

THIS weekend, the World Peace Council (WPC) is marking the 70th anniversary of its foundation and seven decades as an international mass organisation of struggle against imperialism and war and for peace and justice, in solidarity with all peace-loving people of the world.

At a recent meeting of its secretariat in Belgrade, WPC president Socorro Gomes said: "I would like to celebrate with you the long and brave path of our peace organisation, with its history of struggle and resistance ... [It] remains committed to building ever more bridges, today and tomorrow, for the unity of the anti-imperialist, democratic and peace forces against oppression, colonialism, wars and domination."

From April 20-24 1949 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, 2,000 delegates from 75 countries gathered for the first World Congress of Partisans for Peace, which was shortly to be renamed the WPC.

The Congress was backed by the newly formed Liaison Committee of Intellectuals for Peace and the Women's International Democratic Federation, founded in 1945, which campaigned for peace as a prerequisite for equality and justice for women.

In 1949 in Paris, the huge assembly – including scientists, teachers, women's rights activists, lawyers, trade unionists, writers, poets, actors, artists, musicians and students – were united in their condemnation of US-led imperialism as the root cause of war.

The latter's hegemonic plans were directed at the overthrow of the Soviet Union and the socialist states of eastern Europe and at achieving unchallengeable control of the resources, cheap labour and markets of the post-war world.

Implementation of these plans condemned the peoples of the world to gross exploitation, rampant racism in both former colonies and in the imperialist heart-

70 years of the World Peace Council

LIZ PAYNE pays tribute to the WPC and its struggle against imperialist aggression as it enters its eighth decade this weekend

lands, relentless pursuit of cold war, deprivation arising from the channelling of resources that should have been meeting people's urgent needs and improving living standards into military research and an arms race imposed on the Soviet Union and socialist countries – all with the fearful ever-present threat of thermo-nuclear annihilation.

The Partisans for Peace denounced the warmongering, aggressive North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington only 16 days before the Congress in Paris opened.

Delegates were clear that it was a precursor to an attack on the USSR. US communist and women's rights campaigner Shirley Graham told the Congress that the black mothers of the US, whose status there was the lowest of the low, were unwilling to allow their sons to be consumed by another war.

One of the most outstanding contributions was that of world-renowned lawyer, civil rights campaigner, singer and actor Paul Robeson.

Summoned to the microphone, he captured the sentiment of the whole convention when he said:

"We in America do not forget that it is on the backs of the poor whites of Europe ... and on the backs of millions of black people that the wealth of America has been acquired.

"And we are resolved that it shall be distributed in an equitable manner among all our children."

He condemned the contemporary war hysteria and concluded:

"We are determined to fight for peace. We do not wish to fight the Soviet Union."

His speech was to cost him dearly – a passport revoked, mass media vilification, scores of concerts immediately cancelled across the US and denunciation before the House Un-American Activities Committee – an example for all to see of what happens to those who campaign for peace when the ruling class depends on wars and rumours of wars.

Not surprisingly, the world

movement for peace was subject to attempted sabotage by governments lined up with the US from the outset.

In the run-up to the 1949 Congress in Paris, French officials refused visas to hundreds of delegates from the socialist countries.

They hoped this would halt proceedings, but a simultaneous meeting of the Partisans for Peace was convened in Prague in which all could participate.

A major outcome of the Paris Congress was the setting up of a permanent body – the World Committee of Partisans for Peace – and plans were soon under way for a second World Congress in 1950 in Sheffield.

The Labour government, doing the bidding of the British Establishment, was extremely hostile.

It would not allow organisers of the event from outside Britain to enter the country, refused visas to over 200 delegates, turned away others at the border (only after ascertaining details of their peace movement contacts in



Britain for security purposes) and withdrew its initial consent to allow 18 charter flights to bring delegates from eastern Europe.

Despite this, a packed one-day meeting of 3,000 people was held in Sheffield City Hall, while the main World Congress was transferred to Warsaw.

Here the organisation was named the World Peace Council, with Frederic Joliet-Curie becoming its first president (1950-58).

Its second president (1959-65) was the British scientist and socialist, JD Bernal, whose invaluable Peace Archive is housed in the Marx Memorial Library.

The power of the WPC lies in its principled stance against imperialism as the prime cause of war and barrier to lasting peace; its ongoing penetrating analysis to which all members contribute; its mass solidarity actions and campaigns and the internationalism that underpins everything it undertakes.

An early example is the Stockholm Appeal, launched in March 1950 to ban the atomic bomb and treat its use as a war crime.

Over 482 million signatures were gathered – a massive victory in a pre-internet world. The most recent example is the launching of the current global campaign for the closure of all one thousand US and Nato military bases – including the British mega-stations in Cyprus and the Chagos Islands.

The WPC supported the US Peace Council and the Peace and Neutrality Alliance Ireland in holding the first international conference against US/Nato bases in Dublin in November 2018.

In a world of escalating imperialist aggression, the role of the WPC and its affiliates is of paramount importance.

Post-1991, after the bringing down of the Soviet Union and socialist countries, the true face of imperialism (which promised us permanent capitalist-maintained post-socialist

peace!) has been revealed – in horrific aggression in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria and Yemen; an attempted coup in Venezuela and the continuing blockade of socialist Cuba.

No country refusing to do the bidding of imperialism is safe from US-led threats, interventions, provocations and all-out war.

The lithograph, *The Dove*, produced by Pablo Picasso for the World Congress of Partisans of Peace in Paris in 1949, was adopted as and remains the WPC's symbol.

Under its wings, the WPC, its affiliated organisations and all its millions of members in over 100 countries across the world stand together.

As Joliet-Curie insisted: "It is not possible for a people alone or for a person alone to prevent war."

The World Peace Council's objectives remain – to struggle against imperialist wars; the occupation of sovereign countries; the renewed arms race and the continued existence of foreign military bases and for universal disarmament under effective international control including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction; respect for the territorial integrity of states and the right of their peoples to sovereignty and independence; non-interference in the internal affairs of nations and the elimination of all forms of colonialism, neocolonialism and discrimination.

On the 70th anniversary of the WPC, the British Peace Assembly salutes the WPC and reiterates its conviction that while imperialism lasts, there can be no permanent peace and that saying "Yes to peace and No to Nato" is the only way forward for a left-led Labour government and the people of Britain to build with the peoples of the world towards a socialist future.

■ Liz Payne is convener of the British Peace Assembly.



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