to go towards decent levels of benefits instead of defence spending.

The labour movement in Britain has a central role to play in mobilising the growing sections of the population rejecting this dangerous rise in militarism and the attacks on living standards. This is absolutely vital if we are to build a movement strong enough to stop this terrifying rush to war and ensure nuclear weapons are never used in war again.



CND is part of 'Stop ReArm', a new network of peace organisations campaigning against the rise of militarism. CND is taking part in a week of protest and activism from Saturday 21 to 28 June, including an international forum and demonstration against the NATO Summit at The Hague, in the Netherlands, on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 June.

USA Patsy or economic revival: Defence Spending and Growth

Vince Mills, joint-secretary of ROSE looks at the evidence for the oft used claim that military expenditure creates jobs and economic growth and finds it wanting

Setting out his commitment in February 2025 to increase spending on defence to 2.5% of GDP from April 2027, with an ambition to reach 3% in the next parliament, Keir Starmer claimed that increased defence expenditure would drive economic growth and create jobs across the UK, as well as enhancing our security from perceived threats.

Does increased military expenditure help economic growth? In a weighty academic paper in The Review of Economics and Statistics which claims to show it does just that, the authors Moretti, Steinwender, and Van Reenen argue that defence expenditure has “a positive effect of private R&D on TFP”. TFP is Total Factor Productivity - the ratio of aggregate output to aggregate inputs. However, even from this perspective the authors can offer only a modest impact “an increase in the defense R&D to value added ratio of one percentage point causes an 8.3% increase in the yearly growth rate of TFP (e.g., from 0.98 percent per annum to 1.06%). We view this as a significant but not overwhelming effect.”

But that’s not all, in their conclusions they write: “This of course does not imply that it is efficient to raise defence R&D or government-funded R&D across the board, since government-funded R&D clearly has an opportunity cost in the form of taxpayer money used plus any welfare loss that inevitably comes from taxation. Our paper does not compare the benefits of government-funded R&D to its costs.”

Why is it then that Starmer and his allies are sold on the notion that military expenditure will help economic growth?

The answer of course is that it is politically convenient to be able to argue that economic expenditure, £53 billion in 22/23 and rising, is acceptable because it helps with one of the sacred quests of Starmer’s government – growth. The real reason for the expenditure is that the British state and its Western allies need to sustain the dominance of NATO in a period when US economic support is wavering as Trump turns his attention to China.

“Finding evidence to support the importance of military spending in stimulating economic growth.... is pretty difficult.”

Finding evidence to support the importance of military spending in stimulating economic growth, as suggested in the study above based in the USA, is pretty difficult. Only one major study, by Dimitros Dimitrou and others, managed to find a positive, if small correlation in Britain.

And yet two of Britain’s largest unions Unite and GMB support increases in defence expenditure. It may seem to them to be a no brainer because the defence sector, they believe, sustains well paid, highly skilled jobs. The notion that defence expenditure is “jobs rich” leans on the idea that Ministry of Defence procurement generates jobs in the private sector arms industries and related services. According to analysis undertaken by the Scottish government, published December 2024, (Supply, Use and Input-Output Tables: 1998-2021) that belief is unfounded.

Commenting on the Scottish government analysis Michael Burke of Global Campaign on Military Spending notes that in fact, military spending has one of the lowest 'employment multipliers' of all economic categories ranking 70th out of 100 in terms of the employment it generates. Health is rated number one. Agriculture, energy, food, manufacture, chemicals, iron and steel, computers, construction, and many more have greater 'employment multipliers' than military spending. Investing in health is two and half times more 'jobs rich' than investment in military spending.

And not just that, as the Ministry of Defence figures for 2022 show, defence employment is highly concentrated in specific regions as opposed to evenly spread across the UK. 31.1 percent is in the north-west of England, a region with low productivity growth, further undermining the argument that defence spending stimulates innovation and enhances skills.

And it isn't only geographically concentrated. It is highly concentrated in a relatively small number of large firms, with small and medium enterprises securing only 5 percent of orders. And because many of the defence industry's employees are bound by regulations that require secrecy, innovation through knowledge sharing is near to impossible, reducing further opportunities for innovation.

The biggest player in the sector, BAE, effectively a joint US and UK company, has to enforce strict barriers against knowledge transmission to its British section. This is because it is allowed to compete for high security US contracts. Yet again any possible beneficial technology spill-overs for wider British industry are sacrificed on the altar of US led western military secrecy.

This takes us back to the paper produced by Moretti, Steinwender, and Van Reenen and the opportunity costs of public money being spent on products which, hopefully, will never be used as opposed to the myriad of other needs we have in Britain. It is indeed ironic as Michael Burke points out, that after the second world war West Germany was obliged to use its Marshall Plan funds for economic regeneration, not for military expenditure of any sort, leading to economic growth referred to as an "economic miracle".

Britain on the other hand continued to spend heavily on its post imperial military projects and the cold war. There was no British economic miracle then nor will there be today, if Starmer persists in his pathetic post imperial pursuit of importance as the USA's patsy of choice instead of addressing inequality, social decay and economic decline at home.



Welfare not warfare: Campaigning for Peace

Here, **Arthur West**, ROSE member and former chair of Scottish CND looks at the work of the Scottish Peace Movement in the face of moves towards increased militarisation across Europe.

We live in challenging times for organisations and individuals who are interested in working for a peaceful world. However, despite all the UK political parties currently beating the drum for increased military spending - the Scottish Peace Movement is working on a number of fronts to highlight the need for a sensible and measured approach to foreign and defence policy .

As Roger Waters the famous musician and singer -songwriter has said, war is highly profitable and there are huge profits to be made . This means that financial and business elites have a vested interest in a never-ending cycle of war.

Three examples of the important work of the Scottish Peace Movement are:

1. Don't Bank on the Bomb Scotland is a network of organisations campaigning for Scottish financial institutions and public bodies to divest from companies that are involved in nuclear weapons production.

The network also exposes the massive amounts of money involved in supporting weapons of mass destruction. Recently it organised a Day of Action which involved street stalls and leafleting in Glasgow and Edinburgh .

Glasgow activities have also included delivery of letters to HSB , Royal Bank of Scotland and Barclays city centre branches to express concerns about the millions of pounds which these banks provide in loans and underwriting facilities to companies involved in the production of nuclear weapons .

2. Reclaim our Clyde is a Peace Movement network which works to raise awareness about the presence and impact of nuclear weapons in relation to communities near the River Clyde.

The network is posing the question of how communities and towns in the vicinity of the River Clyde could benefit from the resources currently devoted to maintaining nuclear weapons at the Faslane nuclear base. Basically the purpose of the network is to campaign for the River Clyde and communities linked to it to flourish in the future - free of the spectre of nuclear bombs being hosted around 30 miles down the road from Scotland's largest city .

The Network is currently involved in a number of information days and street stalls across towns in Ayrshire , Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire which the River Clyde flows through.

3. The Scottish Trade Union Peace Network is affiliated to both Scottish CND and Stop the War. The network works to raise awareness about the dangers of nuclear weapons and increased militarism. It has also stood out for its work in raising awareness about the increasing pro militarisation policies which are emerging from the EU.

On a number of occasions the Trade Union Peace Network has highlighted the work of EU officials in paving the way for increases in arms spending and the development of the EU's military capacity. It makes the case for tensions between countries to be resolved through negotiations and diplomacy rather than war and political violence.



The network runs stalls at trade union events and promotes motions on peace and security for trade union bodies such as trades councils to take to trade union policy conferences such as STUC Congress. Another important feature of the network's work is to produce a regular bulletin on peace and security issues which is circulated across the Trade Union movement.

All of these parts of the Scottish Peace Movement are successful in the sense that they raise awareness about the negative aspects of weapons of mass destruction and alternatives to war and political violence.

However, it remains the case that 260 nuclear warheads are based at Faslane and Coulport on the River Clyde. This is only 22 miles from Clydebank and 30 miles from Glasgow. Research indicates that if there was a nuclear weapons exchange involving these weapons- radiation could be blown across an area from Helensburgh to Clydebank, Glasgow, Paisley, Stirling and Dundee.

The effects would be frankly cataclysmic and last for generations. It also remains the case that the Starmer Government and European Union governments such as Germany and France at the time of writing are banging the drum for increased military spending as a response to Donald Trump, indicating that the US might be less interested in European defence issues in future.

Given these twin threats around nuclear weapons and reckless military spending it is urgent that the Peace Movement in Scotland and elsewhere builds on the positive campaigning and awareness raising work which is currently being carried out. It now falls to Scottish CND and larger peace movement organisations to redouble their efforts to argue the case for an end to reckless spending on nuclear weapons and other weapons of war.

A good starting point would be to focus around Stop the War's current call for a Welfare not Warfare approach to public spending. One of the important aspects of a Welfare not Warfare approach to public spending is that it would prioritise human security needs - such as the need for decent housing, control of energy prices and a fully funded NHS. This is surely something everyone on the left can get behind.

“It now falls to Scottish CND and larger peace movement organisations to redouble their efforts to argue the case for an end to reckless spending on nuclear weapons and other weapons of war.”

WOMEN AND WAR

Kate Ramsden, ROSE editor looks at the impact that war is having on women across the globe, especially as the rules of war are so often ripped up, leaving non-combatants so vulnerable.

Just like poverty, inequality, cuts to welfare and almost all social ills, war and global conflicts have a profound and disproportionate effect on women.

War increases women's vulnerability to violence, health risks, and economic hardship. Conflict-related sexual violence, loss of livelihoods and disruption of healthcare services have major consequences for women and girls and result in higher death rates even from preventable causes.

And the effects of war and conflict on women and girls are worsening. [A 2024 report](#) for the UN Secretary General compiled by UN Women showed that in 2023, the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to 2022. Four out of every ten people who died as a result of conflict in 2023 were women.

This can only have worsened over 2024/25 as Israel's assault on Gaza rages on, with over 65 per cent of those killed women and children.

“Women continue to pay the price of the wars of men.”

Displacement during war also affects women disproportionately. For example, the war in Sudan has displaced more than six million Sudanese women and girls, more than half of those displaced. This exposes them to heightened risks, including economic hardship and increased vulnerability to sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, targeted as a weapon of war or as a result of unsafe living conditions in refugee camps.

Shockingly, UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50 per cent over 2022-23. The UN report above also highlighted this alarming trend and it too is likely to be even higher now. It pointed to “disregard for international law, arms proliferation, increasing militarisation, and shrinking civic space” as continuing to exacerbate conflict-related sexual violence, hindering safe reporting and response.

Conflict-related sexual violence is mainly perpetrated against women and girls, who account for more than 95% of the total 3,622 UN-verified cases. In almost 2000 cases of sexual violence, the victims were children, with girls accounting for 98% of the victims. As we know, sexual violence has impacts on women and girls that are lifelong, with both physical and psychological trauma.

However, women in war zones increasingly suffer from restricted access to the healthcare they need, as a result of the massive and widespread destruction of health facilities, the killing of health workers and humanitarian access constraints. This severely hinders the provision of life-saving and other necessary medical assistance for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Most survivors also face barriers to justice, and impunity remains widespread.

The rising death rates and violence against women is taking place against a backdrop of increasing blatant disregard for the international law designed to protect women and children living in war zones. For example, Israel's blockade on humanitarian aid to Gaza, a feature of this conflict throughout, but worse since Israel breached the ceasefire agreement in March, has meant that daily life for women and girls in Gaza is extremely challenging.

As well as being deprived of food and basic medicines, there is also a lack of access to sanitary products, clean water and privacy for 690,000 menstruating women and girls - another serious health concern.

And across the world, 500 women and girls in conflict-affected countries die every day from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. In Gaza, Israel's targeting of healthcare facilities including maternity care has resulted in around 130 women giving birth daily without necessities or medical care. Save the Children reported in April that the survival of mothers and newborn babies in Gaza is under particular threat due to the lack of food, destruction of hospitals and chronic stress.

But women are not just victims in war. They also play an incredibly important role in supporting their communities throughout conflict, and in many countries, women have also been instrumental in the peace process. In Sudan, for example, women have been at the forefront of relief efforts, providing care, organising aid, and advocating for peace and stability. Many women have taken on leadership roles, ensuring that displaced families receive food, medical assistance, and shelter.

Despite facing economic insecurity and gender-based violence, Sudanese women continue to be pillars of resilience. They have led grassroots initiatives, supported education for children, and maintained essential services in war-torn areas.

Throughout history, women have also played crucial roles in ending wars, often working behind the scenes and on the front lines of peace efforts. However, despite commitments to ensure women's full and meaningful participation in peace and security matters, made over many years, political and military power and decision-making around conflicts continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by men.



Women made up only 9.6 per cent of negotiators in peace processes in 2023, even though studies show that when women are involved, peace agreements last longer and are better implemented.

UN Women report that at the local level, women have led many successful negotiations, for example to secure access to water and humanitarian aid, broker the release of political prisoners, prevent and resolve tribal conflicts, or mediate local ceasefires. However, at the national level, they remain sidelined from the main negotiations. This needs to change.

As UN Women Executive Director, Sima Bahous has said, “Women continue to pay the price of the wars of men. “This is happening in the context of a larger war on women. The deliberate targeting of women’s rights is not unique to conflict-affected countries but is even more lethal in those settings. We are witnessing the weaponisation of gender equality on many fronts, if we do not stand up and demand change, the consequences will be felt for decades, and peace will remain elusive.”

“In many countries, women have also been instrumental in the peace process.”

Yemen Crisis: The Need for Principled Solidarity

***Payam Solhtalab** is a law graduate and Left activist of Iranian background currently working as Communications and Operations Consultant for Liberation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom, established in 1954) where he also sits on the Editorial Team for the organisation's quarterly Liberation Journal. Here he writes for ROSE about recent fast moving developments in the ongoing crisis in Yemen.*

Beginning in mid-March 2025 and continuing until recently, under the codename 'Operation Rough Rider', the United States has conducted a large wave of air and naval bombardments on targets within areas of Yemen controlled by the Houthi group - marking the largest US military operation so far in President Donald Trump's second term in office.

On 29 April, the United Kingdom government got in on the act and participated in a joint operation with US forces to carry out airstrikes in Yemen - the first such military action authorised by Prime Minister Keir Starmer. This represents a continuation of Britain's malevolent role in Yemen's contemporary history - not least its shameful colonial legacy there, before being forced out of southern Yemen at the end of the Aden Emergency in November 1967, which led to the inception of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, South Yemen).

While these strikes were ostensibly against Houthi military and strategic sites - supposedly in response to the Houthis' continued targeting of commercial shipping near the Bab al-Mandab Strait (which they hold out as solidarity with the Palestinians) - reliable sources on the ground indicate that targets included critical civilian infrastructure. Water plants, power stations, and fuel depots were hit, further crippling an already impoverished country and heaping more misery on its long-suffering civilian population.

These strikes concluded with a ceasefire on 6 May between the US and the Houthis, officially brokered by neighbouring Oman but actually procured by Iran (the Houthis' principal benefactor) on the side of its own ongoing negotiations with the Trump administration according to many reports.

Indeed, one might credibly posit that these bombardments of Yemen were at least as much about sending Tehran a clear signal during these negotiations as they were about dealing a blow to the Houthis, who have proved remarkably resilient to extensive bombardment throughout the war while remaining entrenched in their positions.

It must be emphasised that principled solidarity with the Yemeni people should not be conflated with support for the Houthis. Progressive activists should resist interpreting developments through the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" prism, which risks miscasting the Houthis as allies in the anti-imperialist struggle - for they are nothing of the sort.

Despite representing no more than 15% of Yemen's population, the Houthis now assert control over most of what was formerly North Yemen, including the capital Sanaa, except for the eastern Marib Governorate. In territories under their control, the Islamist group preside over a fiercely authoritarian and reactionary regime where women, religious minorities, and political dissenters do not fare well.

Many civil society figures have been forcibly disappeared by the group, while abuse and torture are rife in Houthi detention. Furthermore, the Houthis have routinely obstructed humanitarian aid delivery, imposing arbitrary mafia-like taxes that only exacerbate the desperate situations in areas they control. This has led to marked declines in access to food, clean water, healthcare, and vital assistance for vulnerable populations.

Thus, Yemenis living under Houthi rule face a triple threat: authoritarian and often violent governance; an increasingly desperate humanitarian situation with no basic services provided by Houthi authorities; and the constant existential threat of military strikes drawn by reckless Houthi adventurism. All the while, the Islamist insurgent group operates without anything resembling a democratic or popular mandate.

A principled stance on Yemen would be one of unwavering solidarity with its civilian population regardless of their regional-tribal affiliations. Despite a relative lull since spring 2022 in the decade-long war, abuse, violence, and killings by all belligerents continue with impunity, and the fear of returning to all-out conflict remains palpable among Yemeni civilians. Therefore, a campaign of solidarity with the Yemeni people is needed now more than ever.

Integral to such a campaign is the demand that Yemen's inviolable sovereignty be respected and that outside interference end - whether from regional actors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, or from US-led imperialist powers, which regrettably include Britain.

The UK government's shameful involvement in bombing Yemen should be steadfastly opposed, as should its continued arms sales to Saudi Arabia and any other party to the conflict

As called for at the UN Security Council meeting on Yemen in April 2025, urgent movement is needed toward facilitating an intra-Yemeni national dialogue under UN auspices, with the full backing of regional actors, aimed at reaching a definitive political solution and ultimately the establishing of a civilian-led national democratic republic. All political forces should be engaged in this initiative, with the exception of those fundamentally at odds with this vision.

A parallel program of investment in rebuilding Yemen's critical civilian infrastructure, monitored by the UN, must accompany this political process - but should not be conditional upon any one political faction prevailing.



Child of Bones by the Yemeni woman street artist Haifa Subay

Beyond addressing issues specific to their constituency, the Houthis cannot continue to assert dominion over the rest of Yemen - an arrangement that is unpalatable to the vast majority of ordinary Yemenis. Questions also remain about Yemen's viability as a single entity, as most of what was formerly South Yemen remains controlled by al-Hirak al-Jonobi (the Southern Movement), which cites legitimate grievances dating back at least to the 1994 civil war and the bloody suppression of elements associated with the former PDRY. This issue is complicated by al-Hirak's domination by the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a front for the UAE and its nefarious designs in Yemen.

Ultimately, the course of future developments in Yemen must be determined solely by Yemenis themselves and never by external forces. Decades of foreign interference have reduced the country to ruins. Principled internationalist solidarity with Yemen's people and their legitimate civic representatives is imperative and should hold particular resonance for progressives in Britain, given the historic links between the two countries and the well-established Yemeni communities that have existed in Britain for over a century now.

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council



SOLIDARITY FROM NLTUC TO ALL COMRADES FIGHTING COUNCIL CUTS



Irvine & North Ayrshire Trades Union Council

Unity is Strength

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solidarity to all workers and
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- Scottish level organisation: **£50**

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- Account name: **Radical Options for Scotland & Europe (ROSE)**
- Sort code: **83-21-05**
- Account No: **00132622**

To get involved with ROSE, email Vince Mills (vp mills@outlook.com).

**“A BAYONET IS A WEAPON
WITH A WORKER AT
BOTH ENDS.”**

VLADIMIR LENIN