

L i b e r a t i o n

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Iranian Elections

Implications for the ordinary working people

- Justice for Western Sahara
- Trump and Cuba
- Peace Process in Colombia
- Africa then, now and in the future

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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In Western Sahara all the human rights are violated because of the right to self-determination, after 42 Year it is time for justice for the people of Western Sahara

Omeima Abdeslam

The Right to Self-Determination

The UN General Assembly has repeatedly recognized Western Sahara's right to self-determination as a Non-Self-Governing Territory and has urged the Kingdom of Morocco to end its "occupation" of Western Sahara. Nevertheless, the Kingdom of Morocco continues to administer the territory as if it were a part of Morocco proper. The Kingdom claimed that it would grant Western Sahara a degree of autonomy through the "Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region", however, the "Autonomy Initiative" falls far short of what is required to meet the Kingdom's international obligations. Furthermore, as a result of the Kingdom's rejection of a series of proposals regarding the referendum, MINURSO has been unable to fulfil its mandate.

The Right to Freedom of Movement

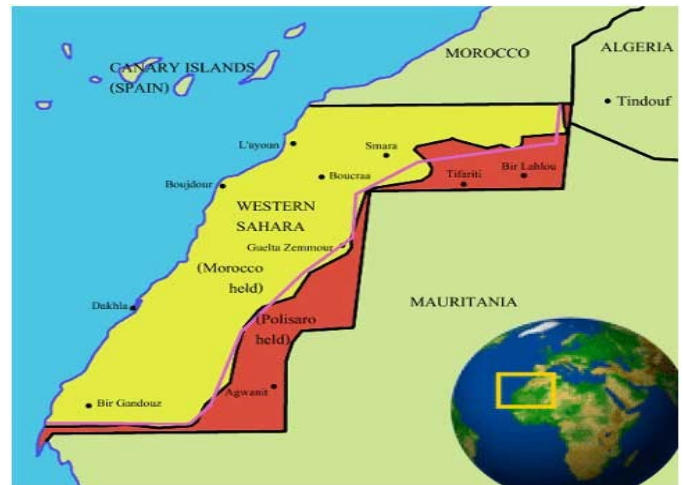
The Kingdom of Morocco maintains a fortified wall, or berm, that stretches the entire length of Western Sahara. The wall has an estimated seven million landmines and has only five crossing points: four are for the exclusive use of MINURSO staff, one is open to civilians, but all five are blocked to Sahrawis. In its 2004 Advisory Opinion on the Israeli wall, the ICJ concluded that the construction of the wall violated the right to freedom of movement under Article 12 of the ICCPR. There are striking parallels between the effects of the Israeli wall on the Palestinians, and the effects of Morocco's wall on the Western Saharan people. Unlike Israel, however, Morocco has not been held accountable by the international community for its actions violating the rights of the Western Saharan people.

The Right to be Protected from Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment

States must prohibit torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and must also investigate allegations of torture, prevent the introduction of evidence obtained through torture, punish the perpetrators, and provide redress for victims. The Kingdom of Morocco has failed to comply with these international obligations, subjecting Sahrawi human rights defenders and others to police brutality, torture, and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In August 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention reported that torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are commonly used to extract confessions of guilt in criminal cases involving Sahrawi detainees.

Right to Freedom of Expression and Association

The Kingdom of Morocco routinely persecutes Sahrawi human rights defenders and interferes with their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. Since the Kingdom of Morocco was last reviewed under the UPR, it has systematically repressed public demonstrations in support of self-



determination. After breaking up demonstrations, authorities typically scour the streets, invade homes, and "hunt down" activists and Sahrawi journalists and bloggers. The Kingdom further violates the right of the Sahrawi people to freedom of expression and opinion by employing media blackouts and mass censorship.

The Right to Freely Dispose of Natural Resources

In Western Sahara, natural resources such as phosphate deposits, fisheries, and arable land are principally found in the enclave occupied by the Kingdom of Morocco, which is located between the coast and the Moroccan wall. The inability to cross effectively bars Sahrawi people living east of the wall from accessing Western Sahara's many physical resources located west of the wall, and bars those living west of the wall from their lands in the east. Moreover, the Kingdom consistently violates international law for the exploitation of natural resources in a Non-Self-Governing Territory.

Cultural Rights

The Kingdom of Morocco censors Sahrawi cultural productions and cultural voices. Sahrawi artists who refuse to support Moroccan authority over Western Sahara are banned from taking part in cultural life and may be subjected to harassment, arbitrary detention, and beatings. Moroccan authorities also exert intense pressure on the content of Sahrawi cultural productions, leading in practice to the censorship of Sahrawi culture, denying it even the name "Sahrawi" in favour of calling it "Hassaniya." Schools in Western Sahara do not allow the Hassaniya language and do not teach Sahrawi history, culture or geography. Additionally, Moroccan authorities sometimes prevent Sahrawi parents from registering the Hassaniya names they choose for their children.

This article was written for Liberation by Omeima Abdeslam, POLISARIO Front Representative to Switzerland and UN in Geneva.

Iranian elections - no chance for change

Jane Green

With presidential elections in Iran scheduled for 19th May the manoeuvring for position within the Iranian regime is well underway. Jane Green considers the implications for the ordinary working people in the Islamic Republic of the political chess being played by the clergy.

Under the Iranian presidential system, only the powerful Guardian Council can approve candidates for the presidency or any other key political office. The Guardian Council itself is under the firm grip of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, thus ensuring that the ruling theocracy have a firm hold on the 'democratic' process.

Heralded as a reformer by certain sections of the Western press current Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, has spent four years in office without doing a thing to improve the human rights record of the Iranian regime. Rouhani has done nothing to support the development of trade unions or advance the position of women in Iranian society. His neo-liberal economic policies have seen inflation rampant while unemployment has soared.

In spite of this Rouhani will be seeking a further four years in office. He will not be standing on a platform of extending the misery of the Iranian people, though this is a likely outcome, but as the man who delivered an end to international sanctions through the 5+1 deal with the United States and European Union. The deal, whereby international sanctions will be softened in exchange for Iran accepting strict controls on its nuclear energy programme, was barely bedded in when the US electorate returned Donald Trump as president.

Trump has been a vociferous opponent of the deal with Iran and, if his foreign policy concerns were not already overburdened, with airstrikes on Syria, bombing Afghanistan and the developing face off with North Korea, rewriting the terms of the deal may have been further up his agenda. Which is not to say that Trump will not return to the subject of Iran, no doubt he will. This inevitably means that the forthcoming presidential elections in the Islamic Republic will be shaped by the question of which candidate will come out best in any dealings with the US president over the next four years.

Rouhani's cards are already on the table. The more conservative elements in the clergy have fielded little known Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi. Regarded by many as a likely successor to Khamenei, but lacking political experience, the presidency is seen as a possible route to paving the way for Raisi to take over as Supreme Leader. With Khamenei rumoured to be in the advanced stages of prostate cancer the need to locate a successor may come sooner than anticipated.

Raisi as a candidate is problematic for the regime, bringing his own baggage. Although little known as a politician, he does have a reputation as a 'hanging judge', particularly in relation to the massacre of thousands of the regime's opponents in an es-

pecially brutal episode in 1988. The commemoration of the executions, known as the national catastrophe, is a significant event taking place each September in Iran, and Raisi's role is well known.

Raisi has been named as one of the members of the committee of four judges that oversaw the executions of political prisoners, labelled as one of the "crimes of the century" by the late Grand Ayatollah Montazeri. There have been a number of legal cases opened against the committee and those complicit, in various countries around the world, including Canada, which has recognised the 1988 executions as a crime against humanity. There is a realistic prospect that if Raisi is elected to the Presidency there would be significant barriers to his free movement abroad, including possible arrest for his role in these crimes.

Most observers believe that Rouhani has a better chance of securing a second term, based on the fact that the Iranian leadership will want to continue the normalisation of diplomatic relations and cooperation with the EU and US. They will want to see the sanctions lifted and thus remove an immediate existential threat to the survival of the regime. A Rouhani administration is considered to be a grouping of mainly able technocrats, many educated in the UK and US, who are best placed to oversee this process of detente. The attitude of the Trump administration remains a potential barrier to this strategy.

However the players finally line up, there is certainly little hope in prospect for the Iranian people from the election outcome. Negotiations with the government have been ongoing for some time in order to set a national minimum wage, based upon an agreed basket of goods and services. Over the last year the cost of the basket of goods and services that could provide an acceptable living standard for workers has, according to the National Statistical Centre, risen from \$863 to \$924 monthly.



Source: SODIR

The government committee setting the minimum wage in March determined the rate for the current financial year at \$287, based on the argument that the employers and the government were not prepared to accept an increase of more than 14.5% on the previous year's figure. The basis of the decision was the official inflation rate. The employers have said that they will not consider a higher rate, in spite of the fact that the official rate of inflation is widely accepted as being well below the actual rate in the economy. Even so, Iranian workers will be condemned to another year of poverty.

In its effort to shackle the rights of workers the current government has tried to amend the labour law. The main aim is to make it easier for employers to hire and fire employees. The current labour law, a legacy of the early years following the 1979 revolution, stipulates that the dismissal of workers should follow a defined process, guaranteeing the right to appeal. Iranian Labour Law also makes it mandatory that all workers should have contracts of employment with their rights and salaries, observing the minimum wage, and other benefits clearly defined. Although Iranian employers have been flouting the labour law, it nevertheless provides a legal entitlement that could be employed by workers organisations and workers representatives.

The regime has been trying to open the labour market to foreign capital. They argue that the Iranian worker is educated, skilled and is cheapest in comparison with similar countries. However, the labour law is an obstacle to inward investment as far as the government is concerned.

Since his election to the presidency in June 2013 Hassan Rouhani's government has attempted to persuade the parliament to agree to change the law. Trade unions and workers organisations organised a mass demonstration outside the parliament on 15th November as the law makers were due to start their work. Under pressure the parliament sent back the proposed legislation to the government. However, whatever the outcome of the presidential election, there can be little doubt that the government will once again try to reverse one of the few legal protections afforded to Iranian workers.

Unemployment continues to be a significant threat facing the workers in Iran. Based on the results of the labour force survey, released recently by the Statistical Centre of Iran, the unemployment rate in 2016-17 increased by 1.4%. The unemployment rate was 11% in the previous year. Based on the results of the study, 39.4 % of the working-age population, aged 10 years and older, are considered as active in the labour market. The results show that the economic participation rate among women is less than men in urban areas.

According to the report, during the summer of 2016 the unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 24 years was 30.2%; the unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 29 years was 26.7%; and 31.9% for the age group 20 to 24 years. In the age group 20 to 24 years, 26.6% of men and 50.6% of women were unemployed.

The rate of unemployment is a significant factor in generating discontent amongst the people of Iran and in particular the

younger population. While education outcomes remain generally positive in the country the likelihood of finding gainful employment is clearly diminishing.



Conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi enters Iran's presidential race
Source: CODIR

International factors will no doubt play some part in determining the outcome of elections in Iran. Candidates will use the threat of external action or sanctions as a means to try and galvanise the support of the population behind them. It may be however, that internal factors play as significant a role and protests against whoever is elected may yet be a feature of Iranian politics following the election outcome.

Jane Green is National Campaigns Officer of CODIR (Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights).

For Further information on CODIR's news and views please visit www.codir.net

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- **Working Class Movement Library**
- **SOAS Library**

Educating the Kenyan 'BIBI' And 'BWANA'

Dan Thea

The national Teachers Service Commission is reported to have said that Kenya had “12 million learners in public learning institutions”; virtually equal between bibi (girls) and bwana, (boys). Increasingly more children start school with ‘early learning’, i.e. ‘play school’. However, since the country has a substantial private education sector catering for the rich and the well-off, the total number of school students would be substantially bigger. Furthermore, this number keeps rising; reflecting the fast-growing population; estimated by the United Nations to reach 48.5 million by July 2017; and due to reach 65 million by 2030. The data also places the country at the 29th position in population size globally, and, frighteningly, due to move up to the 18th position by 2050; with a population of 96 million!

I will endeavour to provide an idea of the Kenyan education system that is expected to produce the necessary human resources which will lift the country to the hoped-for medium-developed level status by 2030.

This year, 2017, 1,618,202 students registered for either primary or secondary school examination; up from 1,519,274 in 2016; i.e. a 7% increase. The number of those registering for the end of secondary school examination rose from 577,253 in 2016 to 615,284 in 2017, i.e. also by 7%. However, the number proceeding to public universities was only 88,928, i.e. only 16% of those completing secondary education; and was a cause of a major row in the country; in spite of the fact that the annual increase in admissions was up 6%. The controversy was indicative of the eagerness for university education in a country with 12 million pupils in public schools alone; with more, though a smaller number, in private sector schools.

Noteworthy also is the fact that the majority of the country's population are teenagers and younger; and the prospects are that both the birth rate and the overall population will continue to grow fast over the coming decades.

While the total number of pupils is impressive, there are still many problems. For example, there are still cases of children not going to school, in disregard of the law; and for many reasons. Children in remote parts of the country, particularly among nomadic populations tend to miss school more often, e.g. because their nomadic family moves home for fresh pastures for their animals; pregnancies and unavailability of sanitary pads also lead to absence, etc.

There are also many cases of absent teachers; having absconded to attend to personal affairs; perhaps in collusion with school heads.

However, matters seem set for radical change with the arrival of the new, radical and seemingly fearless Cabinet Secretary, (Education Minister). He soon announced that he was not employed to sit at his desk, reading newspapers or drinking tea! His approach is to appear in the remotest, least known or most famous school unannounced; and proceed to inspect things. Absent school heads etc find themselves “sent home”; and face severe consequences! Those who have pocketed money that was meant for text books are in hot water. Corrupt officials who leak exam papers face the music. University chancellors who dish out dodgy degrees are in disgrace; and their university is likely to lose its charter. Bureaucrats who ‘sell’ exam papers find themselves jobless. Dodgy school governors specialising in placing kids for a fee are exposed. And the officials who sell examination papers lose their trousers! Our Dr Matiangi’ does not care whether it is a primary school; a secondary school; or a university. What a breath of fresh air!

Matiang’i does not like all that paper-and- pencil stuff either. So, on the first day at school, every one of the one-and-a-quarter million kids is presented with a laptop. An ICT-trained teacher stands in front of the class. Teaching Assistants are behind the students. Technicians are on stand-by in the nearby Computer Room, in case they are needed. This is paperless learning: called the Digital Literacy Programme!

Also noteworthy is that while the initial test batches were imported, the gadgets are assembled at two locations near Nairobi and Eldoret.

Lucky Dr Matiang’i! He has the character to simply brush off the complaints. Luckier still, his boss, the President, simply asked for ‘more of the same’!

One immediate challenge is that according to the Teachers’ Service Commission, in early 2017 there was a shortfall of 87,000 teachers. Unfortunately, I have not heard further on this issue; but I understand that it takes three years to train a teacher. Anyway, surely the ‘fixer’ minister will fix it!

At the same time the education ministry reported a very poor performance in the latest end of secondary school examination; with a stunningly huge number of students, 295,463, i.e. 52%, performing poorly, with grades “D and below”; which is below university admission standard. This in turn caused a huge uproar nationwide; including complaints that the exam marking was to blame.

As one can imagine, the Minister dismissed this argument outright; maintaining that what was required was better teaching, maintaining tough standards, and greater effort by the students. For my part, and from a distance, I am inclined to agree with the Minister.

There is, however, the difficult problem of the country having a substantial private education sector; which is mainly run on business lines. Data from the Kenya Private Schools Association indicates that it has at least 10,000 member schools. While some of these schools are undoubtedly good; and even very good, many others are very poor indeed. I eagerly await the Minister's attention to this troubling matter.

How did the Minister respond to the President's challenge of "more of the same"? A new school curriculum has been devised; and is already on test in selected schools countrywide. Its goal is to ensure the adequacy of study content and the related instruction materials and methods in meeting the required core competencies.

The Minister has quite appropriately pointed out that going to university is not the only available route to a worthwhile education and career. He pointed to the available capacity for providing technical and vocational training for all those who do not proceed to university, advising that: *"We must shift from the popular view of white-collar jobs, which are highly pegged on university degree qualification; and focus more on skills-oriented approaches that equip our youth with practical skill sets that match their aspirations and can help our country to become a middle income industrialised nation."* Indeed the government insists that the demand for technicians can be met by the Technical and Vocational Education Training Schools.

In March 2017 it was announced that 125,580 students would start university education in the 70 universities; with 81,931 in the public sector and 43,649 in the private sector; and it was specified that university courses in science, technology, medicine, dentistry, engineering, architecture and mathematics would receive higher funding levels than those in largely arts and humanities. It was argued that this arrangement reflected the country's development agenda; and it would be interesting to annually review the actual numbers and ratios of students in the two categories to check how they reflect the policy.

In April 2017 the Ministry, Commission for University Education and the universities agreed on a range of measures to be taken to greatly raise standards, including raising the ratio of full-time academic staff to part-time staff; class-size; and student-to-staff ratio; to allocate at least 2% of expenditure to research and renovation; and to organise and audit resources so as to focus on core functions.

It is, of course, noteworthy that, virtually inevitably, the country will continue to lose some of its best qualified and skilled people to the countries that offer better terms and pay; as recently exemplified in a recent report that about 2,500 doctors left Kenya in two years, headed mainly for the United Kingdom and Australia.

It should be borne in mind that education is a highly rated matter and consideration in Kenya. Many posts, including in teaching, county and national government, etc require degree qualification. Posts such as Member of Parliament, Member of County Assembly, and civil service officials generally stipulate degree qualification. As I write this I understand that the Kenyan Deputy President is studying for a master's degree at the University of Nairobi; that one of the 47 county governors is embroiled in a legal dispute as to whether he falsely claimed to be a graduate at the time he stood for the position; my local chief is attending evening classes for his second degree, etc. All the more the reason why our Dr Matiang'i is right to have blown the whistle on worthless and false university courses and degrees; and reportedly several universities are facing the possibility of losing their charters and being closed down.

Nevertheless, the content and character of the education provided to the Kenyan 'bwana' and 'bibi' suggest that they are in all probability likely to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to propel national development to attain the ambitious Vision2030 United Nations medium-developed category.

Dan Thea is a regular contributor to Liberation journal, writing mainly on Africa.

Peace advances in Colombia despite challenges of implementation

Cherilyn Elston

Following the signing of the historic peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP in December 2016, Colombia has started implementing the peace agreements, bringing the country ever closer to peace after more than half a century of war.

At the end of January 2017 Colombia's unabated march towards peace was symbolised by the movement of thousands of FARC troops to special zones where they will begin reintegrating into civilian life. Photos of the approximately 6,900 FARC members making the journey by bus, boat or on foot swept around the world. These images showed the remarkable progress of the peace process, despite the difficulties faced when the initial peace deal was narrowly rejected in last year's referendum.

The United Nations, which is monitoring the implementation of the peace agreements, reported that the FARC have now begun laying down arms in the demobilization zones and that they had received 85% of arms in the camps. They praised this as a major step towards consolidating the ceasefire and transforming the armed group into a political party. According to the timeline set out in the peace agreement, the laying down of arms will be finished in 180 days, and all parties have reiterated their commitment to reach this deadline.

This comes despite some serious delays in the process. Jean Arnault, the head of the UN mission in Colombia, reported to the UN Security Council in April 2017 that there were concerns about the "slow pace" of implementation by Colombian authorities. In particular this related to the construction of the demobilization zones, which had not been completed in time for the arrival of the FARC. Many camps did not have access to clean water, there were also reports of inadequate food supplies and medical services; the guerrillas were sleeping in temporary camps and themselves had to take part in building the infrastructure in the zones.

Likewise, the slow progress of the legislative implementation of the peace agreement has raised concerns. In December 2016 the Colombian Constitutional Court granted the Colombian Congress special powers to "fast track" the necessary legislation and reforms for the implementation of the peace deal. This included key legislation such as the amnesty law for FARC members accused of political crimes, the creation of the transitional justice system and laws relating to security guarantees for the FARC and political movements which have been persecuted by the state and right-wing paramilitaries in the country.

Although the amnesty law was passed on 30th December 2016, by the end of March 2017 only 72 FARC members had benefited from the law despite more than 1000 requests. The Colombian judiciary, like the UN, has raised concerns about the delays and

practical implementation of the law. Similarly, only 142 of 400 prisoners pardoned by the Colombian state had been released.

The amnesty and pardon law also applies to political prisoners who have been jailed for supposed links with the FARC, a tactic that has been used to silence many opposition political activists, social leaders and trade unionists in Colombia. Prominent social leaders, such as the trade union activist Huber Ballesteros who was falsely accused of having links with the guerrillas and imprisoned for nearly three and a half years, have now benefited from the passing of the amnesty law. However, many cases remain open until the special transitional justice system is operating and hundreds of political prisoners are still behind bars due to the delays in implementation.

The Colombian Congress has also passed another of the most important pieces of legislation and a core element of the peace agreement, the transitional justice system known as the "Integral System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition". This will create three key structures: a truth commission, a unit to search for the disappeared and a special peace justice system that will consider cases related to the armed conflict and apply alternative sentences for those charged of serious crimes as part of the conflict.



March of FARC troops to demobilization zones. Source: FARC

After considerable debate in Congress the law was ratified but not without some major modifications that have raised alarm amongst social organisations and victims' groups. Of particular concern was the removal of financing paramilitary groups from the remit of the peace courts and possible sanctions for FARC members that could limit their ability to participate in politics. Other worrying changes relate to proof of command responsibility, relating to holding military commanders responsible for crimes committed by subordinates, and the possibility of including false positive cases—where the Colombian Armed Forces murdered almost 4,000 civilians to boost figures for guerrillas killed in combat—in the special peace justice courts.

Despite these challenges, when the Colombian government and the FARC met to evaluate the first 100 days of implementation at the end of March a road map was set out to fulfil the commitments made in the peace agreement. This included a commitment from the government to deliver the infrastructure of the demobilization zones, the presentation of further peace legislation to Congress, the speeding up of the activation of security guarantees and the processing of amnesties. The commitment of both parties to end the conflict is shown by the fact that since the signing of the peace agreement the bilateral ceasefire has held and no casualties have been registered.

However, the security context in Colombia has become a major source of concern for both national and international human rights groups. There have been numerous reports of the presence of illegal armed groups and paramilitary organisations in areas vacated by the FARC, leaving a political vacuum that the Colombian state has not filled and a rise in attacks and threats against local community leaders in rural areas.

According to the Colombian think tank INDEPAZ, 117 social activists and human rights defenders were assassinated in 2016. The OHCHR registered 59 killings of social leaders but reported 127 deaths in total of trade unionists and members of political organisations in Colombia in the same period. While the Colombian state denies any links between the killings and negates the responsibility of paramilitary groups, many activists are fearful of a repeat of the 1980s when thousands of left-wing activists were killed after a previous peace attempt with the FARC. At least 20 killings of community activists have been registered so far in 2017.

In this context it is urgent that the Colombian state recognises the threats against human rights defenders and implements the security mechanisms included in the peace agreement to guarantee the safety of community leaders and political activists. This is especially important as the FARC begin the reintegration process and the country takes the essential steps towards guaranteeing the right to political opposition.

In his report to the UN Security Council, Jean Arnault spoke of the “relatively short window of opportunity” to build a solid foundation for peace in Colombia, and the need for the international community to voice its support for the peace process at this critical juncture. As the country tackles the huge challenge of implementing the historic peace agreement, including the complex tasks of the laying down of weapons, applying the amnesty law and planning the reintegration of the FARC, interna-

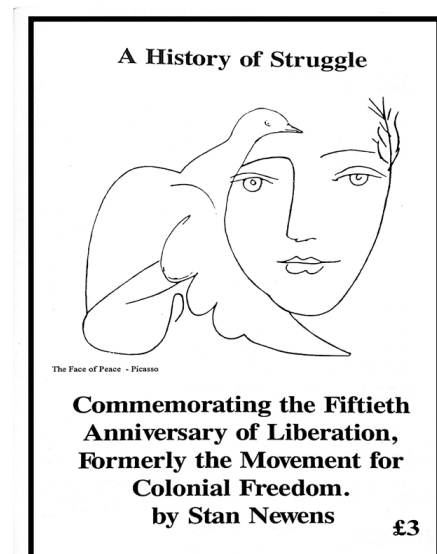
tional solidarity is crucial for the success of the peace process; especially to support local communities in the struggle for peace and end impunity for human right abuses in Colombia.



March of FARC troops to demobilization zones. Source: FARC

Justice for Colombia, the British trade union campaign on Colombia, has been building support for peace with social justice in Colombia since 2002 and has been named official advisors to the current peace talks. We have campaigned for the participation of Colombian civil society in the peace process, built support for the peace talks in the UK and Europe and facilitated experience sharing between Colombian peace negotiators and politicians and trade unionists involved in the Good Friday Agreement.

This article was written for liberation By Cherilyn Elston, Programme Assistant, Justice for Colombia.



Fear of the unknown –Trump and Cuba

What do the next four years hold in store for Cuba-US relations?

Natasha Hickman

In common with US-Cuba experts from diplomats to academics and solidarity activists to press pundits, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign can only guess what Trump's first action on Cuba might be.

If his Twitter stream is any indication, things do not look good.

In the lead up to Trump's inauguration, the Obama administration had been working to shore up the outgoing president's legacy and to try to make the policy of engagement with the island irreversible.

Of course there are fundamental flaws in this policy: the blockade remains, Guantánamo Bay is still occupied territory, and the US government is still pursuing policies of regime change; but compared to the previous 50 years of open hostility and aggression the new rapprochement and warming relations have been welcomed by CSC and, more importantly, by the people of Cuba.

In the two years since the historic 17 December statements announcing the reestablishment of relations, embassies have reopened, direct mail resumed, travel expanded, limited trade allowed, and in March 2016 Obama became the first US president to visit Cuba for 90 years.

The US-Cuba bilateral commission has had five meetings and signed 11 non-binding agreements and memoranda of understanding in areas of mutual interest ranging from health, environment, disaster management, education, narcotics and joint working to prevent oil spills. Clinical trials to test Cuba's lung cancer vaccine in the US, protection of coral reefs and direct flights from many US cities to Cuba have been agreed. Agreements supported internationally, in Cuba, and the US.

From 18 January, just two days before Trump took office, 'artisanal' charcoal produced by Cuban cooperatives will become the country's first export to the US for more than 50 years.

And most significantly for the normalisation of relations was the 12 January announcement that the US was ending its infamous 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' immigration policy and Medical Parole Programme. Finally putting Cuban immigrants on an equal footing with others from Latin America and ending a policy that Cuba has condemned for encouraging dangerous migration and brain drain.

But what happens to these agreements is anybody's guess.

John Kirby, vice president of Alaska Air which began its first flights to Cuba on 5 January was asked at the flights' press launch if the incoming Trump administration might change the rules.

"Your guess is as good as mine at this point," he replied.

Both sides of the blockade lobby are doing all they can to reach the incoming president.

At a White House event to mark the anniversary of the re-establishing of relations on 17 December, Obama urged those gathered who favoured normalised relations to "carry forward the work of strengthening our partnership in the years ahead."

Secretary of State John Kerry focussed the Americas' section of his "exit memo" on the administration's Cuba policy, writing that for over fifty years the policy of trying to isolate Cuba had failed, and indeed backfired as "it was often the United States – not Cuba – that was left isolated by this policy." He concluded "greater engagement will serve the interests of both the American people and the Cuban people."

More than one hundred new Cuban small business owners signed a letter to Trump appealing to him – "a successful businessman" – making the argument that normal relations were "important for Cuba, for the Cuban entrepreneurs and for all of our families".

In Cuba, Josefina Vidal, the foreign ministry's chief negotiator on Cuba-US relations said that "Cuba would hope the new US government takes into account the results we have achieved... that are backed by the majority of the Cuban population (and) US citizens."

And in Congress the 'Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act' sponsored by Senator Jeff Flake (AZ), now has 53 co-sponsors who will attempt to push the bill through the Senate in 2017.

If Trump is sensitive to US business interests in Cuba it would be hard for him to turn back the clock. Business is in favour of improving relations, US companies such as Google, AirBnB, United Airlines and others are already working with Cuba and others are registering their trademarks in Havana looking to a time they may be able to trade freely if the blockade ever ends. Trump himself is reported to have sent associates to Havana in the 1990s to investigate potential hotel opportunities.

However his statements during the presidential election indicate that he is anything but sensitive on the issue.

On the campaign trail he courted the hard line vote in Florida. In a rally for right-wing Cuban Americans in September he said: "All the concessions that Barack Obama has granted the Castro regime were done through executive order, which means the next president can reverse them – and that I will do unless the Castro regime meets our demands. Not my demands. Our demands,"

His vice presidential nominee, Governor Mike Pence, went even further, saying: "When Donald Trump and I take to the White House, we will reverse Barack Obama's executive orders on Cuba".

On 25 October he addressed the Brigade 2506 Bay of Pigs veterans association where he was presented with an award and the group's first ever presidential endorsement.

Just days after Fidel Castro's death he tweeted: "If Cuba is unwilling to make a better deal for the Cuban people, the Cuban/American people, and the US as a whole, I will terminate the deal."

Despite his overtures to the Miami extremists, in Miami-Dade County, heartland of the Cuba-American vote, he lost to Hilary Clinton by 290,000 votes. Polls show that the majority of the Cuban-American population favour better relations. 70 per cent of them back Obama's initiative to open relations and 63 per cent oppose the blockade, according to recent findings of a Florida International University survey.

Unfortunately, Trump's appointments to date fly in the face of such research on Cuban-American opinions or the desires and interests of diplomats and US business. Rather they signal that he is taking advice from the most rabidly pro-blockade groupings in Washington.

Trump's national security advisor and his nominee to lead the CIA are Retired Lt Gen Michael T Flynn and Congressman Mike Pompeo of Kansas. Flynn has called Cuba an ally of radical islamists that shares their hatred of the West. Whilst Pompeo, in response to 17 December 2014's announcements, accused Obama of "cozying up with America's enemies at the expense of our friends and principles."

But it is the appointment of Mauricio Claver-Carone to Trump's transition team at the US Treasury department that raises most alarm.

Carone is former executive director of the most active pro-blockade group in Washington, the US-Cuba Democracy Political Action Committee (USCD PAC) and a fierce critic of improving relations with Havana.

The US Treasury, the department to which he has been assigned, oversees the work of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) which in turn regulates trade and travel to Cuba and is responsible for the billions of dollars in fines imposed on international banks for processing financial transactions with Cuba. It was the threat of sanctions from the OFAC which led the Cooperative Bank to close CSC's account in 2015.

According to USA Today, Claver-Carone now has the "one job that's perfectly suited for him: undoing President Obama's normalisation efforts with Cuba."

Carone also supports Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act being implemented. This is a clause which permits US courts to file lawsuits against foreign companies that have invested in busi-

nesses nationalised by the Cuban government which were once owned by US or Cuban-American citizens. The President has the right to suspend this provision for six month periods – and every president has done for the last 20 years.

Claver-Carone is against this suspension and has testified before Congress that Title III grievances should be allowed to proceed. In 2016 he told the Tampa Bay Times, "I support it 100 per cent."

Former US Ambassador and blockade supporter, Otto Reich, believes Claver-Carone's new job "is a clear signal ... that the president-elect will carry out the promise he made to the Cuban American community".

Reich is also joint signatory to an open letter to Trump signed by five former Reagan and Bush era US ambassadors which calls for a change in the interim ambassador appointed by Obama to Havana, Jeffrey DeLaurentis to one who will be "more in tune with the new administration's world view."

The battle for influence was being fought by an increasingly aggressive lobbying campaign played out in open letters and opinion pieces in national newspapers and journals in the days before Trump was sworn in. José Cárdenas, a former Bush administration Latin America advisor, urged Trump to reverse Obama's travel policies and increase spending on covert programs to topple Havana's government in an article in the Foreign Policy journal this month.

Despite a growing confidence that Trump will deliver for them on the part of the pro-blockade lobby the Obama government's reforms have been designed to make it "difficult, if not impossible for any Republican president to reverse the opening to Cuba", according to a Reuters news agency report. The majority of the US public, politicians from both parties and US business and agricultural interests support the policy. Companies that have invested in travel and telecommunications including airlines, cruises and hotels will not want to lose their investments. There may also be significant legal and financial implications for the new administration if they were to attempt a U-turn on the first day in office.

However, if that was the objective it would be easy for the new president to make such sweeping changes. There is nothing to stop Trump signing executive orders that could close the US embassy, cancel people-to-people travel, and stop sales of rum and cigars at the stroke of a pen.

The aim of the blockade has always been to strangle the Cuban economy and prevent money from getting into the country in order to create suffering and unrest. The likes of Claver-Carone, the Cuban American Foundations, Brigade 2056 and the right-wing of the Republican Party will be pushing for this from the moment Trump steps into the White House.

At his Confirmation Hearing for Secretary of State in January, Rex Tillerson stated that he would be reviewing Obama's Cuba policy and considering whether the decision to take the country off the 'State sponsors of terrorism' list was appropriate.

We can only wait and see what Trump does in power. But whatever happens the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's priorities in 2017 will remain the same. End the US blockade once and for all and return the occupied territory of Guantánamo Bay to Cuba. Neither of these will be won without a fight.

This article was written for Liberation by Natasha Hickman, Cuba Solidarity Campaign.

BOOK REVIEW: ALTERNATIVES TO NEOLIBERALISM Towards equality and democracy

**Edited by Bryn Jones & Mike O'Donnell. Policy Press, 2017.
Reviewed by James Grayson**

The current generation of educators and practitioners of political discourse have not operated in contexts other than neoliberalism. This reflects a failure of radicals to challenge and to convince. The book attempts to address the deficit. It offers three themes: an alternative context, postulated structural reforms and a changed balance between civil society and markets.

Aimed at the academic market it also offers useful content and prescriptions for more general readers. There are thoughts about the likely consequences of Brexit which currently must be speculative.

Some of the contexts advanced are incomplete. Throughout the 19th century there were moves towards adult male suffrage; not to be confused with democracy. There is no mention of the Levellers or the Diggers or the Chartists. There is an incomplete analysis of feminism with neither any reference to the contributions of Rosa Luxemburg and Eleanor Marx nor, more recently, the work of the "Wages for Housework" campaign.

The authors broadly envisage the main alternative to the current regime to be some sort of development of the Labour party. They are critical of the, "Big Government," approaches of Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan, preferring a more autonomous, bottom up approach. A difficulty for a government with a public sector shorn as a consequence of various privatisations is the diminution of its ability to affect the working of the economy in general. Watch the activities of various financial institutions as they anticipate Brexit and set up activity bases in other countries.

A major problem is the tax take. In capitalism there are parasitic industries devoted to discovering legal ways of

minimising the taxes paid by firms, disproportionately by the larger ones. Approaches to innovation in this area include transaction and turnover taxes; both probably need transnational implementation. A further approach would be to use a happiness index as I understand is the case in Bhutan. Perhaps governments should apply broader perspectives within capitalism and become less concerned about larger or smaller states? Instead a major concern might become the modification of capitalist mechanisms with the aim of moving towards a consensus of a better society. To date there is no such consensus.

The two major UK parties, during the Brexit negotiations seem to have decided to prioritise internal conflicts; in other European countries coalitions have become the norm.

"In its 2015 manifesto the British Conservative party pledged itself to higher levels of expenditure on: rail, road and broadband infrastructure, research and development and culture and sport. It promised regulation to protect the countryside and the marine environment." Even the party split is less intense than many might suppose.

Race and gender are identified as potentially promising issues for social democrats. The former relates to the exclusion or inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities together with slants towards immigration. Perhaps women have a greater potential? They are not a minority; most have experienced gender based discrimination.

"The UK economy encompasses massive inequalities, in wealth, and income public and private debt." Might third, or should it be fourth wave feminism redress this?

'Alternatives to Neoliberalism' is an interesting and challenging read.

Democracy derailed in Turkey as Erdogan reaches his desired destination

Melanie Gingell

Winning by the slimmest of majorities and without any criticism from our UK government Erdogan now has his mandate to derail Turkish democracy and set in stone the repressive measures he had imposed by virtue of a series of emergency decrees. The OSCE official election observers have reported that the Referendum of 16th April 2017 did not meet Council of Europe standards, was not a genuinely democratic process and that the mass arrests of journalists and the closure of media outlets denied the Turkish people a real choice.

Our government, which often claims to advance a liberal and democratic agenda in Turkey and the Middle East, has been notably quiet regarding Erdogan's slide into authoritarianism. It has singularly failed to publicly criticise the blatant abuses and massive human rights violations, which have been perpetrated in the name of anti-terror operations and as far as we know neither have any serious criticisms or concerns been raised in private with Turkey, despite mounting pressure to do so.

The Erdogan strategy to consolidate his presidential powers has been based on an unrelenting adversarial approach towards all opposition, deepening the already tragic social, cultural and religious divides, risking civil war and yet more regional instability.

The constitutional changes will bring into permanent effect the current position in Turkey, in which democracy has been undermined by an extended period of rule by emergency decree, expanding the power of the executive and crushing the voices of peaceful pro-democracy campaigners.

The amendments to the constitution will increase the President's executive powers, the position of Prime Minister will be abolished and ministers will be accountable to the President. They will also see senior judges appointed by politicians, and most of them by the President. Thus it is unlikely that the Constitutional Court could or would challenge any abuses of presidential power. The independence of the judiciary will be officially dead.

Abuses of Presidential power abound in Turkey: a secret war is raging in the predominantly Kurdish south-east of the country. In February of this year the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report on the region revealing that some 2,000 people were killed in security operations, including 800 state forces since July 2015. It details 'enforced disappearances; torture; destruction of housing and cultural heritage; incitement to hatred; prevention of access to emergency medical aid, food, water and livelihoods; violence against women; and severe curtailment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as political participation.'

The Referendum took place at a time when a third of all journalists in Turkey are in prison. This is the tip of the iceberg: 130,000 people are currently under arrest for expressing critical opinions. The President justifies this: "There is no difference be-

tween a terrorist with a gun and a bomb in his hand and those who use their work and pen to support terror. The fact that an individual could be a deputy, an academic, an author, a journalist or the director of an NGO does not change the fact that that person is a terrorist."

Thirteen democratically elected members of parliament of the third largest party in Turkey, the HDP, were detained pending trial in November 2016, ten of whom remain in custody. This represents a deliberate crushing of political opposition. Both the United States and the EU have at various times expressed deep concern over the arrests. Our Government has chosen not to make an independent statement.

Our government has chosen to "empathise before criticising" Turkey in the current period. But of course, our government has chosen not only to empathise but also, in January of this year, to approve the sale of fighter jets to a country, which the UN fears is engaging in aerial bombardments of its own people. Since 2015 the UK has sold Turkey £330 million worth of arms, including £26m-worth of ML13 licences, which relate to exports of armoured plate, body armour and helmets. In addition, the UK has sold Turkey £8.5m-worth of ML10 licences, for aircraft, helicopters and drones, and almost £4m-worth of ML4 licences, for missiles, bombs and "counter-measures" and is a priority market for British arms exports.

This is unacceptable, but it is of even more concern in the light of the remarks of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, tasked with scrutinising the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that the FCO has inadequate funding in order to maintain a sufficiently independent analytical capacity in relation to Turkey.

When defending human rights and democracy, the UK must be both seen and heard. The situation for this NATO ally is at a critical point and presents a danger to us all. The FCO must be prepared to raise concerns about Turkey with the Turks publicly. Currently, as the FAC has pointed out, by being insufficiently critical in its dialogue with Turkey, the UK risks being perceived as de-prioritising its own human rights values but it will also be perceived to be abandoning the peoples in Europe who are in the direst of need.

Silence in the face of what is happening in Turkey amounts to complicity. The fight for democracy and the struggle for the fundamental rights of the Kurdish people in Turkey will continue but it will be a difficult and painful struggle. It's a struggle that deserves our support and in the run up to the general election in June we must be asking the difficult questions and pushing for a government that will move towards a modicum of ethics in its foreign policy, for all our sakes.

This article was written for Liberation by Melanie Gingell, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign.

Contact Melanie: knklondon@gn.apc.org

The Demise of Democracy and the rise of Authoritarianism: the case of Guyana

Mohabir Anil Nandlall

The President of Guyana, David Granger, has recently rejected a list of nominees presented to him by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, to fill the position of Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) in accordance with Article 161(2) of the Constitution.

In so doing, the President has etched his name in history, as the first President to have done so, since the 'Carter Formula' devised by former US President Jimmy Carter, was implemented for the 1992 Elections. The President has compounded the issue by the erroneous interpretation of the said Article 161(2), which he conveyed when he spoke to the media. In his remarks, the President communicated the misguided impression that only judges, former judges or persons qualified to be appointed as judges to the High Court or an Appellate Court qualify to be appointed as Chairman of the Elections Commission. The President omitted to disclose that in addition to those possessed of legal qualifications, the Constitution also provides for... "or any other fit and proper person" to be appointed as well. Indeed, the 1980 Constitution was specifically amended to make this addition.

The Carter Formula was intended and designed to create, as far as possible, a politically consensual and balanced Elections Commission. Hence, the Commission is composed of three Commissioners nominated by the Opposition parties in Parliament and three commissioners nominated by the governing party, along with a Chairman who has a casting vote. This Chairman comes from a list of six (6) which emanates from the Leader of the Opposition but which must find the acceptability of the President and from which he is empowered to choose one. If the Chairman is to be chosen by the President alone, it would destroy the vital equilibrium which the Elections Commission was intended to protect.

Whatever discretionary power may lie with the President in this matter, that discretion must be lawfully exercised, that is, the President is enjoined to exercise his discretion reasonably, rationally, taking into account relevant considerations and discounting irrelevant considerations; he must not act capriciously and whimsically.

It is unfortunate, that while he regales the nation about social cohesion and national unity at frequent intervals, political tensions have risen high. Suspicions have been excited and the fear

of rigged elections has returned to stalk this land. Having regard to our political history and from where the imbroglio has originated, these fears are not without foundation. After all, we have gone through the process of appointing a Chairman of the Elections Commission, on five (5) previous occasions over the past twenty-five (25) years, using the identical constitutional formula. On each occasion, the exercise was completed with seamless ease and was devoid of any rancor or conflict. No one ever expressed the view that the language, spirit or intentment of Article 161 (2) of the Constitution was ambiguous or obscure. Mr. Desmond Hoyte, a Senior Counsel, was shouldered with the constitutional duty of presenting four of those five lists, as the Opposition Leader. He appeared not to have ever encountered any difficulty in construing the constitutional requirements or compiling names for those lists. Over the years, he provided lists with names of Guyanese of diverse and disparate academic qualifications, technical skills and professional pursuits. On each occasion that he submitted such a list, the sitting President, without question, selected one person from the list submitted. Although profound legal and other controversies surrounded the 1992, 1997 and 2001 elections, all emanating from the political Opposition, none touched or concerned the process by which the Chairman of the Elections Commission was appointed.

The first time that the table has turned and the Opposition has now become the Government, this hitherto, simple and non-contentious process has suddenly become extraordinarily complicated, complex and controversial. It is clear that technical arguments and obscure legal interpretations are being invented to frustrate the real meaning and spirit of the Constitution. It is equally clear that the President wants to appoint his own nominee to the position of Chairman of GECOM. If this is allowed to happen, it will tilt that vital balance which the Carter formula was intended to achieve. Such a state of affairs will result in rigged elections and social unrest and violence. It will mark Guyana's backward slide into political dictatorship and authoritarianism.

INDEPENDENT CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE FOR SCRUTINIZING THE EXECUTIVE UNDER CONSTANT ATTACKS BY GOVERNMENT

Of course, the blatant attempt to violate the Constitution by this Administration in relation to the appointment of a Chairman is not an isolated phenomenon.

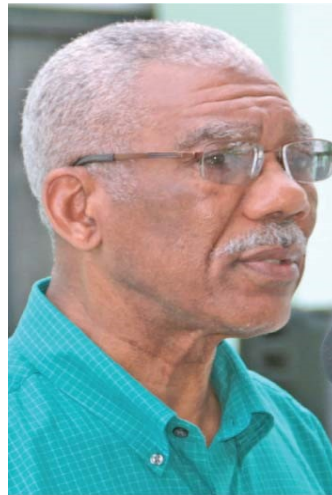
We have already seen the systematic attempts by the Executive to undermine constitutional offices and institutions whose functional responsibility is to check, oversight and scrutinize the Executive and to guard against excesses and the abuse of power. These include: the National Assembly, the Judiciary, the Judicial Service Commission, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Auditor General's Office, the Public Service Commission, the Police Service Commission, the Public Utilities Commission and the Police Complaints Authority. In each of these organizations, there have been attempts to interfere with, undermine, or publicly assault officers, as they attempt to discharge their respective mandate. Most, if not all, of these attempts have been made public. Some have resulted in litigation. In some instances, adverse rulings have already been made against the Government by the courts.

In particular, because of its special role in guarding against constitutional violations, abuse of power and protection of democratic institutions, the Judiciary has been specifically singled out for attacks designed to undermine its independence. There have been no appointments to the Judiciary in almost two years since this Government assumed Office. The Judicial Service Commission has recommended several appointments of judges to the President, to both the High Court and the Court of Appeal. The President simply refuses to make the appointments. Currently, there are three vacancies in the Court of Appeal and several in the High Court. The Court of Appeal cannot sit without a judge moving up from the High Court.

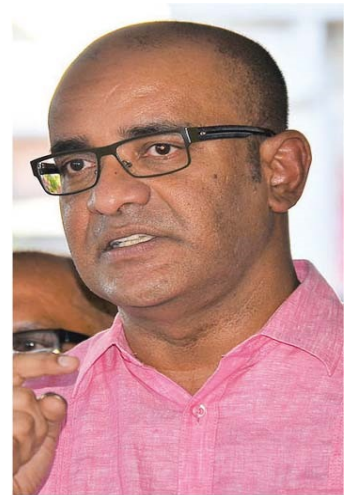
Additionally, the Attorney General openly abuses judges in the media and in the Courts. The Chairman of the Public Service Commission, who is also, ex officio, a member of the Police Service Commission and the Judicial Service Commission was invited to the Office of the President and requested to resign. When he refused, he was issued with veiled threats. This was followed by the establishment of a tribunal to remove him from office. Currently, he is suspended from performing his various constitutional functions. The DPP's Office is constantly being undermined; the latest incident is the hiring of Special Prosecutors by the Office of the President without the authority of the DPP. In the Parliament, the Government has installed a Speaker who unfairly censors freedom of speech in the National Assembly in relation to Opposition Members. This Speaker is, openly, partisan to the Government. The Auditor General was the subject of a humiliating verbal assault at the hands of the Minister of Finance simply because in his Annual Report he opined that the Government was abusing contingency funds in public expenditure.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF THE CITIZENS BEING TRAMPLED UPON

Dozens of agricultural leases issued under the previous PPP Administration to farmers are being capriciously revoked by the President without any due process whatsoever. These very lands are then given to Party hacks by this Administration. This Government has confiscated properties owned by title and given to single parents under the previous Administration, under a subsidized housing programme and are distributing these properties to their own supporters.



President David Granger



**Opposition Leader
Bharrat Jagdeo**

There have been mass dismissals of staff, including, nearly two thousand Amerindians, in the public sector on the ground of their ethnicity or their perceived association with the previous Administration; although the constitution enshrines protection against discrimination and the freedom to associate, politically and to hold political views as fundamental rights and freedoms. These persons have not been afforded a hearing nor paid their severance or contractual benefits. The above is by no means exhaustive and we have irrefutable evidence, in most instances, in the form of sworn affidavits from the victims, to support the transgressions cited above.

In the circumstances, it is clear that democracy, the rule of law and the sanctity of the Constitution are under threat in Guyana. Elections are next due in 2020 and we ask progressives and the labour movement in the UK to give their support to our campaign to expose attempts to subvert and rig the outcome of those elections.

This article was written for Liberation by Mohabir Anil Nandall MP, of the People's Progressive Party, Guyana.

Africa then, now and in the future

Cianan Whelan

The initial disparity in wealth between the West and Africa started with the West's devastating application of organised violence. The West's immense capital, gained during colonial times, gave them successive advantages as money making money. The international markets relationship with Africa must include regulation to ensure effective equity in a true meritocracy. The value system controlling the distribution of wealth within capitalism must be one that incorporates need, empathy and systematic disadvantage, not profit alone. Western intervention in Africa continues mainly through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), who offer loans in return for intrusive structural reform. Multi-National Corporations (MNC's) benefit greatly from IMF and WB reforms. China's desire to help Africa should be viewed with equal measures of optimism and skepticism. The eventual outcomes of China's intervention are widely unknown.

Colonialism has left Africa with significant disadvantages for a variety of reasons. Empires made colonies into economic factories. For example, the Cote d'Ivoire was turned into a predominantly chocolate producing nation. This left these economies lacking the diversity of production needed to achieve sustainable growth. The West controlled value in international markets. For example, Ghanaian gold was taken, without resistance and sold at market value. When Ghana later entered the international market, the true value of gold became apparent. Others were left in a state of war by the British Empire. In Sudan, the British created an Arab managerial complex, dividing the nation and left an ongoing civil war. Many militant groups have been spawned from perceived and real, neo-colonial threats. Recruitment is easier where poverty flourishes.

Noam Chomsky tells us that within an unequal nation the rich will have an unequal influence upon power and that this is a moral truism that should be taught in high school. The West's legacy is endemic and entrenched inequality, the perfect climate for corruption, in post colonial Africa.

The West repressed African potential for development when they were politically, economically and culturally dominated. During this period, Western powers were flourishing economically. Britain funded the industrial revolution from the money it gained through colonialism. Through this process, the West provided loans charging high interest, causing an upward distribution of wealth away from Africa. The key advantage was exchange rate control and domination in international capital movement.

Rutger Bregman researched Indian farmers, who were paid annually, when they sold their harvest. They were IQ tested before and after they were paid. The group scored 20% higher in the IQ test after they had been paid. Poverty breeds poor decisions,

Bregman concludes. The potential of Africa's growth without such poverty is limitless.

The IMF and WB grant African countries loans at moments of crisis. The IMF sets out a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which must be agreed to for the loan to be agreed. The SAP demands a reduction in trade unionism, privatisation of markets, reduction of interest rates and barriers for foreign investment. Africa had a 3.1% share of global trade in 1955, and 1.2% in 1990. During this period SAP's became prominent in Africa.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva paid off his national debt to the IMF five years earlier than scheduled. This enabled his government to enter into debate about the mechanisms of the IMF and pursue a more equal relationship. He challenged their imposing on sovereign rights and subjective view of economics.

Mark Curtis observed that only in a minority of mining operations do African countries have a shareholding. Company tax rates are low whilst generous incentives such as corporate tax holidays are offered.

The IMF demanded a reduction in protectionism which allowed MNC's entry into the market and then domination. Protectionism helps developing countries to grow domestic enterprise to a point where they are able to compete internationally. In developing nations, industries have not got the means to compete with MNC's and thus must be protected. Ghana's rice market is now dominated by US companies. After Ghana dropped protectionism, US companies took the opportunity to crank up demand with lower pricing.

IMF IS DISLIKED BY ALL SIDES

- **From the right:** Nationalists are dislike supranational institutions;
- **From the left:** Socialists dislike policies that hurt poor elements of society;
- **IMF is run by rich countries;**
- **IMF follows bad "neoliberal" policies.**



Source: World Bank

It is a different story in the US. Despite having the highest tariffs and regulations in the world the US was the world's fastest-growing economy throughout the 19th century and up until the 1920s. The 1887 Alien Property Act prohibited the ownership of land by aliens—or by companies more than 20% owned by aliens—in the territories. When labour, resources, the process of adding value to a product and profits are all kept in one country, it inevitably benefits that country the most. Only when domestic industry can compete with international industry should markets be fully opened.

MNC's rarely invests in the long term or lets home grown subsidiaries develop. It is unlikely they will pursue full capacity in the host country. Many simply extract resources. On average, a third of the business is from abroad. Nestle are one exception, producing 5% of their products in Switzerland.

Free market advocates argue that Africa's main commodities have fallen in price because of cyclical pressures of capitalism. However, John Kofas explains that the majority of the people were not better off when prices were falling. Regardless of capitalism's expansion and contraction cycles, from the 1950s to the present, living standards for the African people have not improved. This is evident in terms of life expectancy, access to clean water and sanitation. Unemployment in Africa, the persistence of a working poor and a poorly funded public sector are other critical indicators. GDP figures can be particularly misleading as they can look positive when in actuality only a small group of very high earners have seen an increase in their income.

China appears to do more than other interlopers in Africa. They have invested in roads, ports, railways, hospitals, schools and hydro-energy. However they label loans as 'aid', only invest in those countries rich in natural resources and have developed infrastructure for the benefit of their own companies. African satisfaction is a by-product. There is negligible attention to workers rights, collective bargaining, living wages and affordable housing. Al Jazeera has found that technical blueprints for projects are often presented in Chinese only. Labour and material are also often Chinese.

Chinese investment in Sudan oilfields is partly to be blamed for Khartoum's war of attrition against Southern Sudanese and

West Darfurians. China continues to lend support to General Al-Bashir's repressive regime. They have used their veto at the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) to undercut international efforts to address the crisis. Chinese intervention in Africa should be highly scrutinised as their financial investment is going to make up a considerable share of GDP. As George Orwell wrote "you cannot really rule over people for too long without losing a bit of your own humanity, no matter what your original mission".

Africa must start to meet domestic demand with internal supply. Ha Joon Chang supports controlling foreign direct investment as it can hinder domestic long term progress. Advanced technologies and managerial skills are essential for domestic business growth. A temporary transitional period may be necessary as domestic suppliers rise to meet new-found demand enabled to them by protectionism.

Africa should also look for more equitable trade and loan deals. This can be achieved within an intra continental model. The African Star treaty alliance group, the Africa Monetary Fund and African Central Bank are keys to future success.

Cianan Whelan is a freelance Research Assistant at Liberation

DIARY DATE

Please note that this year's Liberation AGM will be on Saturday June 10th (just after the Election!) from 11.30 am until 4.00 pm at our usual venue, the St Pancras Church Hall, Lancing Street NW1 1NA. Two minutes from Euston Station.

Meet our new Chair, Kelvin Hopkins MP. Help us formulate our priorities for 2018. Please send resolutions to Maggie at info@liberationorg.co.uk. Guest speakers will be confirmed nearer the date.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU



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Mick Whelan, general secretary

Tosh McDonald, president



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