

L i b e r a t i o n

Journal of **Liberation** formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom Journal Vol 61 No2- Summer Issue 2019



No to war in the Gulf

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Formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom, Liberation was founded in 1954. Today Liberation campaigns for peace, economic justice, equality and human rights

Liberation
75-77 St John Street, London EC1M 4NN

Maggie Bowden general secretary
This issue prepared by Ararat Ratoosi

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info@liberationorg.o.uk 02073242498
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An action checklist for the TUC

UNDERSTANDABLY, the labour, trade union, and progressive movement in Britain will be focused in the next period ahead on rebuilding a country that works for working people after Brexit. No doubt, the annual congress of trades unions, the TUC, when it meets in September will want to concentrate on exactly how a better life for all can be achieved.

But, when you consider that at last year's congress, the only motion on international matters not about Brexit was about Turkey, it's not unreasonable to think that, maybe, some thinking about priorities is needed. Not that it's all about motions per se. The General Council report is always at congress, open to probing questions from the floor. Some unions are even relaxed about whether delegates outside the leadership can ask deep questions!

Given that Britain needs desperately to develop a 'rest of the world' approach to global trade, it seems bizarre that the last thing on our collective minds is to think about how we inter-relate with Belize or Guyana, Botswana or Sierra Leone. Surely, developing good links and mutual knowledge of all nations is the first step to boosting trade?

The 2018 GC report had a couple of pages out of 135 devoted to "international solidarity" and the bulk of the text concerned institutions the TUC sends representatives to. There was nothing about developing awareness of trades unionists, especially younger ones, about Britain's appalling record as an Empire. Whilst the TUC International Committee appears perennially obsessed with the EU and the ETUC. In contrast, the quarterly meetings of the London, East, and South East affiliated unions and guests have at least listened to guest speakers from a wide range of countries, including South Africa, Venezuela, and Cuba and many more. Whilst LESE's liaison with parallel Public Services Committee's work on austerity and Race Relations Committee on fighting fascism.

We don't know yet what the motions to congress from affiliate unions will be, though the choice of amendments they make to these one they are known will be critical to the mysterious animal that is "The Composite", whereby all manner of notions are thrown together to magically produce a small number of motions, perhaps leaning towards consensus. This random approach can mean that vital international issues are

neglected.

Giving judgment at the Court of Appeal in London, Master of the Rolls Sir Terence Etherton said the government "made no concluded assessments of whether the Saudi-led coalition had committed violations of international humanitarian law in the past, during the Yemen conflict, and made no attempt to do so", ordering that the government "must reconsider the matter" and estimate any future risks. It was held that there was a clear risk that the arms might be used in a serious violation of international humanitarian law. So, at congress, will there be consideration of the dramatic developments regarding UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, ruled as unlawful?

Consider other possibilities that unions might focus on in their motions and amendments to TUC:

- Counter-protests against fascism
- Humane treatment for asylum seekers and refugees.
- An amnesty for over stayers who have not been engaged in serious criminal activity.
- Greater resources for teaching English as a Second Language Language

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Is it not time for the trade unions to demand that there is a comprehensive education programme in the school curriculum about the British Empire, including the implicit and often explicit racism behind the history of policy making in the two decades from 1948? We now know that the errors about the citizenship of the Windrush generation were a consequence of deliberate government policy under both Labour and Tory prime ministers. Children of all racial backgrounds need to understand this more.

Liberation has a long-standing tradition of work on, specifically British imperialism. You could say that it is its Unique Selling Proposition. It may well be the very body to

bring liberation movements and trades unions together internationally in 2020, which marks the 60th anniversary of the 'Winds of Change' Speech that supposedly announced the end of British imperialism.

Whilst there must be a wide range of possibilities in terms of seeking grant funders to develop educational tools for disadvantaged BAME kids in inner cities to develop understanding about the countries of origin of their forebears? This might enable the digitisation and use as educational aids of archives of The Movement for Colonial Freedom & Liberation archive at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

If unions can't spear-head this, maybe solidarity bodies



Bill Strachan remembered

THIS EXCELLENT pamphlet from the Caribbean Labour Solidarity organisation tells the story of Billy Strachan, who though born in Jamaica came to Britain aged 18 to join the RAF in the fight to beat Hitler. Not that the 'mother country' seemed grateful.

Paying his own fare, and travelling amongst fruit boxes, to Bristol, then by train to London, where he almost accidentally found how to join as the only black recruit in his unit. Yet, in a testament to his sheer competence, Billy ended up as a bomber pilot with the rank of lieutenant.

At the end of the war, he returned to Jamaica, where he met communist Dr. David Lewis, who convinced him that he could help win Jamaica's independence by going back to fight for it in Britain. Which he did a year before HMT Empire Windrush arrived, taking wife Joyce and three

should come together in a unifying council of solidarity, hosted by Liberation? Would unions consider this to have any merit?

The scheme introduced in the past decade by the Department for International Development may have their drawbacks but the notion of Community Sponsorship for those fleeing war zones and seeking protection in calmer parts of the world should get much more support. Instead of a 'hostile environment' we need workplaces and communities to be open to helping to resettle the most vulnerable refugees feel welcome and able to adjust to a new life.

Just as local communities, civil society organisations, faith groups and businesses have been drawn in to being directly involved in helping refugees settle. So too can trades unions and their members. Helping families to rebuild their lives and to become self-sufficient members of their new community would benefit unions and create new bonds.

But there is still too much to do and trades unions seemed to have let slip a principled and coherent view of international matters. A worry is the supine attitude of UK governments to demands by the US to exploit the continuing colonial legacy of British overseas territories, especially for Middle East operations, in the Chagos Islands and the bases in Cyprus, of Akrotiri and Dhekelia - and the possibly imminently military action against Iran – all this stresses the need to return such territories to ownership by the rightful peoples

Will any union step up to the plate at the TUC to demand an apology from the British government for the appalling massacre of upwards of 1,200 civilians attending a peaceful independence rally at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in 1919? Similar actions by Britain to suppress movements for colonial freedom in Asia, Africa and the Americas need to be widely acknowledged in the curriculum of schools and colleges.

A whole range of vital and important motions could be considered. If not, can speeches be crafted to include concerns such as these:

Israel's military attacks on civilians in Gaza have been condemned by the UN and this should prompt calls by the TUC for a ban on further arms sales.

Sudan's repeated shooting of unarmed trade unionists

demonstrating against unaffordable prices raises the need for full solidarity with progressive and democratic forces in a country still scarred by the legacy of British colonialism, which continues to buttress feudal/Islamic landownership.

Turkey should be persuaded by its NATO ally, Britain, the former colonial power, to end its current illegal occupation of north Cyprus and to support a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal solution that restores the integrity of the island as a sovereign state, protecting the rights of all national minorities including the three religious minorities, Armenians, Maronites and Latines.

Ukraine's participation in NATO-led military operations amidst persistent human rights violations.

Venezuela has seen British government's support for Trump's aim of overthrowing a democratically elected Left government. Allied to this, the Bank of England's seizure of £1.1 billion of gold belonging to the Venezuelan government should make us all think what they would do to the kind of government favoured by most trades unions.

Yemen's brutal civil war could be condemned by the TUC, especially the deplorable level of civilian deaths, mainly caused by air strikes enabled by Saudi Arabia and UAE.

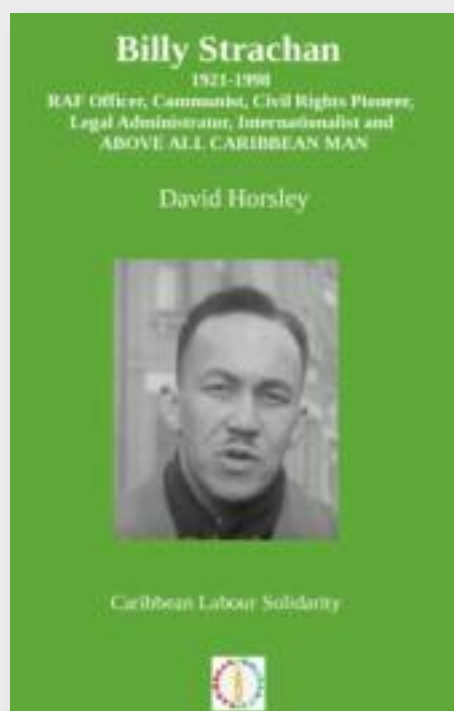
Then there's the classic piece of trade union procedure, the emergency motion, famously not always truly an emergency. Rule 24 of the TUC's Rules & Standing Orders permits such motions if short and purposeful. Unions might well want to see whether the pronouncements of President Trump that he will take his argument with the Islamic Republic of Iran beyond the brink. The aim is to secure the undisputed domination of the US in the region even if the current escalation of aggression by the US and its allies in the Middle East leads to a new and disastrous war, with unpredictable consequences for global peace.

Now that would be some emergency! Should it concern the TUC? You bet; let's face it, that new pay deal, or agreement on conditions, will be pointless if unbridled thermo-nuclear war breaks out in the Gulf of Persia and spreads across the Middle East. Maybe a simple motion that says: "We say No to Sanctions and No to War on Iran" will do it. ●

young boys, and immediately joining the Communist Party, then in full swing helping the colonies to strive for political freedom.

The family home in Kilburn was a centre for left-wing Caribbeans and the CP's West Indies committee. Billy Strachan helped to set up Caribbean News in 1952, the first black newspaper in Britain to propagate Caribbean independence and socialism and he was in regular contact with Cheddi and Janet Jagan of British Guiana. Both of his confidantes later served as Presidents of the independent nation of Guyana. Strachan was active in Liberation's predecessor, the Movement for Colonial Freedom.

Despite having a full-time clerical job, having studied in the evenings, he managed to get called to the bar as a barrister in 1959. Rising to become chief clerk of court, at Clerkenwell and then at Hampstead, he was elected as President of the Inner London Justices' Clerks' Society. Given the importance of political impartiality, with great integrity, Strachan left membership of the CP after discussions with others but never altered his core beliefs, dying in 1998 at the age of 77. ●



• The booklet, *Billy Strachan, 1921-1998*, by David Horsley, is published by Caribbean Labour Solidarity. Copies cost £2 and are available from David Horsley: email -



Iran: resist the drive to war

As US rhetoric pressing for a Middle East war with Iran grows louder, Jane Green, from the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) assesses the current situation.

THE DETENTION of an Iranian oil tanker off the coast of Gibraltar, by the UK military recently, is the latest in a long line of provocations by the West aimed at preparing the ground for military action against Iran. A contingent of 30 Royal Marines were deployed to impound the oil tanker Grace 1 which contained 2m barrels of Iranian oil, bound for the Banyas refinery in Syria.

British sources have said the tanker is likely to remain impounded for several weeks. In response, Mohsen Rezaei, a former leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, has said that the Islamic Republic should consider seizing a British oil tanker in response. While this does not constitute an official response from Tehran the Iranian Foreign Ministry has described the seizure as "tantamount to banditry" and is unlikely to simply accept the situation.

The action follows a period when US President, Donald Trump, has continued to ramp up rhetoric against Iran, stoking further the threat of another Middle East war. Trump claims that in June he called off air strikes against Iran at the last minute, after being told of the potential death toll of up to 150 innocent Iranians. The threatened strikes were in response to Iran shooting down an unmanned US spy drone, which had 'strayed' into Iranian air space.

The reality is that Trump is responding to a crisis largely of his own making. In pulling the US out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) last year, the Iran nuclear deal signed in 2015, Trump triggered increased tensions with Iran. The renewed sanctions as a result have upped the pressure upon the Iranian economy, given the hardliners in the Islamic Republic greater prominence and squeezed the living standards of ordinary Iranians to breaking point.

Even Trump himself recognises that developments are crippling the Iranian poor. Speaking before he left for Osaka, Japan for the G20 summit in June, he stated,

"Well, I don't think their leadership is smart. I don't think

they have smart leadership at all. Look what's happened to Iran. Iran's going down the tubes. Their people can't eat, they're rioting all over their streets, their inflation rate is 60 per cent or something like that. Maybe even worse, actually."

Trump may not have killed any Iranians in a direct military strike, on this occasion, but the US sanctions regime, combined with the profiteering, corruption and ineptitude of the Iranian government itself, is ensuring that the people of Iran are suffocating slowly.

Recent reports indicate that US retaliation has taken the form of cyber-attacks upon Iranian weapons systems. US officials claim that the cyber-attacks, part of a contingency plan developed over weeks amid escalating tensions, have disabled the Iranian computer systems that control its rocket and missile launchers.

The US is supported by its regional proxies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, who are concerned that the power and influence of Iran does not upset their own designs to be regional superpowers. The US, Saudis and Israel have a collective interest in keeping the flow of oil to the West, while at the same time ensuring the flow of weapons from the US and UK into the Middle East.

White House hawks including National Security Adviser, John Bolton, and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, have argued for military strikes against Iran. The attacks upon oil tankers in the Persian Gulf in May, for which Iran was blamed, appear to be the first steps in a pattern of provocation in which Iran is accused of actions which the US has to then address, in order to protect its 'vital interests'.

In response to the UK intervention to impound the Iranian oil tanker for example, Bolton tweeted,

"Excellent news: UK has detained the supertanker Grace 1 laden with oil bound for Syria in violation of EU sanctions. America and our allies will continue to prevent regimes in Tehran and Damascus from profiting off this illicit trade."

The game plan is similar to that used by the Bush administration in the build up to the war in Iraq, a combination of provocations and demonisation of the leadership of the regime. Recent denunciations of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali



Khamenei, combined with sanctions upon any overseas assets held by Khamenei are part of this pattern. However, in spite of the support of regional allies the US remains keen to have greater international backing for any action.

Tory leadership contender, Jeremy Hunt, has recently made clear that he accepts unproven US intelligence blaming Iran for recent attacks in the Gulf, going so far as to suggest that Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn was "pathetic and predictable" for demanding credible evidence. Hunt has even disowned a British general who questioned the intelligence. The Labour leader said the UK should "ease tensions" in the region rather than "fuel a military escalation", saying that "without credible evidence", the government's rhetoric "will only increase the threat of war".

As Foreign Secretary, Hunt can hardly deny that a British military build up was under way on his watch, including deployments of special forces, marines, Royal Navy ships out of Bahrain and, potentially, RAF F-35 fighter jets based in Cyprus.

Given his sycophantic track record regarding Donald Trump there can be no doubt that alternative Tory leadership contender, Boris Johnson, would be an equally willing ally of the US, should he find himself with the keys to 10, Downing Street.

The Islamic Republic has gravely offended the world's only superpower by pursuing policies in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen which do not comply with the interests of US and Western imperialism.

For this reason, the only endgame for the Trump administration is regime change in Iran. The economy in Iran is on its knees, protests continue to sweep the country, the credibility of the regime is lower than ever. Oil exports and revenues have been drastically reduced, further compounding the weakness of the economy and the misery of the Iranian people. In short, Iran poses no economic or military threat to the United States.

Obviously, the current situation is unsustainable for long and the leaders of the Iranian regime are counter threatening the US and Europe that they will fully withdraw from JCPOA, accelerate uranium enrichment, and further inflame the tensions in the region.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Iran, Abbas Araqhchi stated recently,

"If Iran cannot export oil, naturally it will not just sit and watch while others continue to do so. If we cannot export, then others will not be able to either. The options, choices, and possibilities open to Iran are numerous. It is not just the Strait of Hormuz. There is not only one solution."

On 7th July Araghchi announced that Iran will produce uranium at 5% enrichment, exceeding the limit set in the JCPOA signed in 2015. In many respects the increase is a symbolic gesture, although a provocative one. Increasing the uranium enrichment from the 3.67% limit set by the JCPOA to 5% gives Iran no real advantage while representing a dangerous and regressive diplomatic stance, which has been quickly exploited by the US and Trump himself.

While the United States has clearly orchestrated the current situation by pulling out of the JCPOA, the actions of the Iranian regime will create more unfavourable conditions for the reducing of tension, potentially weakening the position of the European signatories to the JCPOA who are currently attempting to save the agreement. Any perceived provocation from the Iranian side could also be seized upon by the US and its regional allies as a pretext to further pressurise the Iranian economy and militarily threaten Iran.

The Iranian people have suffered 40 years of mendacity, poverty and oppression under the Islamic Republic. They are undoubtedly ready for change but not change imposed by the US or its proxies. They want change that they lead and the direction of which they determine. That is something the Trump White House will not be comfortable with, as regime change for the US always means change that is pro US.

In the short term however, the priority remains to stop the war and organise to expose the real designs of the Trump administration. The trade union, labour and peace movements around the world are already well aware of the dangers of a further conflagration in the Middle East, not just for the people of Iran, but for the whole world.

In the UK that means putting pressure upon the UK government not to join with or support any US military intervention. It means condemning any pressure from the United States designed to draw the UK into supporting military action. It means standing firm with the people of Iran and standing side by side with them in their struggle for peace, justice and democracy. ●



Women's struggle for equality and justice: where to next?

Liz Payne interviews leading women activists from four countries on the challenges and potential of the women's movement on behalf of Liberation

Liz Payne Welcome to this round-table discussion. Across the world women are engaged in mass organised struggle against exploitation, oppression, racism and war and for justice and equality. The women's fight is crucial for changing conditions in the present and winning a peaceful and democratic future for all. Little wonder then that the mass media of the West, including that of Britain, pays the women's movement and its ongoing achievements so little attention and reduces the experience of women to impotent victimhood. Liberation, by bringing together leading women activists from across the world, hopes to help redress the balance.

We are honoured to have with us Socorro Gomes, president of the World Peace Council and a former Brazilian MP; Dr Azar Sepehr, international representative in Britain of the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women (DOIW); Layla Naffa, director of programmes for the Arab Women's Organisation of Jordan (AWO) and Dr Amal Gabralla Sidahmed, member of the Central Committee of the Sudanese Communist Party and member of the Sudanese Women's Union.

Welcome, sisters. Let's begin by talking about the key challenges in the struggle for the achievement of equality and justice for women in your country. Can you tell us what they are?

Azar Sepehr The most fundamental and all-encompassing challenge that Iranian women face emanates from the theocratic nature of the regime, which has relegated women to second-class citizens with significantly curtailed rights and freedoms in social, political and economic arenas. This is coupled with the consequences of a neo-liberal economic agenda - privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation,

the dominance of market relations, extensive use of zero-hours contracts, and lack of trade union, civil and women's rights – together with the impact of years of ever-tightening sanctions, especially those recently imposed by the US following its withdrawal from the JCPOA agreement. Heightened tension and the US president's beating of the war drums has meant intolerable poverty and hardship for the ordinary people Iran, with women bearing the brunt.

Amal Gabralla In Sudan, the struggle of women for their rights and emancipation has always been closely linked to the struggle for freedom and social justice. The modern Sudanese women's movement emerged during the struggle for independence in the 1950s, with the Sudanese Women's Union being founded in 1952. The domination of the Islamic regime and its ideology for thirty years is one of the major challenges. Sharia law, which directly affects women, still governs the country. Such statutes include public order and family laws.

Unsurprisingly, women's involvement in the current uprising has been major. Most women and families face harsh living conditions, especially in war zones. Two thirds of people living in camps for internally displaced people are women and children. Even in towns and cities, women struggle with austerity measures and high prices for food, fuel, education and health services. Most Sudanese people live under the poverty line.

Socorro Gomes Brazilian women face multiple obstacles in every aspect of their struggle to achieve equality. Women's emancipation depends on the recognition of the state's duty to provide care and education, from nurseries and the sharing of domestic work to recognition of women's sovereign right to decide about her own body. Coupled with other historical demands, such as equal pay for equal work and women's representation in spaces of power, another important struggle is that for the reestablishment of the rule of law. Since the 2016 parliamentary and judicial coup that overthrew President Dilma Rousseff, those in power have been seriously reducing previously-won rights, especially at present with the bedding in



LEFT: Liz Payne, CENTRE LEFT Layla Naffa- Jordan CENTRE RIGHT Socorro-Gomes- Brazil RIGHT Amal Jabrallah- Sudan

of a government marked by political ultra-conservatism and deepening racial and gender-based prejudices.

Layla In Jordan, the negative impact of the rise of Islamist violent extremism in neighboring countries has hit a culture that used to recognize gender equality and women's rights as human rights. The Jordanian leadership had turned its back on the women's movement by leaving discriminatory legislation as it is and by saying that security comes first, while human rights, including women's rights, can wait. The reactionary Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which is still influential in Jordan, has increasingly close relations with the conservative patriarchal tribal lords, thus delaying any progress towards gender equality and women's rights although Jordan has ratified almost all UN Conventions.

Liz That's very helpful. Thank you all for presenting such a clear picture. Now let's talk a little about how the women's movement in your country is responding to these challenges

Layla Following my remarks on the key challenges, I can say that in Jordan the response of the women's movement, backed by the leftist political parties and democratic forces is robust in the face of the backlash on gender equality and women's rights. The united stand of the women's movement and the leftist political movement for general freedoms is growing stronger. At the same time, women activists are getting closer to the progressive movement by calling for the meaningful participation of women in preventing the spread of violent extremism, regaining a culture that recognizes the importance of gender equality, attaining democratic reform, and strengthening the role of women in political life.

Azar In Iran too, a major element of women's activism has been aimed at reversing the misogyny that has been enshrined in the law - a second-class role for women, through segregation and discrimination. The campaign: One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws, launched in the 1990s, is one example. Many of its activists have been arrested and imprisoned, serving sentences of more than 30 years. Women have been a vocal force in nationwide protests for political rights and freedoms - against the candidate of the Supreme Religious Leader in the 1997 presidential elections, in the 2009 protests over the fraudulent results of the presidential election, in the frequent and continuing strikes and demonstrations of teachers and workers and calls for the freedom of political prisoners.

Socorro The current ultra-conservative and anti-social rights government, with a fascistic tendency, has thrown up a number of obstacles gravely threatening women's lives. A rising number

of female murder victims and the killing of LGBTQ, black and indigenous people, as demonstrated by the brutal murder of Marielle Franco by militiamen arguably linked to the president's family, and the president's fundamentalist and racist speech strengthening the obscurantist setback all add to the challenges faced by the feminist movement. Women have responded by broadening and strengthening organisation of the emancipatory struggle and by intensifying the huge demonstrations for labour rights, public policies arising from the 1988 Constitution and in defense of national sovereignty.

Amal The Sudanese women's movement has long and rich experience of creating various flexible ways of resistance and of adaptation to both peace and war and to short-lived democratic regimes and long dictatorship. Most important is the building of alliances between different women's groups and organizations around specific issues, such as anti-public order restrictions, the release of detained women, etc. This paved the way for the major role of women in the December 2019 uprising. This involved women from different social and political backgrounds fighting for the dismantling of the Islamic regime. We are continuing to push women's issues to the top of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) manifesto through effective women's organization and mobilization. To empower women to stand for their own rights, they need support from progressive parties and to educate themselves to defend and fight for their rights.

Liz Thank you. Let's now look towards the future. My next question is What do you consider to be the next major milestones in your struggle?

Socorro The next great goals in this struggle are the recovery of the democratic process in Brazil, the defense of social rights and the liberation of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. All these represent one of the main tasks which the democratic and progressive forces, including the women's movement, must undertake together, alongside the more specific struggles of the feminist movement.

Amal For us, the dismantling of the Al-Bashir Islamic state and the restoration of democracy and human rights is the gate that will open the door for the women's movement. We must abolish the laws that shackled women and aimed to force them back into the dark ages. Improving women's living standards and conditions is greatly associated with changing economic policies that destroyed agriculture and industry for the sake of capitalism. Women should have a leading role at all levels - reflecting their participation in the current uprising. This will not happen automatically, but it will enable them to take further steps towards the emancipation of women.

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Azar The most immediate threat that Iranian women face today is that of war instigated by the US and its regional allies, alongside poverty and misery caused by the inhumane sanctions and the regime's neo-liberal policies. On the one hand, the Trump-Netanyahu-Bin Salman axis is raising the specter of military conflict with Iran, while on the other, the Iranian regime, intent on its own survival, continues to add to tensions by adventurous regional policies. "No to War, No to Sanctions, No to Despotism" is the slogan of the moment for the women's and people's movement in Iran. It is imperative that the progressive people of the world strive together to eliminate the threat of another destructive conflict in the Persian Gulf region.

Layla Fighting against the culture that demeans women's rights needs to strengthen the women's movement and the relationship between women activists and progressive political parties to face the alliance of the tribal lords and Moslem Brothers. Women activists, progressive political parties and civil society organizations are able to contribute to gender responsive Prevention of Violence Extremism efforts. Notions

around religion and gender roles in society should be discussed and explored, to promote more equitable notions of gender equality and tolerance in general. Leadership should be involved and pressured to acknowledge and actively promote gender equality and the role of women in development.

Liz Finally, can you tell us what factors will best enable you to move the struggle forward?

Socorro In Brazil, in an environment in which there is severe persecution of people's movements, criminalisation of popular organisations and use of the judicial system to persecute popular leaders, such as former president Lula, women are facing the loss of their rights. In these conditions, unity is essential to the advancement of the struggle - unity and the breadth of forces gathered around the achievement of our goals. Today more than ever, for us women, the defense of peace and of our national heritage are indivisible from the women's struggle.

Amal It is essential for the most progressive forces in Sudan to further develop a revolutionary vision for the Sudanese



Iraq: New wave of protests

POPULAR PROTESTS have erupted once again in Iraq against a background of continuing political crisis, poor public services and rampant corruption. There is deep resentment at the failure of the new government, that was formed in October 2018, to fulfil its promises and address the grievances of the people. The general elections in May 2018 had clearly indicated the strong sentiments of the people against the ethno-sectarian power-sharing system that was installed after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003. The electoral coalition and alliance of "Sairoun" (i.e. Marching Towards

Reform), consisting of the Communists, the Sadrist movement and its supporters, and civil and liberal forces, won about 17% of the seats in the new parliament. Its programme called for deep political reforms, to abandon the bankrupt political system and work towards establishing a civil state based on the principle of citizenship, true democracy and social justice. But the corrupt political forces that are entrenched in power have been fighting back, resisting the popular demands for urgent steps to dismantle the "deep state" and fiercely defending their positions and interests.

women's movement, both theoretically and organizationally and to make sure that women can be involved in setting-up programmes and plans that fulfil their needs from start to finish. The priorities should be to improve living standards and conditions, eradicate illiteracy among rural women and replace irrelevant cultural negatives that hinder women's equality and progress. There should be programmes and discussions that appeal to and inspire grassroots and working-class women throughout the country. The mobilization of women requires flexible and realistic ways of organising, plus the building of close relationships with women's groups in all regions.

Layla In Jordan, it is crucial that we strengthen collaboration between the women's movement and progressive political parties, countering arguments mainly emanating from ultra-leftists, against an independent women's movement. We need to reintroduce the culture that recognised women's rights as human rights, which had already accomplished much in respect of abolition of discriminatory laws. The curricula of schools and universities must be reformed in order to recognize that gender equality and women's rights are essential to progress. Moreover, faced with the actions of political parties and the women's movement, governmental

Last February, the Teachers' Union organised a two-day strike, demanding improved living conditions for teachers as well as curricular reform. Nearly 750 thousand teachers in 14 provinces joined the strike. It was the biggest strike of its kind in the recent history of Iraq. It was successful and received strong support from civil democratic forces. The student movement declared support for the teachers against the deterioration of education and called for urgent reform in the education system.

During recent weeks, there were several sit-ins and demonstrations in Baghdad and other provinces expressing the demands of workers and public employees for their rights and protesting against privatization. Thousands of unemployed university graduates have joined the wave of protests demanding jobs. Every day, people are coming out to protest against corrupt and incompetent local governments, holding them responsible for their miserable living conditions.

At the end of June in Basra province, in southern Iraq, peaceful protesters demanding jobs for the unemployed and the provision of basic services were attacked by the security forces. Excessive force, firing bullets and tear gas, was used against the peaceful demonstrators. Tens of civil activists were arrested.

Combating corruption has been one of the main demands of the protest movement. Corruption is widespread on all levels in the Iraqi state and has become a political, economic and social phenomenon. Public resources and wealth are plundered on large scale. Billions of dollars, for example, have been spent on importing electricity and gas, while national production, especially in the petrochemical industries, is stalled. Oil smuggling continues in several provinces with the involvement of influential political groups and under the protection of armed militias. Despite the restructuring of the Supreme Anti-Corruption Council by the new Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, no concrete measures and legal action have been taken to deal with the numerous big cases of corruption.

There is also the continuing suffering of 2 million people who were internally displaced as a result of the war against the terrorist organization "Daesh" (the so-called "ISIS"). They are

measures are being taken to restrict their work and that of civil society. We need to fight against the shrinking of our space.

Azar The fate of Iran must be decided by the people of Iran, without interference from external forces. The despotic nature of the Iranian regime is one of the obstacles in the way of progress. The rejection of theocracy is one step in achieving political reform in Iran. International solidarity to remove the sanctions against Iran that has crippled the economy and driven our people to destitution is another step forward. Imperialist overtures towards a military conflict must be exposed and opposed vociferously and their ploy to show their motivation to be to help the Iranian people must be exposed and rejected. The fate of Iran will be decided by the people of Iran and led by its progressive forces.

Liz Thank you all for detailing the challenges facing you and ways to overcome them. This has been a most useful and enlightening conversation which we will continue in the future.

Liz Payne is the convenor of the British Peace Assembly and executive member of the National Assembly of Women ●

living in miserable conditions in more than 160 camps in several provinces, lacking basic services. Urgent measures are needed to ensure their safe return to their homes. Despite the decisive military victory achieved against the Daesh in late 2017, and relative stability since then, the danger of a resurgence of terrorist activities is looming. A final defeat of the scourge of terrorism requires integrated policies on political, economic and cultural levels, as well as societal reconciliation.

The recent grave developments in the Gulf region, with the military escalation and tightening of economic sanctions on Iran by the Trump administration have increased fears in Iraq and the Middle East of the danger of another war that would have catastrophic consequences. The peoples of the region, including Iraq, will be its main victims, adding to the enormous loss of lives in Syria, Yemen and Libya as a result of continuing wars, crimes by terrorists and external interference.

Civil democratic forces in Iraq have called for peace and dialogue, and for urgent international efforts to diffuse the tensions and prevent war. They have stressed the right of the peoples of the region to choose their own political systems with their own free will, without wars, economic sanctions and blockade.

On 24th May, big demonstrations against warmongering and for peace came out in Baghdad and other provinces. Tens of thousands of people joined a mass rally in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad under the slogan "No to War! Yes to Peace!"

The demonstrations called on the Iraqi government to make every effort to ensure that Iraq is not dragged into a potential war of aggression against its neighbour or be used as a battleground for a proxy war. In this respect, a recent decree issued by the Iraqi Prime Minister ordering the factions of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) to integrate fully in the state armed forces by 31st July 2019 has been widely seen as an important step which needs to be properly implemented. It would help to promote stability and security for the people and the country during challenging times. ●

LEFT: Iraqi teachers on strike



The founding principles of the liberation war of 1971 have been betrayed

Bangladesh: the present juncture

Nisar Ahmed

IN JUST OVER two years Bangladesh will celebrate half a century of independence following its bitter nine-month liberation struggle against the Pakistan army. It is quite natural that we will see a plethora of celebratory events, articles, books and introspection on the “state of Bangladesh” today. But before we reach that milestone there are already worrying signs emerging across the economic, political and cultural spheres which cast a potential shadow on the country’s achievements to date.

One way of measuring the relative success or failure of the nation is to examine the founding principles of Bangladesh as enshrined in the 1972 Constitution. These four guiding tenets underpinned the country’s vision: Nationalism, Secularism, Democracy and Socialism. A useful way of examining where we are today is to briefly focus on how the country is faring against these tenets, which the founders of Bangladesh including Bangabandhu, the father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, laid down.

Let us begin with Democracy. After a decade and half of military and semi-military rule between 1975 and 1991 there were four elections between 1992 and 2009, under various form of caretaker regimes, which were broadly accepted as being legitimate. In each of the elections the incumbent regimes were turfed out and the ruling government alternated between the two main bourgeois parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

These are predominantly centrist parties that relied on right wing allies. The Awami League teamed up with the Jatiya Party of the recently deceased and former military ruler General Ershad. The BNP relied on the support of the fundamentalist religious party Jamaat Islam, which had opposed the creation of Bangladesh. This see-saw lasted for nearly two decades until it fractured in 2014.



The Rana Plaza collapse reflects the continuing neo-liberal economic agenda

When the elections of 2014 were called without a neutral caretaker government, as had previously been the norm, the BNP and its allies created unsuccessful mayhem through militant protests, which saw violent reaction from the Awami League regime. Finally, under the heavy backing of India, and with opposition from EU countries and the USA, the elections were held. These were boycotted by all opposition parties from the whole spectrum of the right and the left.

Out of 300 seats, the elections returned 153 candidates unopposed, giving the Awami League and its allies an absolute majority without a vote being cast. This began the process of a renewed authoritarian turn in politics.

This authoritarianism was taken to new heights in the elections of 2019. Unlike in 2014, there was full participation from all opposition parties in the 2019 elections. However, the full weight of the state was used to first ensure that the opposition parties were hardly given a chance to properly campaign before the election itself was shamelessly rigged to ensure that the ruling Awami League and its allies romped home to victory with unprecedented majorities.

When elections are so crudely and blatantly rigged it is not only that the country faces a crisis but that even the ruling classes are threatened.

In the economic sphere the notion or indeed even any vestige of Socialism is no longer on any regime’s agenda. In the initial three and half years of Sheikh Mujib’s reign, before he was brutally murdered, there was at least talk of a planned and non-capitalist path of economic development. From that initial promise of an alternative path there has been a total retreat.

We now see the uninterrupted sway of neo-liberal economics of the World Bank and the IMF. There has been no demise of the Washington Consensus in Bangladesh.

Whatever their political and ideological differences both the Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party are united in their total embrace of economic policies dictated by international finance capital, global multinational corporations and their institutional overlords.

As for Nationalism, which underpinned the formation of Bangladesh, the independent and defiant tradition of Sheikh Mujib, Maulana Bhasani, Moni Singh and other leaders has been torpedoed.

This was dramatically shown in what is termed in Bangladesh as 1/11 - the short period of indirect military rule which was effectively forced by Western capitalist powers. Similarly, without the crucial role played by India, the elections of 2014 would have been conducted under a caretaker regime. The only honourable exceptions to this acceptance of foreign interventions were when the present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held the War Crimes Tribunal against fierce western opposition and also when she defied the World Bank over the building of Padma bridge

Whenever there is a crisis the ruling parties rush to their foreign patrons for endorsement. The founding fathers of the country must be turning in their graves at these scenes.

Finally, if there was one aspect of the struggle for Bangladesh that defined it more than anything else, it was its ethnic nationalism based on Secularism. That has been cruelly thrown asunder by both the ruling political parties.

This is really sad because Bangladesh, more than anything else, defined itself by its commitment to secularism. The struggle for autonomy and independence began in the cultural and ideological sphere on the issue of Bengali language and non-communal politics, defying the army and the religious ethos that underpinned Pakistan.

Yet in the name of fighting fundamentalism the Awami League has lined up with the Saudi monarchy, in collaboration with US imperialism, to launch "jihad" to protect the interests of global capital. Internally, they are in league with the reactionary religious forces of Hefazat Islam.

In a similar vein the BNP, in the name of fighting for democracy, is regularly scurrying to India to seek the support of the authoritarian Hindutva regime of Narendra Modi. Internally it is in deep embrace with the religious fundamentalist party Jamaat Islam.

The only thing that explains such contradictory postures is the desperation of both the parties to maintain their grip on power.

Today it is increasingly becoming clear that this political, economic, ideological state of the nation bears no relation to those four principles that founded Bangladesh. It requires a complete overhaul.

Such change cannot be led by the parties of the ruling classes. Having compromised the country's interests to globalised finance both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party are increasingly turning to authoritarianism and national jingoism to keep their continued dominance.

The citizens of Bangladesh are slowly recognising what really is happening in their country. They are desperately looking for progressive alternatives that honour and progress the founding vision of Bangladesh. ●

The struggle for the re-unification of Cyprus and peace: EU Elections

Andreas Gregoriou



THE SECOND HALF of 2019 finds the Left in Cyprus evaluating the results of the EU election and planning its next medium-term goals. The results constitute a political success for AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People). We managed to put an end to a long running downward trend, which shows the stabilisation of the Party. We succeeded on our 2 main goals, returning 2 MEPs and increasing our percentage share from the last EU elections.

We faced a much better climate amongst the people, that allowed for a high coiling and very limited leaks to other parties... Facts on the ground that allow the party to leave behind once and for all the hard test experienced post 2011. Under no circumstances can we be complacent. We must work harder to counter the established abstention from a share of leftist voters and to solve any other political, organisational and communication problems that we had.

Through these elections AKEL reaffirmed its role as the cluster-point of all those who are still fighting for a solution on Cyprus, one which will reunite our people and our island on the basis of a bi-zonal bicomunal federation. The positive result owed firstly down to our stable and consistent position and struggle, no matter what polemic we faced. Secondly it was due to the brave and radical choice of AKEL to include in our ballot paper a Turkish Cypriot (Dr. Niyazi Kilzilyirek)... A move that challenged and batted away all the negative reflections and stereotypes that were built around the Greek Cypriot community stemming from the separation and the long-pending issue of a segregated Cyprus... A choice that challenged the polemic of the right and far-right on both sides [of the ethnic divide] but did so in the most inspirational way and was embraced by the people. History has been made with the election of a Turkish Cypriot as an MEP... A result that is opening new potential for cooperation between the two communities. We are going to

continue with the same boldness and not retreat on our position against the nationalist propaganda of the partition currents.

We have to mention that the right-wing government party (DHSY) faced many difficulties, chiefly low coiling and leaks to the far-right party (ELAM) and how to counter these trends; recruitment through fear, psychological pressure and nationalist rhetoric. The whole government was part of the election campaign with the President of the Republic as its head. Deceptive reports on the Turkish Cypriots, abusive comments directed to the Left's leadership and support base were just a part of what took place. They could not prevent the result. Their percentages reduced by 9% and their distance from AKEL is now just 1.5%. No matter their control of the media, they can no longer hide from the people and the tragic consciences of their policies; an extremely dangerous deadlock on the Cyprus issue, a financial policy which serves the elite and crushes the many, corruption, interference and arrogance.

For us the next day has a clear basic goal. To create the circumstances for ejection of the right government pursuant to a progressive political change for our people and country. Our Party will play the role of the point of confluence for all political and social forces fighting for progressive change.

Our priorities are clear. We will continue working and fighting for a solution on the Cyprus issue using the mandate of the people as the force of reunification, building upon the new chapter heralded by the election of a Turkish Cypriot MEP... Open for more cooperation with social movements... Advertising and promoting our positions on the economy... Everyday contact with the people, the youth and particular groups, with the overall goal to improve the functioning of the party. And finally, it is demanded of us that we strengthen our resolve in the fight against the far-right and the rise of neo-Nazism - they didn't succeed to elect a MEP but we must not underestimate them as they have once again increased their percentage.

The Cyprus Issue

We are now two years on from the breakdown of the negotiations at Crans-Montana. The UN Secretary General, Mr. Guterres, in his recent report, stresses yet again that the period of endless talks is definitely a thing of the past and that the status quo is not a viable option. This is a warning sent out in every direction. It is clear that if there is no resumption of negotiations, we will be led to a definite partition. He holds the Greek Cypriot side equally responsible, together with the Turkish Cypriot side, for the failure of the Crans-Montana Conference and for the protracted stalemate on the Cyprus issue.

The UN Secretary General had proposed a specific and very clear course, both as regards to the substance and the procedure: a continuation of the talks from where they had remained were left at Crans-Montana, and an informal document on the mechanism for implementing the solution and the discussion of the internal and external aspects of the Cyprus problem at two separate tables which differ in their composition. Two years later and the UN Secretary General never got a clear answer. On the contrary, so-called "new ideas" were tabled by President Anastasiades, all of which were outside the Guterres Framework.

Anastasiades proposed a decentralised federation - without explaining exactly what he means - despite agreements on this point having almost been reached at Crans-Montana. He

reopened the issue of political equality and effective participation. Mr. Guterres himself - in his September 2017 Report - states that the question of effective participation had essentially already been resolved at the talks. And lastly, the President belatedly called for the reinsertion of replacement of the topic of a convergence of a presidential system with a parliamentary system, which had already been discussed and rejected at Crans-Montana.

All these proposals fell outside the Guterres Framework, which Mr. Anastasiades otherwise claims to accept. It is clear that the path chosen by Mr. Anastasiades does not lead to a conclusion on the terms of reference nor, therefore, to the resumption of talks. Nor does it even lead to putting the Turkish side in a corner. The UN Secretary General felt the need to remind us that for decades the Security Council has remained committed to a solution of bi-communal, bi-zonal federation. However, he also felt the need to make it clear that his Framework, with its six points, meets this strategic goal. It is now more than clear that all such discussions - for the abandonment of the goal for bi-communal, bi-zonal federation - are directed squarely towards partition and not towards a unitary state.

At Crans-Montana we had been within a whisker of a solution to some of the core pending issues. Continuous and maximalist regressions, wherever they may come from, are increasingly distancing the prospect of a solution. Time is running out. Turkey's suffocating embrace of the Turkish Cypriot community and the consolidation of the fait accompli on the ground confirm that the nightmare of the final partition is looming more threateningly than ever over Cyprus.

Now Turkey is stepping up its provocations and illegal actions in the Cypriot Economic Zone (EEZ) with aggressive Turkish offshore drilling in Cypriot territorial waters. This is a flagrant violation of the UN Law of the Sea. However, it is clear that Turkey will continue to exploit the prolonged stalemate on the Cyprus problem to create new serious fait accompli on the ground and in the waters. Only through the solution of the Cyprus problem will we be able to address Turkish aggression effectively. We denounce Turkey's illegal actions. Our government must continue to call for practical support from the international community.

The government must undertake specific and convincing initiatives to promote the goal of the resumption of negotiations to conclude the efforts that began in 2008 in order to reach an overall solution to the Cyprus problem. It is imperative that the President of the Republic addresses the UN Secretary General and expresses his readiness to continue the negotiations from the point at which they were left at Crans-Montana based on Mr. Guterres' Framework and by preserving the convergences. It is only through the negotiations - which, of course, can begin only when Turkey ends its provocations in the Cypriot EEZ - that we can reach a solution which will constitute the solid basis for solving the problems that Turkey is raising as a pretext to create tension and dangers.

Maximalisms in politics, let alone in regards to the management of the future of an entire country, have been tested in the past and have determined to be the worst course for our country. We should, here and now, reach a conclusion on the notorious terms of reference and return to the negotiations from the point where they were left at Crans-Montana. Otherwise, the nightmare of the final partition will become a reality, painful and unbearable for the shoulders of any leadership. ●



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