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L i b e r a t i o n

Formerly, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, Liberation was founded in 1954 as the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Today, Liberation campaigns for Peace, Economic Justice, Equality and Human Rights.

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OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER: WE DEMAND AN IMMEDIATE HALT TO TURKEY'S WAR ON THE PEOPLE OF AFRIN

On International Women's Day we wrote to Theresa May saying You Must Condemn the Turkish Attack against the Women's Revolution of Afrin!

Peace in Kurdistan – Women Alliance for Kurdistan, Iraq and Syria

Dear Prime Minister

On International Women's Day 2018 we call on your government to acknowledge and condemn the Turkish invasion of Afrin and the attacks currently taking place there against a women's revolution in Afrin in Northern Syria.

The invasion constitutes a war of aggression and is therefore in breach of international law. Its continuation is in clear breach of Security Council Resolution 2401.

Furthermore, the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) administration in Afrin is democratic and based on the principles of gender equality and ethnic inclusivity. It is beyond comprehension that a British government can be offering either tacit or overt support to these current actions of the Turkish regime with its deliberate and persistent assault on democratic institutions, its attacks on women and the targeting of Kurdish communities.

It should be recalled that the women and men of the DFNS have been absolutely pivotal in defeating ISIS and have had the direct backing of the US-led coalition. The DFNS has been working collaboratively and transparently with the US and the UK on the ground inside Syria and has lost many brave fighters in the joint struggle against ISIS. Those losses have been felt keenly in the UK by relatives and friends who have established lives for themselves in the UK over the years, having fled persecution by Turkish and Syrian regimes of the past.

The UK is duty bound not to let down its Kurdish allies who have until recently been fighting alongside British forces and who continue to fight against the possible resurgence of ISIS. We call on you not to stand by while Turkey commits this grave crime against the people of Afrin.

On International Women's Day we particularly seek to highlight the democratic institutions that are being built in Afrin and the wider area of Syria known as Rojava. There are autonomous structures based on communal organising, women's councils, academies, and cooperatives, as well as women's self-defence units. Legislation has been developed to address women's aspirations for a better and more autonomous life, putting into action measures against child marriage, forced marriage, polygamy and harmful traditional practices. These imaginative and far sighted developments should be supported by everyone. There are even women's courts for dealing with gender-based violence and women's policing strategies. Through the active

women's solidarity and engagement real change has been achieved in such a short time and within such difficult circumstances the growth in collective strength and women's confidence is unprecedented in the region.

Today, tens of thousands of women have organised to defend their land, their lives, and their futures in Afrin. The resistance of the Women's Defence Units (YPJ) and the Women's Civil Defence Forces are part of a female global resistance against oppression, exploitation, and fascism.

Current international news reports constantly stress that Afrin was "the last relatively stable region in Syria" and that it has absorbed hundreds of thousands of refugees from conflict zones across the country although it was attacked over a dozen times with artillery either directly by the Turkish army or by its Islamist allies in 2017. A report by the Human Rights Association of Afrin, in 2016, recorded a total of 37 civilians killed in Turkish army attacks. The constant provocation and current full scale invasion stems from the Turkish enmity against the Kurdish population and is nothing to do with securing its borders.

Among the refugees in Afrin alongside the Arabs, Turkmen and Assyrians are Yezidi communities whose plight the British Parliament has long highlighted. Yezidis in Afrin, having fled the genocide perpetrated by ISIS in Sinjar are now live in fear of a further genocide at the hands of the Turkish forces. Their religious leader in Afrin has said that they fear the massacres against them will be repeated:

"In the 21st century, we thought there would be no more genocides and massacres against certain nations, but in Afrin, history is repeating itself."

As the world hopes to move towards peace post-ISIS, the model of democracy developed by the Kurds and implemented in Afrin surely deserves our strong support.

We call on you and the British government to extend urgently needed support to the women, men and children of Afrin, and to condemn the Turkish invasion unequivocally.

We urge you to demand an immediate halt to Turkey's war on the people of Afrin.

The establishment of peace and democracy in Rojava and across the whole Middle East region is the best guarantee of British interests.

To that end, we call on the UK government to ensure participation of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria in the Geneva peace talks on Syria, to stop all arms supplies to Turkey and to support the women's revolution underway in a region where women's freedom is most needed.

Disappearances in Mexico: A law has been achieved, the UK and others could do more to help implement it

Mariano Machain

"My sister has been missing since 5th February 2013," says Miriam Castañeda from the Eastern Mexican state of Veracruz. "That day we ran to the Prosecutor's Office to file a complaint. Carnival was on, so they told us she could be having fun somewhere and forgot to tell us. They asked us came back home to wait 72 hours before going back."

Three days later, Miriam and her mother went back to report that the situation remained the same. Staff at the Prosecutor's Office took their complaint and told them that their first step was to send 15 letters to various institutions, such as law-enforcement agencies, hospitals and prisons, to check whether they had Xochitl Castañeda. "They told us: 'It could be ages until we hear back from them. If you want to speed things up, deliver these letters yourselves', and so we did."

More than 35,000 people have gone missing or disappeared in Mexico since the authorities launched a "war on drugs" in 2006 with widespread deployment of soldiers and police officers in order to tackle dangerous criminal networks. The figure is updated every day by official sources, but relatives of disappeared people and experts believe it is fundamentally flawed and many cases are not counted correctly or not even reported due to fear for reprisals.

Those disappeared do not fit to any particular profile. Xochitl is a 25-year-old mother of three. Nobody has made contact with the family since she went missing, soon after leaving her youngest daughter in nursery. Thus, kidnapping has been ruled out, but nobody knows what happened to her. In many cases, kidnappers contact the families of the victims and request ransom, but the communication stops soon afterwards, regardless of whether ransom has been paid or not. In other cases, young women are abducted and trafficked for sexual exploitation. Yet in other cases, people are abducted while driving a relatively expensive car and their bodies never turn up.

Other victims have disappeared when dangerous gangs perceived they were working for a rival gang. Such could be the case of the 43 students disappeared since 2014. They were not working for any gangs, but gang members and local police with apparent links to state and federal authorities perceived them to be. Police and military officers are directly or indirectly involved in many cases of disappearances. They amount to "enforced disappearances" under international human rights law. Accounts of people arrested by police or soldiers and handed over to criminal gangs have been recorded across the country. Presumed killings in the context of public security operations may have led to officials getting rid of bodies in secret in an attempt to pervert the course of justice.

The majority of victims are known to the authorities because their families file complaints. The vast majority of perpetrators, however, are not. Investigations are so few and superficial that

virtually any perpetrator can get away with it. The reasons vary from laziness to ignorance, from lack of resources to fear, from mismanagement to collusion between officials and gang members. The bottom line is that very few cases are ever properly investigated and their perpetrators brought to justice. The Mexican government has reported that from 2006 to 2016 it only achieved 11 convictions for the crime of enforced disappearance.

Thousands of families across the country have found themselves fighting against prosecution services and investigative police forces that do not deliver any results for them. They have formed dozens of local groups through which they organise themselves to campaign and put pressure on the authorities.



Demonstration inside the lower house of Congress, 30th August 2017 Source: SERAPAZ

"We belong to one of the local groups in the city of Xalapa [in Veracruz state]" says Miriam. "There are at least three groups that I know of in our city. Our group consists of 18 families." 52 groups came together in 2015 to form the national Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico (Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México). One of their key goals has been to get Congress and government to pass a national law on disappearances. It was a two year-long battle and the government managed to avoid the inclusion of some key elements. But in November 2017 the bill came into law. Now they are campaigning to get the government to implement the law, which is always the trickiest part in Mexico and the rest of Latin America.

"It would be fabulous to have a working search commission in Veracruz state. That way many families would not have to live the Calvary we've been through since Xochitl's disappearance," points out Miriam with hope. "Had they launched an immediate search, they could have found something." A national search commission, coupled with one local search commission in each state is one of the key provisions in the law.

The national commission is currently under construction, with its chief having been appointed in February, not without controversy from some groups of victims and experts. Also at the federal and state levels there must be a specialised prosecutor's office on disappearances. The federal office has just been upgraded to comply with the law. But the Federal Attorney General failed to consult with victims and experts, a key cornerstone of the national law on disappearances, and the specialized office has been born with many limitations which could have been easy to address otherwise.

Mexico is open to the world, both politically and economically. The British government and the vast majority of governments in Europe, North America and beyond have warm relations with it. Mexico is seen as a reliable partner and a source of trade and investment opportunities, as one of Liam Fox's deputies highlighted a few weeks ago. Unsurprisingly, he failed to make any references to the local human rights situation.

There is much more the British government could and should be doing to support people like Miriam and her colleagues at the Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico. For starters, they could be raising with Mexican officials the fact that more political will is needed in order to get prompt and adequate implementation of the law on disappearances. Lack of consultation with victims and experts, as mentioned above, may wreck the whole process.

Presidential elections will take place next July but none of the candidates has spelled out what they would do on this issue. Many officials have already left their posts in preparation to run their own campaigns. If the current government loses, which is likely, it is unclear how much (if anything) it will deliver until the end of its term in December. Pressure from the international community, including the UK, is crucial this year. As ambassador Duncan Taylor prepares to finish his term and go back to the UK in October, that could be his key task in order to support Miriam and all the victims of disappearances in Mexico.

This article was written for Liberation by Mariano Machain. Mariano is the international advocacy coordinator at Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (Serving and Advice for Peace, SERAPAZ). This Mexican non-governmental organisation supports victims of disappearances across Mexico and the networks they have established to defend their own rights. Email: mariano.machain@serapaz.org.mx



DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS IN MEXICO

DISCUSSING MEXICO'S ROAD TO THE 2018 GENERAL ELECTION AND THE VIOLENT CONTEXT IN WHICH IT IS TAKING PLACE: WHY HUMAN RIGHTS MATTER.

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CHRISTINE BLOWER
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TONY BURKE

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Homage to Catalonia

Gorka Elejabarrieta

Let us be clear, to defend the unity of the Spanish state is at least as nationalist as to stand for the independence of Catalonia.

Being pro-independence does not make you automatically progressive or leftist, but contrary to what some are stating, you can be in favour of Catalan independence from a very progressive perspective.

Moreover, I believe that the driving forces of the Catalan process are mainly progressive. As the process has moved forward in recent years, the left in Catalonia has strengthened while conservative forces have weakened.

In Catalonia, more than 80% of the population supports the right to decide of the Catalan people and that includes nationalists as well as unionists. For the past years, there has not been such a huge popular, civic, peaceful, social, political and cultural process in Europe as the Catalan one. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have mobilised once and again in what should be regarded in my opinion as the Catalan Spring.

This process has brought together the main Catalan institutions, various political parties from the left and right, the main trade unions, hundreds of social movements, and small- and medium-sized businesses.

Spain has rejected once and again to approach this conflict in a democratic way, opposing and closing doors to a dialogue and agreement base solution that would entitle Catalans to decide upon their future through an agreed referendum, similar to what happened in Scotland for instance. Instead of doing so the response of the Spanish state has been to send state Civil Guards and national police to attack thousands as they tried to vote, arrest leading figures of the Catalan social and cultural movements, suspend Catalan autonomy, and jail the Catalan government, forcing President Carles Puigdemont and four cabinet ministers, MP and Secretary General of Left pro-independence Party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) Marta Rovira and leading representative of Radical Left party CUP Anna Gabriel into exile in Belgium, Scotland, Germany and Switzerland.

As a consequence, Catalonia is now being directly ruled from Madrid by a party that has 8% of electoral support in Catalonia. Spain and not the democratically elected Catalan Government, forced new elections in Catalonia in December. Reality is stubborn and majority of Catalans voted once again in favour of par-

ties defending independence. Europe cannot longer avoid the Catalan conflict. If Spain is not yet ready to promote a democratic solution to this conflict Europe must act.

Spain has sent European Arrest Warrants against those in exile in Germany, Scotland, Belgium and Switzerland. German Justice has recently ruled that President Puigdemont cannot be extradited on Rebellion to Spain, a tremendous blow against Spanish judicial strategy. Take into account that several Catalan representatives are on preventive imprisonment under those same charges. I anticipate similar outcomes on the cases in Scotland, Belgium and Switzerland. Spanish Government representatives proudly said that these cases in European countries would help “behead” the pro-independence movement. On the contrary, I think that these cases will help internationalise Catalan cause, show poor democratic standards of the Spanish Kingdom and help raise sympathy and solidarity towards pro-independence movement. These cases are already backfiring Spanish strategy, because at the end of the day what it is going to be judge is Spanish democracy. Or lack of it.

Saying as many have said — that the Catalan process is not a valid one because Spanish laws, specifically the Spanish Constitution, do not allow it — is a not progressive approach. On the dispute between legality and legitimacy, the left should always be on the side “of the many, not the few”, should always stand for democracy. Remember that Spanish Constitution is still a Francoist law, the last Francoist law to be more precise.

How many battles would the left, historically, have won if it did not prioritise legitimacy over existing legality? Suffragist struggles, workers’ organising, the US civil rights battle, anti-Apartheid movement, national liberation movements around the globe — every battle that the left has fought over the past centuries in favour of a better society and for freedoms would not have been fought if restricted to respecting existing legality.

When state repressive apparatuses attack those trying to defend democratic rights for everybody (including unionists), the left cannot remain neutral. It cannot position itself between those being attacked and the perpetrators of the attacks.

As human rights activist Desmond Tutu once said: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”

Some also say that the consequences Catalonia is facing today are equally the responsibility of those promoting independence as of the Spanish state. From a democratic and progressive perspective this position is not acceptable.

Left-wing British journalist Owen Jones, in a debate in the BBC, said it clearly: "It doesn't matter whether you support Catalan independence, it really is quite irrelevant. The issue is, do you support the right of the Catalan people to freely determine their own future without being dragged from polling stations and being thrown downstairs?"

"And in modern Europe, to see... an elected political leadership fleeing a country to claim political asylum and being locked up in prisons should chill every single European and encourage us to stand in solidarity with the Catalan people..."

"If Scotland have been denied the right to determine its own future that would have been a democratic outrage"

Some claim the only way for Catalans to exercise their right to decide is first through a profound reform to democratise the Spanish state. This is the path that we Basques have followed for years with no result.

We always believed that Spain should acknowledge the Basque Country as a political subject with the right to decide. Only then would Basques be in a position to freely and democratically determine our own future.

This path proved futile. There is no enough progressive strength within the Spanish state to democratise it. Not in the past, not now, nor in the near future.

Sortu secretary-general Arkaitz Rodriguez has repeatedly said to the left across the Spanish state: "We are willing to cooperate in the democratisation of the Spanish state with you, but we ask you to be honest and that the day you realise this to be impossible, that you sum up your forces with the pro-independence parties to support constituent processes in our nations, because unlike in the Spanish state, we have enough strength in Catalonia and the Basque Country to reach independent and progressive republics."

The path towards a more democratic and progressive Europe passes through building free republics in Catalonia and in the Basque Country. In his day, Karl Marx understood Irish struggle for independence in a similar way, when he wrote in a letter to Friedrich Engels: "The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland."

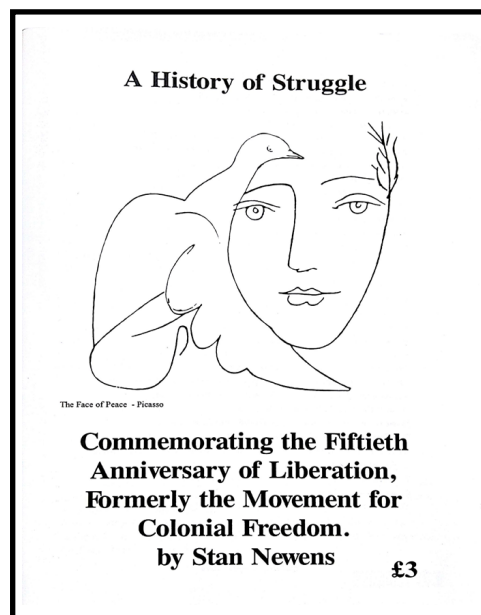
David Fernandez, a leader of the pro-independence Catalan left, summed up this strategy with the simple phrase: If there is not a democratic path towards independence, then a path towards independence will also bring us democracy.

We are facing, in my opinion, a two-dimension dilemma in Catalonia. On the one hand, the Catalan process is a democratic conflict. Catalans should have the right to determine their own future freely. No law or constitution should prevent exercising this democratic and legitimate right. Progressive forces in Europe and around the globe should stand with the Catalans on this.

The democratic solution to this conflict is clear — a legal and binding Referendum on independence. The problem is that Spain will never accept what seems to everybody else a logical and democratic solution.

On the other hand, the Catalan process is a political process. It offers a clear chance to build a republic that is more progressive and democratic than the existing status quo. It is a political process in which the left is increasing its support daily, and where the status quo is being contested strongly. The left in Europe should help Catalan process on the building of a more democratic, more progressive republic. This is not just a Catalan battle but also a European one. Catalonia will never walk alone, and the left be by its side.

This article was written for Liberation by Gorka Elejabarrieta, Sortu - International Relations Department



Cuba–US relations: Obama to Trump to 2020

Arnold August

Canadian author and academic, Arnold August, looks at recent developments in Cuba-US relations and the prospects for improvement under and beyond Donald Trump

On 17 December 2014, the world witnessed the simultaneous surprise announcements by presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama to re-establish diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States after more than five decades. However, some floated the fallacy that this decision represented a huge step toward “normalisation.” On that day, Obama himself claimed that the move was intended to “begin to normalise relations between our two countries.” Nevertheless, as historic as this decision was regarding the reopening of the respective embassies, it did not at all mean that the path was in fact toward normalisation. It was nothing of the sort.

Since US foreign policy is inherently interventionist: striving for the imperialistic world hegemony of capitalism, can one expect miracles from its Cuba policy? After all, Cuba, more than any country in the world, epitomises in words and in deeds with the Cuban Revolution the resistance to such imperialism.

The only “miracle” was that the remaining Miami Five were returned home to Cuba from US jails. However, this was as a result of Cuba’s principled negotiating position and the efforts of activists and progressive forces in Britain and elsewhere in the world.

In fact, reestablishing relations was the easy part. At the time I recalled the public statement Fidel Castro made to his followers on 8 January 1959, just eight days after the triumph of the Revolution:

“This is a decisive moment in our history: The tyranny has been overthrown, there is immense joy. However, there is still much to be done. Let us not fool ourselves into believing that the future will be easy; perhaps everything will be more difficult in the future.”

But just how generous was the Obama Cuba policy in its “thaw” with Cuba? Before delving into the dangers on the horizon, it must be said that it was reasonably positive. Moreover, the Cubans deftly took advantage of this in many ways (trade/commerce, tourism, bilateral agreements on contentious issues for Cuba and the US and other developments), in addition to freeing the remaining members of the Miami Five.

However, despite his executive powers to do so (and the Democratic Congressional majority in his first term), he did not close the prison in Guantánamo or return the territory to Cuba. His administration practically outdid all his predecessors in the allotment of funds for CIA-backed subversive “democracy promotion” programs in Cuba. On this point, recently released documents indicate that a massive amount of US CIA-backed funding took place in the years 2014–2016. This, it must be recalled, took place while the Obama administration was negotiating

diplomatic ties with Cuba and even after the publicly announced new Cuba policy. At the same time the United States aggressively enforced the extraterritorial application of the blockade fining 49 international companies an incredible \$14 billion US dollars for trading with Cuba. Rightly, many Cuban authorities and commentators were asking what kind of ‘normalisation’ this was.

Obama visited Cuba in 2016 to crown his signature foreign policy legacy. There then followed a string of high profile US celebrity visits and the Rolling Stones played an historic concert in Havana. Flying in the face of reality, the illusion of “normalisation” persisted.

Trump

Fidel passed away a year ago on 25 November, only a few weeks after Trump’s unexpected victory in the US elections. The new Trump administration ushered in a change from Obama’s seductive policy toward a more hostile, aggressive narrative coupled with corresponding measures to tighten the blockade while maintaining diplomatic relations as the main feature of the Obama opening.

In the context of Trump’s Cuba policy, the tenets of the “normalisation” myth – emboldened by the virtual across-the-board majority opposition in the United States and abroad to the Trump Cuba policy – have doubled-down in promoting the myth of “normalisation” under Obama. Taking advantage of the fact that Obama looks so immaculate compared with Trump on Cuba, who would dare to argue that Obama did not desire the “normalisation” for which he took the first step?

But does this matter now that Trump has come to power and revealed his Cuba policy? Yes, because immediately after the presidential elections, across-the-board opposition by Republicans, Democrats and trade/commerce/travel businesses at the national, state and city levels to any Obama policy rollbacks hit a fever pitch. To what extent? By 17 December 2017, Trump also joined the “normalisation” illusion by saying, “Hopefully everything will ‘normalise’ with Cuba, but right now, they are not doing the right thing. And when they don’t do the right thing, we’re not going to do the right thing. That’s all there is to it.”

Was he feeling the pinch? One cannot underestimate the opposition to Trump. Yes, even the haughty Trump has to take this into account. This prognosis, however, is hedged with a “protection clause,” which any serious observer must do in monitoring the most unorthodox American president in history: Trump is unpredictable.

Here are some points to take into consideration in explaining what may seem to be an about-face on “normalisation” from the president who supposedly staunchly opposes it.

First, despite all the bombastic rhetoric, Trump did not follow the Miami Republicans' demand to break diplomatic relations with Havana and shut down embassies there and in Washington, even though the staff in Havana is presently only skeletal as a result of the "sonic attacks" pretext. Thus, discussion and negotiations on matters of bilateral concern still carry on both in Havana and Washington. In addition, there is a steady stream of US business people visiting Cuba to work out potential business deals.

Second, the irony of the Trump policy is that the Obama democracy promotion programs have been apparently scaled back, as the new president appears to prefer the option of subverting the Revolution from the outside rather than from within. There are people busy in Miami and Washington acting as lobbyists to hitch themselves to the Trump administration should he modify some policies or waiting in the wings for 2020.

Prospects for post 2020 relations post the 17 December 2014 announcements irrespective of who occupies the White House. Relations can only improve. All Cubans desire this, while the majority of US citizens, even in Florida, and a very wide section of political and economic interests across the country are fighting not only to maintain better relations, but to fully lift the anachronistic and unjust blockade.

The worse-case scenario for 2020 is that Trump wins again. However, he will be forced to take into account the powerful anti-blockade forces in order to win. For example, the Midwest agriculture-exporting states who voted for Trump in 2016 have since publicly expressed a strong desire to continue and increase trade with Cuba. No less than the key state of Texas, Republican dominated, is a strong advocate of trade with Cuba, Houston being the closest US port to Havana. Tampa, Florida is at the forefront of the pro-Cuba trade lobby, and officials and newspapers even favour the complete lifting of the blockade. Trump must watch his flank to make sure that these forces do not swing to the Democrats in 2020.

If the Democrats win, we may, of course, witness the return to the Obama Cuba policy, which would also benefit Cuba. At the same time, a return to the Obama policy could also mean a resurgence of the subversive democracy promotion programs and, by their very nature, interference from within. This will be conveniently camouflaged by the "normalisation" smokescreen. In fact, in 2020, those on both sides of the Straits of Florida who contribute to the normalisation myth will shout, "We won!" Thus, a return to the Obama policy will be coupled with an unprecedented offensive against Cuba's socialist culture for Cuba to "change" to be as "reasonable" as Washington.

However, the Cuban Revolution will resist this new onslaught, as it has done in the past, while pressuring the US – with the peoples and governments of the world – to lift the blockade. If the blockade is lifted, does this mean that the US will no longer try to interfere in Cuba's internal affairs? The answer is a

resounding no. From the US point of view, "normal" relations are completely compatible with interference.

Arnold August speaking tour May-June 2018

Canadian author and Cuba specialist, Arnold August will be on a Cuba Solidarity Campaign speaking tour of Britain between 28 May – 13 June. He will be speaking on Cuba-US relations from Obama through to Trump, and Cuba's future after Raúl Castro, who stands down as president following Cuba's recent general election.

Arnold is speaking in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Kent, Leicester, London, Manchester, Wellingborough, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Wales and Scotland.

Full details can be found at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

Why Colonialism in Western Sahara must end!

Malainin Lakhali

Brief background

134 years ago, the main European colonial powers gathered in Otto Von Bismarck's Berlin to officially formalise the scramble of Africa after having eliminated or destroyed most of the existing African self-governing systems. Under the terms of this infamous colonial conference, Western Sahara (which was at the time a vast independent territory known as "Saguia El Hamra y Rio de Oro" living in total autonomy from all neighbouring entities under a traditional tribal system similar to what will be described now as a Parliamentary Republic) was "assigned" to Spain to become later as the largely known "Spanish Sahara" until the mid-sixties when the UN named it Western Sahara.

But the Spanish colonial power did not succeed to decolonize its colony as most of the other European colonial powers did. In 1975 the Spanish plotted with the neighbouring Morocco and Mauritania to divide the rich territory between the two African countries while Madrid kept privileged interests in the exploitation of the natural resources, especially in the fishing sector and in the Phosphate Mines in Bucraa, north El Aaiun, capital of Western Sahara.

But the Saharawi people, already organized under their national liberation movement, Polisario Front, refused to submit to this tripartite colonial conspiracy, and pursued their armed struggle against the new invaders for another 16 years, until 1991 when the UN succeeded to broker a peace plan according to which the people of Western Sahara were to be given the right to vote in a free and fair referendum on self-determination under the supervision of the UN.

In 2018, Morocco is still putting obstacles in front of any peaceful and just solution of this last African case of decolonisation. After having signed and accepted the initial Settlement Plan of 1991, it repeatedly withdrew from its agreements with the international community, and is now refusing any sort of solution that is not its unclear plan of "autonomy". The problem of this so-called "wide autonomy" is that Morocco does not have sovereignty over Western Sahara to offer it autonomy! Morocco is only an occupying force, according to the UN, AU, EU and the rest of the world (UNGA resolutions A/Res/34/37 1979 and A/RES/35/19 1980) and must therefore decolonize its colony in accordance to the landmark resolution 1514 as clearly stated in the landmark Legal Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 1975.

The United Nations and the African Union are still trying hard to convince Morocco to abide by the international legality and allow the people of Western Sahara to get their freedom back peacefully. The Secretary General of the UN has appointed lately the former German President, Horst Kohler, as his Personal

Envoy to mediate between the two parties to the conflict, Morocco and the Polisario Front, with the aim of bringing them back to direct negotiations with a view to reach a solution that provides for the Saharawi people's right to self-determination.

Latest developments

At the same time, the Saharawi people and their supporters all over the world, including in the UK, never stopped putting pressure on the Kingdom of Morocco to respect human rights, accept the organization of a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara and put an end to the massive and systematic



Source: Polisario UK

plunder of the Saharawi natural resources. In this regard, it is well known the role of NGO Liberation in achieving justice and freedom for the Saharawi at UK level as well as in UN Human Rights Council where Liberation firmly stands with liberation principles and becomes a voice for oppressed Saharawi people.

Last 27th February 2018, the European Court of Justice ruled that the "Fisheries Agreement concluded between the EU and Morocco is valid in so far as it is not applicable to Western Sahara and to its adjacent waters".

"The Court therefore holds that, taking account of the fact that the territory of Western Sahara does not form part of the territory of the Kingdom of Morocco, the waters adjacent to the territory of Western Sahara are not part of the Moroccan fishing zone referred to in the Fisheries Agreement."

This ruling and a previous one already taken by the same court on the 21st December 2016 on the association agreement and the partnership agreement concluded between the EU and Morocco, both confirmed the international stand against the Moroccan claims in Western Sahara.

Both rulings simply affirm that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco! That is to say that all the activities that Morocco is performing in this territory are illegal and should not be encouraged by any country or multinational since buying any Saharawi resources from Morocco will be simply dealing with stolen goods.

It should be recalled here that the case before the European Court of Justice was initially raised by the UK Western Sahara Campaign before the High Court of Justice (England and Wales), Queen's Bench Division (Administrative Court) against the UK authorities for acting illegally in providing for the implementation of the Fisheries Agreement between the EU and Morocco knowing that this agreement is illegally applied to the waters adjacent to the territory of Western Sahara.

Responsibility of the UK

It goes without saying that the UK is now concerned legally with this Court decision since the EUCJ issued its ruling following a request from the UK High Court.



Source: Polisario UK

It is true that the UK stand has always supported the efforts of the UN in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict. But, now the responsibility of the UK authorities are even bigger because they must also make sure this ruling is respected in the UK and abroad making use of its influence worldwide and within the UN Security Council to protect not only the International Humanitarian Law and international legality in Western Sahara, but also in protecting the natural resources of this last colony in Africa and putting an end to the European theft of the resources of the Saharawi future generations.

The case of Western Sahara is a crystal-clear case of unfinished decolonisation. The implementation of the international law in this last colony in Africa is a must if humanity is still willing to uphold what is commonly described as the International law. And on the other hand, allowing Morocco and its allies to maintain the illegal occupation of Western Sahara would mean that the permanent members of the UN Security Council, including the UK, are favouring the rule of the Law of the Jungle worldwide. This will be a tremendous regression in the development of human civilization and an unconceivable support to injustice, human and people's rights violations, and pure and simple theft of African peoples' resources again.

This article is written for Liberation by Malainin Lakhel, a prominent Saharawi writer, journalist, human rights activist, translator and interpreter.



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We express our gratitude to Garden Court Chambers for their generous contribution to our Appeal Fund. Part of the donation has been spent on the costs of producing the current issue of the Journal

Garden Court Chambers, which has existed for almost 40 years, specialises in human rights and civil liberties.

An Appraisal of Sierra Leone's Fragile Democracy: A Historical Perspective

Osman Dumbuya

Introduction

A democracy needs strong and sustainable political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. Further, democracy requires an informed electorate, strong and active opposition parties, functioning institutions and adherence to the Rule of law. These requirements are needed to facilitate a sustained connection between citizens and their elected leaders and are able to understand the needs and concerns of their constituents and thus find ways to address those needs and concerns.

However, with an increasing disconnect between citizens and their elected leaders, a decline in political activism, and a growing sophistication of anti-democratic forces, democratic political parties and their leaders are continually being challenged by the electorate, to ensure that democracy survives. Therefore, this article argues that there is an absence of a strong and active opposition to hold the government to account to the people and this has caused democracy in Sierra Leone to be beaten, bruised and wounded and sometimes collapsed by successive governments. To demonstrate this, the article focuses and examines the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) administrations since 1951 with a particular attention on the APC administration because of their length in power. The article concludes that Sierra Leone's democracy is still fragile but not dead

The Origin of Political Parties and the Birth of Democracy in Sierra Leone

The political landscape in Sierra Leone has been dominated by the two biggest parties, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC). The SLPP Party was founded in 1951 and dominated Sierra Leone's politics until 1967, when it lost the parliamentary election to the APC, led by Siaka Stevens. Although most of the founding fathers of the party hailed from the north, its first leader, Sir Milton Margai was from the south and as a result the southerners who are predominantly the Mende ethnic group have aligned themselves with the party making the south the stronghold of the SLPP. Sir Milton Margai and the SLPP led Sierra Leone to independence in 1961. In 1962, Sierra Leone held its first elections under the universal suffrage which were won by the SLPP. Sir Milton Margai died in 1964 and his brother, Albert Margai succeeded him and became leader of the Party. During his term in power, Albert Margai attempted but failed to establish a one-party state as the bill presented to parliament was rejected.

The APC Party on the other hand was founded in 1960 by a breakaway group from the SLPP that vehemently opposed elections before independence and instead supported independence before elections. The founding father of the APC, Siaka P. Stevens was from the Moyamba District in the south of Sierra Leone but claimed to have come from the Bombali District in the north of Sierra Leone. The north of Sierra Leone is predominantly Temne speaking area. Siaka Stevens deliberately claimed to be a northerner such that he can use the north as a base and stronghold for his newly founded party, the APC Party. Because of their ethno-regional alignments, the south has been the SLPP's stronghold and the north the APC's stronghold hence some called the SLPP Party "Mende Man Party" and the APC Party "Temne Man Party"

In 1967, Sierra Leone held its second elections in which the APC and SLPP each won 32 seats in parliament and two former SLPP Independent candidates won 1 seat each. The two independent candidates, MP Kutubu Kai-Samba and MP Luseni A. M Brewah sided with the APC, making it the majority party in parliament. This development confirmed that the SLPP would no longer lead the country and this subsequently led to a political unrest which eventually led to a military coup. The Military Junta declared martial law and took full control of the national government. The National Reformation Council (NRC), led by Major Charles Blake, was established on 23rd March 1967. However, pressure from political elites, trade unions, and university students led to the junta's collapse in November 1970, and Siaka Stevens of the APC became president after the interregnum. Following a heavily manipulated plebiscite in 1978, the APC became the sole legal party in the country, effectively making Sierra Leone a one party state. In 1978 all but one SLPP MPs (Manna Kpaka, MP in Kenema) joined the APC. The SLPP was eventually outlawed, and its elites and supporters were physically threatened and barred from holding meetings.

Meanwhile, the APC inherited a political system that could have flourished into a viable democracy but instead avoided political plurality and embraced dictatorship. Political opponents were seen as enemies and were framed and subsequently executed or jailed them indefinitely. This demonstrates that the APC cannot operate according to the principles of democracy and the Rule of Law.

The Stevens administration was centralised in Freetown and was characterised by bad governance including corruption; excessive marginalisation and exclusion of a large proportion of the populace from all forms of participatory processes, preventing them from sharing the benefits of the country's economic resources; ethnic polarisation; high unemployment;

low literacy rate due to lack of access to education; and social injustice. The above factors deprived the nation of its dignity and reduced the majority of its citizens to a state of poverty. The nation's assets including its rich mineral resources were plundered by successive political elites at the expense of the nation's good. State institutions such as the courts system and civil society that were meant to protect human rights were thoroughly assimilated by the executive. Consequently, many Sierra Leoneans, especially the youth, lost all sense of hope in the future and ultimately became target for unscrupulous elements who exploited their disappointment to wreak retaliation against the ruling elites. This personalised and monolithic rule by the APC which contributed to the destruction of civil society and democratic accountability led to the civil that broke out on 23rd March 1991.

The NPRC and the Evolution of Democracy

A group of young army officers fresh from a peace mission in Liberia on their return to Sierra Leone capitalised on the state of affairs of the country presided over by an unpopular president Joseph Saidu Momoh who was installed as president in 1985 following an artificial referendum after President Stevens' resignation. The Momoh administration was overthrown in 1992 and the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) headed by Captain Valentine Strasser was established. Strasser was overthrown in 1996 in a Palace Coup by his deputy, Captain Julius Maada Bio who is the newly elected president of Sierra Leone. Bio was Head of State for only 3 months before handing over power to President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP who won the 1996 elections. This marked the return of the SLPP in government after 28 years absence, and the rebirth of democracy in Sierra Leone.

President Kabbah ruled for eleven years and during his tenure in office he ended the war and declared Sierra Leone's war over in 2002. He established the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in 2000 to fight corruption that has been endemic in the country. The centralisation of power in Freetown by the Stevens' administration excessively marginalised and excluded a large number of Sierra Leoneans from all forms of participatory processes and it was one of the fundamental causes of the war. In recognising the significance of participatory processes in a democracy, President Kabbah's administration introduced a Local Government Act in 2004 to decentralised power to allow local participation in governance. President Kabbah's administration further established the National Social Security and Insurance (NASSIT) and the National Revenue Authority (NRA) all of which are sustainable useful institutions that are providing jobs and other benefits for Sierra Leoneans. President Kabbah stepped down in the 2002 election after completing two terms in office. According to the Sierra Leone's 1991 constitution Kabbah was not eligible to stand for a third term so his former Vice President, Solomon Berewa succeeded him. His successor, Solomon Berewa lost to Ernest Koroma in the 2002 elections and President Kabbah sub-

sequently handed over to President Koroma of the APC. Kabbah was widely credited for handing over power peacefully to an opposition something that is very rare in Africa

President Koroma took over the realms of power in 2002 and ruled for eleven years. During his tenure in office, Koroma designed and operated a different style of democracy. He operated a political system that advertises itself as a democracy without observing democratic principles. A state is said to be democratic when there is an emporium of ideas and an active and a constructive opposition that probes and checks the operations of government and holds it to account to the people. As evident, the Koroma administration operated against the tenets of democracy and the rule of law and persistently violated the constitution. The sacking of his Vice President, Samsuana is an example of the many ways Koroma violated the constitution. Unlike the Stevens' APC administration, the Koroma's APC administration did not execute or jailed his opponents but instead attempted to kill the opposition by assimilating it through state induced defections, thereby undermining democracy in Sierra Leone. An example of this was Usman Boie Kamara who was a high profile member of the opposition SLPP who was enticed to join the APC and was made Secretary of Trade and Industry.

Another way the Koroma administration tried to kill the opposition and undermine democracy was by invoking the dual citizenship act. The dual citizenship issue, something the APC flagrantly violated was raised during the election. The ruling party, APC, raised the issue citing Section 76(1) of the 1991 Constitution, which states that "No person shall be qualified for election as a Member of Parliament if he or she is a naturalised citizen of Sierra Leone or is a citizen of a country other than Sierra Leone having become such a citizen voluntarily or is under a declaration of allegiance to such a country". A case was brought to the Supreme Court on 5th February 2018 by an activist of the ruling APC party claiming that Yumkella is a naturalised citizen and therefore unqualified to contest the elections. The aim was to eliminate Dr. Kande Kollah Yumkella (KKY) who became very popular during the election campaigns. The case was thrown out of court for lack of evidence and KKY was allowed to contest the elections

The Koroma administration was riddled with multitude of corrupt practices and scandals; the misappropriation of 14 million \$US Ebola fund, the 2017 landslide incident, the Haj fund misappropriation are examples of the scandals that engulfed his administration. The SLPP as a dormant and toothless opposition did not provide any opposition to the APC government at all, allowing the country to slowly slipping back into a dictatorship. The SLPP as an opposition exists only during presidential elections and ceases to exist soon afterwards.

The majority of Sierra Leoneans may be illiterate but they are certainly not ignorant as they saw and felt the APC misrule and decided to kick them out.

But to a more challenging situation, Sierra Leoneans were faced with choosing between an unpopular APC presidential candidate, Dr. Samura Kamara and a weak and incompetent SLPP presidential candidate, Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio in the second round of the election. Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkellah, a former Director General of United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) was more eloquent, competent and understands the problems and presented resolutions but was eliminated in the first round of the polls on 07th March 2018.

The 2018 Elections and the Survival of Democracy

There have been periodic elections since 1962 in which the two main political parties, the APC and SLPP have held a periodic rotation of power in governance. For the fourth time since 1996, Sierra Leoneans went to the polls to choose their leaders. Following a protracted and controversial process, the 2018 general elections finally came to an end after the Rtd Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP was declared winner of the 31st March presidential runoff election on Wednesday, 04th May, receiving 51.8% of the votes cast. The presidential candidate for the ruling APC Dr. Samura Kamara received 84.2%. The first round of the elections was held on 07th March in which no candidate secure the 55% required to win the presidency.

Sierra Leone operates a modified two-round system to elect their president. This means that if no candidate secures 55% in the first round, a run-off will be held. The 112 elected members of Parliament are however elected from single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post voting. Therefore, since no candidate secures the required 55% in the first round, a presidential runoff was scheduled to take place on 27th March but was delayed after an injunction was made to the High Court by a private citizen who was also a member of the APC Party. The case was vacated, allowing the election to take place on 31st March 2018.

It is fair to say that although the elections have been largely peaceful, there have been incidents of incompetence, malpractice and violence which have cast doubt on the credibility of the entire process. For the second time in the 22 years the opposition party has beaten the incumbent and witnessed a smooth transition from one government to the other and from one political party to the other. This is significant milestone in ensuring peace and stability and a testament of Sierra Leoneans commitment towards democracy.

Conclusion

The conduct of periodic elections does not guarantee democracy. Between 1951 and 1967 there were period elections in Sierra Leone but these did not lead to democracy in the country as both the SLPP and the APC parties tried to operate a one party dictatorship rule. The SLPP under Albert Margai failed to have a one party state, the APC under Siaka Stevens however succeeded and Sierra Leone was ruled under a one party state until 1992.

The Kabbah SLPP administration breathed a new life into democracy by decentralising power to allow local participation in governance and willingly and peacefully handed over power. The Koroma APC administration on the opposite hand attempted to kill democracy in a different way by attempting to dismantle the opposition through the promoting of state induced defections and the dual citizenship fiasco. In spite of this topsy-turvy situation with Sierra Leone democracy, the electorate rose to the accession to keep democracy alive. As demonstrated in the just concluded 2018 elections, the people went out in large numbers to vote for a change and voted APC out. For the second time in the 22 year history of Sierra Leone's new democracy the incumbent has lost to the opposition and successfully handed over power to the opposition. This demonstrates that Sierra Leone's democracy although fragile but alive and not dead

Osman Dumbuya, member of Liberation, occasionally writes for the Liberation Journal focusing on Sierra Leone

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ZIMBABWE: WHERE ARE WE NOW? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Ian Beddowes

When the tanks rolled through the streets of Harare on 14th November 2017 to remove Robert Mugabe and his unpredictable wife from power it came as no surprise to the politically aware section of the Zimbabwean public. What raised eyebrows among those sensitive to imperialist machinations was the arrival of Rory Stewart, British Minister of State for Africa in Harare on 23rd November 2017 prior to the appointment of Emmerson Mnangagwa as President. (This also begs the question, "Why should Britain have a Minister of State for Africa in the first place?"). Further: the leadership of the MDC Alliance flew to complain to their erstwhile sponsors in Washington once it had become clear that they were not being included in government. Following that trip, Nelson Chamisa (who has now emerged as the MDC leader following the death of Morgan Tsvangirai), stated at a public meeting:

"When we met with President Trump in America alongside Biti [Tendai Biti of the People's Democratic Party], he asked us how much we needed to move the country forward and we told him that we needed \$15 billion. He assured us that the money will be disbursed soon after winning the elections."

Needless to say, the US authorities denied this. But recent events in Zimbabwe cannot be comprehended without an understanding of: the history of our country; the relationship between internal struggles and imperialist interests and influence; internal class contradictions.

Appearance and reality in Zimbabwean politics are not the same, and there are a number of misunderstandings in the outside world which need to be corrected. One of them is the relationship of ZANU(PF) under the leadership of Robert Mugabe to Anglo-American imperialism.

In an essay written in 1980 soon after Independence called *The United States and Africa: Victory for Diplomacy*, US diplomat Andrew Young wrote:

"Despite widespread doubts outside Zimbabwe about the strength of Mugabe's political constituency, he had achieved a solid electoral victory over... Joshua Nkomo, who enjoyed military support from the Soviet bloc. The Zimbabwe settlement must also be recorded as a victory of the Western alliance in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU)... it curtailed at least temporarily the trend toward growing dependence on Soviet military aid to bring about African liberation."

The liberation struggle in Zimbabwe was not an anti-imperialist struggle in the normal sense of the word. It was predominantly a struggle against the local white settlers who had come to rep-

resent an outmoded form of imperialism which did not fit into the neo-colonial agenda.

During the course of the war of liberation in Algeria in the 1950s, the first armed liberation struggle on the African continent, and the uprising of the Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) in Kenya, France and Britain respectively deployed their armies at great cost both to themselves financially and to the people of Algeria and Kenya in human lives. Realising that they could not stop the tide of African nationalism, they decided to divert it. The two major colonial powers in Africa embarked on the policy of neo-colonialism, the policy of granting apparent independence while retaining control of the economies.

However, in South Africa and Rhodesia they ran into a problem in the shape of the entrenched white settler regimes. In Rhodesia, the refusal of the settlers (who had been granted "responsible government" in 1923) to agree to the principle of "No Independence Before Majority Rule" (NIBMAR), led to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the Rhodesian government in 1965 and the imposition of sanctions by Britain and the rest of the world.

Sanctions played an interesting role. Although sanctions-busting was widespread and was assisted by conservative sections of imperialism, they really did create shortages which in turn led to the Rhodesians creating an economy largely autonomous from outside control. There was strong central planning, powerful state-owned enterprises (known as 'parastatals' in Zimbabwe) and strict control of the banking system; there were also a number of producer co-operatives established by the white farmers for the collective selling of produce.

This form of economy was to persist after Independence in 1980 and last until 1991 and the acceptance by the ZANU(PF) government of the recommendations of the IMF and the World Bank and the imposition of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Prior to ESAP, 80% to 90% of all products bought in Zimbabwe were made in Zimbabwe. This was unique on the African continent. After ESAP came rapid economic decline.

In terms of internal class structure we have a phenomenon common throughout Africa, the formation of a parasitic bourgeoisie. This was noted as early as 1961 by Frantz Fanon:

"In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster,"

Fanon, then goes on to say that they are:

"...only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it."

the second statement, of course, describes the comprador bourgeoisie; but in Zimbabwe and South Africa we have seen another stratum, the parasitic bourgeoisie — those that talk about "black empowerment" or "indigenous empowerment" and even oppose foreign monopoly capital but are engaged only in looting. In Zimbabwe this tendency has reached epic proportions. Factories have been closed and unemployment in the formal sector has reached more than 90%.

When former white-owned or foreign-owned companies have been taken over by the parasitic bourgeoisie, machinery has been sold off (mainly to South Africa) and a new culture among management of late payment or non-payment of workers has emerged. Over the last 4-5 years, workers all over the country have gone on strike not for more money, but merely to be paid.

Most of the skilled labour force has left the country. It is estimated that there are maybe 4 million Zimbabweans in South Africa plus another 1 million in Botswana. Probably another million are spread around Africa and the rest of the world. It is against this backdrop that divisions in both ZANU(PF) and the main opposition MDC have occurred.

Before the formation of the MDC, many within the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) pressed for the formation of a broad-based workers' party built on similar lines to the British Labour Party and opposed to ESAP and the neo-liberal agenda. When the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) led SADC forces against the US-backed invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by Ugandan and Rwandan forces in 1998, sanctions against Zimbabwe began with the withdrawal of funding by the IMF and World Bank. (Meanwhile these two institutions continued to fund the aggressor nations, Uganda and Rwanda).

Towards the end of 1998, at the bequest of the US, Britain was asked to deal with Zimbabwe, a country in its "sphere of influence". Opposition forces which included the trade unionists and the white farmers, who were under pressure to relinquish their massive land-holdings were brought together and promised huge sums of money if they would unite to form a single opposition party. The following year the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed. From its inception it was dominated by neo-liberals yet gained its main support among the urban working-class. The movement formed originally to fight the neo-liberal agenda now became its main exponent.

Following the narrow defeat of the Draft Constitution of 2000 which would have enabled the government to take land from the white farmers without compensation, War Veterans, tired of waiting for 20 years for the land they had fought for, began to occupy white-owned farms. The ZANU(PF) government, now on the back foot, had no choice but to endorse their action. The War Veterans demanded "One family — one farm" most white farmers being multiple land-holders of farms averaging 1000 hectares in size. In mid-2001, the two main leaders of the land occupations, Chenjerai Hunzvi and Border Gezi died, very conveniently, within 6 weeks of each other. Land reform fell into the hands of the parasitic élite who grabbed the best land for themselves.

Although many peasants and War Veterans DID benefit, the agricultural workers on the commercial farms, mainly of Malawian or Mozambican origin were told that they "were not Zimbabweans" and shifted like cattle from bad employers to far worse employers. It was Ministers and senior civil servants who now became multiple farm owners and agricultural production dropped. Subsequently, in 2008, the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act was introduced to force all white or foreign-owned companies to give a 51% shareholding to "indigenous Zimbabweans". The "indigenous Zimbabweans" involved would always be part of the political élite. This led to the final close-down of most of manufacturing economy as owners either left the country or industrial assets were plundered. The working-class became further disempowered as they became jobless.

In this context we should note that the biggest advocates of "indigenous empowerment" were member of the Mugabe family such as Mugabe's nephew Patrick Zhuwao. It should also be noted as an illustration of the extreme callousness of the parasitic bourgeoisie in the midst of increasing poverty, that in September 2017, shortly before the overthrow of Robert Mugabe, Grace Mugabe's son by her first marriage, Russell Goreraza, flew in two brand new Rolls Royces, boasting to his friends that he was about to also purchase an Aston Martin!

Under the influence of Grace, in December 2014, Robert Mugabe fired Vice-President Joice Mujuru (whose husband Solomon Mujuru had been murdered in 2011). The final catalyst, also under the influence of Grace, was the firing of the other senior Vice-President, Emmerson Mnangagwa on the 6th November 2017, but with the support of the army, he became President of Zimbabwe by 24th November 2017.

Mnangagwa has plans to revive the economy and represents a faction of the parasitic bourgeoisie that has recognised the need for production and now wants to transform itself into a comprador bourgeoisie. Hence the engagement with Britain. He has also engaged with successful Zimbabwean business people in the diaspora. Clearly he is at the mercy of the army and it is believed that General Constantino Chiwenga, now Vice-President will succeed the 75-year old Mnangagwa after one 5-year term in office. Meanwhile, the MDC Alliance which forms the main opposition is racked by division. Nelson Chamisa has seized the leadership of MDC-T, the biggest component of the Alliance in a manner which has alienated its considerable support in Matabeleland grouped around Thokozani Khupe the former MDC-T Vice-President. His campaign is based almost totally on the concept that Zimbabwe needs a younger leadership (regardless of political direction).

Since Mnangagwa took power there has been little change apart from the absence of numerous road-blocks formerly mounted by police to solicit bribes. Despite Mnangagwa's obvious attempt to put his murky, avaricious and violent past behind him and at the latter end his life to present himself as the saviour of Zimbabwe, those around him have shown little inclination to change the habits of the past 38 years.

Workers are still going on strike merely to be paid. Those at work are spending a great deal of time trying to do other things to make ends meet. Even from the point of view of capitalist production, this state of affairs is untenable. The MDC-run Harare Council is handling street vendors with no other means of survival no less viciously than ZANU(PF). In trying to revive the economy, the major parties are only asking where money is going to come from. The workers are not part of the equation. The neo-liberal mind-set has permeated the minds of most of the politicians and discussion among the people is mainly about individual leaders and which ethnic group they belong to.

The bottom line is that we are slowly moving away from parasitic capitalism to militarised capitalism. The coming General Election is unlikely to solve any problems. The only glimpse of light is coming from the re-organisation and of trade unions, street traders and other community organisations representing the working-class, the peasants and the poor. This movement is still in its infancy but promises to develop into a mass movement in the coming years.

Ian Beddowes, ZCP Zimbabwe



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